THE PROSE OF DR. JOHNSON, ITS TECHNIQUES, CHARACTERISTICS AND FORMS (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ITS LATIN ELEMENTS AND TO JOHNSON'S PERSONALITY).

by

ROBERT A. DUNCANSON, M.A.

being a thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Letters in the Department of English Literature in the University of Glasgow in June, 1978.

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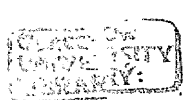

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am most grateful to the staff of Glasgow University Library, and the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, for their courteous assistance. I am particularly indebted to my supervisor, Mr T.F.Wharton, for his stimulating criticism, and perpetual encouragement.

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SUMMARY

Three main approaches to Johnson are biographical, generic and historical criticism. Passages from his works, his distrust of fiction, and his love of biography recommend the first. His original readers' ignorance of him, his works' failure to represent fully what we now know of him, and the counter claims of context and genre challenge it.

The generic method, which emphasizes the rôle of the writer as a disinterested barrister, is supported by Johnson's recognition of genre lore and the bulk of personation in his work, but Johnson was devoted to the moral imperative of truth, incompetent in rôle-playing, and consistent in his expressed opinions.

Historical criticism, which notes Johnson's artistic aim of instruction by delight, over-values didacticism, and is aesthetically incomplete. Each method is pertinent only as it clarifies the appeal of his texts to an ideal untutored reader.

The biographer may use Johnson's works to explain his life, the critic should use his biography to interpret his works. Despite their different dispositions and their historical inaccuracies, the main authorities for Johnson's life and character concur about his personality. They admit his remarkable aggression, but also insist on his almost

indiscriminate charity. Johnson's aggression is the mark of a man critically unsure of his worth. Johnson was essentially solitary, and hostile, even in dealings with his mother and wife. Freudians give the best descriptive elucidation of his behaviour, that he suffered from an obsessional neurosis. This view of Johnson's character suggests what to expect in his prose: a controlled use of language, which avoids authorial inferiority, and employs an almost ritually prescribed recurrence of devices.

Although Johnson's Latin learning is impressive, he was, like many Augustans, selective in his veneration of the ancients. His imitations of Juvenal suggest that moral caution made him perceive imperfectly Juvenal's ironic tone. Macaulay's view of Johnson's Latinate diction as a defensive public gesture is not fully satisfactory, nor is Nichol Smith's view of Johnson's Latin poetry as a protected means of expressing private feelings, but clearly Johnson does use Latin as a defensive measure.

Johnson is in practice a linguistic conservative. His English prose is Ciceronian. His age fostered intellectual conservatism, a belief in human uniformity, and the invariability of moral values.

Latin contributes to Johnson's vocabulary, effecting dignity and generality by abstraction and

scientific imagery, and to his rhythm where the fixed stress in polysyllables enforces that disciplined formality which the analysis of his personality might lead one to expect.

Johnson's images are to be judged not by the standards of an Academy, but by his own five criteria: propriety, generality, coherence, parallelism, and tradition. Johnson's written images are impeccable in propriety, less excellent in generality, and more than adequate in coherence. In parallelism he is seldom to be censured, and his respect for tradition is indubitable. Inconsistency does obtain between his criteria, but he adheres to them closely and pleases our reason without indulging our fancy to excess. By observing these limits he achieves the power of narrow splendid clarity.

Johnson's use of and feeling for rhythm has been generally disapproved, perhaps partly because of his critical attitude towards rhythmical effects, his scepticism about the accomodating of sound to sense, and his firm disbelief in literary inspiration, perhaps partly because he excelled in a particular type of rhythm which corresponded to his obsessional personality, but which, in its isochronism, and its use of amplification and expansion contradicts the modern idea of English style.

The pleasure given by Johnson's rhythms may

be analysed in terms of novelty, beauty, and greatness, but is particularly located in our perception of a tension between his hard words and rhythms and his easy images and sentiments. He is read with effort, but pleasure.

Johnson is to be judged not by his beliefs, which are hardly peculiar to him, but by his manner of expressing them. The age of Johnson revered decorum, and he is justified by a decorum which is neither dramatic nor generic but a common internal verbal fitness, or interior propriety of parts in a sentence. Textual explication of Rambler 145 suggests how Johnson's power reveals itself. Ultimately he is to be judged and justified only in our experience of reading him.

ABBREVIATIONS

ELH	Journal of English Literary History
MLN	Modern Language Notes
PQ	Philological Quarterly
RES	Review of English Studies

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a general study of Johnsonian prose, which it considers as the characteristic utterance of a unique individual. Johnson's biography is investigated as a means of sharpening our apprehension of his verbal techniques, rather than for its own sake. His character is rather inferred from historical sources than speculatively assembled from those very literary works which it may in turn be employed to interpret. Major emphasis is laid neither on the author's life as in George Irwin's Samuel Johnson: a Personality in Conflict (Auckland and Oxford, 1971), nor on his genres, as in Paul Fussell's Samuel Johnson and the Life of Writing (London, 1972), but the focus is set on Johnson's actual prose, as in W.K.Wimsatt's The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson (New Haven, 1941), with the difference that the prose is related more resolutely to Johnson's character, and his critical standards, the larger conceptual foundation of which Jean Hagstrum examined in Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism (Minneapolis, 1952).

The only important proposition in the thesis is an alternative explanation of Lot 649 in the 1823 sale catalogue of Mrs Piozzi's library and personal effects: "A Padlock." It is suggested this may refer to a text of The Padlock, a comic opera by Isaac Bickerstaffe, first

produced at Covent Garden in 1768.

CHAPTER I HOW TO READ JOHNSON

The spirit in which we read Johnson will influence the estimate we make of his achievement. How we do read him may not be how we should read him.

The most popular approach to Johnson's works is what may be termed the biographical method. In this one attempts to remain aware of the psychology of the individual as one reads his works, and to supply the deficiencies of generality by detailed remembrance of Boswell, Hawkins and Mrs Thrale. This attitude is clearly widely available to the common reader only after the publication of Johnson's biographers, but the special friends of Johnson may well have indulged in it much earlier, and there is indeed support for it in the biographers themselves.

Mrs Thrale carefully suggests that many of the severe reflections on domestic life in Rasselas, "took their source from its author's keen recollections of the time passed in his early years."[1] She likewise improbably claims that a specific incident in his mother's life is recalled by the line in The Vanity of Human Wishes: "The general favourite as the general friend."[2] It is hinted that Prospero in Rambler 200 may be based on Garrick,[3] and her determination to stress the biographical element becomes plain when she reports that Rambler 134 on procrastination was hastily composed, under pressure of a dead-line in

Sir Joshua Reynolds' parlour, although, as G.B.Hill pointed out, since Reynolds was abroad from May 1749 till October 1752, Mrs Thrale is deceiving her readers, and perhaps herself.[4]

Hawkins too encourages the biographical attitude by his affirmation that Idler 41 was a letter written by Johnson on his mother's death, and his speculation that the concluding paragraph of the final Idler derived its gloomy nature from Johnson's melancholy as he wrote it.[5] And even Boswell, who regards Johnson primarily as the majestic teacher of moral and religious wisdom,[6] not as a gossip or an autobiographer, reports the tale that Prospero and Garrick were supposed the same person, and notes his own suspicion that there is a large autobiographical element in Rambler 54.

On such a foundation of suggestion, and to no small extent by reason of the popularity of Boswell's Life, it became possible and proper to read Johnson's works as a kind of biography. Fortified by Burke's observation that Boswell's Life was a greater monument to Johnson's fame than all his writings put together, the young Romantic critics damned Johnson's works almost entirely, and were content to praise him, or tolerate him in that biography only.[8] They were obliged to exaggerate the difference between the quality of Johnson's talk and writing, and set the example for their generation.

"The most triumphant record of the talents and character of Johnson," Hazlitt tells us, "is to be found in Boswell's Life of him. The man was superior to the author. When he threw aside his pen, which he regarded as an incumbrance, he became not only learned and thoughtful, but acute, witty, humerous, natural, honest . . . "[9] Such a criticism at once encouraged the biographical attitude among those who read Johnson, and encouraged others not to read him at all. Boswell's sentimental, "Tory" view of his hero met with less resistance than ever before. What Bertrand Bronson called the "popular" Johnson overwhelmed the "learned" Johnson in the public imagination, and the intricacies of his political thought had none such as Professor Greene to explain them.[10]

Macaulay's review of Croker's edition of Boswell fostered this tradition, with its insistence on the paradox that Johnson's manners would be immortal, while his works were doomed.[11] Even Macaulay's lesser known essay on Johnson, contributed to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, despite the partial truth of claims made for it as a retraction of his earlier views, firmly argues that Johnson's spoken style excelled his written style, and that "Boswell's book has done for him more than the best of his own could do. The memory of other authors is kept alive by their works. But the memory of Johnson keeps many of his works alive."[12]

Carlyle too, although his review of Croker provided in response to Macaulay's ludicrous portrait a splendid if somewhat hysterical defence of Boswell, joined with his antagonist to denigrate Johnson's work in favour of Boswell's Life. When he gives way to rhetoric, it becomes clear that Carlyle in fact believed Johnson's life was greater than Boswell's Life, and perhaps Life itself, greater than either. In Boswell's Life he believes is the true history of lived experience: "all Johnson's own Writings . . . are becoming obsolete for this generation; and for some future generation, may be valuable chiefly as Prolegomena and expository Scholia to this Johnsoniad of Boswell."[13] Johnson has ceased to be a writer. He has become a hero.

When Leslie Stephen evaluated Johnson,[14] his consideration of the works was almost an after-thought, for which he makes due apology. Although, in justice, it must be noted that the fault is perhaps in part that of the "English Men of Letters" series. Raleigh has no such excuse for his Six Essays On Johnson. With fine discrimination, he asserts, "Never was there a more ignorant fable than the fable which makes Boswell the creator of Johnson's greatness."[15] And yet, "This is the greatness of Johnson, that he is greater than his works."[16] Raleigh, as so many have done, sets aside Boswell's Life only to exalt Johnson's life: "Any reader who acquaints himself intimately with the records

of Johnson's life, and then reads The Rambler, must be very insensible if he does not find it one of the most moving of books."[17] Here is the frankest expression of the biographical attitude to Johnson's works: "The pages of The Rambler, if we can read them, are aglow with the earnestness of dear-bought conviction, and rich in conclusions gathered not from books but from life and suffering. It is here that the biography of the writer helps us. If he will not come to meet us, we can go to meet him."[18]

Lord Rosebery did not even appeal to biography. For him the Rambler was dead. Rasselas he read at school, but never picked up again.[19] O.F.Christie is keen to lure Rosebery and his kind back to the works of Johnson, but the arguments he employs must appeal to no-one if they could not appeal to Rosebery. Johnson's essays, asserts Christie, are equal to his conversation in wit and wisdom. He spoke exactly as he wrote. His writing gives us insight into social history, and, "There is yet one more reason for studying these Essays. Johnson was a great man; greater even as a man than as a writer."[20] Christie says all that he may to identify Johnson's talk and essays, to obscure the extremely important difference in context between the two.

Right up to the present the biographical method is strongly advocated. Hollis used it to argue for

the originality of the Rambler.[21] George Irwin, in effect, made it a basis of his study of Johnson's personality, since he accords to Johnson's works of literature a status no less factual and historical than that of his letters and diarial writings.[22] Hesketh Pearson actually refuses to discuss the Rambler at all because, "It is hardly worth dwelling upon what no one is now likely to read, and all that need be said is that most of his essays repeat in prose the despondent philosophy already expressed in poetry."[23]

This biographical attitude to Johnson's works has not persisted without there being strong reasons to commend it. Firstly, there are clearly certain passages of Johnson which correspond so closely to his own life that it seems absurd to suppose the resemblance accidental.

The Life of Boerhaave, for example, appears to recall many details of Johnson's life. It is also tempting to suppose that Pitt's retort to Horace Walpole, in which he neither palliates nor denies the crime of being a young man, might have been written by a young Sam Johnson, angrily contemptuous of his literary superiors.[24] His early poem The Young Author seems to me, likewise, to have no small autobiographical element. And T.S.Eliot observed of London, "What keeps the poem alive is the

undercurrent of personal feeling, the bitterness of the hardships, slights, injuries, and privations, really experienced by Johnson in his youth."[25] The history of Pertinax the sceptic in Rambler 95 might possibly be based on Johnson's own intellectual development, and Rambler 85 with its urgent proposition that vice is the result of idleness reminds one of many passages in the Prayers and Meditations. Perhaps no Johnsonian can forbear to think of Johnson's proud rejection of an anonymous gift of boots when he reads of Savage's similar reaction when it was attempted to make him a present of a suit of clothes,[26] or of Johnson's years of happiness with the Thrales when he reads of Watts' years with the Abneys.[27] It is just conceivable that Johnson thought of himself when he described the life of the hack writer,[28] of Levet and Bathurst in appraising that of physicians,[29] and of his days at Edial when he discusses the lot of the schoolmaster.[30] Pope's importunity with servants late into the night recalls Johnson's with Mrs Thrale.[31] Pope's dilatoriness in composition is understood by him who records it,[32] and references to the "freaks, and humours, and spleen, and vanity of women," which "embroil families in discord, and fill houses with disquiet,"[33] perhaps remind us of Johnson's own "family" which he once portrayed thus: "Williams hates every body. Levet hates Desmoulins and does

not love Williams. Desmoulins hates them both. Poll loves none of them."[34]

Secondly, Johnson's dislike and distrust of fiction, especially escapist fiction, is well attested. It manifests itself in Rambler 4 in his discussion of Fielding and Smollett. Rather than argue the point, Hannah More saw fit to mislead Johnson when they discussed Fielding.[35] This adamant opposition to the seductions of fiction appears also in the chapter which Johnson provided for Charlotte Lennox's The Female Quixote,[36] and in his careful interruption of the tales in the Rambler, so that, for instance, Hymenaeus' courtship is allotted to three non-consecutive issues, and the reader is virtually dared to believe in the incredible fiction. Of course, there are frosty commentators like Hawkins prepared to believe as fact, or pretend they believe, anything in print, even the stories about the Admirable Crichton.[37] Nevertheless, it was the biographical part of literature which Johnson chiefly loved, and autobiography he preferred to second-hand accounts.[38]

Lastly, there is to be considered the narrow field of Johnson's imaginative sympathy. It was his habit, George Irwin argued, when those close to him were dying, to think only of himself, and to reveal that he did so even in his letters to those whom he knew must die soon.[39] Rasselas shows Johnson's

unwillingness to allow his readers to think out for themselves the meaning of his work. In spite of his protest that art should imitate nature, and present as well the failures as the victories of virtue,[40] he does not easily permit his audience a broad view of experience. The process of his valuation is unremitting. Each false choice must be shown to be false. Rasselas may be realistic, as Frederick W. Hilles contends,[41] but the life of which it seems representative is rather that of Samuel Johnson than Everyman. As with Butler in The Way of All Flesh, so Johnson in Rasselas is so self-obsessed that he provides two incarnations for his personality, once as Imlac, the middle-aged, once as Rasselas, the youthful Johnson. Every venture described appears to have Johnson's personal hopes invested in it. Hill's famous comment on the failed aviator bears repetition: "Johnson is content with giving the artist a ducking. Voltaire would have crippled him for life at the very least; most likely would have killed him on the spot."[42] Johnson observes, in his remarks on Gray's The Bard, that a fictional character may always be killed, "without expence of thought" but one suspects that for Johnson no fictional death was without expense of feeling.

However, it seems to me that, despite its traditional appeal, the biographical has insuperable

objections. Clearly Johnson did not intend that his Ramblers should be read in this fashion when he wrote them, and few of his biographers, certainly not Boswell, could have so read thm on their first appearing. If, to judge rightly of an author, it is necessary to "transport ourselves to his time, and examine what were the wants of his contemporaries, and what were his means of supplying them"[44] then we must attempt to forget Boswell's Life when we come to the Rambler. Moreover, this method seems a remarkable sort of special pleading, which argues that works too inept to satisfy normal aesthetic criteria should receive a compensatory approabtion from our non-aesthetic faculties. If any experience should be brought to Johnson's work, it is not what we acquire vicariously through Boswell, but in our proper persons in our own lives.

It must be reflected besides that the "popular" Johnson is as gloomy as his works, but the real Johnson, though he might periodically become afflicted with melancholy, was also capable of remarkable cheerfulness. Hawkins claims Johnson had a great talent of humour, and says he has seen Warburton not a little out of countenance when he would like to have been thought a man of pleasantry but Johnson outshone him.[45] Mrs Thrale, too, gives Johnson 16 out of 20 for humour, though neither she nor Hawkins has vividly reproduced this quality for us. Even

Boswell fails in this particular, though he sought the help of Fanny Burney: "Grave Sam, and great Sam and solemn Sam, and learned Sam, - all these he has appeared over and over . . . I want to show him as gay Sam, agreeable Sam, pleasant Sam . . . "[46] No one can know whether it was solemn Sam or gay Sam who wrote London or the Idler or even Rasselas.

Self-expression is a function of art, but the ability of a critical reader to perceive the self which is expressed may be questioned. It is true that Johnson finds fault with Lycidas because, "Where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief."[47] He complains of the inadequacy of Cowley's love poetry: "the basis of all excellence is truth: he that professes love ought to feel its power."[48] And of Hammond's elegies he writes: "Where there is fiction, there is no passion; he that describes himself as a shepherd, and his Neaera or Delia as a shepherdess, and talks of goats and lambs, feels no passion. He that courts his mistress with Roman imagery deserves to lose her; for she may with good reason suspect his sincerity."[49] But, although he is rigorous in his application of "sincerity" as a standard for judging poetry, it must be considered in what this "sincerity" consists. Jean Hagstrum believes that in this respect Johnson was a child of his age.[50] Johnson professed the absurdity of the biographical approach to reading poetry, noting how far a lady

missed the character of Thomson when she attempted to find it in his works,[51] but, Hagstrum claims, Johnson did demand that the poet feel what he wrote, and in this he resembles Fielding, Hume, Dennis, and many others. Yet it seems to me at least possible that it was not sincerity, but the appearance of sincerity which Johnson principally demanded from poets, and even if he himself habitually felt what he wrote, we should not deny him what he did not deny others: the protection of an authorial persona.

Ultimately, the arguments against the biographical method of reading reduce to one: such a reading must undervalue context and genre. The biographical significance of even the Prayers and Meditations may seem doubtful when it is remembered that theories of decorum and genre would prescribe self-examination and self-abasement as proper topics for the meditations of a Christian sinner.[52]

One alternative to the biographical method of reading Johnson is what may be termed the generic method. This has been cleverly expounded by Paul Fussell.[53] He draws attention to the large quantity of Johnson's work which was not written in his proper person: the free prefaces, dedications, and poetic passages, the Debates in Parliament, the Vinerian law lectures undertaken for Robert Chambers, and the sermons composed for John Taylor.[54] He emphasizes

the impact of law and legal thinking on Johnson's literary sensibility, and claims that for him, and many other eighteenth-century figures, a writer or poet is like a barrister arguing a case.[55] He is not engaged in direct self-explanation, but in the artful fabrication of sentiments appropriate to an occasion and the genre which governs it. However, Fussell continues, in a passage which seems to retract partially what he has already said, Johnson expected true literature to be something of a combination of genuine self-expression with received formulations and devices.[56] Plainly, the utility of the generic approach for the reader depends on an author's yielding to his aesthetic rather than his moral sense. It might be remarked that whereas the biographical method tends to make fact of Johnson's fiction, the generic method tends to make fiction of Johnson's fact. One undervalues his art, the other his veracity.

In favour of this generic method, let it be noted how often Johnson recognises genre lore. He admits that the known style of dedication is flattery.[57] He argues that the personal letter is exactly the least sincere and natural of all genres, both in his criticism and in a letter to Mrs Thrale.[58] Rambler 152, on the theory of epistolary composition, stresses artifice throughout. Rambler 156 and the Preface to Shakespeare state that

it is only for the transcendent genius to transgress the boundaries of tragedy and comedy and mingle genres. The difficulty of detecting plagiarism, Rambler 143 suggests, is a direct consequence of the uniformity of human experience, and the conventions which restrict our means of communicating.

It must also be confessed how much artful manipulation of the reader can be detected in Johnson by a critic who is committed to this theory. Carey McIntosh has profitably studied the influence of the conventions of allegory and the oriental tale on Johnson's Ramblers and Rasselas.[59] References to Caesar's commentaries, and to Homer's Odyssey place the Journey to the Western Islands in the tradition of travel books. And examples may be cited where Johnson may have suppressed the truth in order to achieve a more pleasing aesthetic result. The speech which Johnson assigned Walpole when his accusers are driving him from power differs substantially from the version quoted by the semi-official biographer of Walpole.[60] Again, Boswell quotes Langton to the effect that the phrase "without one act of assistance" in the Letter to Chesterfield is misleading. Johnson did once receive the sum of ten pounds from Lord Chesterfield "'but as that was so inconsiderable a sum, he thought the mention of it could not properly find place in a letter of the kind that this was.'"[61] Again, the Lives of the Poets are not distinguished by

their factual accuracy. Some sources appear to be quoted as much for their anecdotal as their historical value. The farcical account of Dryden's funeral comes into this category. Not only did Johnson fail to read proferred evidence for his biographies of the poets,[62] but he also omitted to correct errors when they were drawn to his attention.[63]

Yet the generic attitude to Johnson's prose has certain inadequacies. Although Johnson recognised genres in his criticism, he himself always loved truth better than art. He admits that "The known style of a dedication is flattery . . . " but, "I do not myself think that a man should say in a dedication what he could not say in a history."[64] Rambler 136 brands indecent and promiscuous dedication as the greatest cause of the degradation of literature. Again, "Though a sepulchral inscription is professedly a panegyric and, therefore, not confined to historical impartiality, yet it ought always to be written with regard to truth."[65] It cannot be known that Johnson deliberately misled subscribers to the Gentlemen's Magazine with his Debates. Boswell represents him employing every effort to obtain the fullest accuracy in his Debates, and attributes his cessation of this labour, on Johnson's authority, to his alarm on discovering the speeches were supposed genuine.[66] It is at any event questionable how much scope there is for the arts of fiction when

the speakers and the parts they played in the Debates were prescribed by informers, and sometimes members may have seen fit to honour Johnson with the texts of their own speeches. Truth is Johnson's first aim: "as the drunkard fights for the whisky-bottle or the Shylock for his ducats - so did Johnson fight for truth."[67] He did not accomodate his sermons to the personalities who were to deliver them. They remain "a true index of his own solemn meditations."[68] Of course, it is possible to contend that when Johnson put in the mouth of John Taylor, whose domestic despotism and worldly avarice were famous, sermons condemning cruelty in marriage, or opposing the evils of business and interest, he intended the preacher and his congregation to perceive the irony.[69] When Johnson practises irony on other occasions, however, as in Marmor Norfolciense and A Compleat Vindication, it is rather strained and neither amuses nor stimulates. It is more consistent to suppose that he loved truth better than bold irony or dramatic decorum.

Johnson's failure to use material offered to him for the Lives of the Poets may be plausibly explained in terms of his defensive pride as "the great Cham". No doubt Johnson had formed his opinion of most of the poets, as he had of Shenstone,[70] long before he undertook the project. And his age besides may justify his preferring to write in furious spasms,

than to make an accumulation of notes of which there might be no end. Moreover, the outrage excited by the work referred rather to its critical than its biographical departments, although there was a battle over the alleged illiberality of Lord Lyttelton to Shenstone, from which Fanny Burney has recorded a spectacular foray.[71] Yet I do not know that Johnson ever justified his errors of fact in the Lives of the Poets on the grounds that his genre required them. That he did not respond to criticism by the excision of sundry minor flaws may be attributed partly to deafness, partly to fatigue. Personal sympathy, not aesthetic sensibility induced him to record rather "nothing that is false, than all that is true."[72] But truth was his aim.

That Johnson's Letter to Chesterfield contains a falsehood it is useless to deny, but about the nature of that falsehood there may be useful debate. Langton's note clearly implies that the lie was employed to avoid damaging the rhetorical effect of the paragraph. A reference to the inconsiderable sum which had passed between the patron and the lexicographer would have reduced the epistle from the grand elaboration of general principles to a mean and detailed complaint about particular insults. Mindful of his genre, Johnson asserted what Chesterfield must know to be untrue. Yet it is no very practised exponent of

genres but rather an ever vigilant moralist who feels impelled to focus our observation on this minor deviation from fact. Johnson, besides, was of a highly passionate nature. His rebuff of Sir Thomas Robinson, Chesterfield's agent,[73] demonstrates how strongly he was animated by pride in his independence at this period. It is not entirely improbable that Johnson wrote that phrase "without one act of assistance" less as a calculating literary craftsman than as the victim of an emotional stimulus. Although a penetrating critic of the self-deception of others, Johnson was himself especially vulnerable to comforting delusions. He was alert to the absurdity of over-valuing the future, but he habitually revalued his own past. He recommended the cautious cultivation of forgetfulness as a means to avoid excessive grief and self-recrimination,[74] but perhaps he invented as much as he forgot in his sentimental retrospect on life with Tetty.

