

Graduate Course

Paper VI

English Literature – 3

SAMULE JOHNSON

Extracts from

The Cambridge Companion to
Samule Johnson edited by Greg Clingham

&

The Prose Style of Samule Johnson

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SCHOOL OF OPEN LEARNING

UNIVERSITY OF DELHI

5, Cavalry Lane, Delhi-110007

Academic Session 2012-13 (600 copy)

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Published by Executive Director, School of Open Learning, 5 Cavalry Lane, Delhi-110007
Printed at : DigiConv Technologies, C-240-41, Room No. 103, 1st Floor, Pandav Nagar, D-91, www.digiconv.com

I

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Johnson, the Essay and The Rambler

Johnson started *The Rambler* almost at the midpoint of his most productive literary and scholarly decade (1745-55). In 1745, with his *Observations on Macbeth*, he laid the groundwork for his largest editorial project; in the first months of 1746, as he finished his "Short Scheme of an English Dictionary" (dated 30 April 1746), he set forth on his immense lexicographical labors. He was already well acquainted with large, ambitious undertakings, as we know from his parliamentary reporting. His *Debates in Parliament*, as the publishers of the first collected edition (1787) called them, form his first major literary project, although Johnson obviously did not undertake that task, which ran from November 1740 to February 1743, with a final collection in mind. *The Rambler* is different. As the centerpiece of this decade of immense literary activity, Johnson saw it from the beginning as an entrepreneurial undertaking that would rival the other great collections of English essays, Bacon's *Essays Civil and Moral* and Addison and Steel's *the Spectator*. Every collection is a miscellany, but Johnson, even before he started *The Rambler*, understood the opportunity for his new project to rival if not supersede his famous predecessors. His edition of Shakespeare and his preparations for the dictionary were long-term projects, but a series of periodical essays, as an active participant in contemporary letters like Johnson knew, could create a following and, through publication in a collected version, widen an author's reputation. Johnson's choice of title seems almost accidental and, if we recall one contemporary meaning of "ramble," may seem somewhat adventurous bordering on the *risqué* (Lord Rochester's obscene "A Ramble in St. James's Park" illustrates this aspect of the name). But the subjects that Johnson had planned for the first few months show how much he expected his collection to differ from what are loosely called his models, whether classical, Renaissance, or English.

I

The tendency of twentieth-century readers of *The Rambler* is to insist on the work's incidental qualities, since we assume that Johnson wrote his essays hastily and with little advance preparation to obey the summons of the press. This assessment overbooks Johnson's original intention, which his contemporaries clearly understood. Johnson's original audience, the purchasers of the 500 copies that appeared twice weekly from March 1750 to March 1752, were supplemented after the first few months of the periodical's existence by readers who saw individual numbers that various provincial newspapers began — piratically — to reprint. Complete sets of the original 208 issues are very rare, but this fact does not mean that the work lacked a serious following. Missing numbers in an eighteenth-century work published in series usually indicate that the work was so popular that it was literally read until the copies fell apart. Moreover, enterprising booksellers began to publish the first collected volumes of *The Rambler* within six months of its beginning; Johnson himself was at work on the first volume of the two-volume folio edition before the work was a year old. The usual format for collected editions of *The Rambler* independent of Johnson's collected works was a four-volume octavo; Johnson extensively revised his original for the 1756 edition, which remained his final version, substantially unchanged for the rest of his life.

Most eighteenth-century readers of *The Rambler* first made an acquaintance with the work as a complete collection. In Johnson's own century, this audience was large and influential. By 1759, Goldsmith, in his essay in *The Bee* on the "fame machine," implies that Johnson's reputation was greater for his series of essays than for the *Dictionary*.¹ Besides the original run of the 208 essays, there were

more than twenty reprintings of the entire work by 1800 and, in the nineteenth century, there were another three dozen separate editions of the work plus twenty more reprintings in editions of Johnson's works. Nineteenth-century editions have a larger press run than those of the eighteenth century and are on cheaper paper, so they cost less than the earlier collections. Thus we can be sure that Johnson's periodical writings reached an even wider audience in the century after his death than they did during his lifetime.

The perceptions of *The Rambler's* second, larger audience clearly differed from those of his primary readers. First, these later readers did not encounter the essays as a periodical or an interrupted series. Rather, this second audience saw it as a coherent literary work, with translations of the Greek and Latin mottoes and other quotations from the classics and a table of contents (added by One of Johnson's Publishers, so it has no authorial mandate). Later readers would readily have seen the interconnections among various essays that have similar subjects; doubtless, too, this audience would have been misled by the thumbnail descriptions in the table of contents, which are often amusingly different from the subject of the essays they purport to describe. For example, number 134, one of Johnson's few statements on his method of composition, the table of contents describes thus : "Idleness an anxious and miserable state." Number 114, Johnson's famous attack on capital punishment, in the table of contents is blandly announced as "the necessity of apportioning punishments to crimes." *Rambler* 90, the first in Johnson's original study of Milton's versification, the contents calls "the pauses in English poetry adjusted." Readers of *The Rambler* in these collected editions must inevitable have wondered why Johnson gave his essays such inaccurate titles or why he wandered so far from his announced topics. However, *The Rambler*, Until the first complete edition of the twentieth century, the Yale edition of Johnson's works (3 vols., 1969), has received little or no annotation, which means that Johnson's eighteenth-and nineteenth-century readers had the benefit of his thoughts without the interjection of editorial opinions.

Beginning also in the eighteenth century, and continuing until the present day, there is yet another kind of audience of *The Rambler*. This group, which is probably the largest, consists of readers who have become acquainted with Johnson through the pages of an anthology. The first collections of British essays date from the 1780s, and the first anthologizers began to publish at about the same time. These people were often schoolmasters or others (to use lady Bracknell's phrase) "remotely connected with education"; often they were respectable minor writers like Vicesimus Knox and W.F. Mavor Knox, mavor, and their associates plundered the entire field of eighteenth-century periodical literature to assemble their collections. In an age with only a modest idea of the nature of literary property, the essay was an ideal subject for the anthologizer and, as we would expect, the favorites included *The Spectator* and *The Rambler*. The two series are more or less equally represented in contemporary anthologies; since *The Spectator* contains 635 numbers, this parity shows that Johnson's work, which was less than one-third as long, was already more popular than that of Addison, Steele, and their collaborators. Their early anthologies had in immense audience; some of them survive in dozens of editions. Knox's *Elegant Extracts in Verse and Prose* was still appearing in new editions in the 1830s. Their many editions of Knox's collections include a number of essays from *The Rambler* printed without abridgment save for the removal of the Greek and Latin mottoes and most of the quotations in the texts themselves. By the middle of the nineteenth century, several hundred editions of number of different anthologies had reprinted about a quarter of *The Rambler* as individual essays in an untold number of copies, the first selection devoted solely to Johnson's essays, G.B. Hill's *Select Essays of Dr. Johnson* (1899) prints seventy-seven of Johnson's essays, including about a quarter of *The Rambler*. The formation of modern departments of English in the late nineteenth century created a further need for collections of the classics of English literature and here *The Rambler* outstrips any other series of eighteenth-century literary essays in popularity.

Johnson tells us that he designed *The Rambler* for the largest possible audience in number 106, an essay on the vanity of the hopes of authors for fame :

There are indeed, few kinds of composition form which an author, however learned or ingenious, can hope a long continuance of fame. He who has carefully studied human nature, and can well describe it, may with most reason flatter his ambition. Bacon among all his pretensions to the regard of posterity, seems to have pleased himself mainly with his essays,

"which come home to meas business and bosoms," and of which therefore, he declares his expectation, that they "will have as long as books last." (IV,204)

The Rambler was, by number 106, already appearing in book form, so when Johnson tells his original and secondary audiences that Becon prized his essays above all his works, it is a declaration that he hoped people would compare him not to other eighteenth-century series of essays but to the inventor of the essay in English.²

II

Perhaps among the most frequently anthologized essays from *The Rambler* since Hill's collection of 1899 have been two of Johnson's many contributions to literary criticism, numbers (on prose fiction) and 60 (on biography). Those interested in Johnson's literary criticism, however, are more likely to turn to his famous critical prefaces—to the *Dictionary* and to Shakespeare—and to his *Lives of the Poets* than to his periodical essays. Yet it seems clear that Johnson took as one of his regular topics the explication of themes from the world of letters, a sign that he expected his original audience not just to understand these subjects but to have an appetite for learning more about them. Johnson was aware that literary criticism was often motivated by envy, a vice which he deplored. In *Rambler* 183, for instance, he devotes most of an essay to the subject. This essay contains a collection of maxims on envy, but the essay is a rare original for Johnson, since none of the essayists he modeled himself on, from Plutarch and Seneca to Addison, had written on it. "Envy," he writes, "is mere unmixed and genuine evil; it pursues a hateful end by despicable means, and desires not so much its own happiness as another's misery" (v, 200). The frequency of envy, Johnson makes clear, means that we encounter it in the world of letters as well as in everyday life: "The genius, even when he endeavours only to entertain or instruct, yet suffers persecution from innumerable criticks, whose acrimony is excited merely by the pain of seeing others pleased, and of hearing applauses which another enjoys" (v, 199). *Rambler* 183 is therefore a reference point for the other literary essays in the series, since Johnson comments, throughout the 1740s and 1750s, on questions of the morality of authors.

In *Rambler* 4, for example, Johnson worries about the moral effect of the rapidly expanding genre of prose fiction, books which he believed were "written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life (III, 21). Consequently the authors of novels, Johnson believes, cannot themselves be ignorant of the moral impact of Fiction :

Vice, for vice is necessary to be shewn, should always disgust; nor should the graces of gaiety, or the dignity of courage, be so united with it, as to reconcile it to the mind. Wherever it appears, it should raise hatred by the malignity of its practices, and contempt by the meanness of its stratagems; for while it is supported by either parts or spirit, it will be seldom heartily abhorred. (III, 24)

This essay is Johnson's contribution to a larger debate about novels as different as Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) and Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749). But in terms of the literary-critical essays in the *Rambler*, number 4 is also about the old Renaissance critical commonplace of whether an author had to be a good man writing good things. Johnson returns to this problem often in *The Rambler*, for it is clear that in the 1740s and 1750s he was not certain of its solution. Barely six years before, Johnson dealt with this problem in *The Life of Savage* (1744), a man whom no form of reasoning could permit Johnson to see as a good or a moral person, yet Johnson had to acknowledge Savage's literary merits.³ The statement of *Rambler* 4 is almost uncompromising. Yet barely four months later he changes his attitude. This change comes in *Rambler* 36 and 37, on pastoral poetry. Later in his life, in this "Life of Milton," Johnson would declare his aversion for pastoral, with "Lycidas" as his example of what can go wrong with this genre. But in 1751, while Johnson insists that "The range of Pastoral is indeed narrow," he concedes that every now and then someone has augmented the stock of Pastoral poetry with a new idea (III, 197-98). Moreover, the classical writers of pastoral sometimes made a fresh and original contribution, the absurdity of the genre consists in having people so remote from state affairs as shepherds discuss "errors in the church, and

corruptions in the government" (III, 205). Pastoral writers are not wicked, then, as are the authors of novels that exalt vice; they are simply misguided.

Biographers are another matter entirely, as we know from Johnson's *Rambler* 60, perhaps his best-known critical essay, which the table of contents describes as "The dignity and usefulness of biography." Traditionally, critics have seen this essay as praise of the genre to which Johnson had already contributed a number of short studies and to which he would later make his most important contributions in *The Lives of the Poets*. It is easy to overlook the fact that Johnson had already written one substantial biography, of Richard Savage. Although in *Rambler* 4 Johnson had insisted that the writer of prose fiction must always reprehend vice, he himself had written with understanding of vice in the *Life of Savage*, for his friend Savage was plainly addicted to vice, a fact which Johnson does not try to deny, although he does palliate it. Hence in *Rambler* 60, Johnson can hardly rule out the depiction of vice, since biography must inevitably deal with human wickedness :

I have often thought that there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful. For, not only every man has, in the mighty mass of the world, great numbers in the same condition with himself, to whom his mistakes and miscarriages, escapes and expedients, would be of apparent and immediate use; but there is such an uniformity in the state of man, considered apart from adventitious and separable decorations and disguises, that there is scarce any possibility of good or ill, but in common to human kind. (III, 320)

It is no longer necessary, in other words, for vice to disgust and, in fact, one of Johnson's best examples in *Rambler* 60 on the truth of biography in describing the human condition is Sallust's description of Catiline : "Thus Sallust, the great master of nature, has not forgot, in his account of Catiline, to remark that 'his walk was now quick and again slow,' as an indication of a mind revolving something with violent commotion" (III, 321). Whether Sallust's characterization is accurate is not the point; what matters is that we can scarcely describe the arch-conspirator and traitor Catiline as a figure of virtue. Thus the subject of biography does not have to be a good person.

The genre of biography had evolved, in Johnson's lifetime, from the hagiography of Izaak Walton to a form which could accommodate all shades of moral behavior; significantly for Johnson, literary criticism of biography had to reflect reality. One of Johnson's greatest improvements to the genre, in distinction to writers like Walton or Classical figures like Plutarch, is immediacy; the biographer has to form his or her work while the clay of human life is still malleable. He writes in *Rambler* 60: "If a life [i.e., a biography] be delayed till interest and envy are at an end, we may hope for impartiality, but must expect little intelligence; for the incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory, and are rarely transmitted by tradition" (III 323). Thus biography, in order to be successful, actually has to take account of "political" interest, a vice, and envy, the most reprehensible vice of all. In *Rambler* 93, Johnson readily concedes that critics, "like all the rest of mankind, are very frequently misled by interest" (IV, 132). Furthermore, critics are subject to the dreadful vice of envy: "Criticism has so often given occasion to the envious and ill-natured of gratifying their malignity, that some have thought it necessary to recommend the virtue of candour without restriction, and to preclude all future liberty of censure" (IV, 133). The only way that the critic can avoid envy, Johnson continues, is "to hold out the light of reason, whatever it may discover" (IV, 134). Determinations of vice are up to the audience : the literary critic, like the biographer, simply must describe everything, whether beauties or faults, without envy, interest, or censure. The permissiveness of this view is striking, for it shows that even as early as the 1750s Johnson's conceptions of literary criticism are not monolithic, but evolve in *The Rambler* as he applied his craft to practical situations, to actual writings.

The most extended practical criticism in *The Rambler* is the seven essays Johnson devotes to Milton, five on his versification (numbers 86, 88, 90, 92 and 94) and two on *Samson Agonistes* (numbers 139-40). Johnson's great attention to Milton at this time may represent an effort to surpass Addison, the first periodical essayist to write about Milton;⁴ it may also serve as an atonement of sorts for his role in the affair of the duplicitous Lauder. The Scottish writer William Lauder in 1749 alleged that Milton had plagiarized portions of *Paradise Lost*; Johnson at first accepted Lauder's argument but later, when he

learned that Lauder had lied, urged him to admit the truth, and actually helped him to draft his recantation.⁵ Milton's reputation at the time of the *Rambler* was considerable but Johnson, while he acknowledges his greatness, nevertheless has reservations, chiefly about Milton's personal and political views. One reason for writing five critical essays on Milton's versification, essays which specialists on Johnson's criticism usually ignore, is to compete with Addison, "the illustrious writer [on Milton] who has so long dictated to the commonwealth of learning" (IV, 88) but on a topic that Addison had overlooked. The same desire would later lead him to write about *Samson*, the work of Milton's most ignored in the eighteenth century. Aware of the danger of using abstruse technical terms, and that versification is a topic for which "the dialect of grammarians" is available, Johnson recognizes "that offence which is always given by unusual words" (iv, 89). To be sure, some "hard words" intrude, but the progress of these essays is clearly to take Johnson's audience from Milton's techniques (numbers 86, 88, 90) through classical methods (number 92) to contemporary English practice (number 94). Just as Addison had done forty years before, Johnson finds himself in the role of educating the taste of a contemporary audience for a style of verse that was unfamiliar to the bulk of his readers. "The imitator treads a beaten walk," Johnson notes in *Rambler* 86 (IV, 88); hence his unorthodox choice of subject underscores his search here, as elsewhere in *The Rambler*, for originality.

This impulse recurs in another noable series of critical essays, numbers 152, 154, 156, and 158, which like those on Milton, shows how carefully he planned *The Rambler*. We find the theme of originality again, in number 154 : "No man ever yet became great by imitation" (v, 59). These four essays are also related. Number 152 is entirely original, since it is the first modern critical comment on the art of letter writing. What Johnson, as the author of the most famous letter in the English language (that of February 1755 to Lord Chesterfield), has to say about everyday epistles is worth reading, for he believes that the usual rules of composition do not apply to so varied a genre as letters (V, 45). Number 154 is about another modern intellectual problem, the search for originality through study, for Johnson believes that eminence is possible in every age. He continues his search for greatness in number 156, focusing this time on authority and the so-called rules of literature, making the important distinction between "laws of nature" and "accidental prescriptions of authoty" (V, 66). In literary criticism, as in politics, Johnson rejects "despotick antiquity" and "rules which no literary dictator had authority to enact" (v, 67, 70). In the final essay in this series, number 158, Johnson turns again to the rules of composition and asks whether there are rules for literary criticism, for lyric poetry, even for essays (v, 76-77). With the examples of Montaigne and Addison before him, Johnson can find no reason for thinking that an essayist need follow rules :

A writer of later times has, by the vivacity of his essays, reconciled mankind to the same licentiousness [as we find in lyric poetry] in short dissertations; and he therefore who wants skill to form a plan, or diligence to pursue it, needs only entitle his performance an essay, to acquire the right of heaping together the collections of half his life, without order, coherence, or propriety. (v. 77)

There is no shortage of irony here, as we may often note in Johnson's comments about his own achievements, but his chief concern is that the rules of a given genre must come from reason and nature instead of from authorial caprice. The literary criticism in *The Rambler*, as these four essays show, is highly practical ; Johnson is not simply telling his audience what to prefer, he is setting standards for the authors of his own generation to follow and offering evidence against which he hoped people would judge his writings.

III

Johnson did not plan for *The Rambler* to be a collection of political essays; there was hardly a need for another political voice in the miscellaneous publications of mid-century England. Inevitably, however, the language which he uses to discuss the world of literature—the "despotick authority" of critics, "the commonwealth of letters," the "tyranny" of previous example—is often the language of contemporary

politics. And, since one of his habitual modes of expression in *The Rambler* is allegorical, occasionally we see that some essays which appear to be on apolitical subjects have direct political implications. With rare exceptions, *The Rambler* eschews subjects of contemporary topical interest; one of the outstanding exceptions, in fact, is *Rambler* 114, which deals directly with the severity of English criminal law and the frequent use of the death penalty.⁶ Early in 1751, Henry Fielding had called for an increase in the frequency of capital punishment in his *Enquiry into the Causes of the Late increase of Robbers*; in number 114, Johnson specifically addresses England's wide application of the death penalty and finds it an inadequate deterrent of the spread of crime, precisely the reverse of Fielding's position. In the parliamentary debate on relaxing the breadth of capital punishment in 1818, one of the harbingers of its eventual abolition, Sir Samuel Romilly, would introduce the text of *Rambler* 114 into Hansard; it remains one of Johnson's most powerful political writings.

A second strongly political essay is *Rambler* 148, which, as the table of contents describes it, is ostensibly about "The cruelty of parental tyranny." This essay does, indeed, speak about capricious behavior by parents, especially fathers, a frequent topic in *The Rambler*, but at the start Johnson says bluntly, "The robber may be seized, and the invader repelled wherever they are found" (v. 22), which describes how the Jacobite invasion of 1745-46 was crushed. Throughout *Rambler* 148, Johnson urges that arbitrary, "Capricious" power in the hands of a parent or a sovereign is detestable; this view is consistent with Johnson's dislike of tyranny, but it also shows how he inserts this issue into the current political debate on Jacobitism. The tyrannical family, of course, in the rhetoric of Stuart kingship, was widely understood to represent the tyrannical state, so Johnson here unmistakably expresses his revulsion with the recent Jacobite invasion and with Jacobitism itself. In his essay against capital punishment, Johnson appeals to the authority of Sir Thomas More for political support; in *Rambler* 148, he appeals to Aristotle's *Politica*, which Johnson cites to support his claim that the family analogizes the state. None of the other *Ramblers* on tyrannical parents employs allegory to represent the state in this way, so Johnson must be referring here to another topical issue. The events of the Jacobite invasion may have seemed remote by 1751, but Jacobite incursions and plots and state executions of malefactors continued long after the fateful Battle of Culloden (16 April 1746), into the 1750s. It is possible that Johnson alludes to the execution of the Jacobite Paul Tierney, who recruited for the French army, which attracted much national attention in 1751; nearly half of the issues of *The Rambler* for August and September 1751 touch on issues ancillary to politics. These essays are contemporaneous with the intensive debate about establishing arrangements for a regency if George II were to die before the eleven-year-old Prince George reached the age of eighteen (the death of the Prince of Wales, Frederick Louis, in March 1751, was the immediate catalyst for this discussion). Evidently, Johnson's discussions of parental tyranny in *The Rambler* have more than one focus outside the family.

There is a remarkable similarity among the many "family" essays in *The Rambler*, especially those which purport to be written by young people about family difficulties. Anthologizers of Johnson have generally ignored them. Almost all of these essays deal with adolescence, youth, and early adulthood; the imaginary authors more than half the time are women. The question of authority is always present, whether it is the tyrannical authority of an aging parent, the abused or usurped authority of a guardian or relative, or the insolence of an older person who has some kind of power over the author of the letter. A particularly insidious subgroup of this category are the essays where Johnson talks about the dependence of a weaker, younger, poorer person on someone older, often a patron of some sort. The male patrons in *The Rambler* are usually aristocrats or prominent people in civil affairs with the power to bestow places or to open other avenues to success, his female patrons usually are women who introduce younger female correspondents to polite society (Johnson presents no cases of men patronizing young women or women patronizing young men). Johnson's family tyrants, a word he often uses in this context, exercise their powers arbitrarily. Myrtilla in *Rambler* 84, for example, appears to most readers as a silly child who wants more than her years entitle her to have (she closes her letter with the memorable postscript, "Remember I am past Sixteen" — IV, 81) but her opening is very different: "SIR, you seem in all your papers to be an enemy to tyranny ... I shall therefore lay my case before you, and hope by your decision to be set free from unreasonable restraints" (IV, 76-77). Myrtilla's oppressor is her guardian, an aunt who objects to her wasting time with idle things like intelligent conversation and books, and the presentation is political,

dealing with usurped authority, power mishandled, the refusal to the governor to consider the wishes of the governed.

The character of Squire Bluster, the rural tyrant of *Rambler* 142, typifies a number of similar people whom Johnson sketches, for he has a special purpose in presenting village and domestic despotism. While he never says anything to suggest that one can overthrow the political power of the family unit, Johnson is dissatisfied with the damage that ill-natured rich people can cause in the social order. Insolent patrons may be able to tyrannize over their dependants; Johnson does not believe that such despotism should escape censure. "The general story of mankind will evince, that lawful and settled authority is very seldom resisted when it is well employed," he writes in *Rambler* 50, an essay on the complaints of old men about the state of the world. This theme is the obverse of the topic of political abuse, which runs through several dozen essays, and is Johnson's best statement in *The Rambler* on the proper use of authority. Yet we find many more complaints about "despotick and dictatorial power" (*Rambler* 61, III, 326) exercised by people in every walk of life. We hear Ruricola complaining about Mr. Frolick's usurpation of the power to prescribe taste to his rustic neighbors simply because he has lived in London; in *Rambler* 176 we learn of Bishop Vida's skill in "the politicks of literature" to thwart the "arrogance and brutality" of his critics. In many ways, *The Rambler*, despite its non-political view of the world, is Johnson's best contribution to the wars of truth.

IV

Just as *The Rambler* shows Johnson's progress in his ideas about literature and politics, so it reveals his changing attitude toward women. The work contains about three dozen essays on the problems that eighteenth-century women, almost always of the middle and upper classes, face in society and everyday life. These essays are known mainly to readers of the complete text, for the anthologizers of more than two centuries have seldom considered Johnson's thoughts on women worthy of being reprinted.⁷ Johnson evidently did not at first expect that *The Rambler* would appeal to a feminine audience, for he makes a concession to this effect at the start of number 34 : "I have been censured for having hitherto dedicated so few of my speculations to the ladies; and indeed the moralist, whose instructions are accommodated only to one half of the human species, must be confessed not sufficiently to have extended his views" (III, 184). A year before, the "extensive view" of *The Vanity of Human Wishes* had encompassed "mankind" alone; hence Johnson's self-rebuke in number 34 is an important advance for him. It is noteworthy that, in *The Rambler*, we may see Johnson's progress from Misellus (the successful young male author of number 16) to Misella (the prostitute to whose story Johnson devotes numbers 170-71). The complaint of Misellus, whose literary success has led to a fame greater than he wants, was a traditionally masculine subject, but literary fame is beyond the reach of the average woman. Hence the essays about women deal less with the world of intellect than with the lack of preparation English society gives them for more than "the most servile employments," Misella, herself the daughter of a good family, points out (v, 145). In an early essay on marriage, Johnson comments on the tradition of blaming women for the woes of the married state : "As the faculty of writing has been chiefly a masculine endowment, the reproach of making the world miserable has been always thrown upon the women" (*Rambler* 78, III, 98). Hence, he continues, "I sometimes venture to consider this universal grievance, having endeavoured to divest my heart of all partiality, and place myself as a kind of neutral being between the sexes."

The Misella essays, like many others in *The Rambler*, are nominally the work of a correspondent; indeed, Johnson employs the device of the fictional letterwriter often in his essays about women. All journalistic enterprises receive letters from readers; many earlier eighteenth-century essay collections actually had published a fair number of such writings. Johnson often mentions correspondence from his audience, but the only epistles in *The Rambler* are those of his own authorship, over the signature of a large array of Greek and Latin appellations. Johnson uses this device often in his essays about women. Evidently he found the feminine persona a convenient way to represent the less public sphere that eighteenth-century women occupied, but the fictional correspondent is just as frequently an inexperienced young male whose unworldliness we can especially remark. Hymenaeus on marriage (numbers 113 and

115), for example discusses his growing awareness of marital life and Ruricola (number 61) ridicules the hauteur of those who think their residence in London exalts them over their former associates back in the shires. In the same way, Zosima (number 12) discusses the trials of a young gentlewoman's search for a place as a servant and Myrtilia (number 84) tells us of her discovery of domestic tyranny. The letter from an invented correspondent was a common eighteenth-century political and satiric approach to contemporary social problems. In Johnson's many adept applications of this method, we can see yet another way in which *The Rambler* broadens the appeal of topics that have rather narrow applications.; he seems always to be reaching for the wider audience.

For an eighteenth-century male writer, indeed, Johnson goes much further than most in treating women as the intellectual equals of men, but his idea of a "neutral being" is not androgyny; rather, he tries to show that men as well as women are capable of shallowness and trifling. The essays on women who waste their time playing cards (e.g., number 15), then, are balanced by essays on the wastefulness of masculine dissipation (as in number 197, the story of Captator, the legacy-hunter). So many essays comment on marriage that, if one collected them separately, they would show Johnson to be one of the most copious male writers of his age on the subject. His view is not always compassionate, but it is often aphoristic, as in the proverbial view of remarriage : "It is not likely that the married state is eminently miserable, since we see such numbers, whom the death of their partners has set free from it, entering it again" (number 45, III, 245). Johnson is in favor of education for women; the essays consisting of letters from women often speak of the need for women—women of good families, to be sure - to read widely and converse intelligently. But Johnson's thoughts on the education of women in *The Rambler*, as distinct from other works, are quite limited. In *Rambler* 85, for example, he writes, "I have always admired the wisdom of those by whom our female education was instituted, for having contrived, that every woman of whatever condition should be taught some arts of manufacture ... whenever chance brings within my observation a knot of misses busy at their need'es, I consider myself as in the school of virtue" (IV, 85-86).

Johnson tends, perhaps inevitably, given his century and education, to associate women with housework. Cornelia, who in number 51 tells the story of Lady Bustle, whose life is devoted to pickles and preserves, represents the extreme of this attitude. There is much similar evidence in *The Rambler* to support Johnson's treatment of women as primarily involved with housework and childrearing. As the notes in number 112, "When female minds are imbittered by age or solitude, their malignity is generally exerted in a regorous and spiteful superintenance of domestic trifles" (IV, 234), Often, however essays about women rise above domesticity. One of the most common themes of eighteenth-century moralism is the need to accommodate oneself to loss - of health, wealth, and youth - and Johnson is at his best in writing about such topics. So the story of Melissa in *Rambler* 75 is a parable about the abrupt loss of riches ("My endless train of lovers immediately withdrew," she tells us, when news of her relative poverty spreads (IV, 31); she learns to live without the perpetual masquerade of wealth. *Ramblers* 130 and 133 tell the story of the incomparable beauty of Victoria both before and after she catches and recovers from smallpox : the lesson is that when we live with adversity, we learn to value the good things that we have. The essays on women in *The Rambler*, however neglected they have been, are consistent with the central message of Johnson's periodical essays.⁸

V

The Rambler contains a number of thematic clusters, some of them the result of Johnson's careful planning, as with many of those on literary topics, some the result of his response to current issues, and others part of typical views on subjects of general moral interest. His dislike of tyranny and arbitrary power, which we find in his political pamphlets, appears persistently in various contexts, and his allegorical, personifying approach to morality is as common in the periodical essays as it is elsewhere in his writings. Johnson's essays are not indebted only to the colloquial tradition of Montaigne, Bacon, and Addison and the classical tradition of Plutarch, Cicero, and Seneca. As a Christian moralist, he learned much from the methodology of the great English homileticists; hence his remark to John Wilkes,

"Sermons make a considerable branch of English literature" (*Life*, IV, 105). The argumentative method of a typical essay in *The Rambler* is sermonlike, beginning with a quotation from or an allusion to a well-known author, and following with homiletic exposition, development, and didactic conclusion. But Johnson's purpose is different from a preacher's (his audience is invisible, for one thing, and entirely voluntary), since he does not mean to inculcate lessons and teachings that are simply Christian. Rather, he wishes to reach general theme above sectarian belief; this is one reason why he cites Scripture much less frequently than he alludes to classical and secular authors. For a Christian moralist, Johnson actually refers to specifically Christian topics rather seldom. In number 81 he speaks of "the divine author of our religion" in the context of a discussion of doing unto others as we would have others do unto us (IV, 61, 64; [25 December 1750]). In *Rambler* 185 (24 December, 1751) Johnson meditates on the birth of "our Redeemer" in order to propose that forgiveness is the highest of virtues. "On this great duty eternity is suspended, and to him that refuses to practise it, the throne of mercy is inaccessible, and the Saviour of the world has been born in vain" (V, 210). Yet these specifically Christian topics have a seasonal context; Johnson does not follow them with other essays in which his presentation imitates that of a sermon.

A more usual approach for *The Rambler* is that of number 77, extensively rewritten for the several editions revised by Johnson." Ostensibly, number 77 is about the unjustified neglect of learning and of the learned, a favourite Johnsonian topic. But in reality the question that concerns Johnson is whether the neglect of learning is ever justified. Here he introduces the notion of the worthless guide : "The vicious moralist may be considered as a taper, by which we are lighted through the labyrinth of complicated passions; he extends his radiance farther than his heat, and guides all those within view, but burns only those who make too near approaches" (IV, 41). The theme is that of Luke 12:48, "Of him, to whom much is given, much shall be "required," and Johnson's application is to the perverted man of genius: "The wickedness of a loose or profane author is more atrocious than that of the giddy libertine, or drunken ravisher" (IV, 43), by broadening his topic from the specifically religious context of the biblical text, Johnson translates the moral approach of the sermon to that of the essay. A vicious author is not un-Christian—Johnson does not even imply that—but is rather a civil criminal of a sort, one guilty of fraud : "Whoever commits a fraud is guilty not only of the particular injury to him whom he deceives, but of the diminution of that confidence which constitutes not only the case but the existence of society" (*Rambler* 79, IV, 55), *Rambler* 180 (the other essay extensively revised) is also about the problems of learning and the responsibilities of the author. Johnson commonly finds fault with the conduct of "the scholastick race" (V, 184); here, as he does in other essays about learning, he criticizes scholars who focus their attentions on fashionable topics instead of upon "the permanent lustre of moral and religious truth" (v, 186).