But the most damaging argument against the generic and perhaps the strongest to support the biographical method of reading Johnson is the consistency of his written and spoken opinions. G.B.Hill's "Johnsonian" editions detect parallels of thought in an abundance surprising for one wont to talk for victory. Although it is foolish absolutely to deny Johnson's use of and sensitivity to genre lore, particularly in Rasselas, the Rambler, and his criticism, it would be still more

foolish to interpret Johnson's major expository and epistolary work as mere fiction.

When Fussell makes use of his theory in practical criticism, he is reduced to making use of Johnson's biography in the same fashion as those he has censured. For example, he claims, perhaps attending too much to their English titles, which Johnson did not sanction, to detect inconsistencies in the arguments of certain Ramblers. He explains these as the results of Johnson's haste to write essays which he did not plan in advance and hated to revise.[75] Yet almost all of Johnson's major works underwent many revisions by the author as new editions of them were produced. It seems unlikely that it would prove more troublesome to him to revise the meaning of a paragraph than to alter phraseology minutely. Moreover, James Gray, in his study of Johnson's sermons, has found that in some Ramblers and sermons which deal with the same themes, Johnson uses the same arguments in the same order, despite the more literary flavour of the Ramblers, and the greater length required in the sermons.[76] It is difficult to reconcile such consistency in two differing genres with Fussell's theory.

A third, and important, approach to Johnson's work is that of historical criticism. "To judge rightly of an author, we must transport ourselves to his time, and examine what were the wants of his

contemporaries, and what were his means of supplying them."[77] It is ludicrous to blame Johnson for failing to achieve what he never intended, or to praise him for what he did by accident and even against his will. Johnson defines his literary standards thus: "The only end of writing is to enable the readers better to enjoy life, or better to endure it; . . . "[78] His aim is to inform and to amuse, "aut prodesse aut delectare". This much debated Horatian formula signified for Johnson the notion that the poet is to instruct by delighting. Aesthetic pleasure is the means by which an artist effects the education of his audience, which is his end. In Lucretian terms, as children are tempted by the sweet honey to swallow their bitter medicine, so the poet, by attractive language, induces his hearers to assent to unpleasant truths. Johnson's allegory of Fiction, Falsehood, and Truth in Rambler 96 interprets the function of Fiction as the seduction of man to unattractive truth. The rôle of art is not to provide man with an escape from life, but to promote in him a keener apprehension of his moral status. The task of an author, Johnson tells us at the start of Rambler 3, is either to teach what is not known, or to recommend known truth by alluring ornaments. The writer's duty, Johnson believed, was to instruct humanity. The ideal poet, described by Imlac in Chapter X of

Rasselas, is at once the interpreter of nature and the legislator of mankind.

This didacticism is by no means confined to Johnson. Richardson, Hogarth, Defoe, Berkeley, Fielding and Pope, and, indeed, most major figures of the milieu were concerned with the moral education of their audience. Yet in Johnson this theme so predominates that it seems rather fundamental than incidental to his creation. The Preface to his Dictionary itself occasions sombre reflections on the drudgery inescapable in initially attractive projects, and even in his friendly letters on mundane topics he is driven by a pedagogic urge to consider the general truths of the human condition.

To the didactic element of Johnson's work three criticisms pertain: that his teaching is false, that it is monotonously obtrusive, and that its effect is immoral. Each man's conviction about life may be objected to as a self-centred generalization, but few men have seen life in such encyclopaedic variety as Johnson, and although the rejoinder might follow that Johnson examined only those aspects of life which would provide evidence to confirm the thesis to which his melancholy life of persistent pain[79] had already led him, it might be argued that all men strive to shun a philosophy which "baffles and disappoints our dearest

desires and most cherished powers,"[80] and that we are by nature prejudiced against pessimism about this present life.

It is, too, possible to over-state the gloomy atmosphere of Johnson's work. In Rasselas especially, as Frederick Hilles has remarked,[81] there is an important quality of humorous irony. Johnson's failure to high-light his ironic tone may avoid the hysterical excesses of Swift, but it has let many mistake wry asides for melancholy moralising. The Rambler, if it is to be justly treated, should be read in a periodical fashion, as it was originally issued. Rambler 107 confesses that uniformity is the charge most often brought against this production, but Johnson's humour is not confined to the Idler. Rambler 161 on the revolutions of a garret, and Rambler 117, Hypertatus' eulogy on garrets, may rival Boswell's Hypochondriack in their droll vivacity. The Rambler's tenor is diversified also by papers of literary criticism and allegorical aetiology. Let those who complain of both the despondency and the imperfect characterization of the Rambler consider that had Johnson's presentation been of the most sensitive and subtle type then many of these fictions would have been so pathetic and distressing that they would intensify the dismal effect of the more philosophical discursive papers. To condemn Johnson

for the persistence of his didacticism may be a failure of historical imagination. Johnson's criticism is frequently moralistic. He interprets Aristotle's theory of catharsis in moral terms,[82] and the weakness of Irene, it might be asserted, is somewhat due to the playwright's compulsion to pass moral judgements. For it was to Boswell and Johnson as natural to praise a poem for the nobility of its sentiments as it is to some moderns to delight in wit, irony, ambiguity, paradox and tension. For Boswell Johnson is rather "the great English Moralist,"[83] than the great editor, essayist, or lexicographer. For Boswell and Johnson, as for G.B.Shaw,[84] great art can never be anything else but didactic.

The immorality of Johnson's art is twofold. First , some of his early political writing is vicious in its undiscriminating support of a canting, unprincipled opposition. In this category is Marmor Norfolciense and A Compleat Vindication of the Licensers of the Stage. The latter work may also be censured on the grounds that it praised the institution of the theatre, which, in Johnson's day, was a nest for every type of criminality.

Secondly, Johnson's didactic art may act as a short circuit, a means of avoiding action. Literature may arouse ethical impulses which

cannot be given immediate expression and thereby weaken the link between stimulus and action so much that one may find it easy to fail to respond to the ethical and emotional summons of life. Thus Johnson's art may prove immorally didactic in defiance of his professed intention. It may teach a philosophy from the real expression of which men are discouraged by that very passivity to which they must succumb to be a sympathetic reading audience.

Of course, that Johnson's own works may fail by it, is not a valid objection to his didactic standard for literature. Yet it may suggest that Johnson's capacity for enjoying words was far greater than his conscience would permit his admitting. He justifies pleasure by its efficacy as a teacher: "That which is read without pleasure is not often recollected nor infixed by conversation, and therefore in a great measure drops from the memory."[85] But he judges a poet's ability to excite pleasure in terms of his invention, imagination and judgement. These three qualities, in their highest forms, Johnson argued in the Life of Pope, constitute genius.[86]

By judgement is meant the self-critical faculty

which selects what the present occasion requires. In this respect Johnson is successful, but his triumph is that of restraint. His talent is for the formal and traditional, and he chose work of an unspontaneous nature. Fanny Burney was surprised at their first meeting to find him habitually silent until tempted to speak by others.[87] And Mrs Thrale observes, "he appeared the idlest of human beings; ever musing till he was called out to converse . . . "[88] Boswell records, "Johnson once observed to me, 'Tom Tyers described me the best: "Sir, (said he,) you are like a ghost: you never speak till you are spoken to."'"[89] And Johnson's writing was like his talk in that the Dictionary, the edition of Shakespeare, the biographies, even the Ramblers for which the mottoes were advertised in advance, and the Sermons, for which The Book of Common Prayer and Nelson's Festivals and Feasts might provide themes apt for particular occasions[90], required no exercise of powerful discrimination among materials from the author.

Imagination consists in sensitivity to nature and the capacity in turn vividly to present nature to the reader. Although the range of his perceptions may be limited, the force with which Johnson impresses his truth is praiseworthy. The insistence of his prose rhythms, the emphatic power of his

amplifications, and the clarity of his imagery ensure that even when, as in some of his critical work, he tells us nothing new, he envigorates our old knowledge by the intensity of his expression.

In invention, or originality in materials and their application, is found at once Johnson's great want. His theme is human nature in its invariable state, and this lays on him a lamentable constraint. But he discovered in scientific imagery and the skilled use of Latinate diction the ideal means to reason without passion, and to comfort without grossness or condescension. Yet, as Johnson himself admits in Rambler 78, novelty and variety are necessary if the human mind is to be powerfully affected, and it might be argued that no acuteness of judgement and no power of imagination can compensate for poverty of invention.

The historical approach is useful, despite its confusion of ethical and aesthetic values, and despite its bias in favour of a particular kind of intellectual pleasure characterized by restraint and propriety. But like the other approaches, it is not complete in itself. It is the over-valuation of judgement which must render this standard suspect. Of the two poles of audience response, it stresses detached assent at the cost of involved enthusiasm. Literature, and our relation to it, is essentially complicated. Art, which has been

called the imitation of life, evokes no fewer reactions than life itself.

Neither the biographical, nor the generic, nor the historical method provides a comprehensively satisfying critical attitude to Johnson's works. It can be argued that literary value is subjective in so much as it exists only in the mind of man, and that each of these approaches is "true" because what it describes is not Johnson's work but a possible relation between this work and the reader. But subjectivity does not imply irresoluble heterogeneity of opinion. Men value the same texts, not because "value" is there to be observed, but because they are all men. The primary concern of the critic is the work before him. The author's biography, the expectations of his audience, and his private literary standards, are pertinent only in so far as they serve to clarify a text in its aspect of common appeal to an ideal, untutored reader.

To this end of elucidation, a knowledge of Johnson's character is important.

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CHAPTER II JOHNSON'S PERSONALITY

The life of Samuel Johnson has been recorded by so many hands, with such a variety of discrepant detail, that at last he seems as much myth as man. Source delivers us to source, and there is no end of confusion. The works of a writer must be understood as the products of his particular nature, but in Johnson's case biography threatens to supplant criticism. Psychological insight replaces verbal analysis and Johnson is diagnosed as "merely" neurotic, as though the label of a mental disorder were enough to explain a unique artistic capacity. But biography is a constituent of literary criticism, not its prelude, nor its substitute. From so much evidence a series of traits emerge. From so much caricature a character is to be inferred. And this deduced personality is a key to the works.

There are, apart from Johnson himself, three main authorities for the events of his life and the content of his character. These are James Boswell, Sir John Hawkins, and Mrs Thrale-Piozzi. And even before the host of minor sources for Johnson's life are mentioned, it is clear that few lives can have been recorded in such detail by such different personalities.

James Boswell was lively, sympathetic, and of such a mercurial temperament that nothing could be habitual with him but change. As his Journals reveal, he maintained a kind of dual existence as both the protagonist and the

narrator of his own life.[1] In his perception of himself there was an odd division of these two functions. And it is as a matter of course that he addresses himself in the second person in the series of memoranda which from Autumn 1762 he seems to have jotted down daily to tell himself what to eat, wear, read and buy, whom to visit, and how to conduct himself during these visits.

The capacity for conversion is a sign of uncertainty about one's identity and it has been discovered that in the Spring of 1760 Boswell ran away to London to be received into the communion of the Church of Rome. The gravity of this action was such that had he persisted as a professed Catholic he would have been debarred from practising law, taking a commission in the army or navy, filling a post of government, presenting himself as a candidate for Parliament, voting in an election, and even from inheriting his father's estate of Auchinleck. But it was contrary to Boswell's genius to limit himself to one field of experience. His voracious curiosity is perhaps one result of his failure to resist even trivial impulses. When Madame D'Arblay came to write her father's memoirs, she remembered Boswell in Johnson's company at Streatham as adhering to the great man with canine fidelity, almost ignorant of the rest of the table. And when Johnson rebuffed Boswell for his rudeness by comparing him to a Branghton,

one of the vulgar family connected to Mme Duval in Evelina, the pertinacious Scot took up this new scent, eager to find out what a "branghton" was.[2]

Throughtout his mature years Boswell retained the imaginative pliability of an adolescent personality. Indeed, his adult life may be interpreted as a prolonged series of those "crushes" which typify adolescence. Again and again he notes in his Journals that on a particular occasion he not only resembled but actually was one of his acquaintances. This remarkable capacity for identification with others makes Boswell the ideal biographer. His power as a mimic rivalled the abilities of Garrick, and as Bertrand H. Bronson argues, "No other talent could so well have assisted a phenomenal memory in re-creating dialogue from abbreviated memoranda."[3]

Against the fervour and plasticity of James Boswell must be set the gelid caution of Sir John Hawkins. Johnson himself is reported to have reckoned Hawkins a brutal and mean man, "a most unclubable man!"[4] Yet Hawkins shows himself largely unaware of his own failings, and since he knew Johnson at that period of indigence and toil in the forties when he was fighting to survive in the world of London's hack writers, he is a useful source. Indeed, one almost suspects that Hawkins had not enough imagination to falsify or invent material. Such is his earnestness and industry that for page upon page he discusses whether the Admirable Crichton is fact or fancy.[5]

Johnson had retold the absurd exploits in which this hero of "shaggy dog" stories is glorified, but Hawkins, too dull and sober to see the joke, makes this an issue on which Johnson's reputation for veracity is to be decided. Hawkins traces the life of the Admirable Crichton as far back as he can, even quoting for examination Sir Thomas Urquhart's version of 1652. He weighs the probabilities and at last delivers his verdict that the fantastic creature did exist, but his powers were greatly exaggerated, that Johnson accepted the account of an unknown party, and is not guilty of falsehood, but rather of failing to subject his authority to close scrutiny.

Mrs Thrale-Piozzi was a pleasant, waspish woman, full of that self-assertive, energetic mischief which is associated with older sisters. Some of her actions, as when she pretended to detect a blossoming romance between Fanny Burney and Johnson, who had been so charmed by Evelina, or when, at a party otherwise dull, she engaged, behind the singer's very back, in a talented mimicry of him, suggest a strange combination of malice and fun.[6] Mrs Thrale had need of her self-reliance, however, for her first marriage, which she always admitted was undertaken from prudential motives, was to a man who, though he drank little, ate and philandered to excess. He also proved reckless in his business ventures, and it is due to his wife's mental resources that he survived

the financial catastrophe of 1772. Even when the family income was secure, Mrs Thrale's imagination and intelligence were bound by the cares of the nursery. She bore Thrale twelve children, seven of whom died in their infancy. Even her second marriage, entered in a romantic spirit, demanded strength of character: firstly to survive the public and private hostility to the union in England, secondly to endure her darling Piozzi's cruelly slow death from gout.

For the student of Mrs Thrale interested in her performance as a recorder of Johnsoniana, the most noteworthy trait of her personality is her exceptional inability to judge those with whom she was emotionally involved. In spite of their natural inclinations, she tried to make a scholar of her adopted son Salusbury, and a tender and responsive woman of her daughter Queeney. Of Cecilia too, the daughter who most resembled her in disposition, she made an enemy by trying to interfere in her marriage.

The accuracy of these three major sources for Johnson's life is open to question. Mrs Thrale's techniques of composition have been examined by Katharine C. Balderston.[7] The changes which she detects as material is transferred from Mrs Thrale's earliest "Johnsoniana" to her "Thraliana," and then at last to the Anecdotes of Dr Johnson, are of

such significance as to make one inquire whether Mrs Thrale was not as much an agent of distortion in the initial process of entrusting factual occurence to brief notes and hints, as she was when she came to rework these jottings during her subsequent leisure. "Every variety of freedom was taken by Mrs Piozzi with the original record. She expanded, contracted, telescoped, confused the time sequence, changed general statements into specific ones and specific ones into general, invented occasions for conversations floating in a vacuum, transferred speeches from one person to another, and repeatedly gave in the form of direct quotation from Johnson statements for which there is no hint in her diary."[8]

In the Anecdotes, of course, Mrs Thrale had irreconcilable aims: both to provide a biographical account of Johnson and to justify her treatment of him. Moreover, she had no ready access to the bulk of her Johnsoniana which she had left in England. Her capering intelligence made Mrs Thrale unfit to write a scholarly biography of Johnson, but the memorabilia of him which she began to record as early as 1768 have the advantage of uncloaked sincerity. Johnson even turned to her as a confessor to whom he might trust the secret of his fancied insanity.[9] From the intimacy of the Streatham circle Boswell was always somewhat excluded. He was surprised by Johnson's shocked

reaction to the news of Harry Thrale's death,[10] and so misread Johnson's feelings for Mrs Thrale as to suppose that he might court her when she was widowed.[11] Yet the value of Mrs Thrale's record is spoiled by the personal tinge which colours everything she wrote. Her sincerity is plain. Her failure is not one of veracity but of emphasis.

Hawkins, like many biographers in the eighteenth century, may easily be condemned of scores of minor errors of fact, but he cannot be blamed for deliberate distortion. The charges of prejudice which have been traditionally brought against him are also hard to justify. Bertram Davis has ably defended Hawkins' Life of Johnson as a historical biography,[12] but Davis tends to over-state his case. For example, in his discussion of the digression on the Admirable Crichton, he praises Hawkins for making Johnson's devotion to truth a recurrent theme. Yet it is not the irrelevance of this section, but its display of Hawkins' insensitivity to Johnson's humour which must be the strongest objection to it. Hawkins may not lead us into major error, but in a biographer judicial impartiality is no substitute for enthusiasm and empathy.

From the specific events which Hawkins does recount, such as Johnson's assault on Osborne, or

his rebuff of Chesterfield's envoy, long Sir Thomas Robinson, it is not possible to infer his historiographical integrity or otherwise. Indeed, the more interesting an anecdote is to the biographer, the more likely it is to be found in a multitude of writers in a multitude of versions. For example, Mrs Thrale-Piozzi, Boswell, and Hawkins all recount the incident when Johnson went to see a play at the Guildhall in Lichfield, and after leaving his seat for a short time had to reclaim it from a new occupant. And although in each source the story is told with differences of detail and emphasis, nevertheless, all three claim Garrick as their primary authority.

Even the reputation of Boswell is blemished in this matter of historical accuracy. It is not in Boswell's making of his Life of Johnson out of his journals and the notes on which they are based that there are mistakes and exaggerations to be detected, though they must occur here too, since his journal was not written up daily, and he freely presents us with an example of the shortcomings of his abbreviated writing when he tells how he could not reproduce the passage from Robertson's History of America which Johnson read out to test him.[13] Moreover, what Boswell made note of himself was what he thought worthy of preservation, and he is hardly likely to have accorded that distinction to materials which contradicted his pre-existent conception of Johnson. But in that larger half of the Life where

Boswell edits not his own papers but those of his many correspondents, he is to be discovered changing words and phrases, rearranging sentences and clauses, and even inventing dialogue.[14] What Boswell did to these texts which others sent him was quite in harmony with the standards of accuracy of his own day, but he clearly revised the tone and tendency of their reports to coincide with his own view of Johnson.

It is his adoration of Johnson which is at once Boswell's great strength and weakness as a biographer. What Macaulay called the "Lues Boswelliana, or disease of admiration"[15] accounts for Boswell's success in recreating his idea of Johnson as a social being, but it also accounts for his silence on Johnson's possible incontinence during his early years in London, and his intention to remarry after Tetty's death.[16]

When it is considered how different Boswell, Hawkins and Mrs Thrale were in character, and to what extent they may offend the modern idea of historicity in their compositions, it is remarkable that although they, and the various lesser authorities for Johnson's life, present many irreconcilable pieces of testimony, they nevertheless concur to no small degree about Johnson's character. About details of behaviour they dissent, but about the character which the behaviour exemplifies they usually agree.

There is striking unanimity that Johnson was a man of prodigious aggression. Not only did he offend by positive attack, but he also refused to participate in the common courtesy of expressing sympathy with those whose misfortunes might affect him only indirectly. Mrs Thrale recounts his odious indifference, if such it was, to the fate of Mr Thrale when he leapt from a coach which overbalanced on a cliff road.[17] Johnson seemed to regard Thrale's spectacular dive as humorous. Hawkins claims that during meetings of the Ivy Lane Club the members had great difficulty in restraining Johnson from rudely contradicting Dr Salter, bringing his learning and his truthfulness into question, and openly delighting in his attack on an aged and venerable clergyman.[18] Boswell reports an incident of similar import during the Scottish tour, when Johnson interrogated the Reverend Hector MacLean with a ruthless directness which took no account of the fact that MacLean was seventy-seven, and at least a little deaf.[19]

Fanny Burney reports one occasion on which Johnson passionately attacked one Mr Pepys at a party at Streatham daring him to declare his charges against the "Life of Lyttelton."[20] At first the company was greatly embarrassed by this behaviour, but at last it was heartily weary of it, for Johnson continued his harangue of menaces all through dinner, he persisted when the ladies departed to let the men drink wine after dinner, and even when the ladies returned for tea he maintained his assault. Attempts at

humour and diversion could not stop him. He was silenced only when Mrs Thrale made a dignified and spirited speech of protest against this tedious onslaught of four hours duration. Indeed, Mrs Thrale was so outraged by Johnson's performance that she did not permit him to leave Streatham the next morning before she had delivered a stern lecture to him on yielding to such vehemence.

Boswell reports how he himself was the victim of a similar outburst of Johnson's passion.[21] Johnson, he claims, had spoken of keeping a seraglio. This had provoked Boswell to immoderate mirth, and Johnson responed by employing virulent sarcasm to make his companion an object of ridicule for the whole company. For Johnson simply could not endure the superiority of others. When he was at Oxford, he sat as far as he could from the able scholar Meeke during lectures so that he need not hear him excel in translation.[22] When his poverty at college prevented Johnson from renewing his footwear, someone was prompted to donate anonymously a pair of shoes to replace the tatters he wore. Johnson's response was an immediate and furious rejection of the gift. He would not even touch what he supposed tainted by a donor's disdain.[23]

Johnson may well have been a friend to subordination, but he had in mind the subordination of others, not himself. His own criticism of Mrs Macaulay's republicanism, that it was a system for lowering her superiors without raising her inferiors, might without

impropriety be applied to Johnsonian manners.[24] He demanded from others a respect which he was unwilling to reciprocate. No better example is there of this conflict than Johnson's interview with George III.[25] In Boswell's account this reads more like a diplomatic meeting of two monarchs than an assembly of a group of subjects to receive the gracious compliment of conversation with their sovereign. Johnson is presented as an authority of sibylline infallibility to be treated with the deepest respect. The king's role changes to that of a timid interviewer: Johnson's status is regal.

Johnson seemed to demand as the due of friendship a singular self-effacement from the other party. Mrs Thrale writes in a letter how much she will enjoy her trip to France in 1784 because without Johnson's presence she will feel free to indulge that fondness for painting which fear of Johnson's ridicule had made her suppress previously.[26] We know from Fanny Burney that his violent tongue excluded Johnson from an invitation of Streathamites to Lady Shelley's. We know too that Dr Delap and Mr Selwyn deliberately avoided Streatham from fear of Johnson, and that on one occasion no-one in the household except Mr Metcalf would speak to him voluntarily.[27] Johnson was accustomed to speak his mind about the dress of ladies at Streatham, and they had come to obey him implicitly, altering whatever he disapproved.[28] Mrs Thrale told Miss Burney an example of Johnson's unbridled rudeness to Lady Ladd, when, in ready-made doggerel, he pointed out that she was dressing like a woman of twenty-one

when she was twice that age and more.[29]

Johnson felt justified in imposing on others his own critical standards. In one boisterous argument with Mr Pepys about Gray's poetry and Pope's definition of wit he was so satirical and exulting that he made the whole company abhor him.[30] Like his uncle Andrew in the wrestling ring at Smithfield, Johnson was determined "neither to be thrown nor conquered."[31] When his knowledge of Greek was proved superior to that of a Danish nobleman, he laughed aloud in triumph.[32] It was his joy to conquer in any way. Weak personalities were irresistible to him as victims whereby he could show his superiority. Mrs Thrale and Mr Seward both told Fanny Burney how Johnson delighted in intimidating and brow-beating a dull, foolish young woman called Fanny Brown until once she was so miserable before the bullying onslaught that she burst into tears.[33] Dr Campbell reports an outburst of furious rhetoric against the Irish and Americans in which Johnson proclaimed that had he the power he would raze their cities by burning and destroy the people in the flames.[34]

Boswell tells us that during the Scottish tour Johnson was so infuriated when a waiter put sugar into his lemonade with greasy fingers that he threw it out of the window and looked ready to knock the waiter down.[35] Boswell also reports, citing as his authority Topham Beauclerk at whose house in the country the incident occurred, that Dr Johnson was present when two large

ferocious dogs started fighting. He looked steadily at them for a little while and then, "as one would separate two little boys who are foolishly hurting each other, he ran up to them, and cuffed their heads till he drove them asunder. But few men have his intrepidity, Herculean strength, or presence of mind. Most thieves or robbers would be afraid to encounter a mastiff."[36]

Against this consistent pattern of aggression in Johnson's behaviour must be set his undeniable impulse to charity. He might talk for victory, determined to be master of the field, but most sources seem to agree that very often his first action on attaining victory was to attempt to effect a reconciliation with the party he had offended. He was always willing to help with advice the indigent scribbler who requested that he examine a new production. He freely contributed prologues for plays, producing the prologue for a charity performance of Comus to relieve the distress of Milton's grand-daughter. He expended his energy and skill to try to obtain mercy for the forger Dr Dodd. He took up the cause of the elderly Welsh fringe scientist, Zachariah Williams, who believed that he knew how to find out longitude at sea. He supported innumerable subscriptions for publication, no doubt often knowing that no book would ever appear. He habitually carried loose change which he could distribute among London's poor. During the Scottish tour Johnson and Boswell donated four shillings' largesse to a party of soldiers near Fort Augustus, and

in one glen they gratified a horde of children with a similar gesture.[37] Johnson's own household contained signal proofs of his eleemosynary capacity. Mrs Williams, Dr Levet, and Frank Barber were the only permanent residents in his later years, but Poll Carmichael, the Desmoulins family and others besides seem to have been afforded protracted shelter under his roof. Yet, although many might admire Johnson's piety and be obliged to him because of its practical expression, it is hard to believe that many loved him. It is interesting to note that his charity did not seem to endear him to its beneficiaries. In a letter of 1778 to Mrs Thrale, Johnson describes what was probably the normal condition of his household: "We have tolerable concord at home, but no love. Williams hates every body. Levet hates Desmoulins and does not love Williams. Desmoulins hates them both. Poll loves none of them."[38] Goldsmith might admire Johnson's genius, but he was enraged by his domineering pre-eminence. William Shaw's Memoirs of Johnson show clearly that there was something about Johnsonian kindness which stimulated the recipient to repay it with malice.[39] Fanny Burney might even lead one to suppose that Johnson found benevolent gestures quite compatible with his aggressive impulses. On one occasion she records that he compelled her to eat ham and eggs against her will.[40] She also reports being forced by him to eat cake at tea when he resolutely held it before her mouth and refused to withdraw it.[41] Again, she sets it

down that neither her own repeated attempts to escape from the exclusive company of Johnson when there were a large number of guests at Streatham, nor the interposition of a third party could deter him from treating her as his property alone.[42] It must be admitted, however, that Fanny Burney was a very submissive type.

Nevertheless, as Shaw maintains, Johnson assumed the distinction of a dictator in all companies.[43] When he could not maintain this position he simply withdrew his attention and resorted to a book. This he might also do before deciding whether or not to commit himself as one of an assembly. Fanny Burney's first impression of him confirms this. She describes how the gathering felt as he subjected Dr Burney's library to a close examination: "His attention, however, was not to be diverted five minutes from the books, as we were in the library; he pored over them, shelf by shelf, almost touching the backs of them with his eye-lashes, as he read their titles. At last, having fixed upon one, he began, without further ceremony, to read to himself, all the time standing at a distance from the company. We were all very much provoked, as we perfectly languished to hear him talk; but it seems he is the most silent creature, when not particularly drawn out, in the world."[44] This was a reticence founded not in modesty, but in strategy. Johnson's self-esteem was so precarious

that he never put it to any risk which he could by restraint avoid.

If ever he was threatened, Johnson resorted to either complete attack or complete withdrawal. Mrs Thrale was furious to find that Johnson responded with cold indifference to her intention to leave England to save money on the death of Thrale.[45] But surely the truth of the situation was not that Johnson had made use of Streatham and the advantages it afforded him for eighteen years out of narrow self-interest, but rather that after so many years of fond family life and entertainment among the Thrales the prospect of this relief being terminated hurt him so deeply that he could not express his grief. To reveal his feelings would be to inflict, when he could least bear it, yet another injury to his self-confidence. It would be to admit how much the Streathamites mattered to him. For Johnson's habitual aggression indicates no less than a man so critically unsure of his own worth that he felt compelled at every opportunity to bolster his ego. His relations with other people are characterised by rigid poses of dominance and subordination. What is importantly lacking is any sort of spontaneity and mutuality. It is precisely because his social intercourse was so often wanting in reciprocal trust that his solitude was such an unmitigated torment to him. He was the object

of an unremitting process of valuation: in company by companions, in isolation by God. Johnson inveighed against "feelers", against the cant of bewailing the misfortunes of others, not because he himself was insensible, but because he dared not permit himself to yield to even the smallest trickle of sympathy lest his mind be swamped with that horrid anguish to which his depressive nature made him continually vulnerable.

It is in a humorous sally in a letter to Mrs Thrale that Johnson best explains his own character: ". . . have you not observed in all our conversations that my genius is always in extremes, that I am very noisy, or very silent; very gloomy, or very merry; very sour or very kind? and would you have me cross my genius when it leads me sometimes to voracity and sometimes to abstinence? You know that the oracle said follow your genius."[46] Nowhere is it easier to see the application of this than in Johnson's social life: the orgies of company followed by the fasts of solitude. The middle course was one he found it impossible to follow. His individuality was in peril of exposure to the laceration of loneliness or suffocation in the whirlpool of an audience.

The essential solitude of the human condition was manifest to Johnson. Mrs Thrale-Piozzi recalled in her British Synonymy the surprising suicide of a man very popular in the upper ranks of London

society in the 1770s: "What upon earth, said one at our house, could have made — hang himself? — Why, just his having a multitude of acquaintance, replied Dr Johnson, and ne'er a friend."[47]

It is no surprise that Johnson and Richard Savage were such great friends. Savage was the avatar of childish egotism. He collected acquaintances as other men collect butterflies. Savage's conduct inevitably alienated those who knew him, for his intimacy was superficial and ephemeral, untainted by the compulsion of habit. No relationship could have been less binding. None could have suited Johnson better, for to control and limit his intimacy was the best way to eschew danger and insecurity. The anger with which Johnson reproached Mr Thrale for inviting the Abbé Roffette to visit England was a consequence of this resolution to avoid commitment.[48] This too is the explanation of his deliberate absence from his mother during the last twenty-one years of her life. It was not that he did not love her, but that he loved her too much. Close contact with her would have robbed him of that independence he so prized. He would have been reduced to the status which Plato deemed worse than any, that of a child.

Rasselas, begun after Johnson heard of his mother's last illness, gives an insight into his attitude to her.

One idea present is of course that of the escape from the womb, the Happy Valley, an Edenic scene Johnson depicts with a richness of descriptive detail unparalleled in Rasselas even in the account of the Pyramids. At twenty-six, Rasselas leaves the Valley.[49] At twenty-six, Johnson, in an act of independence, married Elizabeth Porter. It is to be remembered that in medieval pictures the locked garden is a symbol for virginity.

However, this theme of escape from parental protection is but a part of the major theme of the search. In entitling this work the "history" of Rasselas, Johnson adverts to the Herodotean use of "ἱστορία" to mean "inquiry" or the product of inquiry. Rasselas is a philosopher prince, and a practising empiricist. His search for satisfaction makes cohere this rather episodic opus.

It is now recognised that searching is a component of human grief. One consultant psychiatrist writes: "Pining is the subjective and emotional component of the urge to search for a lost object. I maintain that an adult human being has the same impulse to search that is shown by many species of social animal."[50] I suggest that the element of restless journeying in Rasselas is positive evidence that Johnson did experience on his mother's death a grief which bespeaks

previous deep affection. The therapeutic quality of creation is widely acknowledged, and perhaps Rasselas should be considered as one more example of this. The healing function of a self-impelled mental journey has been expounded by R.D.Laing,[51] and there are many obvious parallels in the initiation rites of the classical mystery religions which seem to have enacted a "κατάβασις" that is a journey down to Hell to confront the phantoms of the past and endure trials which serve to purify the spirit of the traveller so that his return to the upper world is in effect a re-birth.

This trait of Johnson's whereby the only alternatives for him were emotional isolation or destructive involvement is perhaps also to be discerned in his relations with his wife. The nature of their marriage is a vexed question. Boswell retails the opinion which Johnson himself expressed in his later years of widowhood, that it was a love match on both sides. Hawkins tends to the view that Tetty and Sam were an absurd couple, playing the parts of lovers but without a true amorous spirit. Both accounts seem likely to be exaggerations, but I believe the unnatural sentimentality of Boswell's account is farther from the truth than the monstrous theatricality which Hawkins suggests. I cannot accept that Johnson could live in peaceful mutuality with Elizabeth Porter, when he could not do so with his parents and brother, or with Boswell, or with the Thrales.

Hawkins' expression of learning matrimonial affection "by rote" seems to me an excellent description of the probable nature of Johnson's marriage. And precisely because Johnson was acting "by rote" his feelings would occasionally rebel. There is a hint in Mrs Piozzi's Anecdotes that Tetty was a house-proud woman and that her passion for cleanliness occasioned disputes between the couple. Moreover, the ease with which their affection might dissolve into emotional rivalry is suggested by the account of their wedding day when, as they rode to church, each tried to make the other match his pace.[52] That their relationship broke down far more critically is suggested by the long periods in 1738 and 1739 when the Johnsons seem to have been living apart. Moreover, from the autumn of 1739 till the spring of 1740 Dr Johnson visited the Midlands to seek the mastership of Appleby Grammar School. By the end of 1739 the matter was settled, but he did not go back to Tetty and London, but stayed as the guest of John Taylor who introduced him to the society of the important families in the neighbourhood.

Johnson's marriage, it seems, was more of a turbulent emotional contest than a peaceful cohabitation. Johnson's behaviour is typically aggressive. He seems to have required hostility in those around him, creating it where it did not exist by nature. It has already been noted that his "family" of dependants lived in mutual hatred.[53]

If Johnson sought hostility in a "family", then it seems likely that he would seek it in a wife.

Both those who knew Johnson as a friend, like Mrs Thrale, Fanny Burney, and Sir Joshua Reynolds, and those who encountered him as a stranger, like the variety of hosts on his Scottish tour, were alike struck by his bellicose disposition. Misdirected patriotism is not enough to explain the Scottish reaction to the tour, nor is middle class sensitivity satisfactory as a cause of the dread with which Johnson was regarded by the Streathamites. Johnson's aggression in company was the counterpart of his guilt in solitude: each state bespeaks his conviction of his own worthlessness. In marriage, friendship, society, and solitude he was ever striving for dominance.

Johnson's behaviour can be explained in extremely different ways. There are those who see his depressions and delusions as the products of inherited genes. Aleyn Lyell Reade consistently supports this view. Some, like J.W.Krutch,[54] would tend to attribute his behaviour to his physical appearance, arguing that unless he dominated a company he would become the object of its ridicule. Others emphasize Johnson's childhood as a decisive factor, taking note of possible quarrels with his brother Nathaniel, and with his mother and father who took up parental duties at an unusually late time in their lives.

The argument from heredity is weak. The mental

capacities measured by IQ tests are claimed to be the product of heredity to a certain extent,[55] but it remains to be shown that personality in its emotional aspect is genetically ordained. The argument from physical appearance and the argument which stresses the effect of childhood are weak in that they both seem to assume an environmental determinism which is itself in want of proof.

A causal explanation of Johnson's behaviour must await the progress of science. For the present, descriptive elucidation is the best that may be expected. The most enlightening account of Johnson's personality seems to be that given by the Freudians. They see him as suffering from an obsessional neurosis. In this illness apparently meaningless and aggravating rituals have to be undertaken either in the patient's mind or in actual physical performance in the course of his or her day-to-day life. The ritual actions are themselves trivial and harmless, but the thoughts which preoccupy the patient are horrifying and disgusting. These impulses never find concrete expression, but may prove so oppressive as to render the sufferer impotent, incapable of carrying out the simplest daily tasks.[56]

There is no reason to doubt the evidence that Johnson adhered to strange rituals of behaviour, such as touching every post on his ambulations about London, or carefully arranging that he make a certain number of paces before ending his journey by crossing the threshold

with the right foot.[57] Johnson's addiction to complicated arithmetical calculations is also well attested. Financial hardship might encourage this trait, but it seems too obtrusive to be explained solely in this way. When Johnson computes how much he may read in a year, a month, or a week, by reading anything from ten to six hundred lines a day, he is clearly expending in obsessive calculation the energy which he should have employed in study.[58] The delusions which attended Johnson's "vile melancholy" may also be interpreted as neurotic symptoms. He himself showed a particular interest in the diseases of the imagination. His famous hypochondria may have been no less than the periodical incapacity of a neurotic to withstand the pressure of his obsessive thoughts.

The nature of Johnson's delusions has been examined by Katharine Balderston.[59] She argues that they were sado-masochistic, and that Johnson invested Mrs Thrale with a power over him which was so great as to be parental. Miss Balderston's account is well documented, but it must be stressed that she proves the delusions, but not their physical enactment.

It is just possible that the references to fetters and manacles which Miss Balderston cites from the Thraliana are to be understood as metaphors, and indeed this metaphor is not uncommon in Johnson's writings, from which it may have been borrowed. The correspondence

in which Johnson seems to ask Mrs Thrale to impose on him a happy servitude may be as much proof of reserve as of indulgence.[60] The strongest evidence of physical license is in the catalogue of a sale by Sir John Salusbury at Manchester in September 1823 of Mrs Piozzi's library and curiosities. Lot 649 is described as "A Padlock," and there is a manuscript, presumably by Mrs Thrale, which reads, "Johnson's Padlock committed to my care in the year 1768." It is tempting to explain this as a reference to Isaac Bickerstaffe's comic opera The Padlock, first produced at Covent Garden in 1768. The objections, however, are quite strong. Bickerstaffe's work was not so famous as to justify the use of an indefinite article in the sale catalogue, like "an Aeneid" or "an Iliad." And even if one interprets the manuscript as implying an especial familiarity on Johnson's part with The Padlock or its author, perhaps even extending to knowledge of it before publication, then it may seem strange that in a conversation about contemporary drama which Boswell records at Oxford in the Spring of 1768 there is no mention of The Padlock, though Johnson does refer to Goldsmith's Good-natur'd Man, for which he wrote the prologue, in this year of persistent gloom.[61] However, Johnson also kept silence before Boswell about his collaboration with Robert Chambers

in 1768 on the Vinerian law lectures. Yet, even if this defence were waived and the physical existence of an actual padlock conceded, still Mrs Thrale's careful wording, "committed to my care," would suggest that the perverse intention was not translated into action. Even if it cannot be claimed that this padlock was specifically intended to protect property during the Wilkite riots of 1768-9, it must be contended that the keynote of Johnson's character is control, and self-control especially. His delusions of external restraint may correspond to his inability to give up internal restraint.

All writing is for communication, even if this be only of the imaginary sort. Johnson's attitude to himself, and his relations with other people suggest what one might look for in his prose: an habitually controlled use of language, in which patterns recur so often as to seem ritually prescribed, a prose which presents aggression followed by reconciliation, the ardour of intimacy followed by the chill of isolation. In these respects, Johnson's use of Latin is important.

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CHAPTER III JOHNSON AND LATIN

Johnson's Latin learning is impressive. He lived in a conservative period, and the course in the classics which he followed was largely the same as that pursued by Colet, Erasmus, and Milton. The Lives of the Poets, The Rambler, The Adventurer, and The Idler give proof of a remarkable familiarity with Latin as well of the medieval and early patristic writers as of the Golden Age of Latin itself. Indeed, one of his earliest projects was to print by subscription an edition of Politian's poems, with his life, and a history of Latin poetry from the era of Petrarch to the time of Politian. Johnson's proficiency in the language was such that he found it easier when he was with foreigners to speak Latin than to attempt their tongue. His mastery of Latin excited admiration during the French journey when he delivered a eulogy on Milton to the Abbe' Rofette.[1] Johnson's most successful poems were not original, but imitations of Juvenal. His critical accounts of the English poets often include consideration of their work in Latin. Johnson himself wrote Latin poetry. The catalogue of the Harleian library, which he helped to compile, was partly in Latin. Johnson expected documents of import and occasion, such as Goldsmith's epitaph, or Ruddiman's letter of resignation to the Faculty of Advocates, to be in Latin.[2] Latin was the language he thought proper for medical matters, a history of his own sickness in Latin, addressed to Dr Swinfen,[3]

being one of his earliest compositions, and one of his last the "Aegri Ephemeris," Latin diarial notes on his fatal illness. Boswell records that when Père Boscovich was in England he expressed his astonishment at Johnson's fluent and elegant Latin conversation.[4] And during the Scottish tour, Boswell, from fear of being overheard in the small Highland houses, often talked to Johnson in such Latin as he could speak, and with as much of an English accent as he could assume so as not to be understood if overheard.[5]

Yet it is possible to question the quality of Johnson's perception of Latin, and indeed that of many of his contemporaries. Johnson's veneration of the ancients was selective. What was congenial to his nature was adopted by him, and what was discordant he either ignored, or reinterpreted. The best way to demonstrate this attitude is to examine Johnson's translations of Horace, and imitations of Juvenal.

To assess an imitation, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the original. Juvenal's reputation has undergone considerable change in this century. There are those who still view Juvenal as an angry moralist, and accept him as a man embittered by disappointment, who attacks indiscriminately the great and the smallest vices.[6] But many scholars would now interpret Juvenal differently.

E.J.Kenney has show how behind the impassioned

rhetoric and poetry of Juvenal's first Satire, there is an esoteric note for those who know their earlier Latin satirists. It is almost as though Juvenal were parodying the genre, and regarding self-mockery as more important than the mockery of others' vices.[7]

H.A.Mason, in an influential essay, has sought to alter the general view of Juvenal, that he is a genuine integrated satirist.[8] Mason noted Juvenal's ironic tone, his hyperbolic use of epic effects, and his vigorous undermining of whatever approaches grandeur. Mason argued that Juvenal is not a classic, but a poet of wit who employs the moralist's persona vicariously. He interprets Juvenal's success in terms of brilliance of description, spiced by surprising wit. He suggests that Juvenal's primary motivation may be literary, that he lacks moral edge, and is not a classic, but a manipulator of language.

The Augustan critics of Juvenal read him rather uncritically. They tend to accept his satires at their face value, without perceiving the self-mockery and irony which imbues them. Dryden provides an example of the usual reaction to Roman satire. He gives an evaluation of Horace and Juvenal as satirists which is exactly opposite to that held by most scholars in our times. Horace, he claims, found his proper quarry in folly. Juvenal's target he defines as tyranny. Horace he represents as a well mannered

court slave, Juvenal as the zealous vindicator of Roman liberty. For Dryden there is no doubt that Juvenal is a classic: "His expressions are sonerous and more noble; his verse more numerous, and his words suitable to his thoughts, sublime and lofty. All these contribute to the pleasure of the reader, and the greater the soul of him who reads, his transports are the greater."[10] In short, from the modern point of view, " . . . as far as Horace and Juvenal are concerned, Dryden's essay is wrong or misleading on almost every major point."[11]

William Windham, a member of both the Literary Club, and the Essex Head Club, who is praised by Boswell for his many kindnesses to the dying Johnson,[12] and in similar terms by Fanny Burney who recorded, "He loved Dr Johnson - and Dr Johnson returned his affection."[13] is the source who informs us that Johnson thought so highly of Holyday's notes on Juvenal as to have employed himself for some time in translating them into Latin.[14]

In the Preface to his translations, Holyday compares the achievement of Juvenal with that of Horace in the genre of satire. He praises Juvenal for his moral tone, and blames Horace for his propensity to comedy. "For, what is the End of Satyre, but to Reform? whereas a perpetual Grin does rather Anger than Mend. Wherefore the

Old Satyre and the New, and so Horace and Juvenal, may seem to differ as the Jester and the Orator, the Face of an Ape and of a Man, or as the Fiddle and Thunder."[15] Holyday is determined to interpret Juvenal as a superb analyst of sin, and advocate of virtue. "O that we could Argue him into a Christian!"[16] The portrait of Juvenal provided in the Preface is indeed remarkably Christ-like with its high forehead, long beard, and saintly expression.

Johnson's critical appreciation of Juvenal seems to run very close to that of Dryden and Holyday. Juvenal is attributed with "massiness and vigour."[17] "The peculiarity of Juvenal," writes Johnson, "is a mixture of gaiety and stateliness, of pointed sentences and declamatory grandeur."[18]

Johnson criticises Dryden's version of Juvenal for failing to imitate the grandeur of the original. No one could blame Johnson's imitations because they lacked grandeur. But Johnson can be blamed because this moral grandeur is not an imitation but an invention. The notable insensitivity to tone which distorts Johnson's criticism of Milton and Gray distorts his perception of Juvenal.

A comparison of London and The Vanity of Human Wishes with Juvenal's Satires is instructive, but Johnson must be judged according to his own standards.

His attitude to translation tends to be liberal. He was not concerned with line for line, word for word accuracy. In the "Life of Dryden,"[19] he criticizes Johnson, Feltham, Sandys and Holyday because their translations from Latin adhered too closely to their originals. And clearly he believes Pope's Iliad to be a greater achievement than the literal versions Pope himself employed to understand hard phrases in the Greek.[20] Pope aspired to something better than unimaginative reproduction of literal meaning. In a letter to Bridges, which Johnson quotes, Pope says what a translation of Homer ought principally to imitate is "'that rapture and fire, which carries you away with him, with that wonderful force, that no man who has a true poetical spirit is master of himself, while he reads him . . . '" But it is very hard, says Pope, for any translator to come up to this standard, "'because the chief reason why all translations fall short of their originals is, that the very constraint they are obliged to, renders them heavy and dispirited.'"[21] Johnson would agree that the translator should not be permitted excessive license. Cowley, for example, went too far in disregarding his originals.[22] Johnson believed that Dryden gave us just rules for translation which are vindicated by their own reasonableness. "In the proper choice of style

consists the resemblance which Dryden principally exacts from the translator. He is to exhibit his author's thoughts in such a dress of diction as the author would have given them, had his language been English . . . A translator is to be like his author: it is not his business to excel him."[23]

It is in the very respect of reproducing the style of his original that Johnson's versions of Juvenal fail as translations. However, they were not intended to be judged as translations, but rather as imitations. In imitations, "the ancients are familiarised, by adapting their sentiments to modern topicks, by making Horace say of Shakespeare what he originally said of Ennius, and accomodating his satires on Pantolabus and Nomentanus to the flatterers and prodigals of our own time . . . It is a kind of middle composition between translation and the original design, which pleases when the thoughts are unexpectedly applicable, and the parallels lucky."[24] Rochester's imitation of Horace on Lucilius is praised by Johnson because it preserves so well a parallelism with the original.[25] I argue that Johnson's poems fail as imitations because he does not match modern topics with Juvenal's true sentiments, but a distorted perception of them which

his moral fervour and respect for received opinion made him prefer to the pervasive irony and comic exaggeration of the original.

It is instructive to compare Johnson's imitation with the original in a passage where political interest cannot excuse distortion. This is from Juvenal, Satire III:

"Nam quid tam miserum, tam solum vidimus, ut non
deterius credas horrere incendia, lapsus
tectorum adsiduos ac mille pericula saevae
urbis, et Augusto recitantes mense poetas?" (11.6-9)

This is how Johnson renders the passage:

"Here Malice, Rapine, Accident conspire,
And now a Rabble Rages, now a Fire;
Their Ambush here relentless Ruffians lay,
And here the fell Attorney prowls for Prey;
Here falling Houses thunder on your Head.
And here a female Atheist talks you dead."

Juvenal poses a rhetorical question: "What life is so sorrowful and solitary that you wouldn't prefer it to shuddering at fires, and buildings that keep falling down, and the myriad perils of the fierce city, not forgetting the August poetry readings?" Juvenal achieves a comic effect by making the last item in his list of urban horrors the poetry readings of August. Johnson keeps the same sense of anti-climax with "here a female Atheist talks you dead," but he

does not maintain Juvenal's wit. Juvenal's "ac mille pericula saevae/ urbis" is a stroke of dismissive force. The poet appears to have made his point, but then another great danger occurs to him and he adds ". . . et Augusto recitantes mense poetas?" Johnson's version omits this sense of frivolity. The objection felt against the "female Atheist" is not only that she is unremittingly tedious, but also that she transmits an evil doctrine.

In the passage that follows, Juvenal describes (ll. 10-20) the scene of departure, the valley of Egeria, the consort of King Numa. Johnson (ll. 19-30) describes Greenwich, and exalts the birthplace of Queen Elizabeth, where his characters kiss "the consecrated Earth," but Juvenal wittily implies Numa's dealings with Egeria were furtive and disreputable. She is "nocturnae amicae," his "mistress by night," with whom "he used to do business," "constituebat," an odd word to describe divine counsel, but apt for commercial dealings.

Juvenal's Third Satire has a charm and humour which London lacks. These qualities consist largely in Juvenal's use of reported speech, and his detailed particularity of description. In Johnson there is no equivalent to Juvenal's list of the furniture of the garret-dwelling scholar. From specific detail Juvenal derives his comic force: the doves nesting on the roof, the sideboard of cheap crockery, the old chest of Greek books, the dog sleeping under the sideboard, and the

divine poems which the nice, being but shallow Latins, unable to read Greek verse, did not hesitate to gape at. In Johnson these details are either ignored or else evaporated in personification and abstraction. Juvenal's ruffian accosts his victim with truculent but humorous interrogation (ll. 292 -296), but Johnson does not attempt this, and the impersonality of his villain increases the idea of menace, at the expense of comic effect.

That Johnson imitates Juvenal's poems clarifies and isolates his attitude to him. Dryden's versions of Satires III and X attest to a similar misinterpretation of Juvenal on his part, but, because Dryden is translating, not imitating, his critical astigmatism is less obvious. Translation includes those elements, in some form, which the translator does not understand. Where Johnson selects for imitation the aspects of the Satires which support his pre-conceived estimate of Juvenal, Dryden, who can exclude nothing, reports the expressions of humour so that witty irony in the Latin becomes moralising sarcasm in the English.