Similarly, Johnson devotes a number of essays to ridiculing, not always gently, pointless collecting, as in numbers 82 and 83, with the story of the collections of Quisquilius, or wasted learning, as in number 106, with its often-quoted lament about libraries : "No place affords a more striking conviction of the vanity of human hopes, than a publick library, for who can see the wall crowded on every side by mighty volumes, the works of laborious meditation, and accurate enquiry, now scarcely known but by the catalogue ... without considering how many hours have been wasted in vain endeavours" (IV, 200). It is difficult to generalize about those *Ramblers* that anthologizers have tended to choose as Johnson's "moral" writings, but one of the most frequent themes is the unwelcome difference between appearance and reality in human behaviour. The conclusion of *Rambler* 14 illustrates this attitude as well as any essay :

A transition from an author's books to his conversation, is too often like an entrance into a large city after a distant prospect. Remotely, we see nothing but spires of temples, and turrets of palaces and imagine it the residence of splendor, grandeur, and magnificence; but, when we have passed the gates, we find it perplexed with narrow passages, disgraced with despicable cottages, embarrassed with obstructions, and clouded with smoke. (III, 79-80)

Here, as so often in *The Rambler*, we see Johnson an moral commentator on the world of learning, a subject to which he turns scores of times in the two hundred plus essays that constitute his major contribution to the eighteenth-century essay.

Johnson had written essays before *The Rambler*— mainly reviews and brief lives—and he would continue to favor the genre afterwards, as his pieces in Hawkesworth's *The Adventurer* (1753-54) and his authorship of *The Idler* (1758-60) show. Our memory of the great landmarks of the periodical essay may, however, obscure an important truth about this form. It is that, save for the eight or ten most famous collections, the periodical essays of the eighteenth century, even in the golden age of essay writing, from 1710 to 1775, did not last beyond their first appearance. After 1775, save for the few most famous collections, like those of Johnson, Addison, and Goldsmith, the changing taste of England's literary audience leads to a lessening of demand for separate collections of essays. The form becomes steadily more confined to ephemeral publications like weeklies and monthlies or, in other words, moves closer to what we would now call journalism. Thus while the contemporary periodical essay gradually becomes more journalistic, the outstanding examples of the genre acquire the status of classics. *The Rambler* and the other classics of eighteenth-century periodical writing have a wide circulation as part of entire sets of books, as in Alexander Chalmers's enormous series, *Bell's English Essayists* (1802-10). In the first third of the nineteenth century, when the market for Johnson's writings, in collections of his works, appears to decline, when the most popular collections, like those of William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb, were no longer part of a titled series, his periodical essays reached the widest reading public they have ever enjoyed.

II

GREG CLINGHAM

Life And Literature In Johnson's

Lives of the Poets

When Matthew Arnold formulated his ideal of liberal education, he turned not to Coleridge or Hazlitt or De Quincey, or even to Keats or Wordsworth or Tennyson, but to Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*. In his *Six Chief Lives from Johnson's "Lives of the Poets"* (1878) Arnold designated Johnson's lives of Milton, Dryden, Pope, Addison, Swift, and Gray as *points de repère* - "points which stand as so many natural centres, and by returning to which we can always find our way again." These critical biographies covered the period from the birth of Milton in 1608 to the death of Gray in 1771, a crucial century and a half in English literature; and although there were significant critical disagreements of judgement between Arnold and Johnson, when it came to an education in literary history, biography, and criticism Arnold saw the *Lives of the Poets* as offering a "compendious story of the whole important age in English literature, told by a great man, and in a performance which is itself a piece of English literature of the first class" (p.362)

I

Like almost everything Johnson wrote, the *Lives of the Poets* was an occasional work. Johnson's career as a biographer had begun in 1740 with brief lives of Blake, Drake, and Barretier, had included the *Life of Richard Savage* (1744) - republished as one of the *Lives* - and had involved Johnson in many other biographical projects. In 1777 a group of London booksellers planned to publish an edition of the works of the English poets, in competition with an Edinburgh edition of 1773, and Johnson, as a celebrity, was asked to provide brief introductions to the poems. "I am engaged to write little Lives, and little Prefaces, to a little edition of the English Poets," he wrote to Boswell (Letters, II, 20) and noted in the author's advertisement that "my purpose was only to have allotted to every Poet an Advertisement, like those which we find in the French Miscellanies, containing a few dates and a general character" (*Lives*, I, xxvi). However, as Johnson engaged with the lives and the works of his subjects his imagination caught fire, and "through the honest intention of giving pleasure (as he noted in the Preface to the edition of 1783), Johnson wrote a work of Complex and far-reaching critical, biographical, and historical substance. This was *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical to the Works of the English Poets*, published as the first ten volumes of the sixty-volume edition of the English Poets. Volumes I-IV appeared in 1779, and volumes V-X in 1781. The publishers soon realized that they had a best seller on their hands and issued Johnson's fifty two prefaces separately in 1781 as *The Lives of the English Poets*, since when the work has appeared under that title (or simply as *Lives of the Poets*), as an autonomous text, separate from the poetry that it was initially designed to introduce.

The diversity, range, and depth of Johnson's *Lives* resist any easy conceptualization and introduction. Not only does Johnson's work respond to a great range of personal and historical experiences as represented by the lives of the fifty-two poets under consideration, but the writing of Cowley, Donne, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Swift, and Gray - to mention only the major writers covered—stimulated Johnson to articulate *several* critical discourses in order to accommodate the specificity of the works and lives under discussion. A partial list of the different topics covered suggests the *Lives's* multiplicity : metaphysical poetry, the pindaric ode,

pastoral, epic poetry, heroic drama, blank verse, translation, imitation, satire, devotional verse, theological discourse, epitaphs, metaphor and simile, the refinement of diction in English poetry, the development of English prose, familiar correspondence, French neo-classicism, the Greek and Roman classics Renaissance scholarship, and contemporary eighteenth-century literary criticism. The topics in criticism covered in the *Lives* read like a list of most of the important issues in literary history during the years 1600-1781. To this list, moreover, might be added the following, equally important historical, biographical, and philosophical topics : literary history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the relation of politics to literature, Puritanism, the English Civil War, the Restoration, Jacobitism, literature and the Hanoverians, regicide, literary friendship, literary warfare, literary values, publishing painting, changing social forms, gardens, travel, money, madness, artistic ambition and failure, and death. Diverse as the contents, narratives, and critiques of the *Lives* might be, the above topics are all contained within one capacious work whose general themes might be said to be the effect of time on human endeavor, and the relation between the finite human being and the continuing experiences and pleasures offered by literature. Holding together all of these disparate materials, and suffusing them with its own distinctive humane imagination, is Johnson's commemorative intelligence.

II

Johnson's intelligence is informed by two interlinked paradigms that govern both specific judgements and the larger structure of the *Lives of the Poets* : the first concerns the theoretical and artistic possibilities of biography as a genre; the second concerns the function of what Johnson's calls "nature" in his critical and biographical writing.

The fictional nature of biography—the use of tropes and figurative language in "constituting" a life in writing — is generally accepted today. Johnson, by contrast, is usually assumed to work within positivistic ideas of verisimilitude emphasizing the direct relation between the biographer's words and the documentary truth of the life of his subject. This commonplace, however, does not do justice to Johnson's idea or practice of biography, which are much more imaginatively inflected. For instance, *Rambler* 60 proposes that the essence of biography is no different from that of "imaginative" literature. Johnson says that biography succeeds in proportion to its appeal to common human experiences, and the imagery he uses to describe this process links biography with poetry and drama :

All joy or sorrow for the happiness or calamities of others is produced by an act of imagination, that realises the event however fictitious, or approximates it however remote, by placing us, for a time, in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate; so that we feel, while the deception lasts, whatever motions would be excited by the same good or evil happening to ourselves. Our passions are therefore more strongly moved, in proportion as we can more readily adopt the pains and the pleasures proposed to our minds, by recognising them as at once our own, or considering them as naturally incident to our state of life. (III, 318-19)

The sympathetic experience described in this essay is no different in kind from that described in the passage on dramatic illusion in the *Preface to Shakespeare* (I, 60), or in the following passage from the "Life of Cowley" in which Johnson registers what he feels to be *absent* from the poetry of Donne and Cowley : "They were not successful in representing or moving the affections. As they were wholly employed on something unexpected and surprising they had no regard to that uniformity of sentiment, which enables us to conceive and to excite the pains and the pleasures of other minds" (*Lives*, 1.20).

Good literature for Johnson — whether drama, poetry, or biography—appeals to and represents human "passions" (joy, sorrow, happiness, calamities), and *Rambler* 60 assumes that a biographer fulfills his purpose *in proportion to the* creativity of the writing. The biographer must not only "conceive the pains and the pleasures of other minds," but must also "excite" them. Many biographers, Johnson notes, "imagine themselves writing a life when they exhibit a chronological series of actions and preferments, "while only a few can "portray a living acquaintance except by his most prominent and observable particularities and the grosser features of his mind (*Idler* 84, p 262)

The portrayal of a "living acquaintance" through the biographer's narrative is connected to the moral purpose of biography. In *Idler* 84 Johnson discusses the prudential nature of the genre, which designates "not how any man became great, but how he was made happy" — how, to paraphrase Johnson, knowledge manifests itself in action in a person's life. That is biography is prudential both in manner and subject: it establishes the relation between first, particular moments in time and human conduct, and second the ends of action - 'ends' here being multiple and ambiguous, and comprehending the sense of "end" as consequences, "end" as aim or objective, "end" as achievement, and "end" as end, terminus, death, for the subjects of the *Lives* are, of course, authors who have employed their energies in representing some truth whatever it might be about their lives, though the crystallization of their experiences in literature. Johnsonian biography might therefore be said to detect whatever truth a person had realized in the ends of his or her activity -that is, in literature, but also at the end of that individual's life.

This link between action and literature in Johnson's idea of biography suggests a complex and active structure for the *Lives*. In general, all the individual lives follow a similar pattern : a biographical and chronological sketch of the author's life and writings is followed by a critical dissertation on the works. However the larger lives of Cowley, Milton, Dryden, Pope, and Addison split the difference between biography and work with an intermediate section on the author's intellectual or poetic character that address his specific intellectual behavior. While the smaller lives (e.g., Halifax, Dorset, Yalden, Duke, Garth, and Hammond) encompass biography and criticism in just a few pages, in the large lives each of the three sections are substantial, and the intellectual portrait consciously and skillfully mediates between biography and criticism, constituting an organizing principle and structure in the whole life. Many of the middle size *Lives* (e.g., Waller, Butler, Rochester, Congreve, Otway, and Gay) have the tripartite structure on a reduced scale. It has been argued that the structure of individual lives reflects Johnson's intention of separating life from work as belonging to two quite different realities (a division supposedly reflected in the title of *Prefaces, Critical and Biographical*) but this discontinuous structure, and the correspondingly formalistic divisions between genres that it implies (i.e., poetry is different in kind from biography), ignores Johnson's writing about biography, as well as the obvious fact that the *Lives* deliberately *bring together* literature and experiences supposedly "outside" literature in one coherent form. Indeed, what interests Johnson are the various continuities and discontinuities between literature and life.

Years before Boswell wrote his *Life of Johnson* (1791) now reputed to be the first modern, self-reflexive biography, Johnson understood that biographical truth is relative, and that the truths, whether factual or critical, are dependent on the biographer's story, his narrative. As Richard Holmes remarks, "The inventive, shaping instinct of the story-teller struggles with the ideal of a permanent, historical, and objective document." Certainly, Johnson knows that biography cannot *reproduce* a life that has been lived and is over, yet his biographies confer a *fictional* presence on the fragmented realities of the author's life and works. That is, Johnson's theory and practice of biography entail a representation implying consciousness of artifice and of differences between art and life. There is no literal correspondence of living and writing, because it is not in the nature of language to provide such correspondence and because "it may be shown much easier to design than to perform .. It is the condition of our present state to see more than we can attain" (*Rambler* 14, III, 75, 76). However, Johnson's prudential approach to biography registers a *fictional* correspondence and hence a *continuity* of life and work that anticipates modern critics in focusing on the transformative power of life writing. As Frederick Karl notes of Conrad : "In biography, we must edge up to that meeting point between mind and work, to areas where the figure who has created something must be related to the work he has created; so that we have a model of his mind...[Biography is at all times the reconstruction of a human model who seems suitable for the work created. Our goal is to understand the transformations that occur when life becomes work, and when work pre-empt life."

Those transformations in Johnson's writing are difficult to unravel, since he does not overtly discuss the psychological origins of specific works or the process of literary creation. But he is interested in the "reconstruction of a human model who seems suitable for the work created," and these efforts encounter the ubiquitous presence of failure and death, identifying the individual's inadequacy to the political and historical events in which he is involved as signs of human division. This perception is a version of the

vanity of human wishes {"Delusive Fortune hears th'incessant Call,/they mount, they shine, evaporate, and fall" [*Vanity of Human Wishes*, 75-76]}. The biographer's retrospective glance (for all of Johnson's subjects are dead and gone) distinguishes the irony in the discrepancy between their intentions and achievements, and ruefully turns that scrutiny upon his own efforts.

History may be formed from permanent monuments and records : but Lives can only be written from personal knowledge, which is growing every day less, and in a short time is lost forever. What is known can seldom be immediately told, and when it might be told, it is no longer known. The delicate features of the mind, the nice discrimination of character, and the minute peculiarities of conduct are soon obliterated. ("late of Addison, " *Lives*, II, 116)

The interaction between the individual and his or her historical moment, constantly slipping from the biographer's understanding because of the gap between the present and the past, is analogous to the discrepancy between human will and action with which Johnson's moral essays are concerned. Both are indications of the limits of reason; Johnson's treatment of limits and the resultant suffering from self-division are usually identified as tragic ("Fate wings with even Wish the affective Dart" [*Vanity*, 15]. But notwithstanding Johnson's ironic consideration of human destinies (as witness the careers of Wolsey and Swedish Charles in the *Vanity*), of which his rueful biographical treatment of literary failure is part, Johnson's proto-tragic view is transformed in the *Lives*. For the acknowledged deficiencies of historical evidence are repaired by Johnson's seeing a person's life and work in the light of each other and of a larger continuum. In Lawrence Lipking's words, Johnson discovers how poetry "can constitute the experience of a life," and how a great poet "makes his own destiny, makes it, precisely with poems." In the *Lives* the distinctive combinations of criticism and biography discover not only some of the lost delicacies of mind and discriminations of character in the *works* of the authors dealt with, but they also mitigate the otherwise inevitable vanity of human wishes. Johnson thereby imparts of the structures of the *Lives* a value and a function not present in any one part of a life by itself. He discovers in human limitations and the historical realm a dignity and grace which moves his writing from proto-tragedy into a "mingled" mode, becoming, like Shakespeare's drama, "compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world" (*Shakespeare*, I, 66). This transformation is achieved in the *Lives* as it is in Shakespeare, through what Johnson called nature.

Although "nature" is *the* crucial critical touchstone for Johnson, it is the least easily explicated of Johnson's major terms. G.F. Parker has suggestively explained how Johnson inherited (through the mediation of Pope) and developed certain intuitions about art, truth, and language from the seventeenth century French writers Boileau and Bouhours, and how these ideas were themselves distinguished from a more formalistic and rule-bound aesthetics of French and English neo-classicism. Johnson discovered in the French (as Addison put it in *Spectator* 62 when discussing Bouhours) the idea that "it is impossible for any Thought to be beautiful which is not just, and has not its Foundation in the nature of things", and, in addition, the "belief in the validity of affective rather than intellectual awareness." Like the French, Johnson believed that literature could release the human mind from its everyday, empirical constrictions, but that the truth and the reality to be found in such literature is inherent in - and not beyond — everyday experience.

While the *Lives* draw on the works of Boileau and Bouhours, they also share Johnson's earlier principles formulated in his engagement with Shakespeare. Shakespeare is a real though implicit presence in the *Lives*, his drama operating general touchstone by which to read such works as *Paradise Lost*, the plays of Milton, Dryden, Congreve, Addison, and Rowe, the poems of Donne and Cowley, and Dryden's translations. There is, however, a significant difference between Johnson's use of the term "nature" in the essays of the 1740s and 1750s - for example, his relatively narrow and moralistic use of the term in *Rambler* 4 to discuss the proprieties and moral dangers of the new realistic fiction of the 1740s (the novels of Richardson and Fielding) — and his use of the term in the Shakespeare criticism and the *Lives*. While the realistic novel imitates the details of common and domestic life (what Johnson calls "manners") with a life like accuracy, the power of Shakespeare's dramatics in its generality and its capacity to generate

pleasure for Johnson : "Shakespeare is above all writers ... the poet of nature ... His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life continued in motion" (*Shakespeare*, I, 62). Novelists like Richardson and Fielding are "engaged in portraits of which every one knows the original, and can detect any deviation from exactness of resemblance" (*Rambler* 4, III, 20); Shakespeare's drama, by contrast, "approximates the remote and familiarises the wonderful," and has the power to rectify confused imagination (*Shakespeare*, I, 65) Johnson's admiration for Shakespeare emphasizes the felt life in a drama that exhibits "the real state of sublunary nature" in all its diversity (1,66); but this quality is contained within and is at one with the generality of Shakespeare's drama: "Nothing can please many and please long, but just representations of general nature ... In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species" (I, 61-62).

The running distinction in Johnson's criticism between the literature of "manners" and that of "nature" (both admired by Johnson, but differently) has not prevented many critics from confusing the two. The apparent contradiction between the general and the particular, however, touches upon a paradox of "nature" that vanishes when it is realized that "general nature" and "sublunary nature" are different ways of saying the same thing that are made one in Shakespeare's drama. For Johnson, it is inaccurate to assume that our observations of the world are immediate and empirical, or that our consciousness is fully possessed in daily experiences. Quite the contrary. The *Rambler* essays testify to the essential emptiness of human consciousness and to the discrepancy between the will and human action that underlies Johnson's thinking about the mind : "The mind of man is never satisfied with the objects immediately before it" (*Rambler* 2, III, 9); "almost all that we can be said to enjoy is past or future; the present is in perpetual motion : (*Rambler* 41, III, 223). The vanity of human wishes and the "striking and manifest contrariety between the life of an author and his writings" (*Rambler* 14, III, 74) are two versions of Johnson's skeptical belief that the human mind, language, and the things of the world are disjunct. So, "general nature" is not part of empirical experience for Johnson, but it becomes accessible through literature, implying the momentary and fictional bringing together of mind and world that Johnson finds deeply pleasurable and existentially grounding : "Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature ... the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth" (*Shakespeare*, I, 61)

Johnson's formulation of general nature develops both Dryden's understanding of wit as a "propriety of thoughts and words — or, in other terms, thoughts and words elegantly adapted to the subject"— and Pope's well-known lines in the *Essay on Criticism* :

True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,
 What oft was *Thought*, but ne'er so well *Express*,
Something, whose Truth convinc'd at Sight we find,
 That gives us back the Image of our Mind. (297-300)

Pope's lines sound very Johnsonian, and Johnson, who thought the *Essay* "One of [Pope's] greatest-works" ("Life of Pope," III, 228), is sometimes taken as simply echoing Pope in his discussions of wit and poetry in the "Life of Cowley" and elsewhere. One version of this assumption is that because Johnson's poetic taste was formed by the couplet art of Dryden and Pope, his conception of wit (i.e., poetry) is necessarily theirs. Pope's wit is certainly impressive. In the *Essay on Criticism* wit depends upon the transforming yet transparent function of language to waken an immanent knowledge within the mind in such a way that the mind takes cognizance of that knowledge as if it were a phenomenal object (a "thing" in Pope's word). This imaginative engagement is a means of knowing the self more fully and of knowing more fully the self's integration into the world. In these lines Pope was assimilating an impressive body of thought about poetry from Aristotle, Horace, and Longinus to Boileau, Dryden, and Walsh. These were some of the qualities that prompted Johnson to note that the poem "displays such extent of comprehension, such nicety of distinction, such acquaintance with mankind, and such knowledge both of ancient and modern learning as is not often attained by the maturest age and longest experience" (III, 94).

In the "Life of Cowley," however, Johnson thought that "Pope's account of wit is undoubtedly erroneous; he depresses it below its natural dignity, and reduces it from strength of thought to happiness of language" (I, 19). This statement comes as part of Johnson's dissertation on the metaphysical poets. The "Life of Cowley" was the first to be written (1777), and it stood first in the *Prefaces* (1779). According to Boswell Johnson considered this to be the best of the Lives on account of the dissertation which it contains on the Metaphysical Poets Life, IV, 38), and, according to Sir John Hawkins, because of its "investigation and discrimination of the characteristics of wit" (Hawkins, P. 482). The function of the famous section on the metaphysical poets is complex. It consists of first fourteen paragraphs (49-63) (in G.B. Hill's edition) in a text that totals 200, it is preceded by a chronological sketch of Cowley's life, and followed by two sections of detailed commentary and quotation, the first offering specific examples from Donne and Cowley to exemplify Johnson's remarks, the second concentrating on Cowley's main poems, from the *Miscellanies* to the *Davideis*. The central section on the metaphysical poets represents Johnson's statement above Cowley's poetic character, and as with other Lives, this section addresses important critical and historical issues. Johnson casts his net widely in this life not only by offering a reevaluation of Cowley's works (after long critical neglect), but also by formulating a mini critical tradition (Aristotle to Johnson himself), implying a mini literary history (Jacobean Age to the Georgian), all in the process of defining a specific poetic style - the metaphysical. While never actually offering the section on the metaphysicals as a manifesto) "To circumscribe poetry by a definition will only shew the narrowness of the definer" ["Life of Pope," II, 251]), it makes a powerful statement of principles and exemplifies Johnson's criticism in the *Lives*.

Johnson's principles and *practice* are related to his sense that Pope's wit falls below the dignity of natural poetry, and he incorporates the reference to Pope into the discussion of the metaphysicals. Even though nature for Pope (as for Johnson) is "At once the *Source*, and *End*, and *Test of Art*" (*Essay on Criticism*, 73), there is the sense that the reader's experience with which Pope's passage begins is no different from that with which it ends. The circle is too small so that the reader is left with the impression that nature is only embellishment ("well *Express*"), and with a corresponding sense that Pope's words do not quite engage with the thought, as the passage declares it *does* ("*True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest, What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Express*"). In Johnson's terms the passage does not discover general nature in sublunary nature. Notwithstanding Pope's talk of "things" (true wit is "*Something*" whose truth convinces us once we see it), the passage's delicate refinement has the effect of dissolving the world it aims to mirror into the image of the mind suggesting Pope's proximity to Marvell's "Mind, that Ocean where each kind/Does streight its own resemblance find" ("The Garden," 43-44). In the "Life of Pope", Johnson is responsive to the social grace and nuances of Pope's poetry, but in the "Life of Cowley" he registers its limited consciousness, commensurate with Pope's skill for "particular manners' rather than "general nature."

Johnson is interested in the "representations of general nature" and the "grandeur of generality," which he associates with literature that "finds the passes of the mind" and "awakens those ideas that slumber in the heart" (*Lives*, III, 227, I, 459) Johnson's judgements on metaphysical poetry all rest on criteria that support that general experience of reading and inform his formulation about wit: "If by a more noble and more adequate conception that be considered as Wit which is at once natural and new, that which though not obvious is, upon its first production, acknowledged to be just; if it be that, which he that never found it, wonders how he missed; to wit of this kind the metaphysical poets have seldom risen" (*Lives*, I, 19-20).

This line of thought began with a historical observation as part of a historical process ("Wit... has its changes and fashions" [I,18], and concludes various ideas of wit and poetry, including Aristotle's (poetry as an imitative art), Dryden's (wit as distinguished from poetry), and Pope's (true wit is nature to advantage dressed) (I, 18-19). Johnson's idea about wit has two distinctive components: it stresses the reader's experience of reading, and it perceives wit as simultaneously combining qualities (naturalness and originality) that *seem* to be mutually exclusive. Johnson's judgments from this point in the "Life of Cowley" exemplify *several* applications of his sense of true wit as being "*at once* natural and new," and how the metaphysicals (especially Donne, Cowley, and Cleveland) art felt *not* to fulfill those criteria. That

perception means that for Johnson the metaphysicals are unable to evoke deep human feeling (1, 20) and to fill and expand the mind (1,20-21).

These judgments (paras. 57-58 in Hill's edition), on the absence of pathos and sublimity in most metaphysical poems, are central to how Johnson works as a critic. Johnson clearly valued Donne's poetry highly : he admired its learning and subtlety ("their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises" (I, 20), its great labor and great abilities, its capacity to stimulate the reader to "recollection or inquiry," and its originality ("to write on their plan it was at least necessary to read and to think. No man could be born a metaphysical poet" [1,21]). That is Johnson identifies Donne as having *risen above* all the mediocre and merely traditional poets in the *Lives*. He belongs in the company of Milton, Dryden, Pope, and Cowley.

Yet for Johnson, Donne's impressive qualities are at one with the conceited inflection of his wit that makes for the violent yoking together of "heterogeneous ideas" (para. 58), becoming hyperbolic (para. 59), and leading Johnson to exclude Donne from his notion of wit as at once natural and new (para. 55).

On a round ball

A workman that hath copies by, can lay

An Europe, Afric, and an Asia,

And quickly make that, which was nothing, all,

So doth each tear,

Which thee doth wear,

A globe, yea world by that impression grow,

Till thy tears mixed with mine do overflow

This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so.

Johnson quotes this stanza (para. 77) from "A valediction : Of Weeping" as an example of the farfetched and perplexing nature of the "heterogeneous ideas" of the metaphysicals. T.S. Eliot praised this passage for its agility and its rapid metaphoric movement;¹⁴ but while Johnson notices the metaphoric cast of the lines) "The tears of the lovers are always of great poetical account, but Donne has extended them into worlds" (para. 77) he also registers their effect and implication : "Their attempts were always analytick : they broke every image into fragments" (para. 58). This is one reason why Donne "was not successful in representing or moving the affections" (para. 57), for the poem's linguistic triumph and its intellectual self-consciousness evade the opportunity of exploring or presenting either what it feels like to weep for the parting of one's lover, or what it might mean. This is perhaps who Johnson remarks that as the metaphysical poets "were wholly employed on something unexpected and surprising they had no regard to that uniformity of sentiment, which enables us to conceive and to excite the pains and the pleasures of other minds" (para. 57). The Johnsonian reader is, as it were kept on the outside of the poem, admiring its dexterity ("their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises") but unable to feel the connection with the lovers' actual drama of the senses and of the soul ("the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he somethies admires, is seldom pleased" (para. 56).

The failure to move the feelings of the reader is, for Johnson, a failure to represent them, which points to a failure of imagination and of art. This perception is similar to his statement that in Milton's "Lycidas" "there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new" ("Life of Milton," 1, 163) - where Johnson's complaint is *not* mainly about the poem's pastoral form or Johnson's supposed expressive theory, but rather about the effect the poem has on Johnson as reader. It is the *effect* of Donne's wit that prompts Johnson's metaphoric idea that the metaphysicals "wrote rather as beholders that partakers of human nature;... as Epicurean deities making remarks on the actions of men and the vicissitudes of life" (para. 57), linking this poetry with Soame Jenyns's remote rationality (attacked by

Johnson in his review of *A Free Inquiry* (1757) and distinguishing it from the epicureanism of Cowley's *Anacreontiques*, songs "dedicated to festivity and gaiety, in which even the morality is voluptuous, and which teach nothing but the enjoyment of the present day" (I, 39) - qualities which Johnson greatly enjoyed.

Donne's poetry moves Johnsons to formulate a wholly special kind of wit: "But Wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike (I, 20; para. 56). That is defining the particular effect Donne has on the reader necessitates a degree of *abstraction*, a separation of the reader from experience ("Wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer"). Although Johnson is able to *imagine* the poem "philosophically" in this way, and to formulate its unrelatedness, he clearly does not like or value the *accompanying feeling*. It is that feeling of absence or frustrated human expectation that Johnson designates when remarking the *discordance* of the metaphysical style ("*discordia concors*"), just as it is when he describes "Lycidas" as "harsh" ("Life of Milton," I. 163).

The idea of "harmony" as a poetic standard can confuse the reader into thinking that what Johnson refers to is the mere sound of the Augustan heroic couplet, and the ordered world to much of that verse. However, Johnson responds from his sense of the "grandeur of generality" that is lost when "all the power of description is destroyed by a scrupulous enumeration., and the force of metaphors is lost" (para, 133), and this perception, we must remember, is informed by his reading of Shakespeare's drama, as well as by his reading of Milton's blank verse. In *Ramblers* 86, 88, 90, 92, and 94 (on prosody and poetic experience) it is Milton and Homer who are designated as the great "harmonious" poets for Johnson—not any writer of couplets. They are so designated, not on the basis of the *sound* of their verse, but due to their particular "force of poetry:" "It is certain that without this petty knowledge [deliberation upon accents and pauses] no man can be a poet; and that from the proper disposition of single sounds results that harmony that adds force to reason, and gives grace to sublimity; that shackles attention, and governs passion" (*Rambler* 88, IV, 99). It is Milton who, according to Johnson, comes closest to replicating Homer's "force of imagination .. [and] flexibility of language" that "gave him full possession of every object" (*Rambler* 92, IV, 124-25). These *Rambler* essays, together with Johnson's discussion of *Paradise Lost* and the *Iliad* in the *Lives*, confirm the idea that harmony arises when literary art is able to establish continuity (not identity) between different realms of experience, such as "musick" and "reason" and "intellect and body" so as to create a wit that is *at once* natural and new.

Jean Hagstrum finds Johnson's criticism governed by three discourses—the beautiful, the pathetic, and the sublime - and each of these qualities to be exemplified, by a different writer (Pope is beautiful, Shakespeare is pathetic, Milton is sublime). But the point of Johnson's observations on the absence of pathos, sublimity, and harmony in metaphysical poetry lies in his discovering *parious* poetic experiences in one compositions that are thought of as mutually exclusive. He finds astonishment alongwith rational admiration, naturalness along with originality. Pathos and sublimity are not, then, characteristics of different poems just as, in Shakespeare, tragedy and comedy are not formally exclusive genres but different ways in which the *same* poem might be experienced as a "just representation of general nature."

Johnson's critical-prose is similarly ambiguous : it is equally sensitive to that which Johnson approves and to that which he disapproves. For example, when Johnson writes, "Their attempts were always analytick : they broke every image into fragments, and could no more represent by their slender conceits and laboured particularities the prospects of nature or the scenes of life, than he who dissects a sun-beam with a prism can exhibit the wide effulgence of a summer noon" (I, 20-21; para, 58) - the metaphoric form of this statement is both a joke at Donne's expense, as well as a sensitive echo of Donne's wit:

And as no chemic yet the elixir got,
But glorifies his pregnant pot,
If by the way to him befall

Some odoriferous thing, or medicinal,
So, lovers dream a rich and long delight,
But get a winter-seeming summer's night.

("Love's Alchemy," 7-12)

As the above stanza shows, splitting a sunbeam with a prism in order to demonstrate the beauty of a summer's day, and then to make *that* a metaphor for "the scenes of life," is quite typical of Donne's wit!