A partial defence for Johnson's imitation might be the argument that he was particularly restrained by the fact that his imitation was designed to support a political case. Juvenal's mockery is successful because his primary motive in writing is literary. He shares values with his readers and can humorously

outrage these shared values. Johnson could not assume the same degree of participation from his readers. His humour must be grim and sarcastic. If he were too gay, he might appear to be siding with the government he attacked. This defence will not do, however, for The Vanity of Human Wishes.

Johnson reworked Juvenal's tenth Satire more rigorously than any doctrine of imitation can justify. Johnson's poem must be valued as an original. Again Johnson omits Juvenal's use of direct speech and specific detail as expressive techniques. Juvenal's cinematic evocation of Roman power (ll.36-46) dissolves into grave generality in Johnson. Juvenal's catalogue of the deformities of old age is severely abbreviated in The Vanity of Human Wishes. Johnson tells us of streaming eyes, myopia, and deafness, but not of hanging cheeks, simian wrinkles, pains in shoulders, hips, and loins, palsied limbs, bald heads, streaming noses, and gums so weak that they cannot chew. Johnson refrains from the hyperbolic humour of infinite infirmity. Delicacy induces him to ignore totally Juvenal's passage on the dangers of male beauty and homosexuality.

Johnson is never so dismissive and contemptuous of human weakness as Juvenal. Johnson habitually identifies with the characters he describes. For him every failure is potentially tragic. For Juvenal every failure is potentially comic. Juvenal finishes

Hannibal directly, in the second person, telling him to go charging over the Alps like the lunatic he is, and become the school-boy's favourite subject for exercises. Johnson, by contrast, summons our pity for Charles XII, not our contempt. The language of Johnson is stately, and there is no belittling of achievements. Where Juvenal evaluates the scholar's life, he takes the opportunity to jeer at Cicero and Demosthenes. There is a great difference between this crude mockery, and Johnson's deeply felt account of the life of letters.

Where Juvenal's Satire and The Vanity of Human Wishes do coincide remarkably is in the closing passages where the poets advise the reader what to pray for. Johnson praises love, patience, and faith, strongly supporting the Christian moral system, and Juvenal advocates Herculean Stoicism, urging the reader to trust in the strength of virtue. Juvenal's verse undergoes a change of tone, and the jester climbs into the pulpit. But throughout the remainder of the poems there is a discord between the imitation and the original. In Juvenal there is unflagging raillery. In Johnson there is tragic comprehension, moral exhortation, and Christian hope.

This is not to say that Johnson could not translate Juvenal, but to suggest that he and his age perceived the tone of the Latin imperfectly. And this failing

in Johnson is not limited to his reading of Juvenal. Discussing Rowe's version of Lucan, he writes: "Lucan is distinguished by a kind of dictatorial or philosophic dignity, rather, as Quintilian observes, declamatory than poetical: full of ambitious morality and pointed sentences, comprised in vigorous and animated lines."[26] Johnson fails to remark the adolescent nature of Lucan's epic, his glorying in lurid detail, which makes suspect his intrusive moralizing. Johnson describes as "vigorous and animated" lines which are tiresomely repetitive, with their predictable caesurae and metrical patterns. Lucan's lines have the same boring invariability in Latin as the "peg-leg" iambics of Gorboduc in English.

Johnson's treatment of Horace's Second Epode, ("Beatus ille, . . . ") also suggests that in reading Latin he was sensitive only to what was congenial to his nature. This poem was immensely popular during the Renaissance. It was the first Horatian poem to be translated into German. An imitation of it inaugurated the Horatian vogue in Spain. In Sweden it was set to music.[27] The popularity of the poem derived from the nostalgia for a simpler Golden Age life to which it resounded. Appreciation was limited to the charming descriptive passages dealing with rural life: the concluding lines which put the earlier encomium of country living in the mouth of an old usurer were more often than not left out in the

translations and adaptations. Yet in Johnson's version, the usurer Alfius is retained. It could be argued that Johnson's translation, probably originating as an exercise at Stourbridge school, included the usurer for no better reason than that the master had prescribed the whole epode for homework. Yet it is not perverse to suppose that these lines which retrospectively revalue the body of the poem were included by Johnson because they made the epode in its entirety express a contempt for the pastoral ideal which he himself shared.

In another translation of Horace, Johnson interprets the original ode as a serious poem, mistaking the irony of its engaging profession of love for a solemn moral tract. This is the famous Integer vitae, (Odes I, xxii). The ode, with Johnson's translation, is in Appendix A.

The narrator of the ode has a simple argument. Virtue protects the possessor of it. See the proof: he was walking in the Sabine woods when a wolf surprised him, but the animal, though one of the fiercest, ran away. So send the narrator to the ends of the earth, and he will still love Lalage.

The reader expects a conclusion to the ode which will complete the argument. The narrator is expected to claim that in the heart of Africa or at the North Pole he will still be virtuous, because virtue protects

its possessor, but by the time he has described the earth's extremes of climate, the narrator forgets or ignores the trend of his rhetoric and completes the cliché by saying he will still love Lalage.

Johnson's translation is a schoolboy version, the type of dry and literal interpretation of the text which outraged Gibbon during his brief spell at Oxford. The uneven tone of the original, with its ironic tension, is flattened into moralizing seriousness. There is no graded exaggeration. There is no comic deflation in the last stanza. The effect of the original is lost.

This insensitivity to tone in Latin makes one question whether Johnson could not be equally unreceptive to the texture of an English phrase. The uniformly ethereal diction of Irene might support this suspicion. So might the strained humour of A Compleat Vindication and Marmor Norfolciense. Perhaps the critic is too kind to Johnson when, like Paul Fussell,[28] he is willing to defend the Cham against the charge that his polysyllables are ostentatious by claiming that these big words are chosen to make the Rambler's correspondents seem ridiculous.

Johnson's selective imitation and translation of Latin derives from the same aspect of his thought which produced extreme moral caution in his criticism. He was

unable to understand Juvenal for the same reason that he refrained from coming to terms with Fielding and Smollett, and dismissed Tristram Shandy as "odd." Johnson's imaginative sympathy was confined to those sharing his preconceptions. Indeed, it might be argued that Johnson must of necessity seldom be pleased as a critic when he judges at once by two standards which cannot be reconciled. He desired both mimetic and didactic effects, art both depicting what is, and defining what ought to be, true to the laws both of nature and ethics. This elusive ideal was attributed to the ancients as a real achievement.

Johnson's determination to see in Juvenal only the great moralist is one example of an habitual reverence for classical authority. Even as Latin writers represented correctness in diction and sentiment, so too the Latin language itself, in its function as a source of English vocabulary, seemed to evoke ideas of scientific correctness and impersonal grandeur. Macaulay, sensitive to the dignified generality of Johnson's Latinate prose, suggested that this Latinity in his English was a deliberately adopted public gesture. He claimed that Johnson did not think in the dialect in which he wrote. "When he wrote for publication, he did his sentences out of English into Johnsonese. His letters from the Hebrides to Mrs Thrale are the original of that

work of which the Journey to the Hebrides is the translation . . ."[29] But Macaulay's account is too simple. Johnson, for example, did not entitle his work the Journey to the Hebrides, as Macaulay states, but the Journey to the Western Islands, maintaining the English formulation. What Johnson persistently pursued was vivid prose. When he decided whether to employ an English or Latin word in a particular text, what he desired was the transmission of an acute idea. For much of what seems to a modern reader redundant Latinity was for Johnson's contemporaries new and precise terms of definition.

A comparison of the Journey to the Western Islands with the letters written to Mrs Thrale which cover the same period does not reveal the uncomplicated process of translation proposed by Macaulay. The passages which Macaulay himself presents for comparison do not prove increased Latinity in the Journey, but rather show Johnson carefully reworking his description of events to avoid offending partisan readers. In his letters Johnson wrote:

"When we were taken up stairs, a dirty fellow bounced out of the bed in which one of us was to lie."[30] In the Journey, Johnson writes:

"Out of one of the beds, on which we were to repose, started up, at our entrance, a man black as a Cyclops from the forge."[31]

What Johnson has done is to introduce a mock-heroic element and thereby soften the reader's disgust at Scottish barbarity. The same motive induces Johnson to remain silent in the Journey about matters which he mentions in his letters. There is, for example, no reference in the Journey to the old woman to whom Boswell spoke who lived in the vault of the Subprior of St Andrew's Cathedral. The Journey says nothing of Johnson's altercation with Lord Monboddo.[32] Indeed, some of those passages which do not find their way into the Journey have more Latinate diction than those which do. Johnson's reflections on his sixty-fourth birthday, and his comments on Sir Alexander Macdonald's meanness are good examples of such excluded passages.[33]

To assess justly the nature of Johnson's "translation" from the letters to the Journey is perhaps impossible. Only four letters have a direct bearing on the events of the Journey, and only a limited number of phrases and sentences is "translated" from these letters. Yet, even if this small area of contrast is surveyed, there is no consistent practice to be ascertained.

Sometimes, there is an increase in Latinity in the Journey. "The weather allowed us to depart, a good boat was provided us, and we went to Reamsa . . ."[34] becomes "At the first intermission of the stormy weather we were informed, that the boat, which was

to convey us to Raasay, attended us on the coast."[35] Again," . . . an old fort which had on one of the stones Maria Re. 1564."[36] becomes "One of the stones had this inscription: 'Maria Reg. 1564.'"[37]

Sometimes, there is a decrease of Latinity in the Journey. " . . . he has erected a monumental column . . ."[38] becomes " . . . he has raised an obelisk . . . "[39] In Letter 323, the water of the Fall of Fiers is "exasperated by reverberation"[40] but in the Journey it is "exasperated by rocks rising in their way."[41]

In most cases, however, the Journey and the letters are equally Latinate. Variations result from the omission of personal elements of the letters, the reporting of particular incident as general truth, and perhaps the use, as an alternative source, of Johnson's undiscovered notebook of the tour.

Macaulay's account of the relation between the Journey and the letters is wrong, but the insight which prompted Macaulay's thesis seems valid: there is in much of Johnson's prose a formal rigidity, and when Johnson was in the vulnerable position of an author before the public, this lack of spontaneity grew.

David Nichol Smith suggested, that Latin was the language which Johnson preferred for the expression of private moods and feelings.[42] "Poems about himself and his feelings he did not write in English. If we

take all his English poems that most readily occur to us - London, The Vanity of Human Wishes, the Prologues to Sir John Lade and on the Death of Dr Robert Levet, and the Prologues - in not one of them does he speak directly about himself, though personal experience sometimes lies clearly behind what he says."[43]

If it is conceded that Nichol Smith's distinction between direct and indirect self-expression is valid, then his case is sound. But it seems to me that this distinction is somewhat blurred in such effusions as Upon the Feast of St John and St Jude, and The Young Author. There is the consideration that if Johnson limited his personal poetry to Latin, he did not limit his Latin poetry to what was personal. The poems written in Latin during the Scottish tour may have a peculiar note of intimacy, but Ad Urbanum, and Post-Genitis are plainly hack work. Moreover, it is open to question to what extent Johnson regarded the Latin poetry of the tour as too intimate for revelation. He does not seem to have complained that Boswell published Latin poetry in his Tour. Even the ode addressed to Mrs Thrale, "Pemneo terras, ubi nuda rupes . . . " which Johnson refused to give to Boswell, telling him he might get it from Mrs Thrale if she were willing, probably was not withheld by Johnson because it was too intimate, but because he enjoyed teasing Boswell. The ode, after all, was not for Mrs Thrale's eyes alone. While

Henry Thrale was alive and a member of Parliament, Johnson's letters to Mrs Thrale were directed "To Henry Thrale Esq." and consequently were delivered free. This made it at least very probable that Mr Thrale would have a natural opportunity to read any letter from Johnson intended for Mrs Thrale. The evidence suggests[44] that in fact Henry Thrale often read Johnson's letters to his wife and that she acquiesced in this. It may be noted in passing that the most intimate surviving communication between Johnson and Mrs Thrale is not in Latin, but French.[45]

At any event, Nichol Smith's argument applies only to Johnson's poetry. In his prose it is unthinkable so to separate personal revelation as fit only for Latin. The most private details of life are recorded alike in both languages. Latin seems to be preferred for medical accounts, the "Aegri Ephemeris"[46] being almost entirely in Latin, but there are exceptions here too.

In fact, Johnson did use Latinate diction in the public sphere to bolster his authority, as Macaulay observed, and Latin poetry in the private sphere to guard his feelings, as Nichol Smith noted. Yet Johnson also wrote Latin poetry and Latinate English where no personal aspect is suggested by the content, and there seems no reason for authorial self-protection. I wish to explain this in terms

of Johnson's neurotic temperament.

I suggest that by Johnson, and indeed by many of his contemporaries, Latin literature, apart from its rôle as a model and source of high culture, was customarily considered in two functions: one as a magazine of quotations which might suggest in shorthand, as it were, any complex of emotions, the other as an exercise-ground for the flaccid intellect. Johnson's letters and essays are replete with examples of the former use. The latter is harder to prove, but one may observe that Johnson displayed the pride of a pedant in his mastery of Latin metre and quantity,[47] a subject which, because of the misconceived pronunciation of Latin in the eighteenth century, could only be learned, as Johnson advised George Strahan,[48] by dedicated practice and vigilant reading. One may also take note that when he was afflicted with a stroke, Johnson composed a prayer in Latin verse in order to test his intellectual faculties.[49] And when he suffered from insomnia, he occupied himself by translating into Latin verse, from the Greek, many of the epigrams in the Anthologia, finding great relief in this.[50] If Johnson was indeed an obsessive neurotic, then employing his faculties in Latin versification may have proved an excellent means of displacing his loathsome delusions. The selectivity of human consciousness has been demonstrated experimentally in our time by Wundt,[51]

but clearly Johnson was aware of the mental process of negative induction when, to refute the theory of the unities dominant in French drama, he argued in his Preface to Shakespeare that the attention of an audience has a shifting focus. Perhaps he deliberately composed Latin in times of crisis as a bulwark against traumatic horror. This might explain his oddly choosing to translate into Latin the menu of the last dinner he ate at Streatham. This was not the action of a sentimental gourmet. Even as Lear, confronted with double grief, can cope only with the death of his clown, and refuses to perceive that his daughter is dead, so too Johnson, faced with the termination of all those pleasures of society permitted him by life at Streatham, mourns the meal and forgets the host. Perhaps Johnson's inappropriate use of Latinate diction may be similarly explained.

Johnson's own Latin prose is not creative but largely imitative. He might agree with the theory of Erasmus' Dialogus Ciceronianus,[52] that one should shun the example of Nosoponus who writes Latin prose which is no better than a mosaic of Cicero's favourite phrases and clausulae, but Johnson's own practice, apart from the occasional post-Augustan word, and a preference for medieval orthography, was extremely conservative. One would expect this in school exercises and formal letters composing

gratitude on being awarded degrees, but it extends even to the medical notes he made during his last illness. It is true that the habitual hypotactic structure of classical Latin breaks down in the "Aegri Ephemeris," but Johnson's usage in grammar and vocabulary within this simplified framework is rigorously classical. This is the more surprising when it is remembered that the classic model for late seventeenth and early eighteenth century England was not Golden Latin, but Silver Latin, not Cicero, but Seneca. Johnson might discover a special pleasure in Silver Latin prose. It has point, antithesis, epigram and personification. It boldly introduces Graecisms, archaisms, and words previously confined to poetry. Indeed, Johnson did translate Sallust's <u>Bellum Catilinarium</u>.[53] Nevertheless, when Johnson speaks in his capacity as the "arbiter elegentiae" of Augustan England he has no praise for Silver Latin writers. He concurs with Boswell that Tacitus was too difficult to be understood, for he rather made notes for a historical work than wrote a history.[54] Johnson strenuously advises George Strahan to model his Latin prose on the best authors: Cicero and Livy.[55] And the syllabus for a Grammar school is by no means a revolutionary document.[56]

As a conservative in a conservative age, Johnson was the last scholar to be expected to follow Politian

and express not Cicero but himself. The monkish Latin of Marion Norfolciensis had a special satirical purpose. Johnson might criticise those who, like Bellenden, and unlike Pope, failed to study modern Latin poetry,[57] but his criterion for judging Latin was the ancient standard of purity. His praise of the style of Boethius is that it "is formed with great diligence upon ancient models, and wholly unbiassed with monastic barbarity."[58] For Johnson, the inaccuracy of Boethius' history is quite compensated for by the elegance of his style. Linguistic values were absolute, unchanged by time or place.

Adherence to this belief crucially damaged Johnson's criticism. He might judge that the age of Pope saw English poetry attaining its state of classical perfection, he might value order, moral seriousness, antithetical balance and lucid wit, yet he also valued, as a neo-classical critic, what had pleased many and pleased long. Paradoxically, the characteristics of "classical" English were the very techniques of rhetoric which marked the degeneration of "classical" Latin. As a conservative and a moralist Johnson quotes Virgil and Horace. As a stylist he quotes Seneca and Ovid. For Seneca was the model of the seventeenth century divines for whose prose Johnson had such fondness that Hawkins claimed his stylistic excellence was due to his

study of them,[59] and Ovid was the Pope of Latin elegy, the perfecter of the couplet as an artistic unit employing symmetry, assonance, alliteration, and antithesis.[60]

If it is asked whether Johnson's English prose is Senecan or Ciceronian, it must be confessed that Johnson employs a variety of Seneca's methods. Seneca's many metaphors from medicine and gladiatorial combat correspond to major themes in Johnson's imagery. Johnson's striking use of antithesis and his wealth of illustration may seem likewise to resemble Seneca. Yet, where Seneca is abrupt, Johnson is copious. Where Seneca loves paradox and seeks to be ingeniously neat, Johnson loves truth and pursues comprehensible amplitude. In its use of rhythm, its stateliness, its insistence on ordered argument, and its love of amplification, Johnson's style is, perhaps, "the most Ciceronian in the language."[61]

It is easy to exaggerate the importance of these comparisons, but it seems broadly true that Johnson wrote more like Cicero than Seneca, yet praised poetry the more as it came closer to resembling Pope, who wrote more like Ovid (and Seneca) than Cicero. It is perhaps worth noting that in his Lives of the Poets where he is consciously supporting the theory of English poetic development towards a Popean classical

ideal, Johnson's prose itself becomes more Senecan, with shorter sentences and fewer amplifications and repetitions.

Johnson's determination to simplify literary value is one example of a general pre-Romantic attempt to control and understand the heterogeneity of experience by the application of a simplistic view of human psychology. Johnson's standards are plain, but they owe their clarity to his intolerance of contradiction. In the idiom of his own beliefs, Johnson is irrefutable, but his idiom is itself limited. It is his desire to unify all literary standards in a positive correlation which is the most charming and stimulating aspect of his criticism.

Johnson, as a critic, associated propriety of thought with propriety of diction. The praise due to Dryden was paid "as he refined the language, improved the sentiments, and tuned the numbers of English poetry."[62] The progress from Waller and Denham through to Dryden and Pope was progress alike in matter and manner. Johnson conceived "classical" English as distinguished alike by a discipline of sentiment and expression. A poet's "classical" status depended on a standard at once moral, aesthetic, and linguistic.

Intellectual conservatism in the eighteenth

century was encouraged by political and economic stability,[63] and by the belief in human uniformity of such diverse philosophers as Hobbes, Locke, Mandeville, Shaftesbury, Hume, Hartley and Butler. Virtue was a social action. The retreat from nature which meant for Marvell and Vaughan a retirement from business to contemplation, for Cotton and Pope signified a withdrawal from ambition to usefulness. When Pope foresees the end of Timon's lavish villa, he imagines it succeeded not by savage nature, but a cultivated cornfield.

Moral and aesthetic values, at least in theory, were shared and ascertainable. The condition of man and his standards for conduct and art would admit of little variation. What was good for the ancients was likely to be good for the moderns. It was assumed that the pursuit of letters required classical learning. Fanny Burney told Johnson how one man was surprised to find that the authoress of Evelina knew no Latin. Partly grave, partly jesting, Johnson responded: "'the man thought it because you have written a book - he concluded that a book could not be written by one who knew no Latin. And it is strange that it should - but, perhaps you do know it - for your shyness, and slyness, and pretending to know nothing, never took me in, whatever you may do with others. I always knew

you for a toadling.'"[64] Untaught inspiration was not an accredited concept. Traditional habits of thought lulled the critical faculty when it dealt with ancient learning. Johnson's determination to see in Juvenal only the great moralist was partly a result of the temptation to perceive the present as but a poor imitation of the perfection of the past, and civilised man as a corruption of an original splendid innocence.

However much Johnson might rail against Rousseau's theory of the noble savage, the author of the great Dictionary sometimes seems to lapse into the same attitude towards words which Rousseau had towards men. Even as it seemed to Rousseau that man had fallen from a state of natural nobility and felicity, so too it seemed to many eighteenth-century philologists that language had degenerated from the purity and uniformity of Biblical times to the modern Babel of the impure and the diverse. It seemed to the neo-classical linguists that standardization of language was natural, diversity a perversion. This attitude would encourage a dictionary-maker to explain definitions in terms of etymology. Misuses of language were to be understood as departures from etymology. The "real" meaning of a word could be identified with the original meaning of its root.

It is not true that Johnson's prose is inordinately Latinate, but those words which he uses which are

derived from Latin retain their native sense. In the medieval scientific tradition, all Latin words were potentially English. Thus, during the Scottish tour, Boswell invented the word "equitation," and was surprised to find the Earl of Pembroke later independently introducing this term from the Latin word-building stock.[65] Johnson's prose, although often abstract, possesses the vivid forcefulness of its classical roots, yet does not sacrifice the impersonal dignity associated with Latinate diction. Perhaps Johnson's prose seems hard, not because he used difficult words, but because his complex word formation did not coincide, as it had done in medieval scientific writers, with increasingly simple sentence structure. Although Johnson's Latinate lexis lays emphasis on his abstract nouns, the hypotactic form of his Ciceronian periods gives to his verbs a compensatory importance, which is increased still more by his frequent use of the verb as the key word to establish a metaphor.

In English prose, though not, of course, in English verse, where inversion and dislocation of word order are almost obligatory, fewer opportunities for syntactic variation occur than in the prose of languages, like Latin, whose morphological forms tend to be agglutinative or inflected. Nevertheless, Johnson employs verbal subordination for literary effect. In Rasselas, the

hierarchy of clauses is used to provide temporal and logical perspectives. Johnson's choice of adverbial locutions rather than adverbs, of the appositional genetive rather than the union of noun with adjective, and of verbs in the perfective aspect, or even in the passive voice, where, in English, there is an ambiguity of aspect, rather than in the imperfective aspect, establishes and reinforces the episodic structure and undynamic theme of the work. Rasselas forever attempts to engage in the process which is happiness, but is forever reduced to that state which is dissatisfaction. Johnson describes this in a syntax which suggests stasis rather than change. In the sixth paragraph of Chapter I Johnson shows his syntactic skill even in his choice of the definite article rather than a simple plural in "the sprightly kid", "the subtle monkey" and "the solemn elephant". This use of the definite article suggests something universally known, or a familiarity with a context on the reader's part. Thus, even before he explicitly demonstrates it, Johnson hints by syntactic forms the tedium of living in such a "happy" valley.

For the particular importance of Johnson's syntax is not its remedying the imbalances of his lexis, nor its fortifying the power of his metaphors, but rather its capacity to stress by patterns of intonation unimpressive words which accentual rhythms may not easily emphasize.

It is therefore one function of the syntax in the first sentence of Rasselas to lay stress on "fancy", "hope", "youth" and "morrow". This is achieved by an inversion which places at the head of sentence subordinate clauses which end with a fall-and-rise intonation. The delaying of the main clause till the end of the sentence has another important effect, however, for the main clause naturally closes with a low, falling intonation, and the vocal inflexion for this entire sentence therefore becomes the "compound falling inflexion" which is regularly used in English to express intense doubt, or irony.

The effect of Johnson's Latin learning on his prose style is perhaps greatest in the aspects of vocabulary and rhythm. Latinate vocabulary tends to be polysyllabic. Between a sequence of monosyllables and a rhythmically similar polysyllable this difference persists, that in the polysyllable the stress is fixed, but in a sequence of monosyllables there is potential variation. Polysyllabic prose is therefore likely to be more rhythmically exact. And yet there is no loss of speed in such a style, for in English, though not in all languages, there is a tendency to give equal duration to each group of syllables which contains a main stress. In fact, since Johnson's abstract polysyllables often have fewer main stresses than a synonymous group of monosyllables, it might

even be contended that his prose is swifter than that of his contemporaries.

Johnson's use of Latinate polysyllables has these two important effects. It permits Johnson to avoid direct self-explanation in his prose, and it introduces a constraint on the reader's response by the fixing of main stresses. The prose remains vivid because, as W.K.Wimsatt has argued, Johnson's Latinate vocabulary, especially during the years when he was at work on his Dictionary, is not merely idiosyncratic, but part of a rich tradition of word creation and borrowing for scientific use.[66] The splendid imagery of science is, however, impersonal in its associations, and serves to make the author seem remote, even as does Johnson's delight in the abstract and the general. Just as in his private life Johnson shunned intimacy and spontaneity, so too in his prose style he eschews the vulnerability of the first person and the familiar phrase. Johnson's resolute control of rhythm, and his liking for Latinate derivatives with their effect of scientific dignity and unemotional impartiality produce in his writing the same sense of constraint and isolation which may be educed from

the biographical accounts of Boswell, Hawkins, and Mrs Thrale. And the nature of this constraint, and how it might function as a creative stimulus can be inferred from a close examination of Johnson's imagery and rhythm. In these, persistent self-discipline perhaps outdoes spasmodic release as the chief aid of art.

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CHAPTER IV JOHNSON AND HIS IMAGERY

After 1660 good prose comes to mean a prose without images. Bishop Sprat in the Royal Society, and Hobbes, almost an atheist, outside that prestigious body, shared the esteem of mathematical plainness as the highest quality of expository prose. The flowers of rhetoric were represented as meretricious ornaments which served to deceive the gullible reader. The new science of Locke, Boyle, and Newton was to be transmitted in a new prose pruned of emotive elements. The language which was to state unchanging physical laws should itself be fixed. In 1664-5 the Royal Society set up a committee to examine and improve the language. One member was Dryden who regretted the absence of an English Academy in his Dedication to The Rival Ladies. The committee was ineffectual, but the idea of correctness remained in Dryden's mind. He even went so far as to "correct" his works to avoid the recently discovered "error" of placing prepositions at the end of sentences.[1] An English Academy was one of the proposals in Defoe's Essay on Projects, and Swift and Roscommon were eager in the same cause. Johnson commented that the edicts of such an academy would be read by many only that they might be disobeyed,[2] but paradoxically his own Rambler and Dictionary were to achieve by example what he claimed no academy might do by dictate.

The distrust of the devices of oratory encouraged

that division of the language of prose and poetry which has done so much damage to both. Poets like Beaumont might recommend a pure type of verse, with sober care of metaphors,[3] but poetry itself was never quite free from suspicion. One may note that "enthusiasm," despite all its associations with evil stupidity in other areas of eighteenth century life, retained its warm sense of approval in the realm of poetry,[4] but, as Gray wrote to West, "The language of the age is never the language of poetry. . ."[5]

The dangers of fancy were seldom so keenly eschewed. Since Aristotle, metaphor had been likened to a light which elucidated discourse. Now, by a deliberate inversion of convention, it was seen as a mist or cloud to obscure the light of reason. Where before the adornments of metaphor attracted by their beauty, now they repelled by their artificiality. Truth was naked and similes could only hide it.

From Restoration comedy, that useful index of social decorum, it is clear to us that a taste for the metaphorical was taken as a sign of intellectual inadequacy. In The Way of The World it is the character not of a Truewit but of a Witwoud habitually to employ similes, and to be therefore "an annihilator of sense." (IV, ix) Brilliance of metaphor is seen as an almost involuntary reaction to the stimuli of dialogue, the function of a will-less dolt. (II, v)

If the literati had fully believed in the plain style

of prose, then one condemnation of the florid would have been enough. It may be that the pleasures of extravagant prose were indulged in attacking the same. So Pope seems to enjoy exercising his ingenious virtuosity to example what he disapproves of in An Essay On Criticism, and Johnson, in blaming Shakespeare's fondness for quibbles, displays his own capacity for them.[6] Likewise Swift in his Genteel And Ingenious Conversation surely derives satisfaction from enumerating the cliché's and mixed metaphors of polite and pretentious society. He even makes fun of Hobbesian nominalism in his account in Gulliver's Travels of the Academy of Lagado where the sages have attempted to replace words with things, and the greatness of a man's business is judged by the size of his sack of things which he carries about for daily conversation. Dryden too continued to coin appealing images for his prose, although he had demanded that metaphors be largely restricted to poetry. He criticized imagination as wild and lawless, like a high-ranging spaniel, and praised rhyme because it encouraged a poet to use his judgement, but the prosaic quality which he exhibits in his verse does not consist in the avoidance of poetic images and conventions so much as in his close adherence to prose rhythms which sit uneasily in the line and induce us to overlook more ornamental matter.[7]

The influence of the dogma of the Royal Society

was moderated not only by authorial impulse, but also by commercial exigency and public taste as the new century proceeded. In The Vicar of Wakefield, George discovers, when he tries to live by writing, that easy simplicity of style and harmony of periods go for nothing. Those write best who write quickest. The author is a workman, paid by the page.[8]

It is perhaps unwise, then, to prefer to Johnson's own standards for imagery those typical only of an age, however clearly they elucidate him. It is perverse to try the work of one so self-obsessed and so influential in forming public taste by ideals not his own.

Johnson has five main criteria by which he judges imagery: propriety, generality, coherence, parallelism and tradition. The propriety of eighteenth-century literature was absolute, being observed even in Fanny Hill, and it implied dramatic decorum whereby the speech of a character should correspond to his station, and generic decorum whereby the writer's genre should determine his style and vocabulary. Goldsmith was probably keenly aware of dramatic decorum, for it was when the bailiffs, disguised as officers, in The Good-natured Man, began to speak in a style which did not correspond to their dress that the play was jeered by the super-sensitive audience.[9] So perhaps Goldsmith may be forgiven for his unjust and famous criticism of Johnson's style, that Johnson would have

made the little fishes in the fable talk "'like WHALES.'"[10] For although dramatic decorum demanded that the little fishes talk in character, generic decorum demanded that a moral fable be told throughout in an earnest manner. Johnson's critics, however, despite Paul Fussell's insistence on the influence of the theory of genres in this period,[11] tend to ignore generic theory and attack him directly for pomposity. Even when Boswell resorts to the notion of propriety to explain and justify his friend's use of the grand style, he comes perilously close to admitting that the demands of Johnson's personality are equivalent to those of his genre.[12] Indeed, one weakness of Wimsatt's account of Johnson's different styles as appropriate for the different mediums in which he wrote is that Wimsatt tends to obscure Johnson's freedom to choose a genre which would complement his "natural" style. Genre might dictate style, but the author may dictate his genre. And although a writer may be held to create to some extent the genre in which he writes, surely it is something like a violation of genre that The Rambler should mimic so many of The Spectator's techniques. In a sense, Rambler 12, with its dialogue between a young gentlewoman and her various prospective employers, and Rambler 191, with the frothy, fluttery chatter of Bellaria, are quite un-Johnsonian. But

a difference obtains between the habitual tone by which a work is to be judged, and the spasmodic extremes of expression to which a writer is infrequently impelled. The contending claims of dramatic and generic decorum are effectually irreconcilable. Johnson's belief in decorum is undoubted. He believes that sentiment and diction should be in accord, and argues so in Ramblers 37 and 140. But, in consequence perhaps of his stylistic strength, his conviction that "the greater part of mankind have no character at all,"[13] which can be represented in literary form, and his detestation of romances merely entertaining, he matches his diction not to the sentiments of his weak and vicious correspondents, but rather to his own comprehensive moral intention. For a moral essayist like Johnson, propriety of imagery signified the eschewing of "low" terms and ideas, but, as Rambler 168 insists, "lowness" cannot always be shunned, for it is oftener the product of fashion than of philosophy.

Johnson praised generality in metaphors because this provided grandeur, clarity, and truth. The conceits of the metaphysicals were the antithesis of this ideal. "The fault of Cowley, and perhaps of all the writers of the metaphysical race, is that of pursuing his thoughts

to their last ramifications, by which he loses the grandeur of generality; . . . . . the force of metaphors is lost, when the mind by the mention of particulars is turned more upon the original than the secondary sense, more upon that from which the illustration is drawn than that to which it is applied."[14]

The coherence of imagery of which Johnson approves consists in not breaking metaphors. Thus he finds fault with Shakespeare for confounding Fortune's wheel and Clotho's spindle.[15] He blames Gray for mixing in the first stanza of 'The Progress of Poetry' the images of spreading scum and running water.[16] And he takes to task Addison for a broken metaphor which makes his Muse first a horse, then a boat, and then a potential singer.[17] Milton too is reproached with having not accurately preserved the consistency of those metaphors which he admits to Samson Agonistes.[18]

It is perhaps to the parallelism of an image that Johnson attaches most importance. In Idler 34 he divides images into the literal and real or the fortuitous and fanciful.[19] An example of the first sort in the comparison of poetry and painting, "two arts which pursue the same end, by the operation of the same mental faculties, and which differ only in this that one represents things by words permanent and natural, the other by signs accidental and arbitrary." An example of the second kind in the comparison of an animal body

with a group of men. The second type is approved in proportion as it achieves the parallelism of the first type. It is in the resemblance of particulars that the success of an image resides. The literal comparison convinces by its truth, the fanciful pleases by its genius. Both the conviction and the pleasure derive from the exactitude of the parallel. The further an image is extended, the greater the danger that it will break. So Johnson complains of an inept elaboration of the body politic: "He, however, owned, that London was too large; but added, 'It is nonsense to say the head is too big for the body. It would be as much too big, though the country were ever so extensive. It has no similarity to a head connected with a body.'"[20] Likewise, Gray's Cat becomes absurd when the poet confuses the object of the comparison with its subject: "if what glistered had been gold, the cat would not have gone into the water; and, if she had, would not less have been drowned."[21] It is unforgivable to produce an image whose parallelism fails even before it is developed. Johnson asks, "Who but Donne would have thought that a good man is a telescope?"[22] and the question is enough to damn the poet. For Johnson, the comparison, in the Essay on Criticism, of a student advancing in science with a traveller in the Alps "is, perhaps, the best simile in our language; that in which the most exact resemblance

is traced between things, in appearance, utterly unrelated to each other."[23] The value of the image derives from the parallelism which it sustains in spite of apparent dissimilarity.

The fifth criterion of convention is in some sense a term which summarizes the first four. Established example is not to be ignored. "Modern writers are the moons of literature; they shine with reflected light, with light borrowed from the ancients."[24] There are many comparisons, like that of the life of man with the duration of a flower, which every nation has been pleased to record.[25] Johnson observes in Rambler 143 that there is for authors a common stock of images from which they with their contemporaries are free to borrow. As Johnson censured perverse novelty in the metaphysical poets, so he rebuked Shakespeare for reversing the common image of zeal in King John II.i.477 -479, and representing it in its highest degree not as a flame, but a frost.[26] Only a genius might so dare to defy the historical judgement of humanity.

The importance of tradition is partly to be related to Johnson's endorsement of Locke's theory of language. For Locke, words signify "only men's peculiar ideas, and that by a perfect arbitrary imposition."[27] "The far greatest part of words that make all languages are general terms; which has not been the effect of neglect or chance, but

of reason and necessity."[28] His Preface to the Dictionary[29] and his discussion of the accomodation of sound to sense in Ramblers 92 and 94 show that Johnson did not believe meaning is inherent in words. His criticism of Boswell's assertion that a pamphlet means a prose piece illustrates Johnson's perception that human language is customarily general: "'A pamphlet is understood in common language to mean prose, only from this, that there is so much more prose written than poetry; as when we say a book, prose is understood for the same reason, though a book may as well be in poetry as in prose. We understand what is most general, and we name what is less frequent.'"[30]

Communication depends on the sharing of language. Since meaning does not inhere in sounds by nature, it must be established by convention. This is practicable only when each word is potentially general. The importance of traditional imagery is that it provides forms of expression the literal meaning of which will not hinder a reader's ready apprehension of metaphorical meaning.

Examined by his own standards, Johnson's imagery cannot be considered an entire success. In the aspect of propriety his practice is good. In his written work "lowness" is scrupulously avoided. The accumulation of detail which might lead to "lowness" in a metaphor

tends to convert it into an allegory which is to be judged on a different basis. It is in the speech reported by Boswell that the love of victory drives Johnson to become "the greatest sophist that ever contended in the lists of declamation" and employ any image to win his point. Boswell asked what a child should be taught first. "JOHNSON. 'Sir, it is no matter what you teach them first, any more than what leg you shall put into your breeches first. Sir, you may stand disputing which is best to put in first, but in the mean time your breech is bare.'"[31] Clearly, Johnson allowed himself to use in conversation images which he would have condemned as execrable "lowness" in written prose.

Likewise, he sometimes condescended to use a pun in conversation, although he would deliberately eschew it in written work, for he had a great contempt for that species of wit. The pun on "the Block" and "ye Blockheads" in lines 171 -174 in The Vanity of Human Wishes is perhaps an exception, but the original manuscript suggests that Johnson was troubled by the repeated sound. The Augustans' horror of lowness made them look on the pun with suspicion. The verbal coincidences which had reassured Elizabethans that their universe was divinely ordained, aroused now an expectation of the crude, the fatuous, and the abusive.

Throughout the century the pun is under attack. In Spectator 61 it is deemed as a species of false wit. In Chapter 6 of Mansfield Park, Mary Crawford's

moral character is clearly indicated by her perception of a vulgar pun in casual talk about admirals as "Rears" and "Vices". In her British Synonymy, Mrs Thrale-Piozzi joins in the general depreciation.[32] When Boswell reports Johnson's use of a pun in April 1778 he observes that he had known Johnson fifteen years before ever hearing him stoop to such sport.[33]

Yet, as Spectator 61 admitted, the pun is a natural part of language. It is for Pope a favourite device. Sterne's A Sentimental Journey reaches its climax in a pun, and his Tristram Shandy, which, despite Richardson's disgust, had great popularity, repeatedly employs the double entendre. Mrs Thrale was willing to indulge in puns to the end of her life,[34] and remembered that although Johnson professed to detest punning, yet he always favoured the tale of a lawyer who, when defied to produce a precedent in answer to that alleged by the opposite counsel from Burn, "suddenly replied, I can quote instantly an opinion to the contrary, and quote it from Kill Burn too."[35] Moreover, we may suspect Boswell of desiring to exalt our conception of Johnson by claiming that he had such an aversion to puns. Boswell is, of course, our source for Johnson's most famous pun, which refers to a Scotchman's

noble.t prospect,[36] and which was invented less than fifteen weeks after their first meeting.

The truth is that Johnson was acutely aware of latent meaning. His ingenious etymological speculation in the Dictionary suggests a keen capacity to apprehend semantic plurivalence. In the "Life of Dryden" he is careful not to condemn the poet outright for delighting "to tread upon the brink of meaning,"[37] but to admit that sometimes this endeavour after the grand the new produced images just and splendid.

The propriety of Johnson's imagery is so nearly impeccable because he uses latent meaning to complement, not to contradict, apparent meaning. It is for this reason that Professor Empson's remarks on Johnson's ambiguity are so unsatisfying.[38] For Johnson metaphorical expression "'is a great excellence in style, when it is used with propriety, for it gives you two ideas for one; - conveys the meaning more luminously, and generally with a perception of delight.'"[39] The two ideas are united, not set in contradiction. Whereas the technique of the vulgar pun reveals man as the victim of his language, Johnson's vigorous alignment of "etymological" with superficial meaning is a

synthesis of metaphor confirms him in his prejudice of verbal emptiness.

Yet where Johnson's sense of propriety might have been expected to produce the most concrete and sublime images, in the Prayers and Meditations, there are few metaphors indeed which obtrude into the reading mind, and in a lesser degree this is also true of the Sermons. The clergy, with the notable exception of the Puritans, had tended to support the reforms in language advocated by the Royal Society. There had long been felt the tension between the decorum of classical literature and that of the Gospels. Holy writ mixed the styles, attributing lofty rhetoric and heroic deeds to irredeemably "low" characters. Whether one should obey the rules of the pagans, or follow the examples of the Bible was a question which dogged writers and still dogs them. Johnson's solution was to forbear from attempting to find out parallels for that which is beyond parallel. "The ideas of Christian Theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestick for ornament; to recommend them by tropes and figures, is to magnify by a concave mirror the sidereal hemisphere."[40]

In the main, Johnson's work is in the grand style, and he easily avoids impropriety of imagery by remembering the traditional stock-pile of metaphors.

The generality of images is less well observed in

Johnson. This failing is chiefly discernible in the scientific metaphors which W.K. Wimsatt has perceptively studied.[41] But it is to be remembered that Johnson praises generality in images because the ramification of the metaphysicals lessened our feelings of grandeur and drew the mind away from the major idea to that secondary idea with which it is compared. Although these scientific images are not general, they do not greatly offend the principles of generality. Johnson's focus is on people, and in the moral essays our imaginative sympathy lies with them. When animate activity is compared with the inanimate, the reading mind tends to return to the animate. Moreover, the affective force of the scientific image is often lessened because it consists of Latinate words which derive their figurative sense from their etymology. The number of possible meanings tends to increase, and this often reduces the impact of each particular meaning. Johnson observes in the Preface to his Dictionary:

"The original sense of words is often driven out of use by their metaphorical acceptations, yet must be inserted for the sake of a regular origination. Thus I know not whether ardour is used for material heat, or whether flagrant, in English, ever signifies the same with burning;"[42] Even where a scientific image is explicit and ramified, one must be careful not to impute to Johnson the mechanical determinism of La Mettrie's

L'homme Machine. Although a continental writer of this period, like Diderot, might easily show himself a deist or an atheist by the habitual use of scientific images, in England there was what seems to some moderns an almost perverse piety among scientists. Newton was as a second Moses come to reveal the laws of God. However little they respected poetry, Bacon and Locke were anxious to preserve religion. Boyle, Priestley, and Gilbert White are typical in their reconciliation of Christian faith with scientific scepticism.

In this aspect of generality, Johnson's other images seldom fail. This is partly due to their traditional force, and partly to the sheer fertility which Johnson enjoys. So far is he from pursuing an image to it's remotest ramifications that he will in quick succession present images drawn from three or more spheres of life to illustrate one notion.

So, in the debate on "New Raised Men" of December 1740, one speaker finds it fit to compare public policy with two private expedients at once: the repair of a declining estate by large expenses, and of a languishing body by severe operations.[43] Likewise, in a letter to George Strahan in 1763 Johnson compares impermanent friendship to a light article easily blown away by a storm of wind, and then, without pause, to a heavy object hanging

by a mere hair.[44] Again, in his Preface to the Dictionary, he introduces four images in a few lines to describe how one word may be understood in diverse senses, and compares the confused development of meaning first to threads woven in cloth, next to the branches of a plant, then to the gradual changes in shades of colour, and lastly to people of the same race who, though not exactly alike, are yet very little different from each other.[45]

It may be suspected that this aversion to minute elaboration is a consequence of Johnson's conversational expertise. In this piece of assertive criticism the metaphors have the power of hammer blows: "JOHNSON. 'Mudge's Sermons are good, but not practical. He grasps more sense than he can hold; he takes more corn than he can make into meal; he opens a wide prospect, but it is so distant, it is indistinct.'"[46] In impromptu debate, to use a detailed metaphor is often to subvert one's position, and even to invite the petty quibbling characteristic of Shakespearean comedy. Indeed, it is sometimes hard to distinguish Johnson's images from the exempla of an orator, for he often employs an image as a species of argument by analogy. His images are often no less persuasive than

descriptive, as in this passage from a letter to William Drummond: "He, that voluntarily continues ignorance, is guilty of all the crimes which ignorance produces; as to him, that should extinguish the tapers of a light-house, might justly be imputed the calamities of shipwrecks."[47] The images in Johnson's talk are vivid in their specific reference to homely examples, yet it is the great praise of Johnson's written images that their force derives not from gross particularity but from a co-operative accumulation of contrasted comparisons. He achieves the grandeur of generality in energetic prose.

The logical rigour of Johnson's mind, and his aggressive fear of seeming ridiculous appear to have prevented his images from frequently lapsing into incoherence. If he so erred in talk it is unlikely that Boswell would tarnish the fame of his hero by recording the fault. But even in his works, he seldom fails. The combined images of light and of budding flowers in the Lives of the Poets do not outrage the principle of coherence, because no emphasis is given to the colouring of the flowers. It is rarely that Johnson confuses two arts, as he does here horticulture and painting: "The soft luxuriance of his fancy was already shooting, and all the gay varieties of diction were already at

his hand to colour and embellish it."[48] And most examples of incoherence in his imagery could be nullified by a repointing of the text, as a new paragraph in the "Life of Dryden" would obscure the inconsistency of speaking of Dryden's wit now as the perfume from an odoriferous substance, now as the stamped coins of a mint.[49] In the "Life of Milton" he writes,

"These are very imperfect rudiments of Paradise Lost; but it is pleasant to see great works in their seminal state, pregnant with latent possibilities of excellence;"[50] If a great work is in its seminal state, then it is properly the author's mind which is pregnant, not the work itself. This is perhaps the worst example of Johnson's incoherence of metaphor, and it is trivial indeed. The simplicity of his images, and his acute awareness of latent meaning enabled Johnson to eschew the delightful absurdity of the mixed metaphor to a pre-eminent extent.

Johnson's images often possess the simplicity of symbols. Their parallelism therefore seldom is to be censured. It would be hard to deviate from the parallelism of the stream of life or the hard road of virtue unless one intended to do so. It is interesting that in Taxation No Tyranny where there is just enough logical argument to make one wonder why there is not more, one of the major images is at odds with the less than

convincing political thesis. According to the conventional terms, Johnson refers to England and America as Mother-Country and Child, but the image he chooses to express their relations is that of a body and one of its members. A member could not exist without its body, but a child must some day be independent of his mother. It can also happen that the enthusiasm of the point he expresses induces Johnson to break a parallel. So he concludes his critique of Dryden's Eleanora: "Knowledge of the subject is to the poet what durable materials are to the architect."[51] Surely the architect's materials correspond to the poet's words, and the poet's knowledge of his subject to the architect's plan of his building. With exceptions of this sort, Johnson's images generally cannot be blamed for violating their parallelism.

Johnson's imagery is not rigorously traditional. His reported conversation reveals a readiness to seek comparisons in any department of human experience. In his formal prose, too, many metaphors are drawn from chemistry and optics and would seem therefore to fail by this standard. It is perhaps captious, however, to judge talk on a literary basis. Moreover, it may be questioned how far Johnson's readers associated the "philosophic words"[52] of his essays with the specific scientific practices and theories to which they refer. It is just conceivable that

his readers connected these words primarily with their Latin roots, and neither knew nor tried to know their technical import. Although scientific images are not traditional, the Latinate vocabulary which forms the language of science acquits them of the charge of abstruse novelty.

With these excertions, Johnson's images are almost beyond criticism in the criterion of tradition. He employs a strong synthesis of the images of the Bible, the classics, and the medieval icons and allegories. It is perhaps impertinent, however, too confidently to ascribe to conservatism the use of images universally popular.

The images of the Debates in Parliament cannot with certainty be attributed to Johnson. Boswell reports that Cave tried his hardest to make the Debates as perfect as they could be, even writing to the original orators to obtain corrections, and sometimes requesting that the genuine compositions be transmitted to him.[53] However, Boswell quotes Nichols who heard Johnson repent of his unintentional imposition on the world which took for a true record speeches "'frequently written from very slender materials, and often from none at all, - the mere coinage of the imagination.'"[54] Moreover, Boswell tells us of Johnson's mirth when he discovered in Dilly's splendid edition of Chesterfield two speeches ascribed to the lord but really written

by Johnson himself.[55] The speech which Johnson assigns Walpole when his opponents were at last to drive him from power (13 February 1741) is quite different from the resentful harangue in the official biography of Walpole.[56] It may even be the case that the metaphors which Johnson independently decided to use were popular among the greater parliamentary orators. The two major images of the Debates, the ship of state,[57] and the body politic[58] were no more original when Pitt and Burke employed them.

The best known classical precedent for the body politic was perhaps Menenius Agrippa's fable of the belly and limbs by which he pacified the plebeians.[59] The ship of state has no pre-eminent source, but it too is easily example in classical texts.[60] But Johnson's practice is not simple imitation. His personal history has its effect. When the ship of state is mentioned, emphasis is laid not on the organising of naval discipline, but on the danger of being overwhelmed by the hostile ocean. There is surely a similarity between the feared flood of alien troops, and the dreadful incursions of vain imaginings. In the image of the body politic parallelism is easily preserved, for Johnson habitually presents the evils of political life not in terms of members of the body rebelling against the head or belly, but in terms of a general disease to be cured by antidotes or surgery. So Johnson's political images

possess a personal tone which rescues them from the monotonous rigidity of purely derivative art.

In his moral writings, Johnson's two major images are the road of life and the voyage of life. In the road of life particularly he found opportunities to resurrect dead metaphors. The word "error" for example at once is a plain word of which The Royal Society might approve and an evocation of the most tortuous allegories. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress was both a literal description of Christian's journey and a figurative term for his spiritual development.

This idea of the journey of life had classical and Biblical justification. There was the Tablet of Cebes of Thebes, and Xenophon's account of Prodicus' allegory of the Choice of Hercules,[61] both of which were translated in the volume of The Preceptor for which Johnson produced his Vision of Theodore. Matthew VII. xiii -xiv. was likewise a fortifying example. The image of the journey was particularly popular in eighteenth-century literature. Boswell confessed, in the advertisement to the second edition, that in moments of vanity he had considered his Life as akin to the Odyssey in that amidst a thousand episodes the hero is never long out of sight.[62] It is not that the attraction of the theme of the journey lay principally in the ease with which moral ideas could be discussed by confronting

the guileless innocent with the world of corruption, though this is important. It is to be remembered that in the picaresque novel the freedom to travel lets numerous criminal outrages be perpetrated in series. It may be that the popularity of the journey was a consequence of its utility for those attempting the new genre of the novel. For confusions of time scheme, the absurdity of coincidences, and most of the ill consequences of bad plotting could be effectually obscured by the device of sending characters on intersecting journeys. The inadequacies and improbabilities of Tom Jones, for example, only become clear on a second reading.