When Johnson writes, however, that the metaphysicals "were wholly employed on something unexpected and surprising [and] had no regard to that uniformity of sentiment, which enables us to conceive and to excite the pains and the pleasures of other minds" (I, 20; para. 57), the measured deliberateness and the eloquence of the sentence enlarges and opens the mind of the reader, creating (I would suggest) something of an *equivalence* to the experience Johnson does *not* find in the poetry itself. The parallel clauses, the internal rhymes, and the rhythm {"enables us to conceive and to excite the pains and the pleasures"} expand the reader's sense and suggest some feeling beneath the level of conscious thought ("awakening," as Johnson says of the poetry of nature, "those ideas that slumber in the heart" ["Life of Dryden" I, 459]) which gesture toward the general nature that Johnson finds absent in the poetry. One might add that, as Johnson remarks on the absence of feeling in the poetry, his prose at the same time manifests a sadness, a pathos mirrored by the particular choice and disposition of words ("Their courtship was void of fondness and their lamentation of sorrow. Their wish was only to say what they hoped had never been said before" [I, 20])

The general nature by which metaphysical poetry is implicitly tested, then, is a composite experience (not a simple proposition or cognitive idea) toward which Johnson's prose moves; it is neither entirely part of his given experience, nor entirely outside it. His critical position here might be said to enlist the antithetical wit of the metaphysicals in its own imaginative statement about poetry. In this critical yet serendipitous relationship with his subject-matter, typical of Johnson's criticism in the *Lives*, his prose is as he describes Dryden's: "the criticism of a poet;... a gay and vigorous dissertation, where delight is mingled with instruction, and where the author proves his right to judgement by his power of performance" [Life of Dryden," I, 412).

III

Johnson's literary biography is governed by a rooted self-possession and an open responsiveness that comes under the heading of "nature." Johnson's "general nature" is, as Christopher Ricks explains, a set of *principles* that is applied in flexible and particular ways depending upon the context : "The task of criticism' was, for Johnson, to 'establish principles' (*Rambler*, No. 92), and he everywhere made clear that his refusal to elaborate and concatenate the needed concepts beyond a certain point (a point reached early) was not a refusal to continue to think, but a decision to think thereafter about the application of the principles and not to elaborate principles into theory." These are principles operating in Johnson's discussions of the lives as well as the works of the poets, and they condition the distinct "mingled" quality of the *Lives*. Johnson is aware of the historical and relative nature of language ("*words are the daughters of earth, and... things are the sons of heaven*." Language is only the instrument of science, and words are but the signs of ideas" [Preface to *Dictionary*, Greene, p. 310]), yet he does not hold an aesthetic view of literature, as Coleridge does. Literature, for Johnson, does not occupy its own separate realm, but is part of the ordinary experiences of life, offering potentially transforming pleasures to the reader, but essentially no different from the other pleasures of life.

In the *Lives* Johnson is additionally interested in the ways in which literature manifests the powers and the qualities of mind and sensibility of the authors themselves. This is not an expressive or naively biographical view of literature - one that imagines a correlation between the good person and the good workout a sophisticated understanding that, in the words of Henry James, "There is one point at which the

moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together, that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of mind of the producer. In proportion as that intelligence is fine will the novel, the picture, the statue partake of the substance of beauty and truth.' It is a similar thought to that of James, grounded in the commonality of "nature," that underlies Johnson's interest in the continuities and discontinuities of the lives and the works of the poets.

Johnson's way of writing Cowley's life, as Lawrence Lipking remarks, is to subordinate the biographical questions to the poetic, because Johnson felt that Cowley's life had been more fully treated (by Sprat, for example) than his poetry and because Bishop Hurd's 1772 selection of Cowley's works was prejudicial. In all the major lives Johnson records how poetic genius transforms the personal into the impersonal, the temporal into the eternal, and the individual's personality into the poet's character. While critics have tended to see Johnson's idea of poetic character as governed by rules that privilege the sublime and the heroic, the *Lives* actually trace *different* ways in which poets give shape and value to their experience. Just as Shakespeare's drama is not exclusively natural, so not all the poets in the *Lives* are poets of nature. While Donne is metaphysical, Milton is sublime, and Pope is idealist, only Dryden (and, in some degree, Cowley) is natural. Our sense of the differences between these writers is conveyed by the manner and engagement of Johnson's particular lives. Whereas the "Life of Milton" is monolithic and intellectual and the "Life of Pope" is subtle and minutely discriminatory, the "Life of Dryden" is easy, comfortable, and capacious, as if Johnson were relaxing in the company of a friend with whom he felt an inner kinship, and where the "repose" he associates with nature in the *Preface to Shakespeare* is felt, despite the many criticisms he makes of Dryden. The style of each of these lives is directly responsive to, and (in some way) imitative of, the qualities of mind of the poets discussed. Johnson is, as he says of Dryden, "always 'another and the same'; he does not exhibit a second time the same elegances in the same form" ("Life of Dryden," I, 418)

IV

The lives of Dryden, Pope, Milton, Swift, and Addison all register how poets "realize" their characters or "genius" in literature. For Johnson, making a character is tantamount to *re-member-ing* or making a self out of the unconscious, the past or a general human nature, this is not the absolute, hegemonic attitude often identified as Johnsonian by readers who have only a superficial knowledge of Johnson's texts and the flexibility and sophistication of eighteenth-century thinking. In one of the finest essays on the *Lives*, James Battersby discusses how "our conceptual grasp of character [in the *Lives*] depends upon Johnson's conjectures and surmises ... from the available facts and especially from the writings." It is important here to notice that the process is from text to character and not from biography to text: Johnson is not making interpretations of the author's text from what he knows about the author's life, but rather working toward a conception of poetic character and literary text that recognizes their differential yet unified structure. Although Milton's sublimity, Pope's idealizing aspiration, and Dryden's numinous energy all testify, as Johnson says in the "Life of Gay" (II, 282), to the "*mens divini*or," the divine soul in the poet,²⁴ Johnson does not reify reason or any other intellectual aspect that goes to the making of poetry; each poet and *oeuvre* is circumstantially contingent, and each poet realizes his character through his work differently.

The "Life of Milton," for example, depicts the dynamic relationship between man and poet more starkly and paradoxically than the other lives. The work of Lawrence Lipking, Stephen Fix, and Isobel Grundy has made it possible to appreciate that, despite Johnson's oppositional treatment of Milton in the biographic part of the life, he establishes continuities between Milton's life and work that have a different meaning when considered in association with *Paradise Lost*, a poem that Johnson considers as second only to Homer's *Iliad* in Western literature. Johnson detects human qualities common to Milton the man and Milton's poetry, but however much he disapproves of Milton's egotism, aloofness, and radical republicanism, he also recognizes that those qualities nurtured a mind peculiarly apt for writing *Paradise Lost*. Milton's "character" is actually not a given in this life, but created by the confluence of the personal and the poetic as traced by Johnson's text.

The biographical part of the text records Johnson's hostility to Milton's politics but it also registers a bafflement at the way a transcendent imagination enslaves itself to a political program whose fancied good entails the destruction of the political, social and religious orders of English civilization. For Johnson, Milton's republicanism is more serious than Edmund Waller's support of Cromwell, which, by comparison, is the mere weakness of a superficial man., Unlike Waller's political allegiances, obsequiously bending in the winds of change, Milton's republicanism is deep-rooted, founded on principle, and supported by his "envious hatred of greatness...sullen desire of independence., and pride disdainful of authority" (I, 157). At the same time this aloofness and pride fed Milton's poetic genius : "He had accustomed his imagination to unrestrained indulgence, and his conceptions therefore were extensive. The characteristic quality of his poem is sublimity" (I, 177). Johnson's treatment of Milton's personal characteristics and politics suggests that what starts out as childish distrust of the world issues into a poem of great and beautiful splendor. The qualities of mind exemplified by Milton's politics cease to be obnoxious to Johnson when they are enlisted in a poetic enterprise such as *Paradise Lost*.

This paradox also characterizes Milton's religious opinions. Johnson gives much weight to the fact that Milton distanced himself from all churches, both Protestant and Catholic ("he loves himself rather than truth" (I,106); see also (154-56). How does a man, Johnson seems to be asking, who has the "profoundest veneration" for the Holy Scriptures, and a "confirmed belief of the immediate and occasional agency of providence" (I, 155-56) live without visible worship? Johnson never answers this implied question, but, once he brings Milton's poetry into play, the paradox ceases to be problematic and becomes, instead, expressive of the complexity of Milton's character, for "Prayer certainly was not thought superfluous by him, who represents our first parents [i.e., Adam and Eve] as praying acceptably in the state of innocence, and efficaciously after their fall. That he lived without prayer can hardly be affirmed, his studies and meditations were an habitual prayer" (I, 156). Johnson does not say that because Adam and Eve are represented as praying in *Paradise Lost* therefore Milton himself must have prayed. Instead, he says that the intelligence in the poetry is so clearly imbued with spirituality that, given Milton's belief in the truths of Christianity, it is inconceivable that he did not also, *Somewhere*, acknowledge his human status through prayer.

It is in a "fictional" realm, then, between life and text, in which Johnson creates a representation of Milton's Character, that the above discrepancy vanishes. "In Milton every line breathes sanctity of thought and purity of manners" (I, 179). This suggests that the obstinacy which prevented Milton from accepting his own ordinariness, dissolves in the seriousness which comes upon his mind when filled by the "*mens divini*:" "The heat of Milton's mind might be said to sublimate his learning, to throw off into his work the spirit of science, unmingled with its grosser parts" (I,177). The movement of the "Life of Milton" from Milton's personal characteristics to the manifestation of qualities of mind in poetry is marked in Johnson's writing by the evaporation of personalized and ironic treatment. In *Paradise Lost* Milton's mind seems to come free, legitimately encounters no opposition from the world, and is able to expand to the limits of conception, and therefore Johnson registers Milton's ability to "realize fiction" (I, 170) : "To display the motives and actions of beings thus superior, so far as human reason can examine them or human imagination represent them, is the task this mighty poet has undertaken *and performed*" (I, 172). The poetic success of *Paradise Lost* in Johnson's estimation might be gauged by comparing his qualified response to the religious poems of Waller, Watts, and Cowley with his unqualified admiration for Milton's poem. Not only does the poem satisfy the demands of the epic ("the first praise of genius is due to the writer of an epick poem, as it requires and assemblage of all the powers which are singly sufficient for other compositions" [I, 170]), but it also overrides the imaginative and moral reservations Johnson usually has toward religious verse : "[*Paradise Lost*] contains the history of a miracle, of Creation and Redemption; it displays the power and the mercy of the Supreme Being : the probable therefore is marvellous, and the marvellous is probable" (I, 174).

The sublimity of *Paradise Lost* and the heroic aspect of Milton's character are not, however, the mode of being with which Johnson is most comfortable, nor the reality he found in Shakespeare's mingled drama. Milton, in contrast to Shakespeare, "would not have excelled in dramattick writing; he knew human nature only in the gross, and had never studied shades of character, nor the combinations of concurring or

the perplexity of contending passions. He had read much and knew what books could teach; but he had mingled little in the world, and was deficient in the knowledge which experience must offer" (I, 189). Johnson's terminology recognizes the impersonality of the poetic activity, tracing the path from the individual personality to the poetic character, but it also delimits the distance between Milton and himself. This distance might be thought of as a space in which Milton manifests himself, and his manifestation is dialectically related to Johnson's action of confronting and parrying Milton's otherness. The most polemical and strategic use of Socrates in Johnson's work occurs in this life, when Johnson aligns himself with Socrates against Milton's educational views, for it was Socrates's "labour to turn philosophy from the study of nature [by "nature" here Johnson means natural science] to speculations upon life, but the innovators whom I oppose [i.e., Milton and others] are turning off attention from life to nature" (I, 100). In keeping with this distancing of Milton, the words most remembered by readers of Johnson's critique of *Paradise Lost* are that "we desert our master, and seek for companions" (I, 184). This sentiment locates Milton's grandeur at a distance from Johnson the common reader, and — insofar as Johnson possesses and manifests the authority, he claims for his positions—from nature and humanity. Significantly, however, Johnson does not express this view through criticism or irony, but by demanding a *bond* with Milton in order to mitigate the loneliness revealed in and induced by the heroic and sublime imagination— Milton's loneliness and the loneliness Johnson feels as a reader.

In this respect the "Life of Pope" identifies Pope as a Miltonic poet who strives for the heroic and is similarly distanced from the common reader, while the "Life of Dryden" discovers what might be called a Shakespearean diversity, a congenial intimacy and insight into the human mind in the works of Dryden that should remind modern readers of the error of coupling Dryden and Pope as exemplars of a uniform Augustanism.

The "Life of Pope" also develops an argument about the relations between person and text. What distinguishes the "Life of Pope" as a profound and creative example of literary biography is the delicacy and insight with which it maintains the sense of difference-in-continuity between the moral and the literary aspects of Pope's life, and marks the psychological complexity and the artifice of Pope's poetry in Johnson's own sensitive representation.

Johnson's portrait of Pope's poetic and intellectual character, forming the imaginative center of the text (paras. 255-311 in Hill's edition), articulates the interrelationship between Pope's behavior, mind, body, and poetry governing Johnson's earlier biographical discussion of the main events in Pope's life (paras. 1-254) and his subsequent criticism of particular poems by Pope (paras. 312-86). In appreciating the seriousness of these passages consideration needs to be given to the detail and care of Johnson's depiction of Pope and his poetry. Johnson writes suggestively (paras. 255-63) about Pope's physical appearance, sensitivities and deformity, his behavioral eccentricities, and his delight in artifice ["In all his intercourse with mankind he had great delight in artifice and endeavoured to attain all his purposes by indirect and unsuspected methods" (III, 200)]. From these aspects of Pope's life arise Johnson's consideration of his intercourse with others and the ways he represented himself. Paragraphs 264-91 deal with Pope's conversation, sense of humor, frugality, hospitality, social qualities, letters and their rhetorical self-constructions, attitudes toward his own poetry, contemptuousness of others and public opinion, friends and attitudes to friendship, self importance, religion, and learning. Johnson's narrative then takes up these topics in the closing paragraphs of this central section of the life to treat Pope's intellectual character (paras. 293-96), his methods of poetic composition (paras. 297-302), and, in a famous comparison with Dryden, Pope's poetic character (paras. 303-11).

The formal comparison with Dryden stands in a line of similar set pieces in the history of criticism, in it Johnson encapsulates all the tension and the force of Pope's poetry and Pope's life. When read with a lively remembrance of Pope's poetry (not only the *Imitations of Horace* and the *Moral Essays* but also the *Essay on Criticism*, *The Rape of the Lock*, and the translation of Homer's *Iliad*, which Johnson considered the greatest of Pope's poems) Johnson's portrait of Pope is recognized as being of a mind elevated to grandeur and dignity, and at the same time painfully *unable* to embody the knowledge for which it strives : "Pope had likewise genius; a mind active, ambitious, and adventurous, always investigating, always

aspiring; in its widest searches still longing to go forward, in its highest flights still wishing to be higher; always imaging something greater than it knows, always endeavouring more than it can do" (III, 217).

It is not immediately clear how this energy of mind can be construed as weakness, especially since "It is the proper ambition of the heroes in literature to enlarge the boundaries of knowledge by discovering and conquering new regions of the intellectual world" (*Rambler* 137, II, 362), but whereas Milton was able to conquer and *contain* within the imaginative structure of *Paradise Lost* those new regions, Pope's poetry is registered as partially unrealized, only *striving toward a vision* that is never quite brought into focus and never quite embodied.

The metaphor of the body in the above statement about Pope's imagination is apt for Johnson's text since he gives much weight to Pope's physiognomy and bodily experiences. He sees Pope's crippled and hunchbacked body, with great tact and seriousness, as the material basis for Pope's particular imagination, and as a metaphor for his poetry. As with Milton's blindness, which Johnson invokes as a pure factual component to the extraordinary inner light of Milton's poetry—as if in compensation for his outer darkness—so Johnson's references to Pope's twisted body are offered entirely without irony and with deep insight into the connectedness of different sides of our being at the deepest levels.

He was then so weak as to stand in perpetual need of female attendance; extremely sensible of cold, so that he wore a kind of fur doublet under a shirt of very coarse warm linen with fine sleeves. When he rose he was invested in boddice made of stiff canvas, being scarce able to hold himself erect till they were laced, and he then put on a flannel waistcoat. One side was contracted. His legs were so slender that he enlarged their bulk with three pair of stockings, which were drawn on and off by the maid; for he was not able to dress or undress himself, and neither went to bed nor rose without help. His weakness made it very difficult for him to be clean. (III, 197)

This important passage forms part of Johnson's extended exploration of the pain and inconvenience under which Pope labored, and its poignancy is perhaps sharpened by Johnson's personal experience of physical awkwardness and suffering (so fully treated by Boswell in the *Life*). Pope's physique was important, to himself and to his contemporaries: he writes about his body frequently, and others attack him for it. Given Johnson's awareness of the disparity between intellectual gestures and physical actions, and given the readiness with which he criticizes Pope's rhetorical pretentiousness (e.g. para. 280), it is remarkable that Johnson presents Pope's physical being without any tonal inflection. The dignity of the above passage lies, partly, in the recognition of the possibility of making crushing satire on Pope, and choosing *not* to do so in the name of a larger vision. Close to the surface of the passage lies a parody along the lines of *the Rape of The Lock*: Pope being "invested" in armor by the domestic deities before going out to do battle with the world. There is also the implicit contrast between Pope's weakness and dependence on others and his intellectual (and financial) independence, and the imaginative heights of his poetry. Johnson's vision here sensitively connects and contrasts Pope's human weakness — the physical weakness shown up repeatedly in the perpetual striving for transcendence of the earthly in the poetry — with a cool rootedness that seems to lie outside life itself.

While Johnson dwells on the particulars of Pope's person and activities, he unobtrusively links them with their effect on the world. In Johnson's text Pope is not allowed to slip into the privacy of his materiality or to escape through his imagination. Hence, the range of Johnson's references become more and more inclusive, from the observation that "He is said to have been beautiful in his infancy; but he was of a constitution originally feeble and weak" (para. 255), to the recognition that "The indulgence and accommodation which his sickness required had taught him all the unpleasing and unsocial qualities of valetudinary man" (para 259), to the idea that as "He was fretful and easily displeased, [so he] allowed himself to be capriciously resentful" (para 265). From the perception of the shaping power of Pope's physical nature, Johnson moves into a discussion of Pope's social qualities as presented through his letters (paras. 273-88), and then on to the articulation of Pope's intellectual qualities and poetic genius (paras. 293-311).

That intellectual portrait connects Pope's striving, disembodied genius with other aspects of intellectual skill: with good sense ("a prompt and intuitive perception of consonance and propriety"), a quality that Johnson identifies as the "constituent and fundamental principle" of Pope's mind (para. 293), as well as with Pope's strong memory and "incessant and unwearied diligence" (paras. 295-96). These qualities, combined with Pope's genius, clearly make for a very high degree of imaginative excellence and poetic finish of the kind that made *the Rape of The Lock* for Johnson the "most airy, the most ingenious, and the most delightful of all his compositions" (III, 101). Unlike Shakespeare or Dryden, who "seldom struggled after supreme excellence, but snatched in haste what was within his reach" ("Life of Dryden," I, 464), Pope "was never content with mediocrity when excellence could be attained" (III, 217). But Pope's excellence also raises in Johnson's mind the idea of the compulsive and unresolved drive of Pope's efforts, registered by the frequently repeated words "always" and "still" : Pope is "always investigating... always aspiring... still longing... still wishing... always imagining... always endeavouring." Recognizing that critical judgement required the contextualization of Pope's linguistic purity and finish in terms *other* than itself, Johnson (within a few paragraphs) invokes Dryden as a standard of a *different* and evidently more encompassing form of genius by which to measure Pope : "Of genius, that power which constitutes a poet; that quality without which judgement is cold and knowledge is inert; that energy which collects, combines, amplifies, and animates — the superiority must, with some hesitation, be allowed to Dryden" (III, 222, para. 310)

Since the "Life of Pope" was the last of the lives to be written (completed 5 March 1781) and the "Life of Dryden" was one of the first (completed between 21 July and early August 1778), this comparison between Pope and Dryden draws upon Johnson's earlier discussion of Dryden in developing the critical discriminations under consideration. The reader is clearly expected to recall those earlier arguments. The essential point about the "Life of Dryden" for the comparison is that it had traced out a natural rather than a heroic character for Dryden most typically exemplified in his translations of Horace and Lucretius (in *Sylvae* [1685]) and of Homer, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Ovid (in *Fables* [1700]). While Johnson does not hesitate to criticize Dryden's temporizing ("in the meanness and servility of hyperbolic adulation I know not whether, since the days in which the Roman emperors were deified, he has been ever equalled" [I, 399]), his moral judgement is modified by the power of Dryden's writing.

This poetic power, as it were redeems the baseness of Dryden's flattery ("he had all forms of excellence, intellectual and moral, combined in his mind, with endless variation" [I, 399]), it administers to the pleasure that Johnson finds necessary to all reading {"Works of imagination excel I by their allurements and delight; by their power of attracting and detaining the attention" [I, 454]}, and it issues into the paradoxical qualities that define the essence of all Dryden's writing for Johnson, both prose and verse :

none of his prefaces were ever thought tedious. They have not the formality of a settled style, in which the first half of the sentence betrays the other. The clauses are never balanced, nor the periods modelled; every word seems to drop by chance, though it falls into its proper place. Nothing is cold or languid; the whole animated, and vigorous; what is little is gay; what is great, is splendid ... Though all is easy, nothing is feeble; though all seems careless, there is nothing harsh; and though since his earlier works more than a century has passed they have nothing yet uncouth or obsolete.

He who writes much will not easily escape a manner, such a recurrence of particular modes as may be easily noted. Dryden is always "another and the same"; he does not exhibit a second time the same elegances in the same form, nor appears to have any art other than that of expressing with clearness what he thinks with vigour. (I, 418)

This passage may start by considering Dryden's critical prose; it quickly becomes clear that Johnson is responding to a deep imaginative dimension of Dryden's poetic mind. What distinguishes Dryden's genius for Johnson is its being "another and the same"; this quality marks a continuity and not a discreteness of self and world in Dryden's writings; he uses his art as a means of registering and embodying the materiality of the world and of experience while also, apparently, circumventing the demands of the ego, expatiating confidently and pleasurably in his own poetic creations. These complex qualities of Dryden's writing are registered and *recreated* in Johnson's own descriptive prose as it traces

the movement and clarity of Dryden's mind in its articulation of positions clearly felt by Johnson to be general and pleasurable.

Dryden's genius is, as the comparison in the "Life of Pope" observes, one that "collects, combines, amplifies, and animates," and its "nature" locates the self firmly in the world of differential experiences. Pope's genius, by comparison, is one that strives relentlessly to transcend that world of nature and commonality, although the tension that Johnson detects in that effort also indicates that Pope cannot wholly leave the world behind. Certainly, the consequences of Pope's drive take a toll on his moral being.

With such faculties and such dispositions he excelled every other 'writer in *poetical prudence*; he wrote in such a manner as might expose him to few hazards. He used almost always the same fabric of verse...

Pope was not content to satisfy; he desired to excel, and therefore always endeavoured *to do his best*: he did not court the candour, but dared the judgement of his reader, and, expecting no indulgence from others, he shewed none to himself. He examined lines and words with minute and punctilious observation, and retouched every part with indefatigable diligence, till he had left nothing to be forgiven. (III, 219, 221)

The literary qualities of his description have, as with Dryden and Milton, moral and psychic ramifications, and reflect the relation of reader to poems and readers to poet. Pope's Surgency ("desire to excel") has two direct consequences: it diminishes the poet's engagement with the world ("expose him to few hazards"), and it establishes an aloofness ("he did not court the candour but dared the judgement of the reader"); both have the effect of cutting him off from the reader *and from himself* ("he had left nothing to be forgiven"). To have nothing to be forgiven exempts the human being from redemption and frustrates the human contact and the self-forgiveness that comes with the movement of self toward the other.

The stance described by Johnson identifies a poetic consciousness that took the form of opposition between Pope and the world:

Ask you what Provocation I had?

The strong Antipathy of Good to Bad.

(*Epilogue to the Satires*, II, 197-98)

and a discreteness of consciousness that Johnson finds even in such great poems as *The Rape of the Lock* when, notwithstanding the praise and pleasure the poem occasions, he pursues John Dennis's observation of a flaw in the poem: "It is remarked by Dennis... that the machinery is superfluous; that by all the bustle of preternatural operation the main event is neither hastened nor retarded (III, 235).

Johnson, of course, refers here to the crucial point in Pope's poem in which Ariel, one of Belinda's mock-heroic superintending deities, is unable to help her when she is "threatened" by a suitor who intends to cut off a lock of her hair. Ariel's helplessness (III, 143-46) is significant in various ways. It is a mark of the necessary separation of the real from the fantasy world in which Belinda lives that conditions her growth in the poem as she deals with the expectation of compromise in social and personal relationships. For all of their brilliance in dramatizing Belinda's beauty, the sylphs are disembodied and beyond real human passions. In this sense the sylphs (the poem's "machinery") function in the poem as the gods do in Homer's *Iliad*, who, as Felicity Rosslyn has beautifully demonstrated, draw attention to human limits (gods are immortal while people are mortal), and therefore shed grace and dignity on human aspirations as well as on the pure pity the gods feel for mortals on the other side of an insuperable divide:

Zeus is the machine by which the imagination can grasp what humanity is from the outside... when the poet tells us that gods and men are alike, he helps our imaginations conceive of ourselves on the grandest scale; and when he says in the same breath that we have nothing in common worth mentioning, for gods are immortal, he helps us take all our actions more seriously, for human actions are taken under the sentence of death."

Pope has appropriated Homer's divine machinery in an ironic and comic manner as a "divine shadow-play of the humanly possible" (Rosslyn, "Of Gods and Men," P. 17), and Johnson recognizes that the invention and deployment of the sylphs is a stroke of original genius animating the poem : "In this work are exhibited in a very high degree the two most engaging powers of an author : *new things are made familiar, and familiar things are made new*. A race of arial people never heard of before is presented to us in a manner so clear and easy, that the reader seeks for no further information" (III, 233—my emphasis).

Yet Johnson's description of the sylphs suggests another way of understanding their function in the poem. For Pope's conception of the sylphs is different from Homer's gods in one crucial aspect, for in the *Iliad* the heroes are *aware* of the presence of the gods and experience their power in their very actions and encounters, whereas Pope's Belinda is aware of nothing but herself in her refined, artificial world. Johnson therefore notes that "The sylphs cannot be said to help or to oppose, and it must be allowed to imply *some want of art* that their power has not been sufficiently intermingled with the action" (HI, 235). That Johnson observes that the sylphs have "Powers and passions proportionate to their operation" (III, 232) simply draws attention to their circumscribed function. Clarissa's choral speech (V.9-34), designed, as Pope himself says in a note, to open the moral Of the poem, goes unheeded by all in the poem :

but since, alas! frail beauty must decay,
 Curled or uncurled, since locks will turn to grey;
 Since painted, or not painted, all shall fade,
 And she who scorns a man, must die a maid;
 What then remains but well our power to use,
 And keep good-humour still whate'er we lose

(V.25-30)

Johnson's qualifications, then, prompt the reader to reflect on the precise terms of his strong praise of the poem. One notices, for example, that Johnson's description of the poetic powers of the poem use the words "new" and "familiar" rather than "new" and "natural," as he does in the "Life of Cowley" when articulating his conception of true wit: "In this work are exhibited in a very high degree the two most engaging powers of an author: new things are made familiar, and familiar things are made new" (III, 233). "Familiarity" does not carry the same powerful poetic appeal in Johnson's thought as "nature." If, as I have argued above, Johnson thought of the deepest poetry as being "at once natural and new," then his syntax in the passage on the *Rape* suggests that the making of one thing into another is that poem is somehow divided and incomplete. Newness and familiarity in the *Rape* are kept separate, and, furthermore, the two terms are kept scrupulously apart in the two paragraphs Johnson gives to elaborating these qualities in the *Rape* (paras. 338-39). Johnson's syntax, prose structure, and thought, therefore, reflect the divided and double consciousness in the *Rape*, played out in its imaginative structure, that is of a piece with the particular type of genius that he finds in all of Pope's writing, and that is echoed in a different register, in Pope's life. These are the qualities in Pope to which Johnson responds when he finds that, in comparing Dryden's *Alexander's Feast* with Pope's *Song for St. Cecilia's Day*, "Pope is read with calm acquiescence, Dryden with turbulent delight; Pope hangs upon the ear, and Dryden finds the passes of the mind" (III, 227). This too is why Johnson identifies the specific *limits* of Pope's type of wit in the "Life of Cowley," at the beginning of the *Lives of the Poets* : "But Pope's account of wit is undoubtedly erroneous; he depresses it below its natural dignity, and reduces it from strength of thought to happiness of language" (I, 19).

Nonetheless, Johnson's complex response to Pope maintains throughout a fine awareness of the complexity of the poet himself and of his poetry. The "life of Pope" asks for Pope's qualities to be taken in two always coexistent ways : Pope's heroic aspiring genius is perfectly at home in an insubstantial form, mirrored in the great dexterity of his couplet verse; at the same time, this perfection has serious human consequences, both for the man in his relations with the world, but also as replicated in the experiential range and consciousness of the poetry Pope "was not content to satisfy ...[he] left nothing to be forgiven".

V

Not all poets rise to such levels as Milton, Dryden, and Pope; the lives of these poets strike a more clearly memorializing or redemptive tone. The "redemptiveness" of the *Lives* is a delicate notion. Although the term "redemptive" is the right word for Johnson's work, it is not meant to convey any theological or strictly religious meaning. The *Lives* are among the first biographies in English literature to have stripped themselves of medieval hagiographic overtones. The "Life of Rochester," for example, is a good example of how Johnson, notwithstanding his deeply religious nature, declines the opportunity to make a Christian interpretation out of a person's life and work. Johnson admires Bishop Gilbert Burnet's *Some passages in the life and Death of John, Earl of Rochester* (1680) for its elegance, argument, and piety, and recognizes the changes of behavior and belief at the end of Rochester's libertine life documented by Burnet ("life of Rochester," 1, 222). At the same time, the "Life of Rochester" bears no resemblance to the hagiographic structure of Burnet's work. For the clergyman, Rochester's late conversion is exemplary and evidence of providential intervention in human affairs. Johnson, however, internalizes hope; it manifests itself or does not — in life and action. Though Johnson may be happy that Rochester *may* have saved his soul, the weight of his life of Rochester falls on his deeds and works: "every where [in his works] may be found tokens of a mind which study might have carried to excellence" (1, 226).

Johnson's biographical method is, therefore, not providential, but it does register the moral and spiritual power of a person's life with regard to the quality and influence of his work. In the case of Joseph Addison, Johnson is quite aware that "to write and to live are very different" (11,125), and that a degree of skepticism is necessary in assessing Addison's moral professions. Yet, notwithstanding Johnson's reluctance to place Addison in the higher category of writers, his treatment of Addison's writing emphasizes the moral and redeeming power of the writer's life.

It is justly observed by Tickell that [Addison] employed wit on the side of virtue and religion. He not only made the proper use of wit himself, but taught it to others; and from his time it has been generally subservient to the cause of reason and of truth... This is an elevation of literary character, "above all Greek, above all Roman fame." (11, 125-26)

Yet, "Addison is to pass through futurity protected only by his genius" (II, 126), and Johnson's assessment of Addison's contributions to English literature in the form of the familiar essay perfectly capture the strengths and weaknesses of that "genius." *The Spectator* was instrumental in transforming middle-class sensibility in the early eighteenth century by "regulat[ing] the practice of daily conversation" (II, 92); yet notwithstanding this powerful cultural intervention, Johnson also registers the particular limitation of Addison's writings:

His prose is the model of the middle style; on grave subjects not formal, on light occasions not groveling; pure without scrupulosity, and exact without elaboration; always equable, and always easy, without glowing words or pointed sentences. Addison never deviates from his track to snatch a grace; he seeks no ambitious ornaments, and tries no hazardous innovations. His page is always luminous, but never blazes in unexpected splendor. (II. 149)

The weaknesses of these apparently strong qualities are evident in the modesty and mediocrity (in the eighteenth-century sense of politeness, delicacy, and moderation) that Johnson's words carefully seek to delineate, and they become clearer when compared with Johnson's passages on Dryden's energetic prose ("Life of Dryden," 1, 411-13) and with Johnson's own prose. Equally important, however, is that alongside the *literary* judgement of Addison's prose—of his literary character—is the sense that the purity of Addison's life and thought is what redeems his work and makes for a "literary character, 'above all Greek, above all Roman fame.'"