The voyage of life likewise has respectable antecedents, especially in the Odyssey and the first half of the Aeneid,[63] but also in English literature.[64] Yet, despite their traditional force, Johnson's use of these images can be disappointing. Johnson located most of the pleasures of life in the prospect of imaginary joy. In these images he anticipates the disappointments of acquisition. They are presented with the static quality of allegorical paintings. The truth impresses us less because the expression of it is predictable.

However, it is in a variation of this main metaphoric theme that it is possible to detect Johnson's

mind in its assimilative reworking of a traditional theme. As Johnson was finishing his work on the Dictionary, he wrote to Thomas Warton on 1 February 1755: "I now begin to see land, after having wandered, according to Mr Warburton's phrase, in this vast sea of words. What reception I shall meet with upon the Shore I know not, whether the sound of Bells and acclamations of the People which Ariosto talks of in his last canto or a general murmur of dislike, I know not whether I shall find upon the coast, a Calypso that will court or a Polypheme that will eat me. But if Polypheme comes to me have at his eyes."[65] One week passed, and Johnson was provoked to renounce any amity which might be supposed to subsist between himself and Chesterfield. He wrote the celebrated letter, with that devastating comparison suggested by Warburton's phrase and Ariosto's verses: "Is not a Patron, My Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a Man struggling for Life in the water and when he has reached ground encumbers him with help?"[66]

In his literary criticism, Johnson clearly shows himself a traditionalist. His comparison of Pope and Dryden, "If of Dryden's fire the blaze is brighter, of Pope's the heat is more regular and constant."[67] may owe something to Pseudo-Longinus' contrast of Cicero and Demosthenes which compares the latter to a flash of lightning, and the former to a wide-spreading

conflagration.[68] The terms of approbation for the Latin critics were words relating to light: illustris, splendor, nitere, clarus, silus, elucere, scintilla, lux, lumen. And Johnson, who like the Latins showed peculiar insensitivity to colour, followed their example. In fact, it is in his appeal to light that Johnson appears strongest as both moralist and critic.

The garden image which is also very frequent in his criticism is easily understood and skilfully employed, but its value, in presenting the idea of literary order attained by dutiful labour, is impaired. For Johnson places side by side the images of the garden of literature and the road of life. In the former, blossoms and fruits are praised while thorns and blasted buds are condemned. But in the latter, there is a complete reversal of this valuation: the pilgrim is repelled from the path of virtue by its thistles and asperity, and seduced to the luxuriant blooms of the vicious alternative.

Images of light, prominent in his criticism, are to be found throughout Johnson's work. Their import varies. The source of the light provides the clue to how it must be valued. The Sun may give the light of reason, and so Johnson writes of

"The variable weather of the mind, the flying vapours of incipient madness, which from time to time cloud reason, without eclipsing it, . . ."[69] But the

Sun may also be borrowed from neo-stoical writers and employed as an image to evoke the passionless constancy to which a sham sage lays claim.[70] Generally, however, the Sun is an object of laudatory comparison, which sheds the light of truth, knowledge, and revelation. In this sense there is the precedent of the Sun simile and the simile of the Cave in Plato's Republic VI.v; VII.vii, and innumerable passages in the Bible.[71] Meteors, though, are invariably associated with deceptive excellence and short-lived fame:

"If, instead of wandering after the meteors of philosophy which fill the world with splendour for a while, and then sink and are forgotten, the candidates of learning fixed their eyes upon the permanent lustre of moral and religious truth, they would find a more certain direction to happiness."[72]

No less misleading are the shadowy phantoms which excite hopes which must be disappointed. Light may suggest the valueless by the two extremes of the glittering and the dazzling. True worth lies in the mean.

One of the most recurrent of Johnson's images is that of the balance.[73] In the Debates the good of Europe is regularly represented as residing in an equipoise of power. In the moral essays the scales of judgement are the symbol of scientific impartiality and mature sagacity. And mediocrity is surely Johnson's aim in his choice of metaphors. The ideal is the middle

way:

"To walk with circumspection and steadiness in the right path, at an equal distance between the extremes of error, ought to be the constant endeavour of every reasonable being;"[74] Even so, Johnson conceived of his age as occupying in time an intermediate state of classicism. In no sphere was he more acutely aware of this than that of language: ". . . every language has a time of rudeness antecedent to perfection, as well of false refinement and declension . . . "[75]

"Language proceeds, like every thing else, through improvement to degeneracy."[76]

This view of literature, which stressed the need to resist any impulse to decadence accorded with Johnson's characteristic self-restraint. His metaphoric vocabulary is perhaps influenced by personal interests. His poor eye-sight may account for the lack of colour in the garden and light images. His bad health may explain the preponderant emphasis on disease as the main threat to the body politic. His love of victory in debate may cause him to describe conversation in terms of a battle or duel. His sado-masochistic fantasies may invest with new force the chain images which express man's subservience to the woman he loves.[77] His interest in chemistry might induce him to develop new patterns of scientific metaphor. The effect, however,

of this personal interest is often to mute those elements of individuality and emotion which one might have expected such metaphors to reveal. Even on great occasions when Dr Levet is to be lamented or Lord Chesterfield to be rebuked, the transforming power of immediate interest reconciles the form of tradition with Johnson's individual experience.

Johnson's favourite images are not peculiar to him. The balance of judgement,[78] the journey of life on a hard road, or treacherous sea,[79] the light of reason and the darkness of ignorance[80] are to be exampled abundantly in Johnson's contemporaries.

Moreover, the criteria by which Johnson judges imagery are non-aesthetic. They refer to style rather than beauty. They enable him to praise what he likes and damn the rest. His preference, for example, for Pope's comparison of a student with a traveller in the Alps surely is better explained by the pessimism and the personal relevance of its subject matter than its approximation to an abstract ideal.

Inconsistency obtains between Johnson's critical values. The criterion of tradition is at odds with those of propriety and parallelism. For, with startling impropriety, Homer, the father of European literature, compares Greek troops to a flock of geese, Aias to a stubborn donkey which boys chase from a field, and Myrmidons to angry wasps.[81] So too, Vergil likens a

queen to a top driven along by children with whips, and a prince to a cauldron of boiling water.[82] The ancients, besides, were divided in their attitudes to parallelism. Vergil's similes do maintain parallelism, establishing several points of contact between the subject and the object compared, but Homer's similes start with a single point of similarity, and develop themselves in more or less complete detachment from the likeness which suggested the comparison.

Yet, it is in the self-consciousness which restrained Johnson's imagery that its success consists. What a modern reader admires is not the concrete nature of the images, despite Professor Greene's elucidation,[83] nor even their "abstractness" despite the insights provided by Professor Wimsatt.[84] It is the propriety of metaphors which impresses us. The images are unobtrusive[85] less because of any obscuring "abstractness" or of our ignorance of eighteenth century vocabulary, than because they are absolutely appropriate. Imagery in Johnson aids meaning and is not merely a substitute for it. The tendency to monotony[86] is apparent rather to the scholar who collects examples than the reader who wants pleasure and instruction. In fact, it is a considerable tribute to the capacity of Augustan humanists to conceal art that their common property of images has only lately been fully recognised.[87] Johnson's images may be repetitive, but they are

not mechanical, except to the analyst who reads in a mechanical fashion.

For Johnson's images are not merely demonstrative. They appear designed to explain a world of which the moral and physical nature is uniform. Yet analogy is no logical argument. Johnson's images always have a purpose, but often seem, in addition, almost gratuitous, and in his use of them there may be detected a spontaneity unparalleled in other features of his prose.

Johnson's hack work might suggest that he found it difficult to relax his self-control when writing. In his minor biographies, where it is reasonable to suppose he had a target of a minimum number of words, he will rather quote sources and bibliographical details at length than release his composing faculties to work up substance from an apparent vacuum. So perhaps his frequent recourse to imagery signifies that he found particular pleasure in the use and sometimes over-use of the ornaments of simile and metaphor.

For Johnson's love of imagery there is ample evidence. In London and The Vanity of Human Wishes he develops many of Juvenal's images, and invents still more which are not to be found in the original Latin. In his private letters there are abundant images, and, as he wrote to Mrs Thrale in one letter:

"In a Man's letters you know, Madam, his soul lies naked, his letters are only the mirrour of his breast, whatever passes within him is shown undisguised in its natural process."[88] Two of Johnson's peculiarly personal poems in Latin, his Skia, An Ode on the Isle of Skye and his Γνωθι σεαυτον derive emphatic vigour from his metaphoric technique. Images pervade his diarial writings, both in English, where it is to be expected, and in Latin, where it is surprising, since that tongue loves the concrete and literal.[89] His contributions to Chambers' Vinerian law lectures might surely be attributed to Johnson even on the evidence of their imagery.[90] Moreover, if the sketches for Rambler 196 and Adventurer 45 which Boswell records,[91] and those for Ramblers 197, 198, and 101, and Adventurer 84 which Hawkins records[92] are compared with the published essays it is clear that Johnson's mind was remarkably fertile in images. He did not slavishly copy the images of his sketches when transforming his essays into their final state. In the two stages, two independent systems of metaphor exist. Rather than developing his images as he does his vocabulary and sentence structure, Johnson repeatedly creates fresh schemes of similitude.

Johnson's images are of narrow scope, but true and emphatic. His criteria for imagery may be restrictive, but within these restraints he

engages freely in every variety of creative comparison. His love of metaphor redeems him from the vices of binding prejudices. He observes his own rules and pleases in spite of them. He burdens his fancy, and makes a harmony out of opposite tensions. His mind is full and he fills his reader's mind.

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CHAPTER V JOHNSON AND RHYTHM

Rhythm is perhaps of all literary effects the least subject to the critical legislation of national academies. The dogmas of a Royal Society may, in the name of plainness, require the excision of metaphor, but only with language itself can rhythm be extirpated. The question posed is not whether to create rhythm, but which type should be made. And the inaccessibility of rhythm to critical evaluation has left this choice rather to the individual than any coercive tribunal.

Johnson's appreciation and use of rhythm has not been a cause of much critical approval. Mrs Piozzi helped to establish the tradition that he was alike blind to painting and deaf to music.[1] And Hawkins, in a peculiar paragraph, reported, citing his source as Johnson himself, that the lexicographer was insensitive to the harmony of music, but could derive pleasure from the metrical harmony of long and short syllables arranged by rule. He even commented, "That his own numbers are so harmonious as, in general, we find them, must have been the effect of his sedulous attention to the writings of Dryden and Pope, and the discovery of some secret in their versification, of which he was able to avail himself."[2] So in our own century John Bailey wrote, "His prose, spoken or written, is altogether wanting in some of the greatest elements of style: it has no music, no mystery, no gift of suggestion, . . . "[3] And again, "The criticism of Johnson has many

limitations. He was entirely without aesthetic capacity. Not only were music and the plastic arts nothing to him . . . but he does not appear to have possessed any musical ear or much power of imagination."[4] Hazlitt among the romantics repeatedly complained of the uniformity of Johnson's rhythms: "All his periods are cast in the same mould, are of the same size and shape, and consequently have little fitness to the variety of things he professes to treat of."[5] And he asserted that Johnson's critical influence was employed to convert Milton's vaulting Pegasus into a rocking-horse.[6] Leslie Stephen likewise judged that the especial fault of Johnson's prose was a mechanical repetition of forms without reference to meaning or the need for variety.[7] Macaulay too, while conceding the partial success of Johnson's prose rhythm, condemned the pomposity and the excessive love of balance which he associated with it.[8]

Praise for the rhythm of this style, "perhaps the most Ciceronian in the language," is so infrequent that McAdam and Milne felt obliged to make particular mention of Johnson's keen ear for the musical properties of language in the introduction to their edition of his poetry.[9] And even Boswell thought it worth his while often to draw the reader's attention to Johnson's delight in the proper harmonies of prose and verse. When Dr Brocklesby repeated to the dying Johnson lines from Juvenal, he misquoted Satire X, 358 "Qui spatium vitae extremum inter munera ponat,"

and pronounced "supremum" for "extremum"; "at which Johnson's critical ear instantly took offence, and discoursing vehemently on the unmetrical effect of such a lapse, he shewed himself as full as ever of the spirit of the grammarian."[10] (However, his rigid critical spirit seems to have been defective in his version of Pope's Messiah where he makes the letter "o" in the word "virgo" long and short in the same line.[11]) When Boswell pressed Johnson to reveal his purpose in collecting orange peel, the interrogation closed with Johnson's correcting Boswell's phraseology: "'Nay, Sir, you should say it more emphatically: - he could not be prevailed upon, even by his dearest friends, to tell.'"[12] And it was an occasion of no slight triumph for Johnson when he proved the inadequacy of Garrick as a public speaker by making him repeat the ninth commandment, in which he mistook the emphasis.[13] Boswell presents his here exalting Vergil's melodies,[14] exulting in his own knowledge of classical metres,[15] locating the excellence of Horace not in sentiments but numbers,[16] and lashing the Scots and Irish for failure to maintain correctness in learned languages,[17] yet Johnson's perception of rhythm is denied, and the quality of his prose is execrated.

For the dislike which Johnson's prose rhythms provoke there may seem to be two major reasons. The first lies in his critical attitude to rhythm, and the second consists in the unfortunate position his own prose occupies in the history of the English sentence.

Although Johnson regarded harmony of periods as necessary

in the composition of fine sermons and praised Sir William Temple as the first writer to give cadence to English prose,[18] his major criticism discusses rhythm only to belittle those who make extravagant claims for it. Johnson was deeply suspicious of literary theories of inspiration. One consequence of this caution, and of his desire to reduce literary effects to examples of simple rules is his unvarying belief that rhyme excels blank verse. When Boswell told Johnson that Adam Smith strenuously maintained the same opinion, he replied: "'Sir, I was once in company with Smith, and we did not take to each other; but had I known that he loved rhyme as much as you tell me he does, I should have HUGGED him.'"[19]

Johnson perceived of language as essentially an occasional and temporary affair, fit to express only a limited range of meanings. He conceded (Rambler 86) that man derives delight from his discernment of harmony. He advocated the variety achieved by the substitution of syllables in poetry. He warned against the frequent use of monosyllables in English lest there be too much ruggedness in pronunciation. But Johnson's prosodic theory is virtually a justification of the eighteenth-century couplet, in its insistence on strict accent alternately placed in a syllabically limited decasyllable with a strong medial pause. He is an apologist for precisely those mechanical elements of poetrywhich correspond to that over-use of balance in prose to which he was prone. While

supporting the theory of decorum, Johnson is persuaded that no absolute correlation of meaning and medium is possible. He is extremely sceptical of the claims made for the accomodation of sound to sense. He is not so rash as completely to deny the phenomenon, but he does assert (Ramblers 92, 94) that the only ideas which can be suggested by sound alone are those which refer to motion and duration.

In Johnson's view the meaning of words is established by convention. When a man believes that a word is not merely an arbitrary sign for an idea, he confuses usage with nature. When Moll Flanders speaks of "that unmusical, harsh-sounding title of whore"[20] she is the victim of a misleading association of ideas. Of the theory of this phenomenon, Locke provided a popular account in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.[21] The explanation of our ideas of cause and effect by Hume, and of our ideas of beauty by Burke were also in terms of the power of habit in human behaviour. Joseph Priestley, in his Lectures on the Theory of Language (1762), likewise explains our preference for the sound of one language before another by our ease in grasping it, which, he says, depends on its similarity to the language which we habitually use.[22] In short, custom seduces us to false beliefs, and Johnson holds that such a belief is the theory that sound may fully echo sense.

The locus classicus for Johnson's disparagement of these theories is in the Life of Pope:

"One of the most successful attempts has been to describe the labour of Sisyphus:

'With many a weary step, and many a groan,
Up the high hill he heaves a huge round stone;
The huge round stone, resulting with a bound,
Thunders impetuous down, and smoaks along the ground.'

Who does not perceive the stone to move slowly upward, and roll violently back? But set the same numbers to another sense;

'While many a merry tale, and many a song,
Cheer'd the rough road, we wish'd the rough road long.
The rough road then, returning in a round,
Mock'd our impatient steps, for all was fairy ground.'

We have now surely lost much of the delay, and much of the rapidity."[23]

Yet Johnson's example is misleading and unfair. The numbers may remain the same, but the sounds are changed in the second quatrain. The open vowel sounds in "weary," "groan" and "stone," which Pope put in emphatic positions, Johnson replaces with shut vowel sounds. Johnson severely reforms Pope's repetition or "turn" at the end of the second and the start of the third line, by increasing the

intermediate pause, changing it from a semi-colon to a full stop, and using the alliteration of "r" in "the rough road," for "r" is not a "stop" consonant, but a continuant, and its repetition tends to increase the speed of reading. In the final line, Johnson has added in "Mock'd" a collision of sounds which seems awkward to pronounce, and has removed one of the pauses which Pope may have required to suggest speed.

Johnson can show himself as pure and unhistorical a rationalist as any of the Encyclopaedists. The strength of his argument lies in the sureness with which his conclusion follows from his premises. Its weakness is the narrowness of his focus, his failure to analyse sound as well as numbers. He does not consider that sort of meaning which comprises the effect we perceive in the organs of touch, taste, and smell, as we pronounce a word. The function of speaking is for many people an almost inseparable associate of the function of listening. Regularities of connection between visual and auditory senses have been investigated by prominent psychologists. There is evidence that people, irrespectively of their cultural, geographical and linguistic isolation, do consistently associate particular noises and shapes.[24] Since sounds were chosen which were not in common usage as words in their own right, this finding may seem to challenge Johnson's contention that we often invent the resemblances which we profess to hear. In justice, however, it must be

allowed that Johnson has some truth on his side. The reading public is adept at self-deception, and the dictionary meaning of a word need bear no resemblance whatsoever to its effect as a sound in evoking visual or other ideas in our minds. The behaviour of taboo words in a language easily proves that meaning does not inhere in words by nature, but is attached to them by convention.[25]

Yet Johnson's theory and practice do not always coincide. He is to be discovered employing puns even in his Ramblers, in spite of his professed disapproval of them. For surely when Cornelia, in describing Lady Bustle's precautions lest anyone should learn the recipe for her orange pudding, remarks, "the mouth of the oven is then stopped, and all enquiries are vain."[26] there is surely a playful personification involved, since the use of the verb "to stop" to mean preventing another's speaking by filling his mouth with one's own speech has many parallels.[27] Likewise, Johnson sometimes seems to make the sound of his phrases echo their sense, as when in London 1.189, and in the letter to Chesterfield he notices that a man's "all" may be little, and the word is small like the object it describes. In the main, however, Johnson neither assiduously seeks such effects, nor do his general themes often permit particular concrete exemplification.

Apart from Johnson's unhistorical approach to the question, and the short-comings of phonetic theory in his time, he had another powerful motive for denying these theories of rhythm. This was his passionate conviction that the will of man is free.

Johnson's insistence on free will seems at times desperate. Perhaps he was strongly moved by the case for determinism. His thought runs close to that of Mandeville, Hume and Hobbes, the Mephistopheles of his day. His horror of civil disorder and his reverence for sovereignty align him with Hobbes: his perception of the more obvious fallacies involved in mercantilist economics, and his recognition of the importance of self-deception in human behaviour prove him akin to Mandeville. Hume's empiricism in philosophy, and his scepticism in history concur with Johnson's belief that experience is the great test of any system, that progress is a precarious and unpersisting phenomenon, and that justice, not freedom, is the end of government.

Hume, Hobbes, and Johnson, moreover, agree in their interpretation of human thought and experience as uniform. When Imlac informs us that every man may, by examining his own mind, guess what passes in the minds of others,[28] he reminds us of Hobbes, in the Introduction to his Leviathan: " . . . whosoever looketh into himself, and considereth what he doth,

when he does think, opine, reason, hope, feare, &c, and upon what grounds; he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and Passions of all other men, upon the like occasions."[29] Yet Johnson is not led to infer from human uniformity that our actions are determined. He does not yield to Hume's argument that the regularity of man's life is of the same order as that of the planets' courses.[30] Nor does he subscribe to the Berkeleian hypothesis that the action of a will is the type of all causation, and that God's spiritual agency is required to account for the consistency of nature. Johnson justifies his belief in free will by an appeal to experience, not to theory.[31]

It is clear that there were powerful emotional elements involved in Johnson's belief in free will. It might be argued that moral responsibility presupposes free will.[32] Indeed, as one might expect of a man so interested in the law, Johnson seemed to give stronger assent to the doctrine of justification by works than by faith. Johnson thought the parable of the talents had peculiar relevance to his own life. His diarial writings show him engaged repeatedly in a condemning self-judgement. To Johnson life is a test. If one is not tempted, one is not tested. Johnson did not agree with the rationalism of

Samuel Clarke, in spite of Hawkins' testimony.[33] Nor did Johnson accept Shaftesbury's philosophical school of benevolence. Johnson believed that wickedness is always easier than virtue.[34] Man is by nature vicious. He becomes virtuous through education.[35] It is a mark of Johnson's maturity that he almost never takes a simple view of our moral behaviour. Self-deception is as common as insight. A true perception does not bear with it a guarantee of its own validity. Freedom of the will demands faith and courage if it is to realize virtue.

When Boswell suggested that the deity might have contrived to make man's life predestined, in so far as God is held to have universal prescience, Johnson, uncharacteristically, at once withdrew from the knotty debate, so sharply did the very mention of determinism pain him.[36] When the topic was raised at Fores during the Scottish tour, Johnson argued that free will is worth the evil it involves. Boswell rejoined, "'A man, as a machine, may have agreeable sensations; for instance, he may have pleasure in musick.'" To me this suggests pleasure in perceiving the sounds of music, but Johnson, it is interesting to note, understood a different emphasis:

"'No, sir, he cannot have pleasure in musick; at least no power of producing musick; for he who can produce musick may let it alone: he who can play upon a fiddle may break it: such a man is not a machine.'"[37] One suspects, however, that Johnson did feel that in merely responding to music a man was no better than a machine.

The idea that a set of sounds could produce from a reader a determined set of responses was in itself repugnant to Johnson, who refused to separate his feelings from their ethical context. Boswell reports from an evening in September 1777 when the company were being entertained with a number of tunes on the fiddle:

> "Johnson desired to have 'Let ambition fire they mind,' played over again, and appeared to give a patient attention to it; though he owned to me that he was very insensible to the power of musick. I told him, that it affected me to such a degree, as often to agitate my nerves painfully, producing in my mind alternate sensations of pathetic dejection, so that I was ready to shed tears; and of daring resolution, so that I was inclined to rush into the thickest part of the battle.

'Sir, (said he,) I should never hear it, if it made me such a fool.'"[38]

Johnson's contempt for this type of folly is clear in his ridicule of Gray's belief that he could only write at certain times,[39] and of Milton's fear that he had been born in a climate too cold for flights of imagination.[40] A man can write at any time if only he will set himself doggedly to it. Manhood is freedom. Dick Minim, the mechanical critic of Idlers 60 and 61, has lost his independent identity and has become an irresponsible feeling machine. Johnson never succumbed to shallow emotionalism. "It may be observed, that in all the numerous /rhythmical?/ writings of Johnson, whether in prose or verse, and even in his Tragedy, of which the subject is the distress of an unfortunate Princess, there is not a single passage that ever drew a tear."[41]

Although Johnson resisted so strongly the notion that man is a pipe on which other men may play their tunes, his own writing resolutely controls its reader's response. There is never in Johnson's couplets, as there is often in Goldsmith's, a choice of intonation. Indeed, the device of setting a divided against an undivided line, and, therefore, two short tone groups against a longer tone group recurs so frequently in Johnson's

poetry that he might be reproached as rigid and unimaginative. In Johnson's prose too, as Coleridge saw, no conjunction is ornamental merely: each confirms a single manner of reading the sentence. As Johnson's plotting defines the ethic of his works, so his syntax fixes the emphasis of his phrases beyond error. He is an exponent of the rhetoric of the series, where two items assert a fact magisterially, and three items argue reasonably and persuasively from typical cases. By such a simple variation Johnson orders his prose. Johnson's talk differs from his essays because in it his own modulation, not his imposed syntax, directs our understanding. Macaulay rightly distinguished Johnson's speech from his writing, but he was wrong to suggest that the change is lexical only. How Johnson marshals words justifies and explains their selection.