This "redemption" is less equivocal in the case of Isaac Watts, one of the poets added to the *Lives* at Johnson's request. Watts's religious poetry is registered as being good but not great: Johnson did not feel that Christian devotion was a suitable subject for poetry, because, as he writes in the "Life of Waller," "Contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul, cannot be poetic. Man

admitted to implore the mercy of his Creator and plead the merits of his Redeemer is already in a higher state than poetry can confer" (1, 291). He rates Watts as having "done better what no man has done well" (III, 310). But Watts's piety penetrated whatever he touched ("As piety predominated in his mind, it is diffused over his works" (III, 309), so that Johnson's focus in this life does not linger on the works as literary creations, but focuses on the piety and innocence of this selfless man. Significantly, the very last word of the "Life of Watts" is "God" (III, 311).

Rochester, Addison, and Watts are all writers who, in one way or another, have some substance. Johnson's secular redemptiveness works differently for writers who have less substance, who are more absent from the historical imagination. The "Life of Halifax" is a case in point. This is a very short text (fifteen paragraphs in Hill's edition) of a small poet who had extensive political influence and extended significant patronage to other poets of the Restoration. Yet this life proposes a complicated relation between Halifax's power as a patron and the quality of his own poetry, and recognizes (though does not judge) that Halifax's poetry was, inevitably, overvalued because of his political influence. The moral complexities of this situation, however, are dissolved by the fact of Halifax's death, which makes possible the recognition of the diminishing attractions of his poetic output. Johnson's manner of handling the movement from Halifax's life to his memory, after death, is most illuminating:

Many a blandishment was practised upon Halifax which he would never have known, had he no other attractions than those of his poetry, of which a short time has withered the beauties. It would now be esteemed no honour, by a contributor to the monthly bundles of verses, to be told that, in strains either familiar or solemn, he sings like Montague. (II, 47)

These are the last words of the text. The fading beauties of Halifax's poetry are implicitly connected to his death. The movement from power to mortality is the movement from "Halifax" to "Montague," Charles Montague being the given name and Halifax the earldom acquired as he came of age, and which was associated with political power. Johnson's thought moves in two directions at once: away from Halifax's political world as death comes, and toward the private world of Montague, whose presence and reality are remembered in the text even though his poems have been forgotten. Without invoking a religious dimension, Johnson's paragraph simply registers some reality about the *difference* between the business of the world and the realities of death and time, and in registering that difference casts a kind of grace on the life of Charles Montague that it would otherwise not have had.

The symbolic and metaphoric commemorativeness of the *Lives* might be summed up in a short passage from the "Life of Parnell." At the opening of this life Johnson remembers his dead friend Goldsmith :

a man of such variety of powers and felicity of performance that he always seemed to do best that which he was doing ... I have ... this gratification from my attempt that it gives me an opportunity of paying due tribute to the memory of Goldsmith.

ho gar geras esti thanonton (II, 49)

Johnson's Greek quotation comes from the *Odyssey* Book 24, where the spirit of Amphimedon addresses the spirit of Agamemnon: "Thus we perished, Agamemnon, and even now our bodies still lie uncared-for in the halls of Odysseus; for our friends in each man's home know naught as yet — our friends who might wash the black blood from our wounds and lay our bodies out with wailing; *for that is the due of the dead*" (186-190).

"Paying tribute to the memory" of Goldsmith is metaphorically and metonymically seen as washing the dead body, a narrative act whereby the absent spirits of the dead poets are released through memory and ritual so that they may find their way from the past into the present. Not only is the washing of the dead body what the dead need, it is also what the living need for their fulfillment. Memory here touches both those who are gone and those who remain. Johnson's prose inculcates that fulfillment, and gives it an authority. Such commemoration is religious in a non-doctrinal sense; it is also an act of witnessing, and therefore political in nature, because it shifts the locus of authority from the material and temporal to the eternally embodied, by giving voice to others, empowering them to manifest themselves.

Commemorativeness, therefore, suggests that Johnson's skeptical exploration of human division and failure is not, as they are habitually interpreted, necessarily tragic. Death, indeed, always comes as a blow, and, in an obvious sense, is always final. But both the structure and the style of the *Lives*, by taking into themselves the fractured nature of human endeavor and the distance between the past of the poets and the present of the reader, imitate and enunciate a triumph in time not unlike what we find in Shakespeare's comedy. In this sense the *Lives of the Poets* is a comic work. It is comic too insofar as it dramatizes and transforms an important Christian theme, one shared by Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Montaigne's *Essays*, and Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly* — that *because* humankind is divided and foolish, *therefore* are we susceptible of grace. But this is a grace which manifests itself, and keeps the consciousness in the *present world*, while enlarging that world with human difference normally beyond experience. Paradoxically, grace reveals itself at the point in the *Lives* where different discourses meet; where the impermanent imperfect details of a person's life touch the potentially permanent, immortal realm of art. Johnson's art as a biographer—which is also his art as a literary critic — bridges the gap between the two, making grace the best effect of his writing.

INTRODUCTION

Style as Meaning

BETWIXT the formation of words and that of thought there is this difference," said Cicero, "that that of the words is destroyed if you change them, that of the thoughts remains, whatever words you think proper to use." This is a clear statement of the view of style and meaning which today may be conveniently called "the ornamental." The ancient rhetoricians all seem to have something like this in mind. They may stress the need of meaning, or may in their metaphysics insist on the interdependence of matter and form, but when they reach the surface of meaning, the plane of most detailed organization, they are not able to speak so as to connect this with meaning. It is as if, when all is said for meaning, there remains an irreducible something that is superficial, a kind of scum—which they call style. One may consult as representative the whole treatment of rhetorical figures in Quintilian's *Institute*.

There is the opposite theory of style, one that has been growing on us since the seventeenth century. "So many *things*, almost in an equal number of *words*," says Sprat. And Pascal, "La vraie éloquence se moque de l'éloquence." And somewhat later Swift, "Proper words in proper places, make the true definition of a style"; and Buffon, "Style is simply the order and movement one gives to one's thoughts." By the nineteenth century the doctrine is proclaimed on every hand—very explicitly, for example, by Cardinal Newman:

Thought and speech are inseparable from each other. Matter and expression are parts of one: style is a thinking out into language ... When we can separate light and illumination, life and motion, the convex and the concave of a curve... then will it be conceivable that the . . . intellect should renounce its own double.

In one of the best books on style to appear in our own day, Mr. Middleton Murry has said:

Style is not an isolable quality of writing; it is writing itself.

It is hardly necessary to adduce proof that the doctrine of identity of style and meaning is today firmly established. This doctrine is I take it, one from which a modern theorist hardly can escape, or hardly wishes to.

The chief difficulty with the modern doctrine of style lies in its application to rhetorical study. The difficulty appears in two ways partly in the implicit abandonment of the doctrine when rhetorical study is attempted, but more largely in a wide, silent rejection of the whole system of rhetoric. "We have done with the theory of style", proclaims an eminent critic in Crocean vein, "with metaphor, simile, and all the paraphernalia of Graeco-Roman rhetoric." Now it must be contended that we have not done with "metaphor" —that we still have an important use for the term. But for scarcely any other term of rhetoric have we better than a shrug. We no longer are willing to take seriously a set of terms which once—for centuries— were taken seriously, and which must, no matter how unhappy their use, have stood for something. In throwing away the terms it is even possible we have thrown away all definite concept of the things they once stood for. The realities of antithesis and climax, for example, are perhaps less and less a part of our consciousness. But literary history without these old realities and their old terms is impossible; without an evaluation of them it is superficial. The fact is that Cicero used "figures" of this and that sort— moreover, he wrote criticism about them. Hooker and Donne and Johnson used such figures too. And the old terms when used to describe these old writings do mean something. We cannot avoid admitting that we recognize certain things as denoted by the terms, that we know the nominal definitions. Furthermore, we are not ready to call Cicero and the rest simply bad writers. We may insist; and properly, that the accounts they give of their devices, their theories of rhetoric, are insufficient—even baneful as guides to composition; as for the living use they made of what they called "devices," their actual saying of things, in this we see that their intuition was better than their theory.

ANY discourse about a definition of "style" is fruitless if it concerns itself too simply with protesting: style *is this* or *is that*. Definitions are impervious to the "lie direct," mere "intrenchant air" for the sword of evidence. The only reason a term *should* mean something is the history of its application, the fact that it *has* meant something. We may say that dubious terms have a kind of repertoire of related meanings. But the meaning of a term in a given instance is what any man decides to make it, and if I dislike what he makes it, I may not tell him he is mistaken.

Nevertheless I may dislike it, and justly. This is the problem in facing definitions—that they do often bother us as bad definitions and make us wish vehemently to reject them. The basis for our uneasiness is ultimately one of relevance, relevance of a definition to the principles of the whole science of which the term is accepted as a part. If there is not a fixed real meaning for a term, there is at least an ideal one, a something to which the term *should* refer if it is to be used in its science without producing nonsense. It is the purpose of definition to determine *what* is referred to, and the business of him who formulates a definition to determine what *should be* referred to, as most relevant to the presiding science. The first step towards forming a definition, a theory, of "style" must be taken in the science of literary esthetics, more specifically in a consideration of the nature of words as esthetic medium.

*It is the nature of words to mean. To consider words only as sounds, like drum taps, or to consider written letters as patterned objects, as in alphabet soup, is the same as to consider a Stradivarius as material for kindling wood. There is, to be sure, a certain truth in the contention that it is useless to speak of the limits of each art. If a painter of abstractions succeeded in conveying a concept which he described as rhythmic, it would be pointless to contend that such a concept should properly be expressed in music. Insofar as the painting did succeed as an expression, there would simply be that expression. On the other hand, even Croce will admit that different artistic intuitions need different media for their "externalization." Even when the various media are considered as forming a continuum, a spectrum, one point in the spectrum is not another point. Red is not green. Stone is not B flat Stone can be used for a statue; B flat cannot. Words can be used to "mean" in a way that nothing else can. In various senses the other arts may be called expressive or communicative. But it is not in any such senses that words are expressive. When Maritain says that "music *imitates* with sound and rhythms ... the movements of the soul" and when Dewey says that architecture "expresses ... enduring values of collective human life," they are speaking of the kind of representation we should speak of if we said that the images of autumn, nightfall, and a dying fire in Shakespeare's sonnet stand for his sense of mortality, or if we said that the whole poem is a symbol of his sense of mortality. While the music and the architecture *are* the symbols of what they represent, the words of a writing must *express* a meaning which *is* a symbol. "A poem should not mean But be," writes Mr. Archibald MacLeish. But a poem cannot *be* in the simple sense that a statue or a piece of Venetian glass is. For each thing insofar as it *is*, must *be*, have *being*, according to its nature. The nature of words is to mean, and a poem *is* through its meaning.*

There are such things as the Caroline shape poems, the winged or altar shapes of Herbert or Quarles; there are the typographical oddities of E. E. Cummings. There are illuminated manuscripts or illustrated books, Gothic books of Gospels, arabesque texts of the Koran on mosque walls. And people may even have wondered what they ought to think of Cummings. But nobody thinks that the Gospel suffers when not read in the Book of Kells. It is clear that in the case of illuminations and illustrations of a text there is not a single art expression, but two running side by side. Words, music, costume, and stage may make one expression in an opera; the poetry of Vachel Lindsay read aloud and the accompanying dance may have made one expression; it may be possible to conceive a text so referred to and interrelated with a series of pictures that the two make one expression. Yet it remains true that what we call literature, whether prose or poetry, has not been a graphic medium. It has not been possible or worth while to employ words in this way.

But language is spoken before it is written; even after it is written it is implicitly spoken; and language as sound has potentialities far beyond those of language as written or visual. Sound is in some

sense the medium of literature, no matter how words are considered as expressive. What is more questionable is how near this medium ever can come to being that of music. Sound in its conventional semantic value is certainly not a musical medium. Further it is not musical in its whole complex of suggestive or directly imitative values, onomatopoeia, and all the more mysteriously felt shades of sound propriety.

A more difficult problem of sound in literature is that of meter and such associates as rhyme and alliteration. But it is usual to insist that these elements of verse are in some way expressive. They express the emotion of poetic experience; or, by inducing in us a pattern of expectancy and playing against that the surprise of variation, they make us realize more intensely both sense and emotion. Or, the verse of a whole poem may be considered as a form, an aspect or way of being known, which gives unity and particularity to the whole—makes it the special poetic symbol that it is. It may be possible to say that this second kind of expressiveness is on the same level as that of music and architecture mentioned above, a direct symbol of experience. But in this case it will be necessary to remember that the expression of the verse coalesces with and is in effect the same as that of the words in their semantic function.

Here we might let the question of language as sound medium rest were it not for the persistent appearance of the mysterious critical term "prose rhythm." From what has been said of verse it is plain that a prose rhythm is conceivable—that is, some alternation of sounds akin to meter, though more variable. If such a succession of sounds could be detected with certainty in any body of prose, and if one had no sense that this was unconnected with the meaning or detracted from it, then it would have to be admitted that in the given case a prose rhythm as an expressive medium did exist. The general question, then, is not whether there *can* be a prose rhythm but whether there *is*. And a particular question, such as that concerning English literature, is but the general question narrowed—whether there *is*. Certain things may be asserted: I. The rhetoricians of antiquity found in Greek and Latin oratory rhythm which they analyzed almost as definitely as verse meter particularly in the sequence of syllables ending clauses, the *cursus*. II. The *cursus* was also a part of Medieval Latin prose. III. There are some who hold that variations of the *cursus* occur in English prose. IV. There is, however, no agreement, but the widest divergence of opinion, among those who have made extended studies of the nature of rhythm in English prose. Their number is not small (and each is at odds in some respect with almost all the others): those who would scan, or make meter; those who are interested in some vaguer kind of periodicity, time measurement, those who rely on the *cursus*, and those who find rhythm in the movement of phrases.

It would be within the province only of a very special investigation to dare say what English prose rhythm *is*. And I have admitted above that the question is not whether there *can* be a prose rhythm. Yet there are some things that can be said about the possibilities of prose rhythm. If it is a quality of sound, it is either expressive of something or not. If not (if, say, it is like the number of times the letter "t" occurs on a given page), it is not a medium of art and therefore claims no interest; it is not in fact prose rhythm at all. Secondly, if it is expressive, it expresses either the same meaning as the words do otherwise, or it does not. If it expresses the same meaning, it may, like meter, express perhaps from the same level as words do otherwise, perhaps from a level more like that of music. These possibilities are admissible.²³ But thirdly, if it expresses other than the same meaning, then it must express some meaning which is proper to nonverbal sounds—some kind of musical meaning. This is perhaps conceivable, that words should do two separate things, convey their language meaning, and at the same time be a nonlinguistic tune—perhaps even harmonious with the language meaning. This, however, seems improbable in view of the limited musical value of spoken word sounds. It is, like the pictorial value of print in typographical poems, very slight.²⁴ Music is not written in words, but in tones and time.

The notion of a separate music is further crippled if we consider that it is impossible for any system of sound in prose to be unconnected with its meaning—that is, neither contribute to it nor detract from it. Suppose a man to be writing a double composition, both prose and music; then in the use of any given piece of language he must, consciously or unconsciously, choose for the meaning or for the music. (It is impossible that two such disconnected effects should often coincide.) Or, to change the sense of "must" he must choose for the meaning and sacrifice the music, for the meaning of words is their nature, while the music of words is negligible. "In the vast majority of those words which can be said to have an

independent musical value," says Mr. Middleton Murry, "the musical suggestion is at odds with the meaning. When the musical suggestion is allowed to predominate, decadence of style has begun."

Let me close this part of the discussion by indicating my own notion of what ought to be called prose rhythm—if something must be called that. The notion has been well expressed by H.W. Fowler : "A sentence or a passage is rhythmical if, when said aloud, it falls naturally into groups of words each well fitted by its length and intonation for its place in the whole and its relation to its neighbors. Rhythm is not a matter of counting syllables and measuring the distance between accents." Prose rhythm is a matter of emphasis it is putting the important words where they sound important. It is a matter of coherence; it is putting the right idea in the right place.

"Rhythm" as applied to prose is a metaphor. "Rhythm," when used literally, means "measure" or "regularity," and since the movement of good prose is precisely *not* regular but varied with the sense, the union of the terms "prose" and "rhythm" has been none the happier.

iii

A FIRST step towards a theory of style might be the reflection that one may say different things about the same topic—or different things which are very much alike. A rose and a poppy are different, but both are flowers. Sidney writes, "Come, sleep! O sleep, the certain knot of peace, etc." Shakespeare writes, "O sleep, O gentle sleep, Nature's soft nurse, etc.," and again, "Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care, etc." It is not that these writers have had the same meaning and have "dressed" it, or expressed it, differently. Rather they have had the same subject, the benefits of sleep, or beneficent sleep, but have had different thoughts, different meanings, which have found expression in different language. They have expressed different, if similar, meanings. Even Betterton, when he recasts one of Shakespeare's passages on sleep, has not merely reexpressed the same meaning; he has actually changed the meaning. Different words make different meanings.

It is true that meaning is not identical with words. Meaning is the psychic entity, the something in the mind—for which material is not adequate. In the language of the scholastics : *Voces referuntur ad res significandas mediante conceptione intellectus*. Nevertheless, words do determine meanings relentlessly. To come at it another way, meanings vary persistently with variations of words. It may be well to recall one of Newman's figures, "the convex and the concave of a curve." The convex is not the concave, but if we conceive the curve as a line, then every change in the concave produces a corresponding change in the convex. There is that much truth in the contention of Croce : "Language is a perpetual creation. What has been linguistically expressed is not repeated ... Language is not an arsenal of arms already made, and it is not a *vocabulary*, a collection of abstractions, or a cemetery of corpses more or less well embalmed."

We may be tempted to believe that we have at length distilled words or style away from meaning when we think of *bad* style. It might be plausible and would probably be useful to formulate some rule like this : Style occurs in isolation only when it is bad, when it fails to coincide with meaning. This might be almost the truth where writing is so bad that it is meaningless—for example, in errors of expression made by one unfamiliar with a language, matters of syntax and elementary vocabulary. But poor expression in the wider sense cannot be reduced to this. The nature of words is against it—their constant tendency to mean. It is not as if we could forget or fail to put meaning in words. They persist in meaning, no matter what we intend or are conscious of. We may fail to say what we intend, but we can scarcely fail to say something.

Bad style is not a deviation of words from meaning, but a deviation of meaning from meaning. Of what meaning from what meaning ? Of the actually conveyed meaning (what a reader receives) from the meaning an author intended or ought to have intended. This is true even of those cases where we might be most tempted to say that the fault of style is mere "awkwardness," since the meaning is conveyed completely. In such cases, the awkwardness consists in some absence of meaning (usually but implicit) or in some contrary or irrelevant meaning, which we disregard, inferring the writer's real meaning, at least so

far as it would be explicit. We must do this so continually for most writing—seek out the meaning, put the most relevant construction on every word and phrase, disregard what tries to say the wrong thing—that we fail to sense any lack of meaning and dub the cause of our annoyance metaphorically and conveniently "awkwardness."

The question what the author ought to have said is the true difficulty in judging style. *Ut jam nunc dicat*, says Horace, *jam nunc debentia dici*. It is the only difficulty, for it is the only question, and it is one we implicitly answer every time we judge style. We do it by our sense, more or less definite, of what the author intends to say as a whole, of his central and presiding purpose. The only consideration that can determine an author in a given detail is the adequacy of the detail to his whole purpose. It does not follow that when we are sure this or that phrase or passage is bad style we shall always refer our judgement precisely to our impression of the whole. The steps in subordination are too complicated. Furthermore, a fault in one whole can have something in common with a fault in another whole; whence arises the classification of faults of style and a tendency to refer individual faults only to the class definition. The whole is usually forgotten.

From the foregoing one many begin to infer that a detailed study of style can be fruitful—even in the hands of those who least connect style with meaning. If faults can be classed, so to some extent can merits. That which has for centuries been called style differs from the rest of writing only in that it is one plane or level of the organization of meaning; it would not be happy to call it the outer cover or the last layer; rather it is the furthest elaboration of the one concept that is the center. As such it can be considered. The terms of rhetoric, spurned by Croce and other moderns, did have a value for the ancients, even though they failed to connect all of rhetoric with meaning. To give the terms of rhetoric a value in modern criticism it would be necessary only to determine the expressiveness of the things in language to which the terms refer. This has been done for metaphor, which used to be an ornament, but has now been made "the unique expression of a writer's individual vision" or "the result of the search for a precise epithet." Mr. Empson has spoken ingeniously of that highly "artificial" figure the zeugma. Mr. Beteson has praised a hypallage.

The greatest obstacle to recognizing the expressive value of rhetorical devices is the fact that they recur. One notices that Cicero uses a *litotes* or a *praeteritio* several times in a few pages, or so many hundreds of balances are counted in the *Ramblers* of Johnson. This suggests play with words, disregard of meaning. One is likely to reflect: if these devices express something, then the author must be expressing, or saying, much the same thing over and over—which is useless; therefore the author is really not trying to say anything; he is using words viciously, for an inexpressive purpose.

Such an attitude would not have been possible if the theoretical rhetoricians had not thrust forward the repertory of devices so as to throw them out of focus and conceal their nature as part of language. No one thinks, for example, that sentences because they recur are artificial, that they say the same thing over or say nothing. This is the key to what our attitude towards devices ought to be. Sentences are expressive; so also are declensions, and conjugations; they are expressive *forms*. *They express, not ideas like "grass" or "green,"* but relations. The so-called "devices," really no more devices than a sentence is a device, express more special forms of meaning, not so common to thinking that they cannot be avoided, like the sentence, but common enough to reappear frequently in certain types of thinking and hence to characterize the thinking, or the style. They express a kind of meaning which may be discussed as legitimately as the more obvious kinds such as what a man writes about—the vanity of human wishes or the River Duddon.

It might be better if the term "device" were never used, for its use leads almost immediately to the carelessness of thinking of words as separable practicably from meaning. That is, we think of a given meaning as if it may be weakly expressed in one way but more forcefully in another. The latter is the device—the language applied, like a jack or clamp, or any dead thing, to the meaning, which itself remains static and unchanged, whether or not the device succeeds in expressing it. There is some convenience in this way of thinking, but more philosophy in steadily realizing that each change of words changes the meaning actually expressed. It is better to think of the "weak" expression and the "strong" expression as two quite different expressions, or, elliptically, two different meanings, of which one is further from, one nearer to, what the author ought to say, or what he intends to say. The whole matter of

emphasis, which is the real truth behind Herbert Spencer's wooden theory of economy in words, seems to be best considered in this light. (To keep the mind from being fatigued while receiving ideas—this is Spencer's function for style. One may object that the most important thing about the mind is not that it can be fatigued—but that it can entertain splendid, though often difficult and fatiguing, conceptions.) If a word is to be placed here or there in a sentence in order to be effective, to have due weight, this ought to be thought of not as a juggling of words round a meaning to give the meaning emphatic expression, but as a choice of a more emphatic rather than a less emphatic meaning, or, strictly, the choice of the meaning needed, for meaning exists through emphasis; a change of emphasis is a change of meaning. We must preserve a notion of words, even in their most purely suggestive functions, as something transparently intellectual, not intervening between us and the meaning but luminous and full of their meaning and as if conscious of it.

The expressiveness of the rhetorical device is not always so easily analyzed as that of the sentence or declension—frequently it is a form of implicit expressiveness, one which is certainly present but not simply in virtue of meanings of words or of syntax or of morphology, for example, one of the most frequent forms of implicit expressiveness, or meaning, is that of equality or likeness—with its opposite, inequality or unlikeness. Any succession of words, phrases, or sentences must in any given degree be either like or unlike, and appropriately or inappropriately so in accordance with whether the successive explicit meanings are like or unlike. The "jingles" collected by H. W. and F. G. Fowler are admirable illustrations of the fault which consists in a likeness of word sounds and hence of implicit meaning where there is no corresponding explicit meaning to be sustained. "To read his tales is a baptism of optimism," they quote from the *Times*. Here there is a nasty jingle of "ptism," "ptimism"—nasty just because the two combinations so nearly alike strike strive to make these words parallel, whereas they are not; one qualifies the other. The case is even plainer if we take an example of the common "ly" jingle, "He lived practically exclusively on milk," and set beside it something like this: "We are swallowed up, irreparably, irrevocably, irrecoverably, irremediably." In the second we are not conscious of the repeated "ily" as a jingle, any more than of the repeated "irre." The reason is that behind each of these parallel sounds (implicit parallel meanings) there is a parallel explicit meaning. So far as we advert to the sounds as sounds at all it is with a sense of their concordance with the structure of meaning. Such is perhaps the most frequently underlying reason why expressions are approved of or objected to as "euphonious" or "cacophonous," "harmonious" or "inharmonious."

And matters of sound are not the only ones to which the principle of equality and inequality applies. Even so basically wrong a thing as parataxis, the monotony of a schoolboy's writing, consists just in that he is using the same form of meaning in successive clauses and hence fails to relate his meanings, that is, fails to express the really different meanings which lurk dimly in his mind as his real intention or are at least what he should intend. Hypotaxis, the rare sounding opposite of parataxis, but no other than all modulated writing, consists in the use of different forms of meaning to sustain the sequence of the complex whole meaning. The author whose style is the subject of this study offers on every page emphatic demonstrations of implicit meaning through equality; and it will be one of the purposes of the study to show that what is sometimes called cumbrousness or pompousness in Johnson is but the exaggeration into more rigid lines of an expressive principle that lines in the very warp of all verbal discourse.

CHAPTER I

Parallelism

AMONG the qualities of Samuel Johnson's style most often noticed by critics has been something which they called "balance" or "parallelism." There has been no doubt what things these terms referred to, what clauses or phrases, or at least what were the most conspicuous examples. On the other hand there is a distinction, suggested even in the two terms "parallelism" and "balance," which has been either overlooked or, if noticed, pursued with disregard for the relation between the two qualities distinguished. These two qualities are parallelism of meaning and parallelism of sound. Perhaps it is the first that a critic has been more aware of when he used the term "parallelism, and perhaps the second, when he used "balance." And it is the second by which he is carried off when he dallies with the terms "cadence" and "rhythm." We may begin to form an opinion of Johnson's parallelism when we consider that of sound as auxiliary to, and made significant by, that of meaning, Parallel meaning, or multiplied similar meaning—that is one of the basic notions to be explored for Johnson's style, and those who have used terms like "repetition" and "amplification" have been nearer the truth than those who have talked most of "balance."

Any series of connected meanings is in some degree a parallel series. The least degree of parallelism is that the sentences (or clauses, or phrases, or words) are all parts of the same discourse—with reference to the whole meaning each has the status of member. The highest degree is some kind of immediate equality with reference to a third element, and this supported by some equality of form. Suppose three clauses, the first of which tells the cause of an act, the second the act, and the third its consequence. These three meanings are parallel if the sequence is taken as a whole and if as a whole it is referred to a fourth meaning. Yet they are non-parallel if considered in their reciprocal relations. Further, if the first and second be considered as the cause of the third, they assume a special parallel relation of their own; and if the second and third be considered as the result of the first, they too assume their own parallel. Not that in a single passage all these parallel meanings will occur simultaneously, or with equal emphasis. It is the function of syntax and other forms of meaning to show the intended relations of such members to one another and to a whole or another member of a whole in which they occur.

An opposite but equally basic element of all discourse is that of difference. If two clauses are parallel, say as illustrations of a third statement, they must yet differ between themselves in some degree however slight, or both would not be used. If the first and second members of the example used above express a cause of which the meaning of the third member is the effect, the first and second are so far parallel, yet they are different too inasmuch as they express a cause and effect relation between themselves. If beets and carrots are referred to only as examples of vegetables, they are yet different, for beets are not carrots.

If we define a parallel of two explicit meanings as an equal or approximately equal relationship to a third meaning either adjacent in the context or deducible, we have a minimum on which to build a classification. The degrees of parallelism above this can hardly be defined in terms of substance. A series of degrees, however, can be usefully defined in terms of form, explicitly and implicitly expressive. A writer having a pair (or more) of parallel meanings may employ a number of forms with greater or less regard for the parallelism. The least and worst he can do is choose forms which are explicitly nonparallel in the degree in which the substance *is* parallel, forms which therefore belie the substance. This weird phenomenon, a kind of "elegant variation," will not concern us hereafter, but may serve by antithesis to emphasize the positive side of our scale of parallels.

It is a "humane illusion" to think fascism can be dealt with and won over to the idea of peace and collective reconstruction by "understanding and loyal concessions," according to Dr. Mann, who declared that democracy and facism inhabit different planets and live at different epochs."

I refer not to several minor parallels such as "dealt with and won over," but to the parallel between two parts that make the whole passage, the two things that Dr. Mann said, one of which is made to sneak into Dr. Mann from behind with an "according to," while the other blurts out the front with a "who declared." This is using the resources of the language for confusion. It is one of the bad things of journalism.

The least a careful writer can do, and sometimes—when the degree of substantial parallel is not too great—the best, is to set down his members with no other formal expression of parallelism than a negative one—an absence of special connection.

The springs that move the human form, and make it friendly or adverse to me, lie hid within it. There is an infinity of motives, passions, and ideas contained in that narrow compass, of which I know nothing, and in which I have no share. Each individual is a world to himself, governed by a thousand contradictory and wayward impulses.

Here are three sentences, each complicated and containing minor parallels within itself, but each with reference to the others a unit, one of three meanings in equal relation to a more general statement which has gone before and to a conclusion which is to follow. These meanings are left unconnected. Except for the fact that each is a declarative, noncompound, sentence, there is not even any resemblance in their structure.

There are in general three explicit ways of binding groups of words, of indicating parallel : by the use of conjunctive or disjunctive words; by the syntax of words, that is, the relation of one word to two or more others; and by the repetition of identical words. These ways, especially the first two, have an affinity and frequently appear in combination. In the first sentence of the passage just quoted the verbs "move" and "make" are made parallel not only by the conjunction "and" but by their syntactic relation as predicates to the subject "that." The combination of the first and the third ways may be seen in the second sentence above, "of which . . . and in which." Here the structure of the relative clauses leaves no choice but the repetition of the word "which"; nevertheless it is of great value in enforcing the parallel. Repetition of an initial word, especially of some more emphatic or special word, is called by the rhetoricians "anaphora." These three explicit ways of parallel are the inevitable expressions of any writer who dwells upon, elaborates, or emphasizes any point, even for a moment.

We move nearer to the characteristically Jonsonian parallel with the next degree, that of implicitly expressive forms. I say "forms," not "form," and mean a relation between A and B and one between X and Y, as opposed to a relation of A to both X and Y which makes X and Y parallel. Thus : a subject, as in the example above, makes both its predicated verbs parallel. This is explicitly expressive. But if a subject is followed by its predicate in one clause, and another subject is followed by its predicate in a second clause, the parallel exists only by the occurrence of these two like forms side by side and is expressive only implicitly. If the clauses are joined by a conjunction, this adds explicit reference to the parallel, yet the parallel continues to exist independently and is greater or less in accordance with the resemblance in form of the clauses.

All like syntactic constructions create, of course, insofar as they are like, an implicitly expressive formal parallel: Such a parallel, however, of such unavoidable occurrence, is not what I wish to class as a parallel of implicit expression. This parallel begins only when like syntactic positions are filled by words of like substance and like weight or emphasis.

And as this practice is a commodious subject of raillery to the gay, and of declamation to the serious, it has been ridiculed, with all the pleasantry of wit, and exaggerated with all the amplifications of rhetoric.

Here we have not two sentences, but two predicates each of three emphatic elements, each of these elements in the one exactly paralleled in syntax, and closely paralleled in substance, by each in the other, and two of them closely paralleled in weight of sound. Further, the two halves of the predicate are matched by two halves in the introductory dependent clause, these halves themselves each consisting of two elements closely matched. So the whole construction is a quintuple parallel, broken, so that the arrangement is : a, b; v, w : c, d, e; x, y, z. This is formal parallel, implicitly expressive. For the sake of brevity, let us hereafter call it "implicit parallel."