As Johnson's distrust of the extravagant claims made for rhythm has damaged his reputation, so has his fondness for a particular type of rhythm in the Rambler. The essential characteristic of the rhythm of English prose is isochronism. The writer of good prose may use two methods to give his work a more isochronous character, and thereby give his readers greater pleasure. He may use accents infrequently, by cultivating polysyllables for example, since a difference of duration between two groups of sounds is less readily appreciated when these

groups are long rather than short. On the other hand, he may use accents often, to produce groups which are perceived as really isochronous.[42]

Johnson uses accents infrequently in his Rambler. He had a fondness for philosophic diction of the polysyllabic sort, and shared the prejudice of his time against the use of monosyllables to bear alone the melody of a passage. He blames Cowley for often making his rhymes with "pronouns or particles, of the like unimportant words, which disappoint the ear, and destroy the energy of the line."[43] For, "every rhyme should be a word of emphasis, nor can this rule be safely neglected, except where the length of the poem makes slight inaccuracies excusable, or allows room for beauties sufficient to overpower the effects of petty faults."[44] Not only are polysyllables impressive by reason of their length and their etymological associations, they serve to avoid the potential variation of stress which exists in a sequence of monosyllables. Determining the accentuation of all polysyllables was one goal Johnson set himself as a lexicographer, and his practice as a stylist may suggest one reason for this ambition.[45]

But it is Johnson's distinction that he combines with his infrequent use of accents, groups of sounds which are really isochronous. This he achieves by fulfilling the normal conditions of isochronism, which are parallelism of grammatical structure and phonetic

values. It must be emphasized that by no means all of Johnson's prose is of this peculiar type. Professor Wimsatt re-established[46] that Johnson has not one but many prose styles, and that he employs the "Johnsonian" as a grand style for sublime matter, while using more informal modes in letters, biographies, and diarial work. Moreover, as Carey McIntosh has observed, even among the Ramblers there is considerable variation in the prose style.[47] But what later generations regarded as typically Johnsonian seemed in terms of rhythm incorrigibly old-fashioned to those whose dominant technique was the use of longer groups of sounds between accents, and a much diminished parallelism. Johnson was not insensitive to the music of language, but he favoured a sort which the critical and aesthetic preconceptions of romantic and Victorian readers prevented them from appreciating.

Hazlitt's criticism of Johnson's style is that it "reduces all things to the same artificial and unmeaning level. It destroys all shades of difference, the association between words and things."[48] In fact, this is substantially the same fault which Johnson found with Cowley: "He seems not to have known, or not to have considered, that words being arbitrary must owe their power to association, and have the influence, and that only, which custom has given them."[49] Each criticism is unjust because it is the product of an unhistorical

attitude. Johnson clearly shows himself ardently aware of shades of meaning in his condemnation, however inappropriate it may be, of the "low" terms in Macbeth and Annus Mirabilis. At work on his Dictionary, he could not but be alert to the perishable nature of language as he wrote the Rambler. It is his achievement to deal with the perpetual concerns of humanity in a prose largely purged of the purely occasional. Johnson does not reduce all words to the same level of meaning, but is involved in a continuous process of redefinition by contrast and equation. And where he does employ the techniques of turns and repetitions he does not destroy or level meaning, but accumulates and strengthens it. So he begins his pamphlet, "Thoughts On The Coronation": "All pomp is instituted for the sake of the public. A shew without spectators can no longer be a shew. Magnificence in obscurity is equally vain with 'a sun-dial in the grave.'"[50] The occasion is formal and the style is self-conscious and forensic in its vigorous establishing of the self-evident. Yet Johnson perhaps impresses us still more when he contrasts the elaborate with the severe for rhetorical effect. Considered in themselves, the famous letters to Chesterfield and Macpherson are competent, but their power to move derives from our knowledge of Johnson's customary style in formal addresses. By contrast, the unmitigated monosyllables are brutal: "Your rage I defy."[51] The same method is used to

create comic effects. So Rambler 84, a letter from a young girl impatient of her aunt's control, concludes: "I shall not proceed to extremities without your advice, which is therefore impatiently expected by

MYRTILLA.

P.S. Remember I am past sixteen."

And the sudden descent of the post script reveals as imposture the plaintive dignity which preceded. Again, in Rasselas, Chapter XVIII, when the prince discovers the Stoic's inability to live by the philosophy that he had with such sublime oratory exalted, we are told that Rasselas "went away convinced of the emptiness of rhetorical sound, and the inefficacy of polished periods and studied sentences."[52] The vanity of rhetoric is condemned by vain rhetoric itself.

But Johnsonian prose is ideally a vehicle for one level of meaning: that of consolation. His style is not ponderous, but light and quick. Truly isochronous groups are easier to read at any event, but this ease is increased by the repeated use of words which have Greek or Latin origins and which tend to make the prose smoother by their prevalence of vowel sounds. Some of Johnson's unusual words strike the ear as remarkably lovely: "fugacity," "oraculous," "indiscerptible" and "adscidulous," for example. Besides, Johnson's fondness for verbs intensifies the speed one perceives in reading. Indeed, it might be argued that Johnson's debt to Latin

lies less in his borrowed vocabulary than in the example which that language afforded him of persistent use of the verb.

Repetition and balance soothe an audience. Passions are excited when a pattern of sounds is established, only for the writer to fail to fulfil his own scheme. Johnson's practice is almost invariably to satisfy the expectation of his reader. So it happens that in all the numerous writings of Johnson there is hardly a passage that ever drew a tear.[53] It is perhaps precisely because he himself was so vulnerable to intense emotion that he avoided what might move others. William Shaw observed: "His heart was in unison with every thing that could suffer. He had no equal in affording consolation to the sorrowful."[54] It has recently been argued that Johnson's capacity for sympathetic passion prevented his ever achieving true satire.[55] And Mrs Piozzi recorded, "he was more strongly and more violently affected by the force of words representing ideas capable of affecting him at all, than any man in the world I believe; and when he would try to repeat the celebrated Prosa Ecclesiastica pro Mortuis, as it is called, beginning Dies irae, Dies illa, he could never pass the stanza ending thus, Tantus labor non sit cassus, without bursting into a flood of tears . . . "[56]

It may be that Johnson as much consoled himself as his readers by these rhythms. He often referred his writing to immediate need, suggesting it was a necessary

evil.[57] When Hawkins congratulated him on undertaking the edition of Shakespeare, "His answer was, 'I look upon this as I did upon the dictionary: it is all work, and my inducement to it is not love or desire of fame, but the want of money, which is the only motive to writing that I know of.'"[58] "He has often confessed composition had no charms for him, and that all the fame and reputation which he acquired by his writings, as well as the numerous sublime virtues ascribed to them, were comprehended in the single monosyllable bread."[59] Yet perhaps writing seemed a lesser evil to Johnson than the desolation of the spirit, "the gloomy calm of idle vacancy,"[60] to which it was an alternative. Certainly, it is hard to believe that any man pursues a life of writing as the easiest means to obtain bread.

When Johnson did write, it was at a frenzied pace. When he was producing the Debates from slender materials, three columns in an hour was no uncommon effort, which was faster than most persons could have transcribed that quantity. Most of the Life of Savage was written in a single day.[61] A Journey To The Western Islands was written in twenty days, and The Patriot in three. Taxation No Tyranny took less than a week.[62] The False Alarm occupied just over a day. Johnson appears often to have postponed composition so long that only his maniacal persistence, once he took up his pen, could

meet the dead-line.[63]

Reynolds tells us that Johnson filled his hated hours of solitude with reading and writing.[64] Surely Boswell misleads us in commenting on Johnson's affirmation that "'a man may write at any time, if he will set himself doggedly to it'" with his hint that "doggedly" might not mean "sullenly" or "gloomily" but "'with an obstinate resolution, similar to that of a sullen man.'"[65] Surely Johnson resorted to writing to fend off the dismal ideas which haunted him, and procrastination served to accumulate new guilt which might impel him to the literary toil which would disburden him of his familiar melancholy. This would account for his slowness to give up the oppression of the pen, his consistent inability to strike a good bargain with the booksellers which would win him intermittent release from the pressure of a dead-line, and his pitiful longing, expressed in his Γνῶθι σεαυτόν, and attempted in fact,[66] to undertake new dictionaries when he had revised his first lexicon. Action is the cure for melancholy. Personal conviction perhaps lies behind the maxims of Idler 73: "The incursions of troublesome thoughts are often violent and importunate; and it is not easy to a mind accustomed to their inroads to expel them immediately . . . The gloomy and the resentful are always found among those who have nothing to do, or who do nothing."[67]

If this theory of Johnson as a personality with

an obsessional neurosis is valid, then perhaps his rhythms provide an example of the phenomenon, investigated by Pavlov, of the coincidence of neurotic symptomatology with susceptibility to conditioning.[68] Of course, all languages exhibit a "spontaneous" rhythm, and each person has his favourite forms of speech. It would be absurd to suggest that every communicating being is a neurotic. Clearly, also, eighteenth-century English writing has a strong propensity to balance and antithesis. The ridge-backed couplet, and the pendulum-swing of a pair of clauses are ideal for satirical purposes, and an age of journalistic expansion will foster satire. Yet Johnson's writing is especially thick with antitheses, and his prose often seems to see-saw in perpetual motion, even as did his entire body.[69] His poetry too is distinguished by the device of balancing a divided against an undivided line, and one notes from his version of Horace, Odes II, xiv, that expansion and repetition were part of his expressive nature, even as a schoolboy.[70]

Restraint is a key-word for the understanding of Johnson's social existence, where he either imposed a new tyranny, or submitted to an old. The dark hints of the Thraliana have been brought together by Katherine Balderston, with other evidence, to suggest that Johnson's torturing melancholy was a strong amorous nature severely repressed, particularly after his wife's

death.[71] In fact, one study of Johnson's relations with the fair sex leaves the reader uncertain whether Lothario or Don Quixote is the better model of his behaviour.[72] It may be that Johnson unluckily had both strong passions, and a nature easily trained to deny them. He was, perhaps, one of those who learn too well for their own repose the lessons of ethical instruction. His compulsive honesty and morality may have had in his nervous system a common origin with his compulsive post-touching and step-counting.[73] This is not to suggest that Johnson's rhythms are the inevitable consequence of his neurosis, but rather that the obsessional personality finds such rhythms accord with his nature.

Adherence to traditional imagery is one means of avoiding spontaneity. Another is to practise a style which is based on a principle of expansion, and becomes, so to speak, self-generating. By repetition and balance the writer endows his sentences with their own logic. This formal, self-conscious technique distances the writer from his audience and permits him that solitude which, paradoxically, can be more comforting than intimacy. It is when he is safe in his verbal bonds that Johnson discusses fully his most personal concern: the danger of an over-powerful imagination.

In this process of amplification, which uses the

"congeries verborum," with its parallel phrases and explanatory synonyms, several aspects of Johnson's culture unite. The most obvious model is the Hebraic parallelism of the scriptures, an example both direct, and, through the mediation of homiletic writers, oblique. Johnson's lexicographical experience also contributes to his impulse to define and re-define. There is, moreover, the philosopher's desire to clarify his concepts by establishing his terms. Locke advocated the use of synonyms to avoid error and confusion,[74] but he himself, by his uncautious application of the term "idea" caused Berkeley to misinterpret remarkably his epistemological theory. Perhaps Johnson's legal learning too confirms him in this practice. In the composition of contracts the use in pairs of words close in meaning is a device to prevent misunderstanding of the intention of the parties. And, as Johnson explained to Boswell,[75] in addressing a judicial panel the orator is obliged to say the same matter many times in different words, because it is seldom possible to hold the attention of all the jurors together.

These traditional elements of amplification may be detected in other writers. Sir Thomas Browne, whom some hold greatly influenced Johnson's

prose, certainly displays this characteristic.[76] Yet Johnson would not have brought this verbal form to its classical perfection had it not agreed with his genius. As the obsessional mind sets all in apparently meticulous order, so this style arranges words in definitive ranks. Although he was so resolutely suspicious of the cant of sentiment, Johnson used the same methods to create understanding which Mackenzie, Goldsmith and Sterne exploited to evoke strong feelings: a repetition and prolongation of a single idea to work a cumulative effect on the reader. And by his amplifications Johnson proves English a "perfect" language by the three criteria of Priestley's theory.[77] For Johnsonian amplification requires a "copia" of words, the contrast of these dispels ambiguity, and their parallel grammatical forms enforce an isochronism which is perceived as the harmony of rhythm.

Johnson's rhythm, however, is to be judged by its effect on the reader, not by its approximation to an ideal of linguistic philosophy. Johnson succeeds in this department only so far as he pleases. The three sources of pleasure in prose rhythm seem to me identical with the three qualities to which in Spectator 412 Addison attributes our pleasure in the survey of outward objects: novelty, beauty,

and greatness.

The novelty of Johnson's rhythms is indisputable. His prose is quite individual. Yet he is deficient in variety. No Rambler pleases us quite so much as the first we read. He has many styles, yet they are all of one stamp. His novelty consists in differing from others rather than in being various himself.

Johnson's amplifications and his often perfect isochronism make the prose rhythm of his Ramblers an example of that middle form or average of our impressions which, according to Reynolds, constitutes beauty. Custom and habit, Reynolds argues in Idler 82, may not be the causes of beauty, but are certainly the causes of our liking it.[78] He concludes the Thirteenth Discourse by contending that "the object and intention of all the Arts is to supply the natural imperfection of things, and often to gratify the mind by realising and embodying what never existed but in the imagination."[79] It may be objected to Johnson's prose, as Hazlitt complained against Reynolds' theory of beauty, that it attributes too little importance to our pleasure in variety and detail.[80]

Reynolds' practice, indeed, contradicted his theory. He advocated history painting

and the grand manner to his students, but was himself almost exclusively a portrait painter. Yet Johnson's prose in many Ramblers delineates precisely that perfect isochronism to which all English prose tends. It must be conceded, however, as Burke insisted, that the complete common form is insufficient as a source of beauty, though certainly more pleasing than the deformity to which it is opposed.[81] Hume describes beauty as that which is fitted to please us either by custom, or caprice, or the primary constitution of our nature.[82] In these terms, Johnson's Rambler and Reynolds' theory may be said to stress custom as a cause of beauty or our liking it at the expense of caprice and our natural constitution, although, at the end of his Thirteenth Discourse, Reynolds does assert that we are easily wearied and disgusted by uniformity,[83] and in Chapter X of Rasselas Imlac describes the true poet as one whose learning and verbal virtuosity are equally encyclopaedic in range.

If symmetry, or proportion, or that union of uniformity which Hogarth praises in his Analysis of Beauty be sources of pleasure, then Johnson's prose will please us, but it seems to me that

these qualities of prose rhythm are better described as grandeur than beauty.

Johnson's prose certainly does not abound with beauty as Burke conceived of it. Smallness, smoothness, fragility, and delicacy are less suggested by Johnson's rhythms than that danger and difficulty in which Burke found out the sublime. Burke's dictum that a clear idea is a little idea was, however, disputed by Johnson. In his Review of Burke's Philosophical Enquiry he claimed, "He who is most picturesque and clearest in his imagery, is ever stiled the best poet, because from such a one we see things clearer, and of course we feel more intensely."[84] Burke's view is just, provided that one accepts the extreme Berkeleian interpretation of the Lockean term "idea". If, however, one rejects the definition of an "idea" as a pictorial mental entity, and describes it rather as a "notion," then Burke appears misleading. Burke's distinction between what is forceful and what is clear is admirable, as is his perception of the power of obscurity to affect the passions, but he considers too little that this power depends on a particular context. Unintermitted darkness is as distasteful and tedious as a perpetual light.

It is my belief that it is the particular genius of Johnson's prose that it combines clarity with obscurity, ease with difficulty. His sentiments and propositions are straightforward. His images are lucid. Yet, his rhythms have an unnatural stateliness, and his vocabulary is made up of a great many hard words. It is a common-place of criticism to blame Johnson for trite thoughts and difficult diction, but it is precisely because his prose has both simplicity of meaning and complexity of expression that it pleases us. The understanding is exercised to overcome the difficulties of rhythm and terminology, and is rewarded by the apprehension of an idea that is both clear and true.

Johnson observed that what is written without effort is in general read without pleasure. It may equally be true often that what is read without effort is read without pleasure. There is a delight in the simultaneous apprehension of conflicting concepts. When such a conflict occurs in the sentiments of a work it is called wit. Then it is "a kind of <u>discordia concors</u>; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery

of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike."[85] Nevertheless, there may also be a tension, pleasant to perceive, in the expression itself. In Johnson's prose such an opposition often exists between his hard words and rhythms and his easy images and statements. Eliot's attempt to persuade us that wit and poetic intensity not only may be reconciled, but are after a fashion natural allies, was in a sense unnecessary. Tension is an inevitable ingredient of human art. It defies proscription, and subsists without apologists. Even Addison, who in Spectators 58 to 63 elaborated the definitions of true, false and mixed wit for a generation, failed to observe that the resemblance of sound to sense which he so enthusiastically praises in Spectator 253 must be, since it consists in the resemblance of sounds to ideas, a form of mixed wit. A just estimate of Johnson's prose must consider devices which are more easily damned or exalted in separation as they contribute to a total cooperative effect upon the reader. Unfortunately it is our habit to judge singly, but read wholly.

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CHAPTER VI JOHNSON'S PROSE JUDGED

Johnson is not to be judged by the truth or falsehood of his beliefs, but by the skill and emphasis with which he transmits them. As Rambler 143 shows, he regarded unintended plagiarism as almost inevitable, and originality as prodigious, and sometimes dangerous. He believed, with Dryden, "All comes sullied or wasted to us".[1]

Not only Johnson's themes, but also his critical standards and attitudes were widely shared. His misreading of Juvenal's Satires may be ascribed no less to his chameleon capacity to yield to traditional literary estimates than to his supposed insensitivity to verbal tone. His criticism of the three unities, and his general assessment of Shakespeare, in his Preface may be paralleled by passages in Dryden and Hume.[2] His view of Milton's Paradise Lost, too, seems partially foreshadowed in Dryden,[3] and evidence might be adduced to show that Johnson judged imagery by the same rules as Addison, for there is a plain plea for propriety in Spectator 409, and for coherence, parallelism and tradition in

Spectators 421 and 595. Indeed, in his Lexiphanes, Campbell insists repeatedly that he does not attack Johnson and Akenside on their own account, but as typical representatives of the barbarity of the age.[4]

One consequence of the humanist conviction that the Ancients excelled the Moderns was authorial self-consciousness. When topics are common and commonly exploited, attention is paid as much to expression as to subject matter. The power of Shakespeare might not be equalled, but he could be excelled in correctness. Dryden described the literary setting in To Mr Congreve:

"Our Age was cultivated thus at length;
But what we gain'd in skill we lost in strength."[5]

Dryden might well be dwarfed by Vergil's panoply, as Swift suggests in The Battle of The Books, but in the language of his own day he could attain to a higher propriety than Shakespeare. As Dryden argued, "the genius of every age is different."[6]

It was the genius of the age of Johnson to observe regulation and to revere decorum. The rules were often, as in Pope's Essay on Criticism, Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare, and Dryden's Heads of an Answer to Rymer, recognised to possess

validity only in so far as they were based in human nature and experience, but in practice general standards tended to become habitual prejudices. It was an emotionally powerful tradition which Hogarth mocked in The Five Orders of Perriwigs. Reynolds declared in his First Discourse, "Every opportunity, therefore, should be taken to discountenance that false and vulgar opinion, that rules are the fetters of genius: they are fetters only to men of no genius".[7] Such was the prestige of regulation that Johnson felt obliged to defend Addison against the charge that his criticism was experimental and the product rather of taste than of principles.[8]

Perhaps such prescriptive critical attitudes are less congenial to us than the Romantic licence implicit in Blake's transformation of the limit or horizon into Urizen, a principle of evil. Yet, if the metaphor be changed and "limits" become "goals" it may appear that though the terms of art change its facts do not. The value of a theory of art must be assessed on pragmatic grounds.

Of all rules, that of decorum is king, no doubt because of its breadth. For its sovereignty somewhat confesses the inadequacy of all rules

before the demands of taste. It is by the standard of decorum that Boswell justified Johnson's copious Latinate diction,[9] and by the same measure that Campbell works out his full damnation of Johnson in Lexiphanes.[10]

The vitality of the idea of decorum is obvious in many provinces. In Moll Flanders Defoe admits that he has polished the original confessions to make them correspond more closely to what he believes a penitent's prose style should be. In speculations that fitness might be the origin of beauty, and even of morality, the notion appears again. Wren's desire to preserve the harmony of the Gothic style of Westminster Abbey during the rebuilding of 1666 is another example.[11] So is Hume's Thucydidean style of historiography which attributes representative arguments to party spokesman and reduces actual historical complexity to simpler set-piece statements of political philosophy. It is for the excellence of its decorum that Steele praises Volpone in Tatler 21, and proposes this standard for modern poets. Pope likewise argues for decorous concord in landscape gardening in his Epistle to Burlington: "Consult the Genius of the Place in all;"[12] The

idea of decorum is also present in that desire for conceptual consistency which led to a critical re-working and sometimes to an abandonment of the doctrine of the Chain of Being. Philosophical Optimism clearly appeals strongly to our delight in cosmic economy.

There is a danger, however, that in the pursuit of the decorum of moral and philosophical truth, historical fact may be distorted and human experience re-interpreted. So Hogarth's father-in-law, Sir James Thornhill, chose to paint the Landing of George I in England in 1714 neither in terms of the usual allegories nor as pure historical fact but after a compromise worthy of the occasion.[13] It was perhaps by a similar concern with philosophical truth that Johnson justified to himself his composition of appropriate speeches for the Parliamentary Debates. It may be suspected also that decorum was a fundamental principle in Boswell's decisions how to report Johnson's talk. He owed as well a debt to friendship as to truth. Nevertheless, the publication of Boswell's Life excited outrage as soon as it was realised that it was not, as decorum demanded, a sublime panegyric, but a detailed anatomy. The force of decorum is also evident in the cavalier

editing of her father's papers by Madame D'Arblay, and of Johnson's correspondence by Mrs Thrale. The most extreme example is perhaps the philosophy of Berkeley, whose desire to retain what ought to be was so strong that for the sake of God and a moral world order he surrendered the commonsense universe.

The most convincing proof of the power of the rules of fitness is to be discovered in their deliberate violation for comic purposes, as in The Beggar's Opera, or Reynolds' parody of Holbein in Master Crewe as Henry VIII, or Fielding's mock heroic fiction, or Pope's Dunciad, or Sterne's Tristram Shandy, all of which confirm the convention from which they deviate.

It is by the standard of decorum that Johnson is to be judged and justified. The decorum which consists in a fitness of speech to speaker is not sufficient to vindicate him. For such a demonstration too easily becomes circular. What Johnson wrote may be considered as ipso facto Johnsonian. Nor is the decorum of expression to sentiment an adequate principle. Even if the difficulty of separating the decorative and assertive elements of speech is set aside, the value of this sort of decorum is doubtful, since it relies so largely on a

careful failure to defy convention. If this standard were scrupulously observed, the development of English would be entrusted only to those without the capacity or desire to use language for its own sake. It could be claimed that the episodic quality of Rasselas is effective and appropriate in a work which deals with the soul's tentative search for happiness, but a distinction must be maintained between intended artifice and the lucky correspondence to a particular theme of a writer's general manner. By the convention of his time, Johnson's characteristic prose was a peculiar creation, more peculiar indeed than it can ever seem to us. For Johnson, as he claimed in Rambler 208, familiarised the terms of philosophy. Words which made his readers start have so been sanctified by his authority and example that many of them are now readily comprehended. Johnson, of course, believed that change itself is an evil,[14] and since English, in his view, already enjoyed a "copia,"[15] rather than manufacture words anew, he gave fresh meaning to specialized terms. Johnson's Rambler also employed a gorgeous rhythmic system of doublets, triplets, quaternions, repetitions and antitheses, hitherto hardly

precedented in periodical essays. In short, the quality of his prose might justly be held to infringe contemporary decorum to an extreme degree.

The decorum by which Johnson's prose does triumph is a common fitness which, in its highest form, is a perfect interdigitation of verbal characteristics. His prose succeeds not by caprice, nor yet by convention, but by its appeal to the primary constitution of our nature. Its internal propriety of parts is a more sensible cause of the reader's intellectual delight than the crude and customary allignment of a subject matter with its specific lexis. And, as Johnson's prosaic achievement is of an interior nature, so actual textual explication is the right means for its illustration.

The right test of Johnson's literary worth is not the Lives of the Poets, so over-valued by Boswell who always loved Johnson as the moralist and biographer better than as a writer. Indeed, the most superb passage of the finest Life, the Life of Savage, is an after-thought. It is the final paragraph, which, according to Johnson's written note in the Euing copy, was 'Added'.[16] For it is not the criticism, which was seldom original, nor the biography, often equally

derivative, but the judicial commentary on life itself, the general truth of the Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, the extent to which they approach and simulate the Rambler's best mode, which provides our especial aesthetic pleasure. In literary terms, it seems to me, the Lives of the Poets have been over-praised. Their value as stylistic products is quite inferior to that of The Rambler.

Nor is Johnson to be judged by the verbally interesting, but hardly pre-eminent Journey to the Western Islands, the "best" of which is weak indeed:

> "To abstract the mind from all local emotion would be impossible, if it were endeavoured, and would be foolish, if it were possible. Whatever withdraws us from the power of our senses; whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings. Far from me and from my friends, be such frigid philosophy as may conduct us indifferent and unmoved over any ground which has been dignified by wisdom, bravery, or virtue. That man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona!"[17]

How woefully this fails to fill the mind cannot escape an unprejudiced reader. The concluding

exclamation mark is a confession of failure. Johnson provides only a theoretical discussion of the emotion appropriate to such a place. He had not expected to be impressed greatly by the ruins on Iona, and the event seems merely to have fulfilled his low expectation.[18] Johnson admitted that he was never so eager as Boswell to visit Iona,[19] and his last word on the island is virtually an apology:

"We now left those illustrious ruins, by which Mr. Boswell was much affected, nor would I willingly be thought to have looked upon them without some emotion. Perhaps, in the revolutions of the world, Iona may be sometime again the instructress of the Western Regions."[20]

Johnson gave not a meditation on Iona, but a disquisition upon meditation. He did not so much examine his own feelings, unless, as one suspects, they in fact were weak, as elaborate a defensive attack on Stoic indifference. To be affected by this "meditation," or to be moved by Iona itself, are transports commonly occuring in proportion as they are expected. Johnson did not expect passion. In this paragraph he yields to a pitiable wish to display proper feeling.