Having begun with an elaborate example, we must now return to the germ of the matter. The *simplest* form which implicit parallel can assume is that where the emphatic elements in parallel positions consist of a single word each and are the whole of the members—that is, in simple pairings of words, whether with or without conjunctive or disjunctive words or elements of identity.

faults and follies
labour or hazard
so smooth and so flowery
to enlarge or embellish
against warning, against experience

It seems to me that the parts of speech involved are of no consequence to our classification.

In simple pairs of words a writer may be said to employ an un-avoidable measure of implicit parallel, but it is plain that in the next degree of implicit parallel, where there are two elements in each member, he has sought something that might easily have been avoided. Two nouns, for example, each modified by an adjective in the same position, make a conspicuous parallel, especially if the adjectives are of about the same weight. A good many alternatives are obvious : that either or both of the nouns lack the adjective, or that either or both be modified in some other way. The parallel has considerable value as implicit expression. Again, what parts of speech constitute the double elements is a matter of no concern. There are a good many possibilities:

retrenching exuberances and correcting inaccuracies
integrity of understanding and nicety of discernment
unnatural thoughts and rugged numbers
shaven by the scythe, and levelled by the roller

judgment is cold, and knowledge is inert

So a writer may continue to multiply parallel elements, relating the elements within the members by any kind of syntax. For instance, three elements :

examples of national calamities,
and scenes of extensive misery

Four elements:

the various forms of connubial infelicity,
the unexpected causes of lasting discord

Or he may reach five elements, as in the example with which this series was begun.

We have classed multiplications according to the degrees of parallelism which they exhibit—that is, the elements of parallel in each member. Another classification is possible, according to the number of members. All the examples of implicit parallelism given so far have been of two members. The example of multiplication (with parallelism only of substance) taken from Hazlitt had three members. But any degree of parallelism may appear in two, three, or more members. One element in three members :

reproach, hatred, and opposition
Two elements in three members :
her physick of the mind,
her catharticks of vice,
or lenitives of passion

The greater the number of elements, or the greater the number of members, the rarer the phenomenon, the more space it takes in its context, and the more significant it is of the style of the author.

ii

WHEN a writer employs a pair of words, two words having an equal relation to their context it seems to me that he may have one or more of four expressive purposes, according to the relation of the words to ideas and that of the ideas to objects or facts. Suppose two words, two ideas, and two objects corresponding. This is a common and perhaps the most inconspicuous form of multiplication. The purpose of these words is to give range or scope—or one might say "definition"—it is to name the number of different objects necessary to the whole meaning of the context. And we may subdivide this purpose into that of exact or complete range, and that of illustrative range. When in *Rasselas* Johnson says "the prince and the princess," his purpose is exact range, in the context he could refer to no other object in the same way; his meaning is particular. But when in *Rambler* No. 51, speaking of the country housewife's cares, he says "robs and gellies" or "pickles and conserves," he is referring to these objects as of a certain kind, of which he might have chosen others; he wishes to illustrate; his meaning is generic. To a given pair of words it may be impossible to assign one of these kinds of range exclusively. In *Rasselas*, "they clambered with great fatigue among crags and brambles." Who can say whether it was only crags and brambles that caused their fatigue, or whether boulders and logs did not contribute ? For that matter who can be absolutely sure that anything besides "pickles and conserves" is implied in the sentence about the country house-wife ? There is an ambiguity in most of these expressions which is part of their force.

In the second place suppose now two words, two ideas, but only one object, as where Addison speaks of Aristotle as "that great Critick and Philosopher." Here the purpose is to refer to the object under two ideas or aspects, both of which have relevance to the whole meaning of the context. This sort of thing happens often enough with two nouns (especially with abstract nouns) but more often with adjectives. For example, Johnson ascribes to Pope "a prompt and intuitive perception." Two words referring to the same object may refer to it either more or less obviously under different aspects. The less obviously there are two aspects, the less obvious will be the purpose of explicit meaning. In some cases the words will seem to refer to the object under the same aspect—or almost to do so. The words, whether or not ordinarily synonymous, will seem to overlap. "The constituent and fundamental principle," says Johnson. There *is* a difference between "constituent" and "fundamental." Contexts could readily be invented where one would do but not the other. But in the particular context, it may be asked what relevance one has that the other has not. The question whether two words referring to the same object really convey two ideas can be decided only by what the two words convey or suggest relevant to the context.

To combine these difficulties, that of the first type of paired words, where there are two objects, and that of the second, where there are only two ideas, and to multiply them by a doubt which type is present, we have only to conceive a pair of abstract nouns, a pair of verbs or adverbs, or a pair of adjectives if thought of apart from a noun modified. Behind every abstract or general term there is a set of objects thought of under a certain aspect. If we have two abstract words, they may be so far apart that we can say a different set of objects is behind each; or they may be so close together that we see behind them the same or nearly the same set of objects, but under different aspects; again they may be so close that we see not only the same objects but, so far as any meaning relevant to the context is concerned, the same or nearly the same aspects. "Troubles and commotions," says Johnson, and "activity and sprightliness."

Such overlapping of meaning, at times almost complete, leads us to recognize a fourth type of meaning for word pairs—emphasis. It is present perhaps to some extent in all the types of pairs just discussed. Least, of course, and scarcely perceptible, where exact range is meant ("the prince and princess"), easily perceptible in illustrative range ("pickles and conserves") or where different aspects of one object are clearly distinguishable ("Critick and Philosopher"), heavier and heavier the nearer the aspects come, and almost the whole purpose in extreme cases ("constituent and fundamental," "troubles and commotions"). This is a purpose which we all must feel when we double words, but which we may feel is obtained at considerable cost of meaning when the words used mean nearly *the* same.

iii

EVERY paring of words, as we have seen, affirms (or denies) two notions which are alike insofar as they are paired (have the same immediate relation to a third notion) and which are different insofar as one adds anything to the other. In some, in "constituent and fundamental principle," the emphasis is so far on the harmony of these notions that little if any difference, or range, is adverted to. In others, in "Critick and Philosopher," there is stress on the equal relation of these two notions to a third, "Aristotle," and with this a clear advertence to the distinction between the two. It is but carrying this tendency to its limit to assert the equal relation of two opposites in a scale to a third notion :

that vehemence of desire which presses through
right and wrong to its gratification

Right and wrong are antithetical, yet here, where both are affirmed in the same respect, their expressive value is that of a pair placed at extremes of a range and so emphasizing its length. Rasselas and Imlac press over crags and brambles. Vehemence of desire presses through right and wrong.

to find, and to keep
names for day and night
none of them would either steal or buy

There is little point in arguing whether each of these involves an antithesis or only a distinction.

Antithetic parallel is of course limited to two members. But, like the other forms of multiplication, it admits multiple elements of implicit parallel and sometimes through these shows itself more clearly as antithesis. It may have two elements :

a state too high for contempt
and too low for envy

Or three :

partiality, by which some vices have hitherto
escaped censure, and some virtues wanted recommendation

And so on, though perfect examples are very scarce.

Antithesis of this sort I should like to call antithesis I, to distinguish it from the truer antithesis to be discussed later, which we may call antithesis II. While antithesis I in pointing out opposite notions either affirms or denies both in the same respect, antithesis II makes a distinction in order to affirm one part and deny the other. Antithesis I, inasmuch as it is an antithesis, is often on the verge of becoming antithesis II. If we affirm both A and its opposite B, our affirmation frequently takes the form : Not only A but B, in which case we see more easily that what we mean implies : Not A alone but both A and B, and this is antithesis II, as we shall see later.

It is beyond the scope of an analysis of style to *prove* that any qualities of style *exist* in writing. A writing cannot be proved to have more or less meaning than is understood on reading it. Where a certain quality is recognized as a part of style, statistics may give a numerical ratio between the frequency of the quality in one writing and that in another. But the process of making statistics is one of gathering items under a head, and only according to a definition may the items be gathered. Only by the definition have they any relevance. It is the formulating of the definition, not the counting after that, which is the work of studying style.

When a critic is conscious of quality X in a writing, no accumulation of statistics will increase his consciousness of it. But if he simply announces that the writing has X, he may be challenged. If he says that it has X because he has found X in fifteen examples of fifteen hundred words each, he is less likely to be challenged; if he adds that the average is a hundred occurrences in each example, even less likely. This, however, is not proof, but something more like persuasion, for logically the whole matter rests on the definition with which he began, and statistical details are taken, no less than a blanket statement, on faith.

In the course of analyzing Johnson's parallelism I have, as a matter of fact, done a good deal of counting both in selected passages of Johnson and in passages of Addison and Hazlitt taken by way of contrast. But in the comparative description which follows I have assumed that general statement, illustrated, is more intelligible than statistical scrupulosity and equally entitled to credence.

Three passages from Johnson have been set against three from Addison and three from Hazlitt, but not with any intention of illustrating the history of English prose. The chronological positions of Addison and Hazlitt might be reversed. The two have simply been chosen as points recognized to be at some distance from Johnson in the field of prose style.

From Johnson I have chosen *Rambler* No. 2, *Idler* No. 10, and a section of the *Life of Pope*. For the degree to which they exemplify his whole tendency, one may consult a later chapter, where the consistency of his style is considered. But a study of style ought not to be primarily a study of average style; it is too likely to lead to no conclusion. The same recognition of meaning that leads us to choose certain characteristics for attention leads us to choose the places where they may be found. If it is plain that Johnson's *Idlers* are on the whole of a lighter, less philosophic cast than the *Ramblers*, and that the narrative portions of the *Lives* are less discursive than the discursive portions (for it is just as plain as that), and if we look on Johnson as most different from other writers when he is being philosophic or discursive, there is no reason why we should average the characteristics of all his ways of writing in order to see what is distinctive of the Johnsonian style. I have chosen these three passages because they display a consistent texture of the characteristics which critics for a century and a half have called Johnsonian. *Rambler* No. 2, "The necessity and danger of looking into futurity," is a fair example of Johnson's abstract, moral, or philosophic essay; *Idler* No. 10, "Political credulity," of his treating a didactic theme more concretely; the section from the *Life of Pope*, of his later discursive style.

From Addison I have chosen a part of *Spectator* No. 177, "Good-nature as a moral virtue" (which shows us Addison writing on something like a Johnsonian topic); all of *Spectator* No. 106, "Sir Roger de Coverley's country seat" (which treats a more typically Addisonian, seminarrative subject); and a part of *Spectator* No. 267, "Criticism on Paradise Lost." From Hazlitt I have chosen part of the essay "On the Love of the Country," part of "My First Acquaintance with Poets," and part of the lecture "on Dryden and Pope."

One of the first things that may be learned from a comparison of these nine passages is that we cannot assign to the simple quality of multiplication any effect distinctive of Johnson's prose. Numerically : if one counts all the multiplications of all classes (all coordinate words, phrases, and clauses, of all degrees of explicit and implicit parallel) in each passage, it is found that Johnson far outweighs Addison, but that Johnson himself is outweighed by Hazlitt. We may say of Johnson and Hazlitt that in contrast to Addison their style is marked by the tendency to multiplication. But Johnson is distinguishable from

Hazlitt and, more strikingly than by mere multiplication, from Addison in those two tendencies which we have seen are founded in multiplication—that towards emphasis rather than range, and that towards parallelism of forms. I resume first the discussion of parallelism.

In multiplications having only explicit parallel—syntax, conjunctions, identical words—Johnson, Addison, and Hazlitt are again about equal if their usages are merely counted. But if examples are compared (i.e., if our definitions are refined), then even in these common prose elements Johnson's inclination to parallel may be seen. In general Johnson tends to greater use of identical elements, to nearly identical constructions of almost equal length and weight—things which become particularly noticeable in multiplications of three or more members. Consider a long multiplication from Hazlitt:

No doubt, the sky is beautiful; the clouds sail majestically along its bosom; the sun is cheering; there is something exquisitely graceful in the manner in which a plant or tree puts forth its branches; the motion with which they bend and tremble in the evening breeze is soft and lovely; there is music in the babbling of a brook; the view from the top of a mountain is full of grandeur; nor can we behold the ocean with indifference.

There is a momentary inclination to implicit parallelism here : "the clouds sail... the sun is." The identical element "there is" appears twice. But on the whole, for the shortness of the members and the similarity of the material, there is marked variation. Beside this see one from Addison :

You would take his Valet de Chambre for his Brother, his Butler is grey-headed, his Groom is one of the gravest men that I have ever seen, and his Coachman has the Looks of a Privy-Counsellor.

"His" is a rather unobtrusive identical element in each member, and "is" appears as the main verb of two consecutive members. The four nouns, "Valet de Chambre," "Butler," "Groom," and "Coachman" tend to be elements of implicit parallel. But the first is a compound of three words and is the object of a verb, while the other three are all subjects and single words. The general variety in constructions and positions of emphasis through the four members is plain. Beside these two multiplications see one from Johnson :

He has known those who saw the bed into which the pretender was conveyed in a warming-pan. He often rejoices that the nation was not enslaved by the *Irish*. He believes that king *William* never lost a battle, and that if he had lived one year longer he would have conquered *France*, he holds that *Charles* the first was a papist. He allows there were some good men in the reign of queen *Anne*, but the peace of *Utrecht* brought a blast upon the nation, and has been the cause of all the evil that we have suffered to the present hour. He believes that the scheme of the *South ' Sea* was well intended, but that it miscarried by the influence of *France*. He considers a standing army as the bulwark of liberty, thinks us secured from corruption by septennial parliaments, relates how we are enriched and strengthened by the electoral dominions, and declares that the publick debt is a blessing to the nation.

Here we have seven sentences, each beginning with the element of identity "he" followed by the main verb, which in each case is a verb of mental action. "He has known," "rejoices," "believes," "holds," "allows," "believes," "considers." Four of these verbs are followed by the conjunction "that." In the third sentence "that" is repeated, so that the sentence makes a pair of members, each about equal in weight to the sentences which have preceded. The fifth sentence is divided antithetically, with two parts following "but," and each about equal to the introductory stem, and all three not much different in length and weight from the simpler sentences. The sixth sentence has two antithetical parts, the second reënforced with a "that." And in conclusion comes a quadruplet laid out on the four main verbs "considers," "thinks," "relates," "declares," to all of which the subject is the first word, "he." In the eleven words of saying and thinking which govern the constructions of this long multiplication, there is a weighty element of parallel and one which is manifestly designed.

In the following multiplication of even very short members notice the great variety attained by Hazlitt. What discrimination, what wit, what delicacy, what fancy, what lurking spleen, what elegance of thought, what pampered refinement of sentiment!

Where the members are short, the length and quality of single words are of importance. The identical element "what" is joined first to a long word with the abstract ending "ion," then to the short spurt of a word "wit," then to two words ending in "y" but of different lengths, and then to members which expand climactically, first an adjective and noun, then two nouns in oblique relation, then an adjective and noun in oblique relation to another noun.

The examples we have just considered have all been of four or more members. Here are some shorter ones.

If conversation offered any thing that could be improved, he committed it to paper; if a thought, or perhaps an expression more happy than was common, rose to his mind, he was careful to write it.

Or, with but two members to match, Johnson often uses a pair of antitheses of type II.

He never attempted to make that better which was already good, nor often to mend what he must have known to be faulty.

Contrast these from Hazlitt and Addison :

There was to me a strange wildness in his aspect, a dusky obscurity, and I thought him pitted with the small-pox.

When he is pleasant upon any of them, all his Family are in good Humour, and none so much as the Person whom he diverts himself with : On the contrary, if he coughs, or betrays any Infirmary of old Age, it is easy for a Stander-by to observe a secret Concern in the Looks of all his Servants.

We may proceed to multiplications with implicit parallel. The number of those with one element only (doublets, triplets, or quadruplets of single words) is actually less for Johnson than for Hazlitt, an effect which may be considered only complementary of Johnson's opportunism in the elaboration of parallels of two or more elements. It is in such more complicated parallels that the Johnsonian tendency is manifest beyond question. Here both statistics and comparison of examples speak eloquently. This is pre-eminently the Johnsonian province.

Even in the simpler of these constructions Hazlitt is much inclined to irregularities. He will have one member longer by a prepositional phrase : "in its simple majesty, in its immediate appeal to the senses." He will separate the members by a phrase which explicitly modifies one and is understood of the other : "a strange wildness in his aspect, a dusky obscurity." Or he will add another adjective to one member: "the sequestered copse and wide extended heath." Johnson more regularly follows the models: "excitements of fear, and allurements of desire," "fluctuating in measures, or immersed in business."

Neither Hazlitt nor Addison ever reaches Johnson's extremes. When Hazlitt writes :

the utmost grandeur to our conceptions of nature, or the utmost force to the passions of the heart

it is for him an excessively heavy parallel. And so for Addison when he writes :

from some new Supply of Spirits or a more kindly Circulation of the Blood

Johnson does not begin to be unusual until he writes something like a doublet of five elements, cut in half and alternated, such as that we have already quoted from *Rambler* No.2., or, if we may go afield to *Rasselas*, a triplet of doublets, the first doublet having four elements, the second, two, and the third, seven:

the various forms of connubial infelicity, the unexpected causes of lasting discord, the diversities of temper, the oppositions of opinion, the rude collisions of contrary desire

where both are urged by violent impulses, the obstinate contests of disagreeable virtues,
where both are supported by consciousness of good intention

Or, if we go to *Rambler* No. 129, an antithesis of four elements, chopped and alternated, so that instead of the commoner A,A,A,A,: B,B,B,B, we have A,A : B,B; A: B,A:B.

according to the inclinations of nature, or the impressions of percept, the daring and the cautious may move in different directions without touching upon rashness or cowardice.

Such constructions, though they occur but rarely, yet fill a large space and are conspicuous among the emphatic effects of the whole writing.

We have seen that any member of a writing stands in a relation of equality and in one of difference to the members adjacent to it. A writer may insist, by explicit or implicit means, on the equality or on the *opposite, the difference of the members within their frame* of equality or parallel. He may exploit one kind of meaning or the other. And if he does one or the other consistently, his writing must assume a surface or texture of meaning directly relatable to this. If he recurrently gives to his multiplied phrases or clauses a turn toward equality, then the relations of member to member, of premise to premise and to conclusion, will be strengthened and plain; the whole sequence of meaning will have a high degree of coherence and regularity— but this will be at the expense of modulation, of individuality of premise, of variety. In a given multiplication in a given writing there must always be a specific demand for a degree of parallel and for an inverse degree of variety. Either a greater parallel or a greater variety will be the detail of meaning that better completes the whole intended meaning of the composition, fills it out to the greater relevancy and satisfaction. When Hazlitt says of Johnson, "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," he accuses Johnson of preferring the meaning of parallel to a more relevant meaning of variety.

V

THE tendency toward implicit parallel cannot but be accompanied by one towards overlapping, toward emphasis rather than range. Sameness of syntax, sameness of positions of emphasis in the frame of the syntax, must produce opportunities for likeness of substantial meaning. The degree of this likeness is difficult to define for simple word pairs. It is quite impossible for extended constructions with interweaving of various degrees. Johnson's inclination to emphasis rather than range can, however, be felt as a whole and can be illustrated.

The following are fair examples of how Hazlitt and Addison, even in triple multiplications, or in those of more than one element of implicit parallel, incline to the purpose of range :

the Bishop of St. *Asaph* in the Morning,
and Dr. *South* in the Afternoon
offering its cool fountain or its tempting shade
Their Enemies are the fallen Angels:
the Messiah their Friend,
and the Almighty their Protector.
to paste, pomatum, billet-doux, and patches
First, It should be but One Action.
Secondly, It should be an entire Action;
and, Thirdly, It should be a great Action.

Johnson's ways is on the whole the reverse.

His effusions were always voluntary,
and his subjects chosen by himself.
a deeper search, or wider survey

If a search is concentrated on one spot, it may be called deep, or if the object of the search, e.g., the name of Shakespeare's great-grandfather, be considered an undiscovered spot, then a continued search, an examination of many records, becomes, if we like, a wide survey. In short, according to the way of conceiving, a determined effort to find something becomes a deep search or a wide survey.

the folly of him who lives only in idea,
refuses immediate ease for distant pleasures,
and, instead of enjoying the blessings of life,
lests life glide away in preparations to enjoy them
gradually to amplify, decorate, rectify, and refine them.

If the difference between paste and pomatum, billet-doux and patches is clear, it is not so clear where amplification shades into decoration, or rectification into refinement—particularly when the objects of the action are "thoughts."

Next, as to simple word pairs. If the examples found in our nine passages are subdivided into those in which the purpose is to a great degree emphasis and those in which range is almost the whole purpose, there is not a telling difference in character between those from one author put under range and those from another, nor even a great difference in the numerical ratios of emphasis to range. Hazlitt and Johnson each show about the same ratio in favor of emphasis, somewhat greater than that of Addison. Where the chief difference may be seen is in the general character of the examples of pairs for emphasis, all of which may be conveniently classified together, but which nevertheless are emphatic to different degrees. Through the course of a number of examples, Johnson's tendency to emphasis accumulates and becomes undeniably ponderous. I present for comparison all the examples which I have collected in the passage from *Spectator* No. 267, all from the lecture "On Dryden and Pope," and all from the *Life of Pope*.

Addison, *Spectator* No. 267:

that great Critick and Philosopher
the Counter-parts and Copies of one another
that just and regular Progress
so beautifully extended and diversified

Hazlitt, "On Dryden and Pope":

stripped of prejudice and passion
the most contemptible and insignificant point of view
he was a wit, and a critic
established by the forms and customs of society
the sentiments and habitudes of human life
the thoughts and hearts of all men
an intuitive and mighty sympathy
wished or wanted
with more brilliance and effect

the involuntary and uncalculating impulses
with a force and vehemence
conventional and superficial modifications
the antithesis of strength and grandeur
the extravagances of fancy or passion
long ease and indulgence
smooth and polished verse
the tug and war of the elements
the retired and narrow circle
a new character and a new consequence
apotheosis of foppery and folly

Johnson, *Life of Pope*:

the constituent and fundamental principle
a prompt and intuitive perception
consonance and propriety
a sedate and quiescent quality
always investigating, always aspiring
great strength and exactness of memory
incessant and unwearied diligence
form and polish large masses
with such faculties, and such dispositions
readiness and dexterity
so selected and combined as to be ready
when occasion or necessity called
minute and punctilious observation
considered and reconsidered
images and illustrations
capricious and varied
cautious and uniform
vehement and rapid
regular and constant
meditation and enquiry

None of these pairs from Johnson is composed of nouns referring to different aspects of one readily identifiable object, like Addison's "Critick and Philosopher," or Hazlitt's "wit and critic." Johnson is less likely than Hazlitt to use pairs in the form of hendiadys—where the "and" could easily be displaced by an oblique construction, or where one of two nouns might become an adjective, or one of two verbs or adjectives an adverb. "Brilliance and effect" might be "brilliant effect"; "smooth and polished verse" might be "smoothly polished verse"; "tug and war" suggests "tug of war." Some of Johnson's might be

altered thus, but do not so readily invite it. Johnson is less likely to pair nouns which have a clear relation of genus and species and so have the effect of showing the generic direction in which the species is intended to be thought of. If "foppery" is a species of "folly," it is not quite so clear that "images" have that relation to "illustrations." On the whole the abstract and general character of Johnson's vocabulary makes it more difficult to see the exact relation of the words which he puts in pairs. The present topic has a close relation to that more celebrated one, Johnson's "Latin" or "abstract" diction, which is to be discussed in a later chapter.

Johnson's preference for emphasis rather than range in multiplication can never be fully realized except by seeing his multiplications in their contexts, their position in whole sentences and share in the emphasis of the whole. In *My First Acquaintance with English Poets* Hazlitt writes :

I was at that time dumb, inarticulate, helpless, like a worm by the way-wide, crushed,
bleeding, lifeless; but now, bursting from the deadly sins that
"bound them,
"With Styx nine times round them,"

my ideas float on winged words, and as they expand their plumes, catch the golden light of other years,

The first sentence of *Rambler* No. 51 is this :

As you have allowed a place in your paper to Euphelia's letters from the country, and appear to think no form of life unworthy of your attention, I have resolved, after many struggles with idleness and diffidence, to give you some account of my entertainment in this sober season of universal retreat, and to describe to you the employments of those who look with contempt on the pleasures and diversions of polite life, and employ all their powers of censure and invective upon the uselessness, amity, and folly, of dress, visits, and conversation.

Early in Hazlitt's sentence come two triplets, one on each side of the image of the "worm," partly sensory, asyndetic, hurried; they provide a momentary emphasis, after which the sentence rushes on antithetically with its plumes and golden light, leaving the triplets back by the way, like the worm itself. Johnson does the opposite. He begins slowly, building up through couplets, "idleness and diffidence," "to give. . . and to describe," "pleasures and diversions," "censure and invective," until he makes a climax of his two deliberate triplets, smashingly, one upon the other. And so with many a doublet; where it is jammed into the rush and preparation of the early part of one of Hazlitt's sentences, or scarcely heard in passing some swift climax, it is by Johnson saved till the end, the weightiest motive of the whole, toward which the whole labors up and having reached which, has accomplished its destination.

CHAPTER II

Antithesis

BY multiplication a writer enforces what he means, or what he affirms. By every affirmation, however, something incompatible is implicitly denied; and what is denied, or what it would be relevant to deny explicitly, varies with what it is relevant to affirm. Each thing is all that it is in virtue of not being many other things, but it is what it is in each respect in virtue of not being some other particular thing. An ink well stands on the *table* inasmuch as it does not stand on the floor. It stands *on* the table inasmuch as it does not stand under the table. It *stands* on the table in as much as it does not roll off. The negative defines the positive. The more peculiar and complex the affirmation the more it may need the emphasis of negation, the more negation itself, elaborated in its own aspects, may become a relevant and parallel meaning until which is, superior and which is subordinate is hardly to be told, rather the two as a pair of reflecting, reciprocal movement are the true theme of the discourse. This is characteristics of all thoughtful writing, that the author is interested not only in what is now but in what was or will be, what is in any other respect, what might be or ought to be—what he does mean and what he does not mean—in a word, in distinctions. When these distinctions crystalize into enough formality, they may be called antitheses. Either term might be extended to all examples, the most formal might be called only "distinctions," the most rudimentary, "antitheses." Since our purpose is to examine the expressive tendency that underlies the figure of rhetoric called "antithesis," we shall retain that name though most of the examples we shall have in mind or produce and not such as in most rhetorics would be called antitheses.

Perhaps the point at which antithesis will be felt by most reader as distinctly erupting from the surface of the context is where two single words are placed close together in opposition, the one idea negated, the other affirmed:

not the power but the will to obtain a better state

Yet a number of more rudimentary types may be defined. Among these some of the most noticeable are : a negative implication through a comparative; an expression of excess as in the word "too"; a statement with an exception. "Other causes besides his industry, his learning, or his wit." In other words : Not his industry, his learning, or his wit, but. . . The antithesis is left to inference. "Too envious to promote that fame which gives them pain by its increase." Not generous enough to promote fame, but envious of it. "No crime but luxury." Not other crimes, but luxury. The closeness of all such expressions to explicit antithesis may be seen in the following, where the germ of the antithesis contained in "more than" is developed in the next words. "Whatever facilitates our work is more than an omen, it is a cause of success." And the following sequence of antitheses shows how much may be implied in a word such as "only."

the folly of him who lives only in idea,
refuses immediate ease for distant pleasures,
and, instead of enjoying the blessings of life,
lests life glide away in preparations to enjoy them

The antithesis implied in the word "only" is expanded explicitly in the doublet that follows. Of course the potentiality of any expression to be expanded makes the definition of all these subantitheses a matter for hesitation.

To return to the grade of two opposed words, it is to be noted that these words need not be related by a "not... but." A great many ways of antithetical joining are possible. It may be by a comparative. "More

frequently require to be reminded that informed." "Willing rather to transmit than examine." It may be by a relative or a conditional, "frequently presumes to attempt what he can never accomplish." "Which, if obtained, you could scarcely have enjoyed." It may be by a preposition. "Have long accustomed themselves to receive all that chance offered them, without examination." "To conquer without a context." Sometimes it is by the special meaning of some third term, though these cases are less definite. "Such busy preparations as naturally *promised* some great event." "*Exalt* possibility to certainty." "Whose abilities are *adequate* to his employments."

Further, an antithesis concentrated in two words need not involve at all the negative expressed variously above by "not," "never," or "scarcely," by the preposition "without" or by the comparative. Let us consider this form as symbolized by A , *not A'* and A' are notions so compatible that they might plausibly be affirmed together, and the point of the antithesis is to assert that while one is affirmed the other is negated. Suppose, however, that the negative of the antithesis be attracted into the notion which it modifies. Then we have A , but *not-A'*, a form conveniently illustrated by the following : "however unsuccessful, it will be at last rewarded," which is about equivalent to "though not successful, it will be rewarded." Suppose the negative notion *not-A'* gives way to a positive equivalent, B . Then we have A , but B , where the antithesis consists not in a negation of one idea and affirmation of the other, but in the opposition or incompatibility of two ideas both of which are affirmed (or perhaps both negated). 'Events, however illustrious, are soon obscured.'

In every antithesis, the two affirmations or the affirmation and negation are made with respect immediately to some third notion more or less explicit in the context. In the example last quoted "illustrious" and "obscured" refer to events. The references or connections themselves are of a wide variety, but their particular character is of no importance to the antithesis. For this reason we may adopt the convention of designating the reference by "in." So we have A in X , but B in X , which is clearer if for the moment we change adjectives to nouns: "illustriousness in events, but obscurity in events." Or, A in X , *not A' in X*, "will in obtaining, not power in obtaining." This third element, usually named, as in all the above examples, but once, if at all, is not of importance in so simple a form.

It often happens, however, that this element is given a modulation that makes it contribute to the sharpness of the antithesis. If A in X , *not A' in X*, then X , expressed perhaps in one member, implied in the second, is not completely the same X but, if only in virtue of being related once to A and again to A' , can be viewed under different relevant aspects, and this difference can be expressed by the use of the terms X and X' , So : A in X , *not A' in X'*.

You may deny me to accompany you,
but cannot hinder me from following.

The simpler form, A in X , *not A' in X*, would be : "You may prevent me from accompanying, but not from following you." The distinction between "deny" and "hinder" corresponds to the relations of "prevent" to "accompany" and to "follow," so that in one sense it is a modulation of "prevent" and in another it is an extension of the antithesis between "accompany" and "follow." Where some generic term is not easily found, it will be rather as extension of antithesis that the distinction is thought of.

In the example just seen there is a clear relevant distinction between "hinder" and "deny," but sometimes this is not so; the difference is felt to be rather "verbal":

refuses immediate ease for distant pleasures

The negative is conveyed in "refuses." So : "the future in pleasure, not the present in ease." But perhaps not much relevant meaning has been gained over : "the future in pleasure, not the present," or "the future in ease, not the present," that is, "refuses immediate for distant pleasures," or "refuses immediate for distant ease." The principal elements of this antithesis are those of time, present and future. Difference of time and difference of place, however, more often constitute the elements of extension of antithesis, or modulation of context (X and X') as might be the case here were there a clearer relevant difference between "ease" and "pleasure." In fact if this were so, it would be difficult to distinguish between the A , A'

and X, X' elements. In general the A, A' elements may be considered as those in which the antithesis is more pointed and which could be less easily eliminated from the context. But for deciding that a given example belongs to this class it is not necessary to distinguish its A, A' and X, X' elements.

Just as *A, not A'* was translatable to *A, but B*, so *A in X, not A' in X'* is translatable to *A in X, but B in Y*. Or *A in X, but B in Y* can be considered a complication of *A, but B*. But it is not easy to illustrate these four forms with a single basic antithesis. The example just considered, *A in X, not A' in X'* "the future in pleasures, not the present in ease," will yield the form *A in X, but B in Y*, "the future in pleasures, the present in pain." But for the form *A, not A'*, we have simply "the future, not the present." And to translate this into *A, but B*, it would be necessary to find some positive equivalent of "not the present" which was yet not too nearly an equivalent of "the future." Perhaps we might say, "the future, but by waiting." The following will illustrate more clearly the form *A in X, but B in Y*:

Many things difficult to design
prove easy to performance.
the regularity of her family,
and the inconvenience of London hours
some phrases which, though well understood at present,
may be ambiguous in another century

This extension into two elements makes the antithesis in its most acute form. Here we have the parallel opposition mentioned in the *Oxford Dictionary*, distinctly noticeable as parallel, just as in our multiplications those of two elements of implicit parallel were much more noticeably parallel than simple word pairs. This is the form of such often-quoted antitheses as Macaulay's : "Not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators." *A in X, not A' in X'*, and the parallel is enforced by alliteration. A further increase of elements usually does not much increase the antithesis. Though the elements occupy parallel positions in the members of the antithesis, they are likely not to exhibit any distinction relevant to the antithesis.

If you are pleased with prognosticks of good,
you will be terrified likewise with tokens of evil.

The real antithesis is between "good" and "evil," "pleased" and "terrified." The two words "prognosticks" and "tokens" have no difference in meaning relevant to the difference between good and evil. Except for the alliteration of "pleased with prognosticks," "terrified with tokens," there is no reason to prefer this arrangement to "tokens of goods," "prognosticks of evil." In order that there should be a real antithesis of three elements, the common notion of prediction should be modulated so as to relate in one member especially to the good, and in the other to the bad.

What is even more likely in extension of antithesis is a failure of correspondence of elements, a dilution or blurring. The X, X' or X, Y elements, or even the A, A' or A, B, may be expanded so that each is a phrase, roughly antithetical in the total of substantial meaning, but having no elements exactly matched in syntax or morphology. Inasmuch as X, X' and X, Y elements are, as we have seen assumed out of the context, assimilated to the antithesis by the process of distinction, this blurring of antithetic elements is a kind of merging with the context. The antithesis, latent in all expression, bulges but does not project; or, around some point of projection, some two words clearly antithetic, there is a gradation to the nonantithetical level of the context.

We have seen that another quality of Johnson's style, his tendency to emphasis rather than range, was relatable to something which we have yet to discuss, his general and abstract diction. The same thing may be said of his antithesis. Abstraction and generality are conditions which favor antithesis. Not things but aspects of them can be contrasted in words. The more a writing deals with aspects as such, that is, with abstractions, the more plastic it is and shapable into the exact oppositions of antithesis. Generality and abstraction are concentration of meaning into the pure forms which admit sharp contrast. "Honor" and

"shame" make an antithesis which would be diffused in the naming of "patriot," "gentleman," "lady," and "traitor," "scoundrel," "harlot."

ii

LIKE parallelism, antithesis is something that anyone must have perceived, however indefinitely, on reading the typical prose of Johnson. Again there is no need of statistics to prove the existence of the quality. But if we count the number of clear antitheses of all types in our nine passages from Addison, Johnson, and Hazlitt, two conclusions will be supported. The first, that Johnson is more given to antithetical expression than either Addison or Hazlitt. (Even with an exceedingly low *Idler* No. 10, his totals are much higher than Hazlitt's and somewhat higher than Addison's.) The second, that Johnson is more given to pointing his antitheses by extension or parallel. In the two classes of pronounced parallel, *A in X, not A' in X*, and *A in X, but B in Y*, his quotients greatly exceed those of Addison and Hazlitt.

But as with Johnson's parallel in multiplication, so with his parallel in antithesis—his special tendency is not adequately revealed by the excess of his averages over those of Addison and Hazlitt. Again it may be further insisted that his examples tend more to pronouncement of parallel than do those of the other two. Johnson repeatedly comes near the complete parallel of the models already presented. For example :

If of Dryden's fire the blaze is brighter,
of Pope's the heat is more regular and constant.
He did not court the candour,
but dared the judgement of his reader.

In Johnson's antithesis each member and each element is emphatic; it seems special and striven for. He is saying : Mark this difference and mark this. Hazlitt and Addison are more likely to be casual, irregular, or dealing with the unavoidable antitheses of their subject (an aspect of range as opposed to emphasis).

His hair (now, alas! grey) was then black and glossy."

Here one whole member is a parenthesis, the tone is varied by the exclamation, and one of the elements of the other member is expanded to two words.

as much the same trees and grass, that I had always been used to, as the sun shining over my head was the same sun which I saw in England; the faces only were foreign to me

The Contents of both which Books come before those of the first Book in the Thread of the Story, tho' for preserving of this Unity of Action they follow them in the Disposition of the Poem.

In the latter example Addison has hardly made any effort to sharpen or insist on the distinction which he finds in his material.

In the lecture "On Dryden and Pope" Hazlitt, as if in accord with his neoclassic theme, lends himself more than usually to antitheses. But even here his prevailing tendency is revealed; for, though a number of these are extended to two elements, a larger number are simple, of one element, and a majority are blurred by irregularities.

in describing a row of pins and needles,
rather than the embattled spears of Greeks and Trojans
more delighted with a patent lamp,
than with "the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow"
for earthquakes and tempests,

the breaking of a flower-pot, or the fall of a china jar

An important relation of antithesis to whole meaning is the degree to which antithesis breaks or turns the direction of discourse. This of course is determined in part by the number of antitheses. The more antitheses, major or minor, the more turns, great or small. But it is mostly determined by the number of major antitheses, those rooted directly in the central meaning. If a writer wishes to enforce an antithesis by multiplication, there are two main patterns he may follow. He may state his antithesis, *A, not A'*, then develop one side of it by multiplication, *A*—————*A5*, then the other side, *A'*—————*A'5*. Or, he may break each side into its units and set these individually one from one side against one from the other in a series of antitheses : *A, not A', A1, not A'1, A2, not A'2*, and so on. The first pattern lays more emphasis on the character of each side as a whole. The two are set against each other as masses. The second insists continually and minutely on the antithesis itself.

In the lecture "on Dryden and Pope," Hazlitt states his antithesis: "the poet, not of nature, but of art." He then develops the notion of a poet of nature in a multiplication of about three hundred words. "Such was Homer, such was Shakespeare." Then with an antithetical hinge, "Pope was not assuredly a poet of this class," he returns to the poet of art and launches into an elaboration that runs for perhaps a thousand words blending into a discussion of Pope's poetry in detail. True, in the course of this there are numerous minor antitheses, some of which we have quoted above; Pope is contrasted to Shakespeare, he is contrasted to Milton; each one of his preferences is set against some opposite. But the whole emphasis, in the rapid flood of bright examples, is on what Pope was, a poet so strange that he can be characterized only by contrast to other poets.

Johnson's way is different. It is true he begins his comparison of Pope and Dryden with a paragraph on Dryden's indifference to perfection and then three on Pope's meticulousness. But the third of these ends: "Pope had perhaps the judgement of Dryden, but Dryden certainly wanted the diligence of Pope." And with this begins the most impressive and emphatic part of the comparison, four paragraphs in which the attention alternates from Dryden to Pope and back, here and there a sentence or two on one or the other, but mostly the two matched in each sentence or each coordinate part of long sentences. "Dryden knew more of man in his general nature, and Pope in his local manners." "Dryden is sometimes vehement and rapid; Pope always smooth, uniform, and gentle." "Dryden is read with frequent astonishment, and Pope with perpetual delight."

To Johnson's frequent use of major antitheses, and to his incessant scoring of paragraphs with all kinds of minor and implied antitheses, is due the abrupt, sectional character of his writing. It is put together with tight logic, it is eminently coherent and articulate, but it does not flow. Or, Johnson is like a man who marches a short length in one direction, hitting to right and left as he goes, hammers three times at the end, then turns at right angles or back again and repeats. Logical progression is of that sort; it moves by distinctions, which are antitheses, which may be jerks.

When the purpose of the writer is persuasive rather than expository, when he must argue in favour of something, antithesis may tend to retraction, nullification, or cancellation. There was no chance for this as long as Johnson was simply putting Pope and Dryden side by side for better exhibition. But in *Rambler* No. 2 he is giving moral advice. In the first five paragraphs he states the case against neglecting the present for the future, then, discrediting those who exploit this case, he asserts the necessity of man's looking ahead. But in the next paragraph he veers round completely, in a major antithetic reversal:

Yet as few maxims are widely received or long retained but for some conformity with truth and nature, it must be confessed, that this caution against keeping our view too intent upon remote advantages is not without its propriety or usefulness...

Now he is faced the other way. Yet before going ahead, as if to deny inconsistency, he has a look back in a concessive clause—

... though it may have been recited with too much levity, or enforced with too little distinction.

And not long does he keep even his feet going the same way. The next paragraph begins:

There would however be few enterprizes of great labour or hazard undertaken, if we had not the power of magnifying the advantages which we persuade ourselves to expect from them.

"In all Johnson's disquisitions, whether argumentative or critical," says Sir John Hawkins, "there is a certain even-handed justice that leaves the mind in a strange perplexity. . . Thus it is that he frequently raises an edifice, which appears founded and supported to resist any attack; and then, with the next stroke, annihilates it, and leaves the vacuity he found."

The opposite way is to favor emphatically one side of the initial antithesis, develop the other only by concession, and dwell on each for a continuous space without looking at the other. In the second paragraph of his essay "On the Love of the Country," Hazlitt states his thesis that natural objects interest us only through "recollections habitually associated with them." Then, antithetically, he concedes something of the opposite, "No doubt the sky is beautiful, etc." This concession he develops in a multiplication occupying half the paragraph, having eight members with considerable variation, summed up or repeated by a quotation of nine lines from Beattie's *Minstrel*. Only in the body of the next paragraph, after a minor antithesis, does he return to the positive side of his major antithesis, that natural objects interest us through associated recollections, but having returned to it, he dwells on it, develops it in a multiplication of three main members, each divided, the first into six, the second into three, and the third into two minor members, with great variety, the whole occupying about two thirds of the paragraph. This way of writing reduces the number of turning points, the hesitations, the retractions. It soars away more boldly on the first enthusiasm, moves on the same logic without readjustment. It is this that makes possible in the writing of Hazlitt the large planes of meaning, the variegated details, all part of the same surface, the rush and flood and profusion; it is the generous abandonment to one point of view.

The danger of the antithetic mode, like that of the other kinds of meaning we have considered, is that it may assert itself at the cost of other meaning more relevant and satisfactory. Of this Hazlitt himself has accused Johnson specifically. In the Preface to the *Characters from Shakespeare's Plays* he speaks of Johnson's own Preface to the edition of Shakespeare :

He no sooner acknowledges the merits of his author in one line than the periodical revolution of his style carries the weight of his opinion completely over to the side of objection, thus keeping up a perpetual alternation of perfections and absurdities. We do not otherwise know how to account for such assertions as the following :

"In his tragic scenes, there is always something wanting, but his comedy often surpasses expectation or desire. His comedy pleases by the thoughts and the language, and his tragedy, for the greater part, by incident and action. His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct."

Yet after saying that "his tragedy was skill," he affirms in the page.

"His declamations or set speeches are commonly cold and weak, *for his power was the power of nature* "

There would seem to be much justice in Hazlitt's accusation. If Shakespeare's comedy pleases "by the thoughts and the language," doubtless the meaning is sharpened if the opposite may be said of his tragedy, that it pleases "for the greater part, by incident and action." Doubtless too this antithesis is strengthened if one may add the parallel : "His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct." Yet in this kind of writing there may be a kind of irresponsibility. How if Shakespeare's tragedy is not thus sharply antithetical to his comedy ? And to make matters worse, how if the critic himself, perceiving in Shakespeare a quality at variance with one side of the antithesis, on the next page asserts the existence of this quality ? Shakespeare's "power was the power of nature," yet a moment ago his tragedy was but "skill." Now the writing is at variance not only with its subject but with itself. And we may call this a fault of *style*—just as Hazlitt attributes it to "the very structure of his style"—because it arises from a habit of meaning. It may be called an exploitation of medium. It is cultivating expressive forms for their own sake.

CHAPTER III

Diction

IN his parallelism we have seen Johnson more interested in the alignment of reasoning, the relation of premises to conclusions, than in the individuality of the premises themselves, in his antitheses we have seen him intent on showing the respect in which he does mean something by telling the respect in which he does not mean it. Both these are ways of attaining generalization, of referring to their relevant classifications the concrete or specific objects employed as the texture, really only illustrative, of thoughtful discourse. They are ways of insisting on the formal over the material. And in yet another important way Johnson did the same—in his peculiar choice of words, the distinctively Johnsonian vocabulary.

The critics have not differed much over what words are Johnsonian. "Words of Latin and Greek origin," says Schmidt, "... technical terms of philosophy, medicine and law," and he gives a long list of nouns ending in "ion." "Pompous and long," says Matthew Arnold. "In a learned language," says Macaulay, "... in a language in which nobody ever quarrels, or drives bargains, or makes love, in a language in which nobody ever thinks... It is well known that he made less use than any other eminent writer of those strong plain words, Anglo-Saxon or Norman-French, of which the roots lie in the inmost depths of our language; and that he felt a vicious partiality for terms which long after our own speech had been fixed, were borrowed from the Greek and Latin... ." "None but 'tall, opaque words' taken from the 'first row of the rubric,' " says Hazlitt—"words with the greatest number of syllables, or Latin phrases with merely English terminations."

Scarcely a criticism of Johnson's style has been written without the mention of "long" words or "Latin" words. And the early, more vituperative criticisms abound in epithets like "polysyllabic," "pedantic," "hard," "obscure," "bombastic," "cumbrous." "The teethbreaking diction of Johnson" was Walpole's expression. This may be bookseller's project at bottom," said Archibald Campbell; "he might write his *Ramblers* to make a dictionary necessary and afterwards compile his dictionary to explain his *Ramblers*."

But we must approach the matter somewhat more thoughtfully. In the first place, if an expressive tendency sometimes leads an author to violate idiom, his violations may be exhibited as curiosities, and in proportion to their frequency the author may be more or less censured—for idiom, currency, is one of the conditions of effectiveness in the arbitrary medium of language. Yet these violations, understood however perfectly as violations, are no account of the expressive tendency that produced them. Professor Taylor has well said : "The whole tale is never told when one merely turns his pages—as one easily may—and unearths such a list of musty curiosities as the following : *proemial, momentaneous, interstitial, supplantation, supervenient, annuitant, obtunds, pravity, divaricate, amendations, propagate, procerity, and operose* ." And the perhaps even more exaggerated examples with which O.F. Christie amuses himself are amusing only, not seriously instructive.

Nor is it a stylistic evaluation of Johnson's words to consider where he learned them. The opportunities which a man has to learn this or that kind of vocabulary are certainly a part of his literary history and an important part, but they do not affect the description of his style as expression. The question whether Johnson's vocabulary is traceable to his work on the *Dictionary* is irrelevant here. And so is the question whether it is traceable to his classical education. It is not to the purpose to call his words Latin. Their derivation may have a historical connection with their type of meaning, but for the analysis of meaning this is an accident. If Johnson had been a Roman, he would probably have used Greek words. As a matter of fact it is possible that he uses almost as many Greek as Latin words. Again, it is but little more to the purpose to appeal to Johnson's *Plan of a Dictionary* and his *Preface to the Dictionary* and deduce from these his theory of propriety in English. If we consider Johnson's objection to "Gallick structure and phrase," his belief that the cultivation of the learned languages had helped to perfect and fix our language,

we may understand some of the limitations of his vocabulary but hardly his way of using it. A lexicographical principle is not a stylistic, not an expressive one.

If we would philosophize on Johnson's use of words, we must go again to his meaning, we must describe his words as tending to have certain kinds of meaning. At once then we see the inadequacy of simple lists of words or statistics of the occurrence of certain kinds of words defined merely by qualities that may be observed in them when isolated. What is needed is the context. For the "same" type of word becomes a different type in a different use. An impressive list of nouns in "ion," for example, such as Schmidt presents, may warrant the presumption that some way of using these has been of extraordinary frequency. But what the way is we may miss, because words in "ion" have been used by different writers in different ways.

ii

IN talking of Johnson's words there are in general three pairs of opposed notions that must be mentioned and usually have been either more or less explicitly: the particular and the general, the concrete and the abstract, the sensory and the non-sensory. At the risk of being obvious I enter into a short discussion of the meaning and interrelation of these terms.

Generality in writing is more a matter of whole meaning than of diction, or at any rate it is hardly to be measured in terms of the latter. General terms, as opposed to particular terms, embrace almost the whole language. Only proper nouns, personal pronouns, and demonstrative adjectives and pronouns are in themselves particular. And all particulars in thoughtful writing have an illustrative value, that is to say, a class value. Particularity is often a mere form, as when Addison introduces Eugenius in *Spectator* No. 177, or when Johnson devotes the whole of *Idler* No. 71 to Dick Shifter. All class terms are general, and those that are less general ought to be called more specific rather than more particular. Any given class word is more general or more specific according to the generic idea with relevance to which it is used. If I mention horses in a field in an enumeration of farm animals, I have been fairly specific. If I mention only horses in describing a racing farm, I have been general. For this, to be equally specific, I should know the breeds of horses, distinguish the mares, the stallions and the geldings, the fillies and the colts. And this is only to consider genera and species according to one order. There is also the matter of intersection of species. An apple in an orchard is not an apple in a lunch basket. Any term when put in different contexts assumes by implication relations to different generic scales. Further, an adjective or an abstract noun will have a more or less specific value according to the concrete noun with which it is associated. "Green woods" are less specific than "green hat," for the woods are expected to be green.

The act of generalization is a step toward that other which is called abstraction. In order to form the class concept "animals" it is necessary to see a number of dissimilar objects under an aspect which they have in common; nevertheless the concept is still of the actual objects. It is the act of attending to this concept itself which is better called abstraction. The aspect, adjectival when considered as embodied in the object, is invested with substantiality of its own; and we have "animality." As a usual thing the more general the idea by the first process, the more likely the mind is to find a use in the abstraction. "Animality" is a more common abstraction than "horsiness" or "equinity," and the latter more common than "colthood" or "coltiness." The more specific the class notion becomes, the more difficult it is to conceive it abstractly or at least to find an abstract word for it. And so abstraction depends on generalization, and an author's tendency to abstraction is likely to be in proportion to his tendency to generalization.

The foregoing may have suggested the standing of the terms "sensory" and "non-sensory" in our inquiry. They are as relative as "particular" and "general." Even an onomatopoeic word has some arbitrary, generalized value, or it is not a word. And even an abstract word referring to a mental state, like

"thoughtfulness," is abstracted from experiences which are partly sensory and must faintly suggest them. For thinking is done through the imagination, and the imagination draws its material from the senses. An abstract word like "greenness" has much more sensory value than a concrete word like "man." All that *can* be said in general is that particular or more specific words tend to be more sensory than general or abstract ones. There are more physical qualities connoted in the word "colt" than in "equine." And it may be added that verbs of thought, even the more specific ones, like "speculate," "ponder," "muse," those which are dead metaphors, have little sensory content, while adjectives denoting qualities perceptible to the senses. "green," "harsh," "fragrant," have the greatest, though even this is diluted by frequent metaphorical use, as when one speaks of "harsh manners." A writer's proportion of sensory values will correspond to his use of the specific. And as no single class word can be called absolutely specific or absolutely general, so no word can be called absolutely sensory or absolutely non-sensory. The terms are contraries rather than contradictories.

iii

It is rather as a character of general meaning than as a detail of meaning, as style, that one must be content to consider Johnson's tendency to generalization. It is possible to produce a list of words from Hazlitt like the following:

brilliance, buckles, lake, lamp, library, lustre, mariner, masqueradedress, bosom, brow, dew-drops, garden, glass, spring, sun, pale, paste, cottage, glittering, smooth, soft, stamped, stripped, trembles, laugh, wandered, winged

And to make a list from Johnson to set beside them:

objects, present, schemes, felicity, commodious, serious, ridiculed, wantoning, blessings, transmit, futurity, progressive, horizon, allurements, fear, fatigue, contemplation, harvest, maxims, caution, propriety, usefulness, levity, distinction, vehemence, inquietude, fruition

We may call Hazlitt's words sensory and specific, Johnson's nonsensory and general. Yet it is only in a vague and collective sense that this is so, and only because we know the contexts too that we accept these lists as representative of any quality of meaning. Though many of Johnson's words in the above list could not by any use have much sensory value, it is only the use of a word that ever gives it any. It may be instructive to compile the following list from the same *Rambler* :

railery, gay, wantoning, shine, glide, flowery, gradual, horizon, flights, steps, eyes, ground, harvest, blights, inundations, sweep, reaping, riot, slipped, magnifying, crown, island, squire, mirth, plants, sun, gardens, physick, catharticks, lenitives, dispel, cloud, luminaries, library, caressed, huddled, fluctuating, immersed

Not even at first glance so promising as Hazlitt's bright array. Yet who without the context could guess the dryly non-sensory, intellectual use of these words, the semimetaphorical "track so smooth and so flowery," "flights of the human mind," "horizon of his prospects," or "steps to a certain point," or the flat illustrative value of "an island to bestow on his worthy squire" ? And if we limit the inquiry to the matter of specific or general, it is even more hopeless to define or count. Anyone looking for general words would have to admit that in our first list from *Rambler* No. 2 "schemes" and "fear" are rather general. Yet which is more general ? And where is the line to be drawn ? On which side of these words ? Or between the two?

On the other hand, Johnson's bent for generality cannot be denied. It is part of his moral purpose. It is derived from the very subjects of his essays and suggested in their titles. It is apparent as a character of his general meaning on almost any page. And if he is interested in generality, in the classes to which things belong, the aspects which unify groups of objects, he becomes at moments even more interested in these aspects as things in themselves, as metaphysical realities. Allowing the physical objects to be pressed out of sight, he erects the metaphysicalities or abstractions into the substantives of his discourse.

And in order to accommodate these substantives he resorts at times to certain extraordinary distortions of prose.

Some examples may be seen in the following paragraph from *Rambler* No.2:

This quality of looking forward into futurity seems the unavoidable condition of a being, whose motions are gradual, and whose life is progressive : as his powers are limited, he must use means for the attainment of his ends, and intend first what he performs last; as by continual advances from his first stage of existence, he is perpetually varying the horizon of his prospects, he must always discover new motives of action, new excitements of fear, and allurements of desire.

Johnson has gone far out of his way to bring in the two very general abstractions "quality" and "condition," where the concrete form would be simply : "To look forward into the future seems unavoidable for a being whose motions are gradual." Then "attainment" is an abstraction, and instead of "for the attainment of his ends," the verbal form "to attain his ends" would be preferred by many writers. But the closing phrases of this paragraph show Johnson in his most abnormal employment of the abstract noun in place of another part of speech—the linking of noun to noun, or piling of noun upon noun, by the preposition "of." In "attainment of his ends" the verbal notion is so strong that this objective genitive construction is hardly noticed as containing two nouns. The meaning of such genitive constructions can, however, vary widely, according to the nature of the nouns and their relation to each other. We may have, for example, the subjective genitive, "fear of men" (for death); the objective, "fear of death" (by men); the qualitative, "house of stone," and so on, through many shades of meaning perhaps uncatalogued by grammarians. What Johnson specializes in is a form of the *oppositional* genitive in which one noun is abstract, or both, "He must always discover new motives of action, new excitements of fear, and allurements of desire." The last two members of this triplet area development of the first and taken together are parallel to it. The relations of the three pairs of words connected by "of" are different. "*Motives of action*" are *motives for* action—namely, "fear" and "desire," which, though parallel to "motives," occupy the position of second noun in the last two phrases. The element of action disappears at the end of the phrase, and in its place, but at the beginning, appear the two words "excitements" and "allurements," abstract, in appositional relation to "fear" and "desire." The notion "fear" (itself perhaps abstract) has the quality of exciting pulled out of it and formed into a second abstraction; so "allurements" is pulled out of "desire"; and the pairs of abstractions float in unstable expansion, each ready to collapse into one. The use of verbs would have made the expressions more concrete : "new fears to excite him and desires to allure him," and perhaps would have created a more apparent shade of tautology (multiplication irrelevant to the context).

In the first paragraph of the same *Rambler* occurs the expression :

ridiculed, with all the pleasantry of wit, and exaggerated with all the amplifications of rhetoric

But "wit" is not an agent who displays "pleasantry"; both are qualities of mind or talk displayed by some agent, or better two aspects of the same mental actions or talk. To say "the pleasantries of wit" is to make one grow out of the other, like a hump on the hump of the camel. A more ordinary form would be "pleasantry and wit," a typical Johnsonian doublet for emphasis, but less abstract, for here the two terms are parallel, each capable of an abstract or a concrete interpretation. Much the same may be said for "amplifications of rhetoric." If rhetoric is personified into a rhetorical speaker, the construction may be interpreted as a subjective genitive, with "amplifications" referring to the amplified things said by this speaker. But one is more likely to conceive "rhetoric" as a way of speaking or writing and "amplifications" as another, if a more specific, aspect of the same way.

Along with these abstractions may be noted the passive voice and the absence of concrete nouns denoting agents. The abstractions assume the responsibility of the agent and are usually in an oblique case. "It has been marked with every epithet of contempt." Or the verb itself becomes an abstraction, the agent disappears, and what would be the object is connected with the abstraction of a verb by some other verb. "Which escape vulgar observation," instead of "which people do not commonly observe." Or the

abstraction not only assumes the responsibility of the agent but fills his shoes as subject of the action. "That vehemence of desire which presses through right and wrong to its gratification, or that anxious inquietude which is justly chargeable with distrust of heaven." An abstraction of an abstraction pressing through right and wrong to another abstraction. In the *Life of Watts*, we have "Mr. Pinhorne ... to whom the gratitude of his scholar afterwards inscribed a Latin ode." In *The False Alarm*, "Lampoon itself would disdain to speak ill." Or in any part of the sentence, as subject, as object of verb, as object of preposition, may appear abstractions that are but the faintest shade removed from personification.

The danger of constant abstraction, besides its leading to occasional violation of idiom, is, like the danger of other types of meaning we have considered, that of irrelevant meaning. A series of metaphysical substantives engrafted into a discourse, standing out like shadows from every concrete substantive or rising like ghosts in the level road of verbs and adjectives, is a series of meanings that may point in many wrong directions. Abstraction is the conjuring into substantiality of qualities which in the physical world have not this dignity. Many qualities, quite relevantly named, are nevertheless, like the paint on a bench, better for lying flat. Enough has been said by many a writer on the virtue of concrete nouns and active verbs—how they touch directly what is meant, cut swiftly to the heart of matters. Although in every context some abstractions may be relevantly named, it does not follow that abstraction is a safe prescription for any of the things sometimes vaguely associated with good writing, for dignity or sublimity, force or authority.

iv

BUT the two traits of generalization and abstraction lead Johnson to a third which I consider to be preeminently the Johnsonian trait of vocabulary—the use of general or abstract words which have a scientific or philosophic flavor. "Philosophick" he called them himself. There are certain words for denoting objects which may not denote these any more generically than other words denoting the same objects, but which suggest that the objects are to be thought of as a class, rather than as individuals; they emphasize by their tone the aspect under which the class is conceived and have little or no connotation of complete appearance or the physical accidentals which clothe individuals of the class. These terms speak as having been coined by men who knew more accurately than common men the precise aspect, or complex of aspects, that constitute the class, who named classes only after studying them and with the advantage of vast preliminary erudition, men who understood the nature of things. These, in short, are scientific terms, what Schmidt recognizes as the "technical terms of philosophy, medicine and law," careful terms, and because careful, weighty, carrying authority. Such, for example, is the word "equine." As a noun it refers to no other object than a horse, but it suggests that the writer knows what a horse is: as an adjective it means "horselike," yet it is one word, established, whereas there is that of the makeshift, unready, unauthoritative, about "horselike." The difference is most apparent in terms which actually belong to science. But it appears all through the language. It is the difference between "domicile" and "home," between "cursive" and "running," between "incise" and "cut," even, by extension of the implication, between "frequently" and "often."

It happens that almost all of these terms, if not all of them, are Latin and Greek. This is the accident of their derivation, that the learned tongues were levied upon for the terminology of philosophy and then for that of the growing physical sciences, "natural philosophy," and that the learned tongues were Latin and Greek. So Latin and Greek derivation becomes implicitly learned and authoritative; the character is more or less extended to all words of direct Latin or Greek derivation, whether strictly scientific or not, down to adverbs of such common occurrence as "frequently" and "subsequently." In these the character is of course very faint but can become noticeable by multiplication.

It happens too that Latin and Greek learned derivatives are long. And to length of words I am ready to grant some expressive value—that of emphasis. The scientific authority, the deliberation and certainty, is backed up by a thump on the table. The big word is big enough to enforce its big meaning, to increase the strength of the less emphatic parts of the sentence, to clinch the already more emphatic parts. If

Johnson would use a doublet of nearly synonymous words mainly for emphasis, why not one big one, or a doublet of big ones ?

In considering philosophic words we have of course the same problem of context as with the specific and sensory. We must proceed, not by statistics, but by examining the function of such words as may securely be called Johnsonian. When Johnson said of *The Rehearsal*, "It has not wit enough to keep it sweet," then in correction of himself, "It has not vitality enough to preserve it from putrefaction," he composed in the second version what I believe everyone will admit to be a highly characteristic Johnsonian expression. Moreover, it cannot be disputed that its character depends largely on the diction. Yet one bent on listing Johnsonian words could hardly stop in manageable limits if words like "vitality," "preserve," "putrefaction," were to be included. "Such was the intense vitality of the Béarnese prince." Surely the word "vitality" itself has its innocence. And see what Carlyle could do with the plural. "He was full of bright speech and argument; radiant with arrowy vitalities." "Putrefaction" is less exonerable; its use shines through it more, and perhaps did even more in Johnson's day. Yet Marryat in 1833 was certainly not being Johnsonian when he wrote: "the body is never allowed to remain many hours unburied in the tropical climates, where putrefaction is so rapid." And even in 1756 Gray wrote to Wharton : "I maintain that one sick rich patient has more of pestilence and putrefaction about him than a whole ward of sick poor." And for the word "preserve," who would care to list its humble uses ? It is when "vitality" is the alternative to "wit," or to what would be of its own generic level, "life," that its philosophic character is seen. And "putrefaction" loses its philosophic character when applied in a matter-of-fact, gruesome way to a corpse, or disgustingly to a sick man, but shows this character in full when used in the abstract realm of literary criticism. "Preserve" in this context shows perfectly how a common word (not directly Latin in derivation, but French) becomes philosophic when it displaces a still more common word. The Old English "cepan" might father a sturdy enough plain English word, but never a philosophic one.

As a further illustration I offer the following sentence from *Rambler* No. 2.

In agriculture, one of the most simple and necessary employments, no man turns up the ground but because he thinks of the harvest, that harvest which blights may intercept, which inundations may sweep away, or which death or calamity may hinder him from reaping.

"Agriculture" is the "philosophic" term for "farming"; "intercept," for "cut off; "inundations," for "floods." The terms "harvest," "blights," "sweep away" are non-philosophic or plain, of the same rank as the alternatives just suggested. In this sentence there would perhaps be small loss of meaning were all of the six terms plain.

The danger is once more that of irrelevant meaning. If it is remembered that a "philosophic" word has a kind of meaning, a connotation, which its plain equivalent lacks, at will be easily understood that to use "philosophic" diction constantly is to give to writing an irrelevant overtone, to emphasize or attempt to emphasize every word in a monotonous uproar. It is to Johnson's "philosophic" diction that Hazlitt refers when he says : "He always translated his ideas into the highest and most imposing form of expression,"⁴¹ and when he says again, "The fault of Dr. Johnson's style is, that it reduces all things to the same artificial and unmeaning level."