Nor is Johnson best judged by his diffuse political writings, his Debates, or even Rasselas.

His gift for aphorism weakens the continuity of argument in his longer works, or betrays him to tiresome over-statement. He is best judged by his best achievement: the brief Rambler essay, with its unique style, powerful but not florid, precise yet not pedantic, and full without becoming ponderous.

The unevenness of The Rambler, far from being its great fault, is its especial virtue. It consists in a variety to be discerned not only in subject matter, as allegories, letters, character sketches, literary criticism, and abstract moral speculation, but also within individual essays in simplicity or elaboration of imagery, smoothness of asperity of rhythm, and partial or unremitted polysyllabism.

Rambler 42 is an excellent example of Johnson's character-drawing. The style is easy. There is only one image, and that unstressed. The diction is not the true diction of a "Euphelia", but the sentiments are marvellously appropriate, and her mind is excellently revealed in the reported action. She reveals herself as a Boswellian character who exists only in her commerce with others. For her, to be is itself insufficient: she must be in relation to another human object by reaction to whom she fills

the blank space of time. She is the creature of form, quite indifferent to the feelings of those who perform in her play of love. She depicts herself as a donor of blessings when she refers to "those whom I sometimes make happy with opportunities to fill my tea-pot or pick up my fan" but that "sometimes" clearly hints at the capricious cruelty of a coquette. All the revolutions of the gay world usefully manufacture for her a new stock of admirers. Her failure to adumbrate her farewell to her mother is damaging to our estimate of her. For her maid's leave-taking of the other servants she has no sympathy. Only in their external value as social ornaments and tools do people concern Euphelia. Her misconception of the countryside is rooted in her blindness to her own nature. Superficiality is Euphelia's reality. When she arrives in the country, her first reaction is not to her aunt, but to her aunt's costume, which is so old-fashioned that Euphelia can hardly forbear from laughing. Euphelia's learning is in the "stated and established" answers, the settled forms of complement and response. She is an animal only social, not personal.

In its own manner, the picture of futile activity in the eighth paragraph is as impressive

as Imlac's account of the building of the Pyramids. The rhetorical figures in Euphelia's complaint have all the force of unaffected eloquence. Remark is to be made on Johnson's right use of lists of four elements to suggest satiety and tedium: "shades and flowers and lawns and waters", "without visits, without cards, without laughter, and without flattery". Yet it would be impossible to deny that Euphelia's letter is vitiated by Johnson's tone. The setting of the first paragraph is unconvincing and redeemed only by the humorous depiction of the Rambler as a mastiff who protects his lady but is not allowed the freedom of a fawning lap-dog. When, in the last paragraph, Euphelia refers to herself in the third person, there is an uneasiness of register which betrays Johnson's determination to close his essay. The use of "thus" or "such" to start the last paragraph of an epistolary Rambler is frequent, as in numbers 16, 35, 46, 55, 123, 142, 153, 161, 167, 170 and 198. Johnson the moralist outdoes Johnson the impersonator.

I hope I shall not be misunderstood in saying that Johnson is not always Johnsonian. Rambler 124 seems a better proof of Johnson's literary stature than Rambler 42, although their subjects are almost the same. Johnson's prose seems unsure when he purports to give a particular exemplification of a general fact. I prefer him writing in the fullness of comprehensive breadth. The oratory

of the seventh paragraph of Rambler 124 may not convince as the personal narrative of number 42 does, but it pleases brilliantly, not only in its formulation of rising and falling rhythms, but also in the emblematic excellence of its images. There is a splendid fusion of allegorical technique and social satire in the picture of the hand of avarice, shuffling cards.

It is sometimes said that the eighteenth-century affection for personification came from a desire to bring warmth and life to a world which the power of reason had depopulated of faery vitality. Paradoxically, Johnson's discursive Rambler discovers more visual splendour and delineates in rapid succession more interesting actions than his epistolary or narrative Rambler. To create suspense and use the methods of fiction was never Johnson's strength, but rather to argue, to aphorize, to consummate an unparticular thought, to ornament a theme with all the flowers of rhetoric. It is in this chiefly that he is inimitably splendid.

Let Rambler 145, a text of which is provided in Appendix B, be considered as an example of Johnson's forensic technique.

He opens with an impersonal statement put in the form of a noun clause. This is a favourite Johnsonian device for establishing a dialectical tone. To cite instances which easily present themselves, it is used to introduce Ramblers 2, 6, 18, 23, 32 and 38. Here the proposition is dealt with expansively in the first paragraph, yet there is no deviation from it. This is the disproof of Fussell's contention that Johnson contradicted himself because it was by inconsistency that he could easily stretch his essay to the limit demanded for his bi-weekly deadline. One with such amplificatory powers had no need to alter his attitude to fill our a paragraph.

Johnson's loyalty to his opinions is outstanding. General observation is notoriously likely to lead a writer to over-simplify, but Johnson's concern to admit the claims of a special case is almost perpetual. Indeed, "each case on its merits" might be the motto for most of Johnson's literary and moral speculation. He is forever willing to confess the inadequacy of ideal solutions. When he translates Juvenal's

Third Satire, he cannot resist hinting, as Juvenal does not, that rural retreat may be hungry although virtuous. (London ll. 11 -12) Johnson's didacticism is never glib. He does not preach the ethical determinism of Hogarth's Industry and Illness. He acknowledges that the most abandoned rogue may become Lord Mayor of London, and that in this life virtue is rewarded seldom.

The amplification of this first paragraph is the product of Johnson's comprehensive habit of mind. He does not so much expand his focus to capture distant consequences as rather reduces to their component elements the concepts with which he begins. It is his especial ability to raise an idea and hold it before us still. Yet he is not tiresome, because the doublets "vocations and employments", "artisan or manufacturer", and "profound scholar and argumentative theorist" are not composed of easy synonyms where the first member of the phrase would be an anticipatory gloss for its twin, but of words similar but distinct, and with their individual meaning enhanced by this close opposition.

Rhythmically considered, the antithesis of "accomodation" to "inconvenience" is rather muted,

but there is in the balance of "least dignity" with "most apparent use" a clever deviation from perfect equivalence. The pattern is fulfilled, but after a pause. The stress is thrown on "apparent". Preparation is made for what will be the essay's major premise, that although the value of the works of petty authors is not apparent, it remains real nevertheless, and although they do not deserve exalted praise, they should still be exempt from insult and needless degradation. Johnson's ability to make sound echo sense is perhaps underestimated because of his own penetrating analysis of this phenomenon. Yet consider the end of the first paragraph of Rambler 7 where we are told men "found themselves unable to pursue the race of life without frequent respirations of intermediate solitude." Here the antithesis between rushed brevity and long relaxation is imitated in sound and additionally heightened by the effective juxtaposition of Latinate and Anglo-Saxon diction.

As is appropriate for the introductory paragraph of an essay, the tricolon in Rambler 145 serves to rush us forward into the matter. Each of the three members has virtually the same import. Each member is longer than that which it succeeds,

but they do not hang progressively more heavily on the ear. Since in English the stress on a word is reduced when it is repeated, and to a lesser extent when an idea is repeated by a synonym, and because, by the "isochronic principle", the time elapsing between stressed syllables tends to be uniform in English, our reading is imperceptibly accelerated as the paragraph proceeds.

In the second paragraph there is an example of one extreme of Johnsonian imagery which varies in its manifestation from an explicitness which resembles rather explanatory example than simile, to a weak and equivocal suggestion of superadded metaphor. Here is the latter sort. Behind the words "forcibly struck" and "the first warmth of discovery" exists, I take it, the image of a man struck by a thunderbolt. As one often finds in men deliberately rude, there is in Johnson a superb tact. He does not embellish a metaphor unless it will elucidate his present argument. So in Rambler 23 the first paragraph ends with a triplet, the central member of which is obscurely metaphorical. The image might be of a corpuscle sustained in the blood-stream, or a metal particle held still by the forces of opposing magnets, or a picture similarly scientific. Only at the end

of the Rambler, when Johnson has fully developed his thesis, does he elaborate an image of indifference in comparing himself to a ship in a tempest held upright by contrary blasts.

The third and fourth paragraphs of Rambler 145 set out to reveal that the opinion detailed in the second is false. Johnson examines the theory in a pure form, referring not to the trades of urban life, but to the stay of all life: the agricultural production of food. The description of this basic science is unromantic and direct: "we see the plough driven, the clod broken, the manure spread, the seeds scattered, and the harvest reaped . . . " Paradoxically, practice is to vindicate the claim to worth of the "argumentative theorist" and those who present the "common-sense" view are detected to be themselves theorists of the worst type, propagators of an idea specious in speculation and unworkable in fact. The extreme advocates of utility are but perversely realistic idealists.

The awkwardness of truth, and the folly of attempting to invert the pyramid of merit is insinuated by the double grammatical inversion whereby "theories which" and "men whom", although objects, precede the

subjects of their clauses. It is of course quite normal for relative pronouns in the objective case to begin clauses, but Johnson expands the displaced subjects until the genius of our language is affronted.

Johnson's argument in these paragraphs fails. His confidence in the consensus of public opinion is unconvincing. He seems to appeal to this standard in desperation. Johnson's reference to "Remuneratory honours" is after all a defensive use of Latin roots to avoid the word money, even as Armado in Love's Labour's Lost III, i, ll. 128 -129 calls the three farthings he presents to Costard a "remuneration". Moreover, to advance his thesis, Johnson resorts to the obvious artifice of making mental work sound as much like physical work as possible when he writes of "tasks that exercise the intellectual powers and require the active vigour of imagination or the gradual and laborious investigations of reason."

Now observe the craft of Johnson. He wins sympathy for artisans by this ineffectual criticism of their pretension to dignity. Then he hints at an identity of fortune between the drudges of common trades, and the drudges of the pen. From mean artisans our sympathy is

transferred to petty writers to whom I believe it would not normally be yielded. There is a thematic antithesis between an unjust claim to superiority for artificers, and a fair demand that hack writers should be spared the ignominy of want. Johnson is adept in the use of the rhetorician's techniques of persuasion. He balances his arguments so that we are influenced by a careful and bogus impartiality. He misdirects sympathy by the discovery of cases parallel in logic but not in their emotional appeal. He employs a style which enforces its meaning by repetition mitigated by a pleasant verbal variety. His prose, with its abstractions, impersonal verbs, and many passive constructions gives the impression of scientific precision. This is forensic art.

In the second division of the essay where Johnson's personal interest was presumably involved deeply, there is no false tone of self-pity or self-justification. His emotional competence is unchallenged.

The possible allusion in the ninth paragraph to Horace's "Exegi monumentum" (Odes III, xxx) neatly complements the motto from Odes IV, ix. Horace is recalled in two aspects, both as asserting a self-centred belief in his immortal

predominance, and as a reasonable claimant of an individual but secondary reputation in the rank of poets. With customary realism, Johnson has chosen to understate the romance of poetic power. Mackenzie's Harley is similarly sober when he observes that it may be supposed "that inspiration of old was an article of religious faith; in modern times it may be translated a propensity to compose;"[21] There is perhaps also an oblique reflection on the image of "the pyramid of subordination" in the third paragraph, since Horace's monument was not only more lasting than bronze, but also higher than Pharaoh's pyramids, "regalique situ pyramidum altius". (Odes III, xxx l.2) Imlac's opinion of the pyramid as a monument to the insufficiency of human enjoyments is well known. It is interesting too that Johnson should refer to "a monument of learning". At this period he was of course engaged on the English Dictionary, in the Preface to which he calls the lexicographer a servile drudge, that is, one of those writers whose worth this Rambler is designed to establish. There is here, it seems to me, a paradox about the nature of value of precisely the kind

elaborated earlier by Johnson, a contradiction between the great utility of a lexicon to humanity, and the low and miserable life assigned to him who manufactures it. Nevertheless, Johnson's self-control is sure. His tact triumphs. Whether he writes as the representative of a critical and historical milieu or of the booksellers' hirelings, his power is unvitiated by a lapse into self-concern. Blake's assertion that "Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained."[23] will not apply to Johnson. His passions are strong, and his self-restraint is stronger. In him discipline is not inconsistent with energy.

Note his control and aptitude for definition in the choice of the word "tale". Here is a concentration of meaning discovered by Johnson's comprehensive intelligence. The urban scribblers do indeed tell their tale to make up the reckoning of those who hire them. Mark too the comparison of a humble imitation of an author with the sun reflected in the water: an excellent specimen of Johnson's power to adapt a traditional metaphor to a particular occasion. It may be said of Johnson as a worker in images what he himself said of Dryden as a prose stylist,

that he is "always another and the same, he does not exhibit a second time the same elegances in the same form, . . . "[24] Again, the simile is expressed, appropriately, in very simple language. The purpose and force of Johnson's imagery is always clear, even when the object of comparison itself is not meticulously defined. This clarity, notional rather than pictorial, is the proper counterpart to his definitive doublets and triplets. The end of his technique is neither to intoxicate nor yet to anaesthetize, but to bring us to a sober and conscious apprehension of his beliefs.

Johnson tries every way to get his truth a moral access to the public mind. His writing has the force and virtues of concentration of thought. His understanding is persistently centripetal.

What Johnson wrote is not a great matter of dispute. But his value remains uncertain, perhaps because he is most frequently studied, not for his own sake, but as a type of his age, and because we cannot drive down our prejudice against what is not encompassed in the tripartite classification of novels, poetry and drama. Ultimately, an apologetic critic depends on

merely positive praise. The vindication of Johnson must be a personal revelation. A description of Johnson's prose cannot replace our experience of reading it. And this experience will prove him a drudge of genius in whom are united sagacity, wit, passion and vigorous thought.

1. John Dryden, Of Dramatic Poesy, in John Dryden, Selected Criticism, ed. James Kinsley and George Parfitt (Oxford, 1970), p. 70.
2. Ibid., pp. 56 -57; Defence of Essay of Dramatic Poesy, Ibid., p.89; Defence of the Epilogue To the Second Part of "The Conquest of Granada", Ibid., p. 177; Of Dramatic Poesy, Ibid., pp. 27 -28. David Hume, The History of Great Britain, The Reigns of James I and Charles I, ed. Duncan Forbes (Harmondsworth, 1970), pp. 247 -249.
3. Dryden, Preface To "Sylvae", A Discourse Concerning The Original And Progress of Satire, in John Dryden, Selected Criticism, ed. James Kinsley and George Parfitt (Oxford, 1970), pp. 205, 217, 219 -220.
4. Archibald Campbell, Lexiphanes, 2nd ed. (Westmead, Farnborough, England, 1972), pp. iii, iv, vii, xxi -xxii, xxxii, 120 -121.
5. John Dryden, To My Dear Friend Mr Congreve On His COMEDY "The Double Dealer,"ll. 11 -12, in The Poems And Fables of John Dryden, ed. James Kinsley (London, 1962), p. 489.
6. Of Dramatic Poesy, in John Dryden, Selected Criticism, ed. James Kinsley and George Parfitt (Oxford, 1970), p. 70.
7. The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, 2 vols. (London, 1835), I, 309.

8. "Life of Addison," in Lives of the Poets (London, 1906), I, 446.

9. Boswell in Search of a Wife: 1766 -1769, ed. Frank Brady and Frederick A. Pottle (New York, 1956), p.151.

10. Archibald Campbell, Lexiphanes, 2nd ed. (Westmead, Farnborough, England, 1972), pp. 76n., 87, 89, 127n., 140, 145.

11. Nikolaus Pevsner, The Englishness of English Art (Harmondsworth, 1964), p.87.

12. "Epistle to Burlington" l.57, in The Poems of Alexander Pope, ed. John Butt (London, 1963), p. 590.

13. Nikolaus Pevsner, The Englishness of English Art (Harmondsworth, 1964), p. 30.

14. Samuel Johnson, "A Debate Between The Committee Of The House Of Commons And Oliver Cromwell," in The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, Vol.X, Political Writings, ed. Donald J. Greene (New Haven, 1977), p. 86.

15. Samuel Johnson, "Preface to the English Dictionary," in The Works of Samuel Johnson, Vol.5 (Oxford, 1825), pp. 39 -41.

16. Samuel Johnson, Life of Savage, ed. Clarence Tracy (Oxford, 1971), p. 140.

17. Johnson's Journey to the Western Islands with Boswell's Tour to the Hebrides, ed. R.W.Chapman (Oxford, 1970), pp. 134 -135.

18. Ibid., p. 386.

19. Ibid., pp. 125 -126.

20. Ibid., p. 138.

21. Henry Mackenzie, The Man of Feeling, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford, 1970), Chapter XXXIII, p. 80.

22. Johnson, Rasselas, ed. J.P.Hardy (Oxford, 1968), Chapter XXXII, p. 78.

23. Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1927), pp. 191 -192.

24. "Life of Dryden," in Lives of the Poets (London, 1906), I, 293.

APPENDIX A

The texts quoted are from Horati Opera, ed. E.C. Wickham (Oxford, 1901), Odes I, xxii; and The Poems of Samuel Johnson, ed. Smith and McAdam (Oxford, 1974), pp. 9-10.

INTEGER vitae scelerisque purus
non eget Mauris iaculis neque arcu
nec venenatis gravida sagittis,
    Fusce, pharetra,
sive per Syrtis iter aestuosas
sive facturus per inhospitalem
Caucasum vel quae loca fabulosus
    lambit Hydaspes.
namque me silva lupus in Sabina,
dum meam canto Lalagen et ultra
terminum curis vagor expeditis,
    fugit inermem,
quale portentum neque militaris
Daunias latis alit aesculetis
nec Iubae tellus generat, leonum
    arida nutrix.
pone me pigris ubi nulla campis
arbor aestiva recreatur aura,
quod latus mundi nebulae malusque
    Iuppiter urget;

pone sub curru nimium propinqui
solis in terra domibus negata:
dulce ridentem Lalagen amabo,
dulce loquentem.

To ARISTIUS FUSCUS

THE Man, my Friend, whose conscious Heart
With Virtue's sacred Ardour glows,
Nor taints with Death th'envenomed Dart,
Nor needs the Guard of Moorish Bows.

O'er icy Caucasus he treads,
Or torrid Afric's faithless Sands,
Or where the fam'd Hydaspes spreads
His liquid Wealth thro' barbarous Lands.

For while in Sabine Forests, charm'd
By Lalage, too far I stray'd,
Me singing, careless and unarm'd,
A furious Wolf approach'd, and fled.

No Beast more dreadful ever stain'd
Apulia's spacious Wilds with Gore;
No Beast more fierce Numidia's Land,
The Lion's thirsty Parent, bore.

Place me where no soft Summer Gale
Among the quivering Branches sighs,
Where Clouds, condens'd, for ever veil
With horrid Gloom the frowning Skies:

Place me beneath a burning Zone,
A Clime deny'd to human Race;
My Flame for Lalage I'll own;
Her voice and Smiles my Song shall grace.

APPENDIX B

The text quoted is from the tenth edition of 1784. Spelling has been modernized.

Rambler 145

Tuesday, 6th August 1751

Non si priores Maeonius tenet
Sedes Homerus, Pindaricae latent,
Ceaeque et Alcaei minaces
Stesichoriique graves camoenae.

HORACE.

What though the muse her Homer thrones
High above all the immortal quire;
Nor Pindar's rapture she disowns,
Nor hides the plaintive cean lyre:
Alcaeus strikes the tyrant's soul with dread,
Nor yet is grave Stesichorus unread.

FRANCIS.

IT is allowed that vocations and employments of least dignity are of the most apparent use, that the meanest artisan or manufacturer contributes more to the accomodation of life than the profound scholar and argumentative theorist, and that the public would suffer less present inconvenience from the banishment of philosophers than from

the extinction of any common trade.

Some have been so forcibly struck with this observation, that they have in the first warmth of their discovery thought it reasonable to alter the common distribution of dignity, and ventured to condemn mankind of universal ingratitude. For justice exacts that those by whom we are most benefited should be most honoured. And what labour can be more useful than that which procures to families and communities those necessaries which supply the wants of nature or those conveniences by which ease, security, and elegance are conferred?

This is one of the innumerable theories which the first attempt to reduce them into practice certainly destroys. If we estimate dignity by immediate usefulness, agriculture is undoubtedly the first and noblest science. Yet we see the plough driven, the clod broken, the manure spread, the seeds scattered, and the harvest reaped by men whom those that feed upon their industry will never be persuaded to admit into the same ranks with heroes or with sages, and who, after all the confessions which truth may extort in favour of their occupation, must be content to fill up the lowest class of the commonwealth, to form the base of the pyramid of subordination,

and lie buried in obscurity themselves while they support all that is splendid, conspicuous, or exalted.

It will be found upon a closer inspection that this part of the conduct of mankind is by no means contrary to reason or equity. Remuneratory honours are proportioned at once to the usefulness and difficulty of performance, and are properly adjusted by comparison of the mental and corporeal abilities which they appear to employ. That work, however necessary, which is carried on only by muscular strength and manual dexterity is not of equal esteem in the consideration of rational beings with the tasks that exercise the intellectual powers and require the active vigour of imagination or the gradual and laborious investigations of reason.

The merit of all manual occupations seems to terminate in the inventor; and surely the first ages cannot be charged with ingratitude, since those who civilized barbarians and taught them how to secure themselves from cold and hunger were numbered among their deities. But these arts, once discovered by philosophy and facilitated by experience, are afterwards practised with very little assistance from the faculties of the soul. Nor

is anything necessary to the regular discharge of these inferior duties beyond that rude observation which the most sluggish intellect may practice, and that industry which the stimulations of necessity naturally enforce.

Yet though the refusal of statues and panegyric to those who employ only their hands and feet in the service of mankind may be easily justified, I am far from intending to incite the petulance of pride, to justify the superciliousness of grandeur, or to intercept any part of the tenderness and benevolence which by the privilege of their common nature one may claim from another.

That it would be neither wise nor equitable to discourage the husbandman, the labourer, the miner, or the smith is generally granted. But there is another race of beings equally obscure and equally indigent, who, because their usefulness is less obvious to vulgar apprehensions, live unrewarded and die unpitied, and who have long been exposed to insult without a defender and to censure without an apologist.

The authors of London were formerly computed by Swift at several thousands, and there is not any reason for suspecting that their number has decreased. Of these only a very few can be said

to produce, or endeavour to produce, new ideas, to extend any principle of science, or gratify the imagination with any uncommon train of images or contexture of events. The rest, however laborious, however arrogant, can only be considered as the drudges of the pen, the manufacturers of literature, who have set up for authors, either with or without a regular initiation, and, like other artificers, have no other care than to deliver their tale of wares at the stated time.

It has been formerly imagined that he who intends the entertainment or instruction of others must feel in himself some peculiar impulse of genius; that he must watch the happy minute in which his natural fire is excited, in which his mind is elevated with nobler sentiments, enlightened with clearer views, and invigorated with stronger comprehension; that he must carefully select his thoughts and polish his expressions, and animate his efforts with the hope of raising a monument of learning which neither time nor envy shall be able to destroy.

But the authors whom I am now endeavouring to recommend have been too long hackneyed in the ways of men to indulge the chimerical ambition of immortality. They have seldom any claim to the trade of writing but that they have tried some other

without success. They perceive no particular summons to composition except the sound of the clock. They have no other rule than the law or the fashion for admitting their thoughts or rejecting them. And about the opinion of posterity they have little solicitude, for their productions are seldom intended to remain in the world longer than a week.

That such authors are not to be rewarded with praise is evident, since nothing can be admired when it ceases to exist. But surely, though they cannot aspire to honour, they may be exempted from ignominy, and adopted in that order of men which deserves our kindness though not our reverence. These papers of the day, the ephemerae of learning, have uses more adequate to the purposes of common life than more pompous and durable volumes. If it is necessary for every man to be more acquainted with his contemporaries than with past generations, and rather to know the events which may immediately affect his fortune or quiet than the revolutions of ancient kingdoms in which he has neither possessions nor expectations; if it be pleasing to hear of the preferment and dismission of statesmen, the birth of heirs, and the marriage of beauties, the humble author of journals and gazettes must be considered as a liberal

dispenser of beneficial knowledge.

Even the abridger, compiler, and translator, though their labours cannot be ranked with those of the diurnal historiographer, yet must not be rashly doomed to annihilation. Every size of readers requires a genius of correspondent capacity. Some delight in abstracts and epitomes, because they want room in their memory for long details and content themselves with effects without inquiry after causes. Some minds are overpowered by splendour of sentiment, as some eyes are offended by a glaring light. Such will gladly contemplate an author in an humble imitation, as we look without pain upon the sun in the water.

As every writer has his use, every writer ought to have his patrons. And since no man, however high he may now stand, can be certain that he shall not be soon thrown down from his elevation by criticism or caprice, the common interest of learning requires that her sons should cease from intestine hostilities, and, instead of sacrificing each other to malice and contempt, endeavour to avert persecution from the meanest of their fraternity.

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