CHAPTER IV

Other Qualities

IF we recall our definition of style as the last and most detailed elaboration of meaning, we must see that only a few of the qualities that may be ascribed to a writing are property stylistic. This precludes a complete account of a writing in a study of style. One of the characteristics of Johnson's biographical writing is his analytic disposal of material, the life of a poet in one part, and in another the literary estimate. It is this more than any other quality that distinguishes earlier biography from the Stracheyan school of synthesis and interpretative arrangement. Yet this is not one of the topics to be discussed in a study of style. It is part of a broader study of meaning; in defining style as a part of meaning we imply room for such another part.

There are other qualities of writing which may be legitimately discussed as style, but most often not as peculiar to a given writer. They are parts of detailed meaning, but are kinds of meaning shared so widely among writers that, even when appearing in combination with more peculiar qualities, they are not parts by which the style of the given writer may be defined. Such, for example, is sentence length. It is possible to study the length (and with it the structure) of the Johnsonian sentence and to compile relevant statistics. (The latter Professor Taylor has done and reports for the early *Ramblers* a high average of 51.4 words per "indicated" (punctuated) sentence and even of 36.7 per "actual" (structural) sentence, but a decrease through Johnson's later career to 28.3 and 18.6 in expository sections of the *Lives*.) If we compare Johnson's sentences with those of other English prose masters, we find him heavy in the scale of length and complexity, but not heaviest, and not as heavy as other writers whose prose on the whole may seem less massive. But there is a description of Johnson's sentence by Professor Osgood which seems to me more relevant to the question of style than any other that has been written.

His sentences are nearly always declarative, and the normal order of statement is seldom altered. Entire sentences from capital to period are not as a rule periodic; but his sentences are often compound, and the single member or clause is generally cast into periodic form. The subordinate clauses are also unvaried and narrow in range, and are kept strictly subordinate in sense, as well as in structure; his commonest subordinate form is the relative clause restrictive.

ii

IN the same category as sentence-length I should put what is called 'imagery.' It is a true stylistic quality (more important than sentence-length) but one that has no special relevance to the description of Johnson's style. Boswell himself several times praises Johnson's "imagery" or "fancy," and recently the notion has been taken up by O.F. Christie.

It is in "imagery" that Johnson excels, in picturesqueness of phrase, in apt and concentrated and vivid expressions. This is Johnson's predominant quality, in which, as a prose writer, he has never since been surpassed.

But "imagery" has not generally been chosen for remark by those who praised Johnson's style. And to me it seems that the term is susceptible of such wide interpretation that among the different qualities which may go by the name one at least of sure to be found in almost any good writing, and that the "imagery" of Johnson's writing is imagery only in the most diluted sense. One of the most recent and most deliberate students of imagery, Professor Spurgeon, writes : "When I say 'images' I mean every kind of picture, drawn in every kind of way, in the form of simile or metaphor—in their widest sense." If one may judge from Professor Spurgeon's extended treatment of the subject, she means that imagery is not only non-literal but pictorial—that it is simile or metaphor which has a strong imaginative appeal. This is probably the most useful way to define imagery, the best way to preserve a limited meaning for the term.

But if imagery is to be taken in this way, the question how much imagery is to be found in a writing will have close connection with that already discussed, how much sensory terminology is to be found, how many of the author's terms suggest sense impressions, or images. And, as we have already seen, Johnson's terms tend to be non-sensory, his meaning to be general and abstract. If Johnson's writing may be said to contain imagery, we must understand the term in another sense, that of simply non-literal expression. If it be remembered that not all nonliteral expression, that is, not all metaphor, need be highly sensory, it can be admitted that in some sense Johnson's writing contains imagery. Since a great part of language, and almost all abstract language, is metaphor, dead, half dead, or alive, the use of metaphor,—"the unique expression of a writer's individual vision," or "the result of the search for a precise epithet"—shades imperceptibly into the use of the proper word, the word most relevant in a context. This is the merit of good diction in its most unspecified sense, a sense in which it may be attributed to every good writer. And it is only in this sense that imagery may be attributed to Johnson. The extracts arrayed by Christie to illustrate Johnson's style and particularly the shorter, epigrammatic ones, support this conclusion. "Time is, of all modes of existence, most obsequious to the imagination." The word "obsequious" is metaphorical, relevant, expressive, a good example of Johnson's felicity of diction. There is an odor of the "philosophic" about it; nevertheless it has its more special value in the context and justifies itself eminently. This is Johnson's kind of imagery, which is founded, like all apt diction, in an imaginative concept, but in which there is little sensory value and no need of such value. We need not imagine Time as a butler bowing to his master the Imagination. This is too much; it spoils by irrelevance. Apt diction drawn on all the implications of words but leaves most of them remotely implicit. Johnson refines "obsequious" of almost all sensory value, perhaps down to its etymological sense, of "following," certainly to its archaic metaphorical sense of "obedient."

Perhaps this is the thing most characteristic of Johnson's "imagery," a tendency to reverse dead metaphors, to force them back to their etymological meaning so that they assume a new metaphorical life. Professor Chandler writes:

Whatever power of suggestion terms such as *sedate* and *quiescent*. . . may have when separated from the context is lost when found in the clause, "good sense alone is a *sedate* and *quiescent* quality, which manages its possessions well but does not increase them";... The diction here is not suggestive but exact. One is reminded of the primary meaning of words, not of their acquired meaning : of their denotation; not, of their connotation

And the Reverend Robert Burrowes offers a good illustration.

Ardour, which in his preface to his Dictionary, he observes, is never used to denote material heat, yet to an etymologist would naturally suggest it; and Johnson accordingly, speaking of the "ardour of posthumous fame," says that "some have considered it as little better than *Splendid* madness; as a *flame kindled* by pride and *fanned* by folly.

iii

MISCELLANEOUS other qualities of Johnson's prose might be considered in brief and have been by other writers. Schmidt, for example, glances at asyndeton, polysyndeton, climax, oxymoron, rhetorical question, and others. This seems to me perfunctory, a mere following of a manual of rhetoric. My purpose has been to exploit those rhetorical topics which have special relevance to the Johnsonian style. There remain two others which I have reserved to this point as less important than parallelism, antithesis, and abstract and philosophic diction, but more important than those just briefly dismissed. These two are "inversion" and its special form "chiasmus."

The Reverend Robert Burrowes considered that Johnson's "endeavours to attain magnificence . . . taught him the abundant use of inversions ... Almost all his sentences begin with an oblique case."

Macaulay speaks of Johnson's "harsh inversions so widely different from those graceful and easy inversions which give variety, spirit, and sweetness to the expression of our great old writers."

W. Vaughan Reynolds, defending Johnson against the Reverend Robert Burrowes, maintains that Johnson's "use of inversions is not 'abundant' ... In the first ten *Ramblers* I can find only seventeen inverted constructions—not an inordinately large number in sixty-five pages of the 1792 edition of his *Works*. Johnson's critics seem to have paid too much attention to his inversions."

It is perhaps true that seventeen is not an "inordinately large number" of inverted construction for ten *Ramblers*. But what this means is not so clear. What is an inverted construction? What is an inordinately large number?

Not the number of Johnson's inversions, but their kind, must be the first critical inquiry. The meaning of the term "inversion" is not a thing to be assumed. Inversion, in general a reversal of a sequence, cannot be specifically understood until some normal sequence is defined. The application of the term "inversion" to English sentences must be based on the assumption that there is a normal order of words in the English sentence. This, it may be supposed, is roughly that of subject, then predicate, and within the predicate, first verb, then object or predicate nominative or adverbial modifier. But if inversion means a deviation from this order, or even if it means particularly a deviation at the beginning of the sentence, we are swamped with inversions in every writer. Every time we begin a sentence with an adverbial clause of any kind, or with a prepositional phrase or an infinitive phrase, not to mention other forms less frequent, we are guilty of inversion.

To define Johnsonian inversion we must determine what forms of inversion are admitted by English idiom and what are not. Johnson's peculiar use of inversion is the use of forms that are not English.

Inversion, we may generalize, is in harmony with English usage when the subordinate clause or phrase put in the initial position modifies some word, usually a verb, which follows immediately or almost immediately, or when the clause or phrase is a loose modifier of the whole clause that follows. Even the object of a verb is acceptable at the start of a sentence when followed immediately by subject and verb, though the construction always has the tone of license, of the rhetorical or poetic. The substantive clause as object is likewise an acceptable license, though it has in prose the archaic tone. As subject in the first position it can scarcely be distinguished from a predicate, and an anticipatory "it" subject is more normal.

Johnson's peculiar inversion includes, in the first place, a number of these acceptable but licentious inversions of noun objects or of substantive clauses.

These benefits of nature he improved.

That he who spends more than he receives, must in time become indigent, cannot be doubted.

In the second place he verges on the unidiomatic by separating these elements too widely from the words on which they depend.

The composition of the pudding she has, however, promised Clarinda, that if she pleases her in marriage, she shall be told without reserve.

Whether perfect happiness would be procured by perfect goodness, said Nekayah, this world never afford an opportunity of deciding.

In the third place, he is unidiomatic in his inversion of nouns in oblique cases. And this is his worst fault of inversion. The prepositional phrase which we have already mentioned as acceptable at the start of a sentence is, of course, an oblique noun with its governing preposition—"in case," "for the moment," "over the mantel." These acceptable prepositional phrases, however, usually depend on verbs. Johnson's peculiarity is that he inverts phrases depending on nouns or on adjectives. Also a few of his phrases depending on verbs are for special reasons unidiomatic.

Of composition there are different methods.

Of genius, that power which constitutes a poet; that quality without which judgement is cold, and knowledge is inert; that energy which collects, combines, amplifies, and animates; the superiority must, with some hesitation, be allowed to Dryden.

On necessary and inevitable evils, which overwhelm kingdoms at once, all disputation is vain.

From this inattention, so general and so mischievous, let it be every man's study to exempt himself.

For this suspicion every catalogue of a library will furnish sufficient reason.

With the news of a lottery I was soon gratified.

Of the gardener I soon learned that his lady was the greatest manager in that part of the country.

As an expressive tendency inversion is not far different in Johnson from what it is in other writers. And his violation of idiom is interesting stylistically only in that it indicates the extreme of the tendency. The usual purpose of any writer in inverting is to obtain relevance through order, and especially that kind of relevance known as coherence, which means sequence or continuity. Or, since continuity is maintained by a series of emphases, we may say that the purpose of inversion is emphasis. A sentence following another sentence in a continued discourse must in some way relate to it, either roughly to the whole, or more precisely to one of the parts, and if one of the parts of the second sentence relates particularly to a part of the first or the whole, then this meaning can be strengthened implicitly by the form of juxtaposition. It is in this regard that we all start most of our sentences. We strive to begin with that element of the new sentence which relates most clearly to the final element of the preceding sentence or to its whole sense. (For the same reason we keep the pronoun near its antecedent.) This sentence ordering, "inversion" if one likes, is even taught in school books. It might be illustrated, though superfluously and tediously, by several of our Johnsonian examples if they were restored to their contexts.

But there are some further reasons why a writer may maneuver a given element to the fore in a sentence. One is a more absolute reason of emphasis, at the start of a new topic, where a writer would call attention not to what has gone immediately before, but to what is to be the next immediate center of interest. Johnson has been talking of Pope's diligence and perseverance. He next wishes to say a few words about Pope's method of composition. Therefore: "Of composition there are different methods." Again, there is a use that is more peculiarly Johnsonian, inversion for the purpose of clearing the way for another construction. "It is not to be inferred that of this poetical vigour Pope has only a little, because Dryden had more." After the disposal of "poetical vigour" at the start of the sentence, "little" and "more" may follow in antithetic balance at the ends of their respective clauses. Finally, an inverted element itself may be put in antithetic position.

If of Dryden's fire the blaze is brighter, of Pope's the heat is more regular and constant. Dryden often surpasses expectation, and Pope never falls below it. Dryden is read with frequent astonishment, and Pope with perpetual delight.

The unidiomatic inversions in the first sentence of this passage are a contribution to the balanced antithesis of the whole.

Johnson's inversion is intrinsically an expressive word order. It is part of his inclination to logic his interest in the pattern of premises and conclusion, which sometimes sacrifices the quality of his premises. It happens not to be idiomatic in English; it is idiomatic in some other languages. Forms of expressiveness available in one language need not be available in another. The mastery of a language consists in accommodating the needs of intrinsic formal expressiveness to the limitations of idiom. This Johnson at moments fails to do because his idiom is fused with another idiom, the Latin. Where the demands of expressive form are more easily or more economically answered by the Latin idiom, he adopts the Latin, when another writer would preserve English idiom by recasting his meaning. And very often what he

gains in coherence is more than offset by the intrusion of irrelevant meaning which is concomitant with the unidiomatic. There is an insurgence and agony of language; the emphasis shouts too loud.

iv

A CONSTRUCTION which occurs occasionally in Johnson and which may be called an inversion perhaps more accurately than those just considered is the rhetorical figure of "chiasmus." Chiasmus is reversed order in a pair of expressions : 1—2:2'—1'. 2' and 1' may be analogous to 1 and 2 and hence form an inverted parallel.

Her marigolds (1), when they are almost cured, are often scattered by the wind (2), the rain (2') sometimes falls upon fruit (1') when it ought to be gathered dry.

Or the relation may be antithetic :

a life in which pleasures (1) are to be refused for fear of invisible punishments (2), and calamities (2') sometimes to be sought, and always endured, in hope of rewards (1') that shall be obtained in another state.

A third possibility is that 2' and 1' should stand in some functional relation to 1 and 2, for example, that of result to cause.

They have never contemplated the difference between good (1) and evil (2) sufficiently to quicken aversion (2') or invigorate desire (1').

It will be observed that in the first two of these examples the context contains other more or less isolable elements parallel in the two chiasmic halves. If these come between 1 and 2 and between 2' and 1', they make a pair of pivots on which the chiasmic elements turn; so they add somewhat to the chiasmic effect. In the first example "scattered" and "falls" are of this sort, and in the second, "refused" and "sought."

The expressive value of chiasmus is more complex than that of inversion. First there is a value of continuity in the juxtaposition of 2 and 2', but since these are not identical terms, or referentially equivalent, as often in inversion, but are usually alike only in that they are analogous parts of parallel construction, there comes with the expression of countinuity one of movement, of passage from idea to idea. At times, especially in verse, when 2 and 2' can be interpreted as having the same relation to 1, there occurs a moment of suspension while the reader need not decide whether he is completing one clause or entering on another, a suspension which is expressive in that it suggests for 2'a double relevance, both to 1 and to 1'. This is one of Mr. Empson's kinds of poetic ambiguity.

A second value of expression in chiasmus is that of the elements 1 and 1' which are the extremes, the second bringing us back to the first where we started. There is an unbroken sense of movement in the chiasmus, 1 introducing 2 by an explicit logical connection, 2 introducing 2' by an implication of juxtaposition and analogy, 2' introducing 1' by another explicit connection and 1' reminding us by analogy of 1. Hence a sense of completeness and of reciprocal relation, which is relevant especially to antithesis, whether in prose, or in the heroic couplet, where combined with the closure of rhyme chiasmus is at its best.

CHAPTER V

Consistency of Johnson's Style

MORE perhaps than any other English prose writer Johnson is said to have changed his style as he grew older, to have bettered it. Macaulay says :

Since Johnson had been at ease in his circumstances he had written little and had talked much. When therefore he, after the lapse of years, resumed his pen, the mannerism which he had contracted while he was in the constant habit of elaborate composition was less perceptible than formerly, and his diction frequently had a colloquial ease which it has formerly wanted. The improvement may be discerned by a skilful critic in the *Journey to the Hebrides*, and in the *Lives of the Poets* is so obvious that it cannot escape the notice of the most careless reader.

And within the era of tabulation Professor Taylor has offered corroboratory evidence in one respect, that of sentence length. The only voice raised in emphatic dissent has been that of Dr. Birkbeck Hill. It must be apparent that in some sense Macaulay is right, that in some way Johnson's writing is "lighter" in the *Lives of the Poets* than in the *Rambler*. The question to be decided, then, is one of classification or definition. Is the greater "lightness" of the *Lives* of a sort that should be referred to Johnson's style ? It is just this that Dr. Hill denies, and his denial is what I wish to sustain and elaborate.

As a preliminary, something may be said of Johnson's conversation itself, which Macaulay praises highly before making it the source of Johnson's improvement in writing. "When he talked, he clothed his wit and his sense in forcible and natural expressions." "As respected style, he spoke far better than he wrote. Every sentence which dropped from his lips was as correct in structure as the most nicely balanced period of the *Rambler*. But in his talk there were no pompous triads, and little more than a fair proportion of words in *-osity* and *-ation*. All was simplicity, ease and vigour." Macaulay's description fits a good deal of the recorded conversation of Johnson. There are many shorter conversational passages in the *Life* in the same style as the sustained monologue of 20 July 1763:

In civilized society, personal merit will not serve you so much as money will. Sir, you may make the experiment. Go into the street, and give one man a lecture on morality, and another a shilling, and see which will respect you most. If you wish only to support nature, Sir William Petty fixes your allowance at three pounds a year; but as times are much altered, let us call it six pounds. This sum will fill your belly, shelter you from the weather, and even get you a strong lasting coat, supposing it to be made of good bull's hide. Now, Sir, all beyond this is artificial, and is desired in order to obtain a greater degree of respect from our fellow-creatures. And, Sir, if six hundred pounds a year procure a man more consequence, and, of course, more happiness than six pounds a year, the same proportion will hold as to six thousand, and so on as far as opulence can be carried.

In this extraordinary piece of reporting, if we may believe it is not an assemblage of pieces, but represents Johnson's unbroken discourse, we have something like a spoken essay, and it must be admitted it is something quite unlike a *Rambler*. Here is the method by example rather than generality, the swift tide of unelaborated short statement, the deft insertion of subordinate matter without recourse to periodicity. The style of Johnson the writer appears in a few philosophic words, "procure," "opulence"; but most of the words are plain and blunt, the outcrop of the underlying specific vein of meaning. The tone is the dogmatic cynicism of the conversational Johnson (when he talked to be contradictory), like the dogmatism of his essays, but not like their more hopeful castigation of vice and folly. Emphasis is secured, not by balanced antithetic words (though there is antithesis) or by weighty groups of big words, but by conversational methods, by short independent clauses, syntactic isolation, by "Sir," "Now, Sir," "And, Sir."

Grant, then, that Macaulay's description of Johnson's talk is a fair statement of some of the truth. There is on the other hand the fact that Johnson frequently did speak just such philosophic words as appear in his writing. "There is a good deal of Spain that has not been perambulated." "In the description of night in Macbeth, the beetle and the bat detract from the general idea of darkness,—inspissated gloom." "A speech on the stage, let it flatter ever so extravagantly, is formular." "There is in it such a *labefactation* of all principles, as may be injurious to morality." "It has been maintained that this suprfotation, this teeming of the press in modern times, is prejudicial to good literature." "Sir, among the anfractuositities of the human mind, I know not if it may not be one, that there is a superstitious reluctance to sit for a picture." "Here might have *exuberated* into an Atheist." Mr. S. C. Roberts has made what seems a just observation, "that while long words and laboured phrases may well be a source of weariness or irritation in a familiar essay, they may nevertheless provide entertainment in conversation." Phrases which in the *Rambler* would be "quoted as illustrating the verbal elaboration of Johnson's literary style ... are typical of the kind of sentence that readers of Boswell delight to quote." But it may be added that we read such utterances with delight in Boswell only because we hear the great moral essayist speaking as he writes; it is intimate, revealing, surprising, and funny. There is a shade of self-parody that Johnson himself seems to feel and exploit.

Between these extreme examples and the other sort, which best support Macaulay's estimate, there is the average, a kind of grave, carefully shaped conversation which is much more like a moral essay than that of any other man who ever talked. Examples may be found at random in the *Life*.

JOHNSON. 'Every society has a right to preserve publick peace and order, and therefore has a good right to prohibit the propagation of opinions which have a dangerous tendency. To say the magistrate has this right, is using an inadequate word : it is the *society* for which the magistrate is agent. He may be morally or theologically wrong in restraining the propagation of opinions which he thinks dangerous, but he is politically right.'

Johnson admitted that "he made it a constant rule to talk as well as he could both as to sentiment and expression," "to impart whatever he knew in the most forcible language he could put it in." And we have clear evidence that to his contemporaries his conversation did seem like his essays. Sir John Hawkins wrote that Johnson talked "in such language, that whoever could have heard and not seen him, would have thought him reading." "Johnson spoke as he wrote," recollected Sir Brooke Boothby. "He would take up a topic, and utter upon it a number of the *Rambler*." "His conversation is the same as his writing," wrote Mrs. Harris of Salisbury in 1775. The young lady from America, Miss Beresford, who was fortunate enough to hear Johnson in the coach of Oxford in 1784, said to Boswell aside, "How he does talk ! Every sentence is an essay."

Miss Burney had just been reading the *Life of Cowley* when she reflected:

how very like Dr. Johnson is to his writing; and how much the same thing it was to hear or to read him; but that nobody could tell that without coming to Streatham, for his language was generally imagined to be laboured and studied, instead of the mere common flow of his thoughts. "Very true," said Mrs. Thrale, "he writes and talks with the same ease, and in the same manner."

If we suppose that Miss Burney's notion of Johnson's writing was at this moment formed chiefly from reading the *Life of Cowley*, then this passage supports Macaulay's contention that there is a connection between Johnson's conversation and his later style. But one may wonder whether her recent reading of this work was sufficient to alter a notion of Johnson's writing that must have been formed over a number of years by the reading of the *Ramblers* and other works of his middle period. And the same may be said of Mrs. Thrale. Both these ladies, while praising Johnson's talk as natural and easy, are struck with the resemblance between his talk and his writing. What they seem to mean is that Johnson's writing itself is easy, not only the *Lives*, which they are just reading, but the *Ramblers* and *Rasselas*, the works which they would think of as characteristic. "The *Rambler*" Mrs. Thrale was to say in the *Anecdotes*, "... expressed in a style so natural to him, and so much like his common mode of conversing." And : "We

used to say to one another familiarly at Streatham Park, Come, let us go into the library, and make Johnson speak *Ramblers*.'

It appears to me unlikely that Johnson's conversation was a source of whatever lightness appears in his later writings, that as he grew older and wrote and talked more he talked himself into a simpler way of writing. What is more tenable is that all his life Johnson exhibited different degrees of his own peculiar style both in his talk and in his writing, and that especially in his writing this is to be referred to differences of subject matter.

ii

WE may begin to illustrate this from a body of Johnson's writing which lies closest to his conversation, his letters. Macaulay noticed the lightness of some of the letters, particularly those from the Hebrides. "His letters from the Hebrides to Mrs. Thrale are the original of that work of which the *Journey to the Hebrides* is the translation." And Macaulay compares a sentence from the *Journey*:

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.

and what Johnson had written to Mrs. Thrale :

When we were taken upstairs a dirty fellow bounced out of the bet where one of us was to lie. Macaulay could have cited a number of other passages of this kind. Where the letters to Mrs. Thrale and the *Journey* touch on the same subjects, it is true that the *Journey* is cast in more emphatic patterns and is more serious or philosophic—that is, the style" is heavier. The purpose of the *Journey* is certainly not that of the letters to Mrs. Thrale; its whole intended meaning is not the same.

What is of more importance to note in Johnson's collected *Letters* is the clean cleavage between his essay style and at least two other styles, the factual and the playful, all three of which occur side by side almost from the beginning to the end. Dr. Hill says, "In his letters little change in his diction can be traced from the first one to the last." Little change from first to last, but abrupt changes within the space of a single letter at any time from first to last. In December 1755 we find him writing to Miss Boothby :

Of the fallaciousness of hope, and the uncertainty of schemes, every day gives some new proof; but it is seldom heeded, till something rather felt than seen awakens attention. This illness, in which I have suffered something and feared much more, has depressed my confidence and elation; and made me consider all that I have promised myself, as less certain to be attained or enjoyed. I have endeavoured to form resolutions of a better life; but I form them weakly, under the consciousness of external motive. Not that I conceive a time of sickness time improper for recollection and good purposes, which I believe diseases and calamities often sent to produce, but because no man can know how little his performance will answer to his promises; and designs are nothing in human eyes till they are realized by execution.

But in the same letter :

Mr. Fitzherbert sent to-day to offer me some wine; the people about me say I ought to accept it, I shall therefore be obliged to him if he will send me a bottle.

What has become of the Rambler ? What has affected him so suddenly ? The answer is certainly not that he has lost his style. Rather he has lost his subject. Even the Rambler cannot make antitheses and parallels out of Mr. Fitzherbert and his bottle of wine, or at least does not try.

Twenty-eight years later the same contrast appears. In November 1783 he writes to Mrs. Thrale :

Those that have loved longest love best. A sudden blaze of kindness may by a single blast of coldness be extinguished, but that fondness which length of time has connected with many circumstances and occasions, though it may for a while [be] suppressed by disgust or resentment, with or without a cause, is hourly revived by accidental recollection. To those that have lived long together, every thing heard and everything,

seen recalls some pleasure communicated, or some benefit conferred, some petty quarrel, or some slight endearment. Esteem of great powers, or amiable qualities newly discovered, may embroider a day or a week, but a friendship of twenty years is interwoven with the texture of life.

His next letter to the Thrale household, one to Susanna, begins :

Here is a whole week, and nothing heard from your house. Baretti said what a wicked house it would be, and a wicked house it is. Of you however I have no complaint to make, for I owe you a letter. Still I live here by my own self, and have had of late very bad nights; but then I have had a pig to dinner, which Mr. Perkins gave me. Thus life is chequered.

The whole collection of Johnson's letters is a patchwork of this sort. The pieces of Ramblerism are usually short, sometimes no more than a phrase or sentence containing an inversion, a philosophic term, or a balance. "That I have answered neither of your letters you must not impute to any declension of good will, but merely to the want of something to say." "Some supervenient cause of discord may overpower this original amity." "He had raised money and squandered it, by every artifice of acquisition, and folly of expence." The longest, as long as a *Rambler*, is the carefully written letter on books to Dr. Barnard, the King's librarian. Passages of factual simplicity are to be found in almost all the letters and toward the end of even the most discursive ones. Playful or antic passages are most typical of the letters to Mrs. Thrale or her daughters, though giving way to a strain of melancholy after Mr. Thrale's death in the spring of 1781. Johnson's letters, with their abrupt changes in topic, mood, and style, their juxtaposition of paragraphs of wholly different consistency, exhibit in miniature the differences which are to be found in his writing career.

iii

THE passages which are to follow, illustrating the consistency of Johnson's style from the Preface to *Lobo* to the *Lives of the Poets*, have not been selected at random. I have argued above that the analysis of elements of style cannot be a blind experiment by which we discover some quality in the writing which we could not discover by reading. Analysis can be only a corroboration and detailed appraisal of some quality perceived by the reader as part of meaning. Some passages from Johnson's early and some from his late prose have been culled with great care as examples of *Ramblerism*; others have been chosen for their lightness. The purpose has not been to show averages in the different periods. One must admit that there are more *Ramblers* in the *Rambler* period, that in the late period there is more of the opposite kind of writing.

We have an early forecast of the *Rambler* in the Preface to *Lobo*, 1735. The narrative translation itself of course offered not much opportunity for Johnson to exercise himself. But the Preface, or at least part of it, was an original, discursive composition, an essay. If a count is made of parallels and antitheses, it will be found to have about the weight of a moderately heavy *Rambler*. The very second sentence contains a chiasmic antithesis of type II with two parallel elements : "his attempt stands in need of no apology, whatever censures may fall on the performance." Boswell quotes three paragraphs which gave Edmund Burke particular delight, the last of which is as follows:

The reader will here find no regions cursed with irremediable barrenness, or blest with spontaneous fecundity; no perpetual gloom or unceasing sunshine; nor are the nations here described either devoid of all sense of humanity, or consummate in all private and social virtues : here are no *Hottentots* without religion, polity, or articulate language; no *Chinese* perfectly polite, and completely skilled in all sciences : he will discover what will always be discovered by a diligent and impartial enquirer, that wherever human nature is to be found, there is a mixture of vice and virtue, a contest of passion and reason; and that the Creator doth not appear partial in his distribution, but has balanced in most countries their particular inconveniencies by particular favours.

The *Debates in Parliament*, 1740-1743, again exhibit the Johnsonian style, this time almost unmixed. Here there was no hindrance of facts or narrative; he might luxuriate in abstract emphasis. "They are commonly formed," says Dr. Hill, "of general statements which suit any one speaker just as well as any other. The scantier were the notes that were given him by those who had heard the debate, the more he had to draw on his imagination. But his was an imagination which supplied him with what was general much more readily than with what was particular." Here one may pick almost at random. The following passage from the "Debate on Addressing His Majesty for Removing Sir Robert Walpole" is written in a style that is sustained with little variation through the whole of the two volumes. It is an uninteresting puffy prose, that of Johnson expressing other men's opinions, without the moral conviction and spirit of the *Ramblers*.

To endeavour, my Lords, to remove from places of publick trust all those who appear to want either the virtues or abilities necessary for executing their offices, is the interest of every member of community. And it is not only the interest but the duty of all those who are either by the choice of the people, or by the right of birth, invested with the power of inspecting publick affairs, and intrusted with the general happiness of their country. That therefore every motive combines to make it the duty, and every argument concurs to prove it the privilege of your Lordships, is too evident to be doubted.

If Johnson could be heavy before the *Ramblers*, he could also be (and it is equally relevant to our purpose to note it) light during the period of the *Ramblers*. Dr. Hill has maintained that this is evident in Johnson's miscellaneous writings. "The Preface to the Dictionary, the Life of Sir Thomas Browne, the Review of Jonas Hanway's Journal, and of Soame Jenyns's nature and Origin of Evil.. . are free from any excess of mannerisms." But one may find the principle better illustrated even within the *Ramblers*. A topic on which Johnson was always forced to employ his lightest style was specific literary criticism. The reference to this poem and that, the quotation of passages and reference to them, the use of technical terms, "verse," "food," "syllable," "long" and "short," all conspired to prevent Johnson's logic from taking hold of the theme and carrying it to the realm of elaborate generality. This sort of subject matter in a great measure accounts for the lightness of the *Lives*. Johnson has no sooner done with the recital of biographical events than comment on particular works claims his attention. He manages to insert only interludes of essay, of general appraisal of literary character. And if we look at such a *Rambler* as No. 88, on Milton's versification, we see the complete anticipation of many sections of the *Lives*. How could Johnson be most Johnsonian when he had such as the following to write ?

The great peculiarity of *Milton's* versification, compared with that of later poets, is the elision of one vowel before another, or the suppression of the last syllable of a word ending with a vowel, when a vowel begins the following word. As

Knowledge—

Oppresses else with surfeit, and soon turns

Wisdom to folly, as nourishment to wind.

This license, though now disused in *English* poetry, was practised by our older writers, and is allowed in many other languages ancient and modern, and therefore the criticks on *Paradise Lost* have, without much deliberation, commended *Milton* for continuing it.

Passages of the same lightness are to be found in *Rasselas*, except that here the occasion is not literary criticism but narrative. Such a passage as that running through Chapters XIII-xv, a continuum of rather pure narrative, has a marked difference in weight from philosophic conversation such as that of Chapters XXVII-

XXVIII. The following is from Chapter XIII.

As they were walking on the side of the mountain, they observed that the conies, which the rain had driven from their burrows, had taken shelter among the bushes, and formed holes behind them, tending upwards in an oblique line. "It has been the opinion of

antiquity, said Imlac, that human reason borrowed many arts from the instinct of animals; let us, therefore, not think ourselves degraded by learning from the coney. We may escape by piercing the mountain in the same direction. We will begin where the summit hangs over the middle part, and labour upward till we shall issue up beyond the prominence."

The eyes of the prince, when he heard this proposal, sparkled with joy. The execution was easy, and the success certain.

Contrast it with the following from Chapter XXVII.

The highest stations cannot therefore hope to be the abodes of happiness, which I would willingly believe to have fled from thrones and palaces to seats of humble privacy and placid obscurity. For what can hinder the satisfaction, or intercept the expectations, of him whose abilities are adequate to his employments, who sees with his own eyes the whole circuit of his influence, who chooses by his own knowledge all whom he trusts, and whom none are tempted to deceive by hope or fear? Surely he has nothing to do but to love and to be loved, to be virtuous and to be happy.

Sixteen years later the same mixture of styles is to be observed. The *Journey to the Western Islands* consists for the most part of paragraphs of narrative or description alternate with paragraphs of discussion. We find on one page a passage like the following:

But it must be remembered, that life consists not of a series of illustrious actions, or elegant enjoyments; the great part of our time passes in compliance with necessities, in the performance of daily duties, in the removal of small inconveniencies, in the procurement of petty pleasures; and we are well or ill at ease, as the main stream of life glides on smoothly, or is ruffled by small obstacles and frequent interruptions. The true state of every nation is the state of common life. The manners of a people are not to be found in the schools of learning, or the palaces of greatness, where the national character is obscured or obliterated by travel or instruction, by philosophy or vanity; nor is publick happiness to be estimated by the assemblies of the gay, or the banquets of the rich.

And on the next page:

Finding nothing to detain us at *Bamff*, we set out in the morning, and having breakfasted at *Cullen*, about noon came to *Elgin*, where, in the inn that we supposed the best, a dinner was set before us, which we could not eat. This was the first time, and except one, the last, that I found any reason to complain of a *Scottish* table; and such disappointments, I suppose, must be expected in every country where there is no great frequency of travellers.

These passages are a fair sample of the *Western Islands*, though occasional phrases or sentences where the two modes blend are more striking or amusing. "Such capricious and temporary waters," says the Rambler, "cannot be expected to produce many fish." And again he antithesizes a species of geese. "They are so tame as to own a home, and so wild as sometimes to fly quite away." A reflection on the character of the Highlanders which appears to me to be the longest stretch of abstraction in the whole book is about heavy enough to be a *Rambler*.

Much the same is to be said of *Taxation No Tyranny*. Here argument of a general political character—on "fundamental principles, or common axioms, which being generally received are little doubted, and being little doubted have been rarely proved"—is interspersed with more specific examination of the question at issue. "Suppose it true, that any such exemption is contained in the charter of *Maryland*, it can be pleaded only by the *Marylanders*." The first fifteen hundred words of the essay, a passage among the most homogeneously Johnsonian, will be found about as heavy as a moral *Rambler*.

The *Life of Pope* is an exception among the *Lives*, containing more elaborate discussion than any other; in choosing a passage from it for comparison with Addison and Hazlitt I have, as I confess above, followed Professor Chandler, who used great discrimination in finding a passage so specially Johnsonian.

But a like passage from the *Life of Dryden*, for example, is almost as difficult to find as one from the *Western Islands*. So common throughout the *Lives* are paragraphs like the following :

Davenant was perhaps at this time his favourite author, though Gondibert never appears to have been popular and from Davenant he learned to please his ear with the stanza of four lines alternately rhymed.

Once series of paragraphs, however, on such ductile topics as Dryden's genius, his learning, his prose style, his refinement of the language, offers some good examples of Johnson's essay style as it survived in the *Lives* wherever it found sustenance.

Yet it cannot be said that his genius is ever unprovided of matter, or that his fancy languishes in penury of ideas. His works abound with knowledge, and sparkle with illustrations. There is scarcely any science or faculty that does not supply him with occasional images and lucky similitudes; every page discovers a mind very widely acquainted both with art and nature, and in full possession of great stores of intellectual wealth. Of him that knows much, it is natural to suppose that he has read with diligence; yet I rather believe that the knowledge of Dryden was gleaned from accidental intelligence and various conversation, by a quick apprehension, a judicious selection, and a happy memory, a keen appetite of knowledge, and a powerful digestion; by vigilance that permitted nothing to pass without notice, and a habit of reflection that suffered nothing useful to be lost. A mind like Dryden's, always curious, always active, to which every understanding was proud to be associated, and of which every one solicited the regard, by an ambitious display of himself, had a more pleasant, perhaps a nearer way to knowledge than by the silent progress of solitary reading. I do not suppose that he despised books, or intentionally neglected them; but that he was carried out, by the impetuosity of his genius, to more vivid and speedy instructors; and that his studies were rather desultory and fortuitous than constant and systematical.

In the comparison of passages made in this chapter I have been thinking more of parallelism and antithesis than of diction. I have not much to say about the progress of Johnson's diction, to what degree at different times it was abstract, general, non-sensory, or philosophic—and this for the reason discussed above, that these qualities of diction, being dependent on context, are not measureable or countable in words as such. Professor Taylor has proved beyond doubt, I think, that the average number of syllables in Johnson's words is as great in the *Lives of the Poets* as in the *Ramblers*. This, however need not persuade us to any further conclusion. There are long words and long words. It is conceivable that Johnson's words should have continued of the same average length yet have become less philosophic. And this, I believe, is what did happen. Certainly, even when they continue philosophic, they are less often exaggerated or freakish.

Another matter on which I have little to say is the decrease in sentence length which took place between the *Rambler* and the *Lives of the Poets* Professor Taylor has already treated the matter thoroughly. His painstaking statistics show that in the *Ramblers* Johnson averaged 43.1 words per sentence, in the *Idlers*, 33.4, in the *Lives*, 30.1. Perhaps this was an improvement in Johnson's writing; perhaps he may be read the more easily for it. But it would be difficult to say how far this is independent of the changes in subject matter which we have discussed, and more difficult to say whether anything peculiarly Johnsonian evaporated with the length of the sentence.

CHAPTER VI

Johnson's Theory—I

WHAT a man says about style, his theory of it, expresses a formulated, or fully conscious, preference, while what he does about style may proceed from a preference unrecognized by himself. In this sense the evidence of his theoretical pronouncements is more explicit and clearer than that of his practice. On the other hand the formulated preference suffers the disadvantage of generalization—a thing which comes partly from other minds (with the words used) and is an invasion which may set up the notions and lay out the lines which it is called in only to describe. It is not to be expected that any man should be able to define his own style adequately, even if we make the rash assumption that he is fully aware of it. We must add to this that Samuel Johnson is seldom formally addressed to the subject of his own style, that he lets fall cursory remarks, sometimes with his own style in mind, sometimes with that of others, sometimes with only a notion of style in general. The sort of evidence we are about to see is not so compelling as that already derived from Johnson's practice. It is not to be set on the same level and adduced against the practice. At best it can be but corroboratory—or, where it is contradictory, be accepted as a contradiction, or perhaps as a puzzle. No one, for example, would care to argue on the basis of the following passage that Johnson disapproved of Latin and philosophic diction, yet here we see plainly that on one occasion at least he realized the futility of the philosophic tendency to invent a name for every concept. Boswell asks him for a synonym for "transpire."

'Why, Sir, (said he,) *get abroad*: BOSWELL. That, Sir, is using two words.' JOHNSON. 'Sir, there is no end of this. You may as well insist to have a word for old age.' BOSWELL. 'Well, Sir, *Senectus*.' JOHNSON. 'Nay, Sir, to insist always that there should be one word to express a thing in English, because there is one in another language, is to change the language.'

In like manner it is easy to prove from a passage in the *Preface to the Dictionary* that he understood well enough that learning in other languages could produce corrupt English.

He that has long cultivated another language, will find its words and combinations crowd upon his memory; and haste and negligence, refinement and affectation, will obtrude borrowed terms and exotic expressions.

In the face of passages like these, where Johnson seems to repudiate the preferences displayed in his own writing or to forget other critical statements made by himself, we must parallel Boswell's decision about his eating.

His practice, indeed, I must acknowledge, may be considered as casting the balance of his different opinions upon this subject; for I never knew any man who relished good eating more than he did.

But there is a more deceptive class of statements, generalities and epithetical condemnations, where we can sometimes hardly prove what Johnson means, or where if we can, the meaning is what a reader of today might not at first be likely to conceive. There is notably his *Idler* No. 36, on "The terrific diction," where he speaks of "the ponderous dictator of sentences" and "the stately son of demonstration, who proves with mathematical formality what no man has yet pretended to doubt," and where he finds especially distasteful "a mode of style... by which the most evident truths are so obscured, that they can no longer be perceived."

The style may be called the *terrific*, for its chief intention is to terrify and amaze; it may be termed the *repulsive*, for its natural effect is to drive away the reader; or it may be distinguished, in plain *English*, by the denomination of the *bugbear style*, for it has more terror than danger, and will appear less formidable as it is more nearly approached.

I mean not to suggest that Johnson's own style deserves the epithets which he here applies to other styles, but that these epithets do suggest some of the criticisms of Johnson's style which we have quoted in earlier chapters. "Ponderous dictator of sentences," "stately son of demonstration," the "*terrific*" style, "*the bugbear style*." These recall what we have heard from Archibald Campbell, Horace Walpole, Hazlitt, or Macaulay. Fortunately Johnson proceeds to give us an actual "illutrious example" of what he means. In the "*Letters concerning Mind*," he says, "the author begins by declaring, that *the sorts of things are things that now are, have been, and shall be, and the things that strictly ARE.*" It is the tone of metaphysical mystification which seems to him "terrific." He might have been surprised to learn that a later critic should find the term "terrific diction" perfectly suitable to describe so different a things as the ranting and abusive literary criticism of Swinburne. The fact is that we all deplore terrific diction; there is scarcely anything on which we are more nearly unanimous. But we find ourselves sadly at variance when we set about comparing the objects, the phrases and words, which we actually call terrific. Epithets of this sort and all the more emphatic ways of expressing displeasure may give us a very vivid sense of what a critic dislikes in a given kind of writing if we know what kind is meant, but by themselves they are small clue to what kind is meant.

"The language is laboured into harshness," says Johnson. "The mind of the writer seems to work with unnatural violence. 'Double, double, toil and trouble.' He has a kind of strutting dignity, and is tall by walking on tiptoe." As everybody will recall, he is talking about the odes of Gray. He says of the *Memoirs of the Court of Augustus*. "Sometimes the reader is suddenly ravished with a sonorous sentence, of which when the noise is past the meaning does not long remain." Of Shakespeare: "The equality of words to things is very often neglected, and trivial sentiments and vulgar ideas disappoint the attention, to which they are recommended by sonorous epithets and swelling figures." And one of the faults of the tragedies of Johnson's own day is a "perpetual tumour of phrase."

In all these cases we know what Johnson is talking about, the work to which he is attributing the fault of excess, and from this we can infer at least approximately what form of excess is meant. If we did not know the work, we should know only that he was speaking of some form of the general fault of excess. In the following passage Johnson is speaking simply of bad writings that come under the inspection of Criticism. His range is the whole field of writing.

Some secret inequality was found between the words and sentiments, or some dissimilitude of the ideas and the original objects. . . incongruities were linked together, or . . . some parts were of no use but to enlarge the appearance of the whole, without contributing to its beauty, solidity, or usefulness.

Who shall ever venture to illustrate this passage, to say what concrete shapes of bombast floated before the inner eye of Johnson as he generalized?

General expressions by Johnson and general conclusions based upon such expressions can afford us no satisfaction—even when they do not seem at variance with his practice. To conclude, for example, that Johnson believed style should be "clear," "elegant," and suited to its theme is not to give Johnson a theory of style that can be distinguished from any other person's theory. Everybody believes these things—in one sense or another—just as everybody despises terrific diction. More particularly, everybody in Johnson's day believed them. To find statements we need go no farther than the best known rhetorics of the day, Karnes's or Campbell's or Blair's or the routine performance of Ward. Just as in our study of Johnson's writing we were concerned to describe those characteristics of his style which distinguish it from other styles, so in this study we are most concerned to point out whatever explicit acknowledgements Johnson made of the characteristic preferences exhibited in his own writings.

Either Johnson was not specifically aware of the characters of his style which we have called parallelism,¹⁷ antithesis, and inversion, or he thought it not worth while to discuss them. On the whole matter of the structure of sentences and paragraphs, the arrangement of ideas, Johnson makes but few statements which seem helpful to us. He has much to say, however, on the purpose of creative writing, the nature of general truth and its elaboration in writing, the relation of things and words, and the corollary question of diction.

Johnson's belief that art achieved grandeur through generality, that the streaks of the tulip were not to be numbered, is well enough known but may admit some illustration here. The tulip passage, in Imlac's account of the poet, is as follows :

The business of a poet... is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances; he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recall the original to every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness.

And Imlac makes the same application to men and manners—human nature.

He must divest himself of the prejudices of his age or country; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same.

Johnson says something of this sort again and again. The metaphysicals fell short of the sublime because "great thoughts are always general, and consist in positions not limited by exceptions, and in descriptions not descending to minuteness." Shakespeare is great because "nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature."

Johnson has insisted on an important truth, that a writing should tell something more than the circumstantial or accidental, that it should not be simply representational (if it could be). To our minds it must seem that he has missed another truth, which taken with the first makes the difficulty and debate over literary art. This is that a writing must be itself, original and ungeneralized. What makes both these truths possible is that the subject in art is not things (tulips or human nature) but concepts, visions of things, in the artist's head. The question of detail in the light of this doctrine is not one of "minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected," but of discrimination between detail which is relevant and that which is irrelevant to the central concept. Johnson himself once connects the notion of relevance with that of generality.

Instead of dilating his thoughts into generalities, and expressing incidents with poetical latitude, he [Shakespeare] often combines *circumstances unnecessary to his main design*, only because he happened to find them together.

By his theory of generality Johnson could hardly account for his own experience as an artist or for the effect produced upon him by other literary art. It is not surprising to find him in occasional contradictions. In the "Essay on Epitaphs":

There are no rules to be observed which do not equally relate to other compositions. The praise ought not to be general, because the mind is lost in the extent of any indefinite idea, and cannot be affected with what it cannot comprehend. When we hear only of a good or great man, we know not in what class to place him, nor have any notion of his character, distinct from that of a thousand others.

And he complains that he cannot find in Rowe's plays "any deep search into nature, any accurate discriminations of kindred qualities, or nice display of passion in its progress; all is general and

undefined." In *Adventurer* No.95 he is aware of the conflicting demands of generality and particularity and gropes towards reconciliation. Though the passions are few, "the alterations which time is always making in the modes of life" are a source of variety. "Thus love is uniform, but courtship is perpetually varying."

Thus Johnson wavered in favor of his varying immediate perceptions, but his allegiance to the rule was none the less real. The rule itself was a concrete and genuine part of his perception and of his performance. What he said about the dignity of generality has its most obvious reflection in the fact that his own writing may, as we have said, be characterized as exceptionally general and abstract. Johnson, the last great neoclassicist, the reactionary, was the one who most seriously attempted to put into artistic practice the neoclassic uniformitarian ideal. Pope might speak of following nature, of 'what oft was thought," by nature he might mean only what was universal and comprehensible to reason unmodified by accident of time or place, but Pope wrote about "flounce" and "furbelow," "Spadillio" and "captive trumps," about Atticus and Sporus and the Dunces. Johnson stuck to his principles; with relentless logic he not only theorized but practised the generality, in his elaborate system of parallelism and antithesis, in the "philosophic" pomp of his diction, he devised a way of lending to the abstract an emphasis, a particularity and thickness. He made a kind of poetry of abstraction; out of emptiness he conjured weight, out of the collapsible he made structures. By limiting himself faithfully to the abstract, he achieved more with it than did any other neoclassicist.

iii

ONE function of Johnson's theory—though not directly a stylistic one—appears in his estimate of certain types of literature. History he disdained.

As ethics or figures, or metaphysical reasoning, was the sort of talk he most delighted in, so no kind of conversation pleased him less I think, than when the subject was historical fact or general polity. . . 'He never (as he expressed it) desired to hear of the *Punic war* while he lived: such conversation was lost time (he said), and carried one away from common life, leaving no ideas behind which could serve *living wight* as warning or direction.'

And consistently, he "did not... much delight in that kind of conversation which consists in telling stories." History, or story, tell what happened—in some particular time at some particular place. The event is told merely, as itself, for itself. History gives an idea of this event, this thing, but no generally applicable idea; it carries one away from "common life." Johnson's dislike of history is directly antithetic to his great affection for biography. Arthur Murphy mentions the two together: "General history had little of his regard. Biography was his delight." And we have the clear and authoritative record of Boswell:

MONBODDO. 'The history of manners is the most valuable. I never set a high value on any other history.' JOHNSON. "Nor I; and therefore I esteem biography, as giving us what comes near to ourselves, what we can turn to use.'

The events of biography are no less particular than those of history but are more generally applicable to the personal human problem, and hence may readily be thought of as more universally significant—especially if the thinker is, like Johnson, not interested in economics or government, but in private morals. Biography is what happened to a person, like oneself.

For narrative to be justified at all it must have some value as generality; it must be a "specimen of life and manners." This condition is best fulfilled in biography—in other narrative hardly at all. Events are facts, and hence narrative is an enumeration of facts, differing from other enumerations, inventories and the like, chiefly in the observance of chronological order. When we arrive at this point, at the notion of fact, of statement of fact, of a series of statements of fact, we are at the heart of what Johnson disliked in writing and by antithesis have a good indication of what he did like.

Johnson's dislike of mere fact would perhaps not have been so clearly recorded for us were it not for his extreme dislike of the prose of another writer whose style was the antipodes of his own. Perhaps some personal rancor at time stimulated Johnson to the criticism of Swift, but the criticism is too clear and too often reiterated to leave a doubt either that Swift's style was really offensive to Johnson or that there was an esthetic reason. At best Swift's style is for Johnson but an adequate vehicle for an inferior burden. In the *Life of Swift*:

This easy and safe conveyance of meaning it was Swift's desire to attain, and for having attained he deserves praise, though perhaps not the highest praise. For purposes merely didactic, when something is to be told that was not known before, it is the best mode, but against that inattention by which known truths are suffered to lie neglected it makes no provision; it instructs, but does not persuade.

In Boswell's *Life* Johnson says of those who like and those who dislike Swift's style: "Both agree that Swift has a good neat style; but one loves a neat style, another loves a style of more splendour." There are yet other passages where Johnson is less kind—where he explains in an unreserved, unmistakable, concrete manner, what he dislikes in Swift's writing. In the *Life of Swift* he says of *The Conduct of the Allies*:

Surely, whoever surveys this wonder-working pamphlet with cool perusal will confess that its efficacy was supplied by the passions of its readers; that it operates by the mere weight of facts, with very little assistance from the hand that produced them.

Of the same pamphlet he had earlier said :

Swift has told what he had to tell distinctly enough, but that is all. He had to count ten, and he has counted it right.

At Mrs. Thrale's once he argued with a gentleman on the same subject.

At length you *must* allow me, said the gentleman, that there are *strong facts* in the account of the Four last Years of Queen Anne: 'Yes surely Sir (replies Johnson), and so there are in the Ordinary of Newgate's account.'

Plainness of fact, not as opposed to fiction, but as opposed to elaboration—this must be understood as the opposite of what Johnson admired in writing Swift comes no nearer to merit by the inventions of *Gulliver's Travels*. "When once you have thought of big men and little men. it is very easy to do all the rest." What *Gulliver's Travels* and the "Ordinary of Newgate's account" have in common is that they deal with things, a constant succession of different things, not different aspects of the same things. It is the difference between multiplication for range ("the prince and princess") and multiplication for emphasis ("the constituent and fundamental principle"). The "so many *things*, almost in an equal number of *words*" of Sprat had been no vain exhortation to Johnson's predecessors. It had become a real and conscious rule. Swift himself praised the style of the Brobdingnagians thus: "Their style is clear, masculine and smooth, but not florid; for they avoid nothing more than multiplying unnecessary words, or using various expressions." And this was precisely the aim of Johnson, to multiply words, to use various expressions, to deal not in things but in thoughts about things. In this he is nearer to the romantic essayists than to the neoclassic. His is the more meditative, more poetical style. It pauses and develops the aspects and relations of things, works them into a thought pattern, attracts into the pattern reflections of other things.

iv

THE need for elaboration was one of the consequences of the taste for generality. There were two kinds of subjects matter: things, such as Swift dealt with, which had to be new things in order to claim attention; and general truths, which being general and true must be already known and which hence must be enforced or recommended. This enforcement or recommendation was the proper scope of literary art.

The task of an author is, either to teach what is not known, or to recommend known truths by his manner of adorning them; either to let new light in upon the mind, and open

new scenes to the prospect, or to vary the dress and situation of common objects, so as to give them fresh grace and more powerful attractions, to spread such flowers over the regions through which the intellect has already made its progress, as may tempt it to return, and take a second view of things hastily passed over or negligently regarded.

This occurs in *Rambler* No. 3, where Johnson is explaining the plan of his work—the second alternative, "In recommend known truths by his manner of adorning them." In *Adventurer* No. 115 we find this distinction between the modes of writing repeated. If an author "treats of science and demonstration," he must have a "style clear, pure, nervous, and expressive." But "if his topicks be probable and perswasory," he must "recommend them by the super-addition of elegance and imagery... display the colours of varied diction, and pour forth the musick of modulated periods."

In *Rambler* No. 152: "Among the criticks in history it is not contested whether truth ought to be preserved, but by what mode of diction it is best adorned."

It will be noted that Johnson is an ornamentalist, at least in his terminology. But it is likely that no great writer, or even able hack terminology. But it is likely that no great writer, or even able hack writer, was even an ornamentalist in more than terminology. As a feat of composition or as a concrete critical state of mind, ornamentalism is perhaps impossible. When Johnson speaks of things and their ornamentation, we should have no difficulty in recognizing that he is talking about things and aspects of, or ideas about, things. This is all he can be talking about. Both the things and the ideas about them are included in what we call meaning. Since Johnson was not concerned with our particular problem, he was content to look on things, truths, or facts, as solid "meaning" (though he did not employ the term) and on notional modulations as "ornament." We need not then quarrel with his theory while describing it, but must recognize what it means in our own terms

His most direct statement in defence of his system of elaboration refers to a passage of narration in the *Western Islands*. If *things must* be his reason for writing, his main theme, they can yet be adorned with clustered notions. Lord Monboddo wrote to Boswell that Johnson's language was too rich.

JOHNSON. 'Why, Sir, this criticism would be just, if in my style, superfluous words, or words too big for the thoughts, could be pointed out; but this I do not believe can be done. For instance; in the passage which Lord Monboddo admires, "We were now treading that illustrious region," the word *illustrious*, contributes nothing to the mere narration; for the fact might be told without it: but it is not, therefore, superfluous; for it wakes the mind to peculiar attention, "Illustrious!"—for what? and then the sentence proceeds to expand the circumstances connected with Iona...'

Johnson is giving the reason that justifies all epithetical or non-restrictive modification. When we use any word to tell not what thing we mean but only under what aspect we mean it, we have taken the first step away from plain style. The second step is to multiply the aspects under which we refer to a single object. The third, and extreme Johnsonian, step is to multiply aspects (or words apparently expressing different aspects) so that within the range of relevance they overlap—which is "multiplication for emphasis."

The question whether his style was a way of saying the same thing over and over—that is, giving the same meaning over and over—seems to have occurred to Johnson but not to have worried him. Had he been forced to the wall, he would probably have admitted, needlessly, that elaboration involved repetition. The unshakable sense which all writers must have that a multiplication of notions about one thing is not a repetition of one meaning would have compelled him to defend his practice, but his bias for talking of nature and facts, and not of meaning, would have made him plead guilty of repetition and defend it as ornament. Or, he might have resolved the conflict in another way, and indeed has left some hints that he partly did so. "Words," he says in the *Preface to the Dictionary*, "are seldom exactly synonymous; a new term was not introduced, but because the former was thought inadequate: names, therefore, have often many ideas, but few ideas have many names." If few ideas have many names, that is, if each idea has but one name proper to it (though one name may by turns do service for a number of ideas), then the dignity

of the idea, that is, the difference of one idea from another, is asserted, and the correct basis established for a discussion of words and meaning. Thus:

JOHNSON. 'You may translate books of science exactly. You may also translate history, in so far as it is not embellished with oratory, which is poetical. Poetry, indeed, cannot be translated. . . .'

(This is no other than the Crocean view.) If different words do correspond to different ideas—different meanings - then follows the impossibility of translating works which deal in ideas rather than in facts. Poetry and poetic prose deal in ideas. There can be no doubt that Johnson considered his own prose as leaning toward the poetic. Another step he might have taken in his dignifying of the idea and through it the term, and this would have been the identifying of the idea with the thing and hence the multiplication of as many things as there are ideas and the belief in a different thing for each word. This sort of idealism of course he never yielded to explicitly, but he may have leaned toward it wistfully. In the *Preface to the Dictionary* he wrote:

I am not yet so lost in lexicography, as to forget that *words are the daughters of earth, and that things are the sons of heaven*. Language is only the instrument of science, and words are but the signs of ideas: I wish, however, that the instrument might be less apt to decay, and that signs might be permanent, like the things which they denote.

And in a *Rambler*: "The pebble must be polished with care, which hopes to be valued as a diamond; and words ought surely to be laboured, when they are intended to stand for things." In an *Idler*: "Words are but the images of things." Certainly he did believe that words could have the weight of things, or more weight, and that it was such weight that the writer ought to wield. If "a new term was not introduced, but because the former was thought inadequate," then each different term must have a justification for its existence and for its appearance in a composition. If "constituent" and "fundamental" were created to correspond to different ideas and through these ideas to stand for things, then there was no fault in saying "the constituent and fundamental principle."

CHAPTER VII

Johnson's Theory—II

IN an earlier chapter we have referred to and disqualified as a question of style Johnson's severe canon of correctness in vocabulary. From the *Plan of a Dictionary* and the *Preface* one has no trouble whatever in showing that Johnson said he detested the adulteration of English with foreign words and uses, particularly with French, which seemed to him the most insidious threat of his own day. He would not be reduced to "babble a dialect of France." Perhaps only a wavering distinction may be drawn between Johnson's objection to certain classes of words as incorrect, not English, and his objection to others as unfit for elegant composition, inexpressive of what he thought most worth expressing. And certainly correctness was for him one of the conditions of expressiveness. But an opinion about correctness is an opinion about the limitation of a language, about what liberties may be taken with a conventional medium of expression. This is to be distinguished from an opinion about how language may be most affectively used as an expressive medium, which is an opinion about style.

First we may notice what kind of word was stylistically objectionable to Johnson. "Low" is perhaps his most generic term of censure. He makes his use of the term very clear.

We are all offended by low terms, but are not disgusted alike by the same compositions, because we do not all agree to censure the same terms as low. No word is naturally or intrinsically meaner than another; our opinion therefore of words, as of other things arbitrarily and capriciously established, depends wholly upon accident and custom Words become low by the occasions to which they are applied, or the general character of them who use them; and the disgust which they produce, arises from the revival of those images with which they are commonly united.

Or, as we might say today, low words are those which have low meanings. Since the meaning of words depends precisely upon "the occasions to which they are applied," we should have no difficulty in admitting that words applied to low occasions are to that degree low. Our essential quarrel with Johnson would be over what meanings should be called low, or whether any meaning is so low as to be irredeemable, whether, in fact, lowness or familiarity is not one of the elements that transform most readily into the poetic. When in the same *Rambler* Johnson goes on to pick out as low term the "*dunnest smoke of hell*" and "*knife*" and "*peep through the blanket of the dark*," we know full well that our difference is not about diction but about the very center of meaning. What makes it possible for the question to seem one of diction is Johnson's habit, already noted, of speaking as if things were meaning, and diction (with its accompanying ideas) but the dress of meaning—or, more accurately, as if there were a part of thought that was central and determined, according to the things denoted by words, and this was meaning, while the connotation of the words, the ideas about things conveyed in the names given them, was not meaning. In this way it is quite possible to form a thorough-going theory of lowness in diction.

Language is the dress of thought; and as the noblest mean or most graceful action would be degraded and obscured by a garb appropriated to the gross employments of rusticks or mechanicks, so the most heroic sentiments will lose their efficacy, and the most splendid ideas drop their magnificence, if they are conveyed by words used commonly upon low and trivial occasions, debased by vulgar mouths, and contaminated by inelegant applications.

And it follows that there is also a poetic diction, that is, a body of words never applied to low occasions and hence felt to be suited to the lofty occasions of poetry.

There was . . . before the time of Dryden no poetical diction : no system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestic use and free from the harshness of term appropriated to particular arts.

The concept of low diction and lofty diction and of low thoughts (or matter) and lofty thoughts (or matter)—four separate things—leads to some interesting consequences. It has to be conceded, for example, that some "thoughts by their native excellence secure themselves from violation, being such as mean language cannot express." Again, low diction is sometimes suitably employed when the matter is low. "Yet ne'er looks forward farther than his nose." Boswell "objected to the last phrase, as being low. JOHNSON. 'Sir, it is intended to be low; it is satire. The expression is debased, to debase the character.' " And lofty diction—this may be debased by application to low matter. "To degrade the sounding words and stately constructions of Milton, by an application to the lowest and most trivial things [as in the *Splendid Shilling*], gratifies the mind with a momentary triumph over that grandeur which hitherto held its captives in admiration." On the other hand lofty diction may be successful in disguising low matter. "When the matter is low or scanty [as in Addison's *battle of the Pigmies and Cranes*, *Barometer*, and *Bowling Green*] a dead language, in which nothing is mean because nothing is familiar, affords great conveniences; and by the sonorous magnificence of Roman syllables the writer conceals penury of thought and want of novelty, often from the reader, and often from himself."

ii

In the passage quoted above from the *Life of Dryden* "the grossness of domestick use" is coupled with "the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts." Low terms and terms of art are condemned together. It is even possible that many words were to Jonson objectionable on both counts. The following passage which he quotes from Blackmore would seem to be full of examples.

I am not free of the Poets' Company, having never kissed ... [their] governor's hands [...]: mine is therefore not so much as a permission poem, but a downright interloper. Those gentlemen who [...] carry on their poetical trade in a joint stock would certainly do what they could to sink and ruin an unlicensed adventurer, notwithstanding I disturbed none of their factories nor imported any goods they had ever dealt in.

"Language such as Cheapside easily furnished," says Jonson in introducing this passage. And he follows it with the laconic comment, "He had lived in the city till he had learned its note."¹⁰ These terms of commerce were objectionable to Johnson as such, and used in facetious analogy as they are, they seem to us, as well as to him, expressions of a cheap meaning.

It has been part of the diversitarianism of the Renaissance, just as it is part of romantic and modern local-color technique, to cultivate terms of art. Ronsard spoke out for them.¹ English Elizabethan plays are full of them. Dryden and Milton were still using them—though at moments with rather sour effect, and with misgivings on the part of Dryden. Rymer implied such terms were gross and trumpery." Pope criticizes their use in Dryden. Addison criticizes it in both Milton and Dryden. From his "Dictionary of Rhyme" Edward Bysshe omits without argument "all uncommon Words, and that are of a generally unknown Signification; as the *Names* of Arts and Sciences." Johnson's objection to terms of art is something of his age, though something in which he outdoes the age.

"Words too familiar or too remote," he continues in the passage from the *Life of Dryden*, "defeat the purpose of a poet." And of the second case he explains : "Words to which we are nearly strangers, whenever they occur, draw that attention on themselves which they should transm it to things." In another part of the *Life of Dryden* he says : "It is a general rule in poetry that all appropriated terms of art should be sunk in *general* expressions because poetry is to speak an universal language." The italics are mine. Here we find the notion of generality invested with another value for Johnson—that of comprehensibility. Swift's particularities about the reign of Queen Anne were poor writing because as particularities they lacked the significance or importance of general truth Push particularity further—to the degree of technicality—and to insignificance is added incomprehensibility. Or, since technicality is but an extreme

of particularity, incomprehensibility is an extreme of insignificance. Johnson's objection to technical terms in poetic use is clearly expressed again and again in the *Lives*, and exemplified. From Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* he quotes three stanzas, underlining the nautical terms. It will suffice to quote but two lines here:

Some the *gall'd* ropes with dawby *marling* bind,
Or sear-cloth masts with strong *tarpawling* coats.

"I suppose," says Johnson, "here is not one term which every reader does not wish away."

What Johnson disliked in poetry there is every reason to believe he disliked also in the creative prose of the general and moral essay. Even in essays of technical literary criticism he strove to deny himself the use of critical terms. In the first of the *Ramblers* on Milton's versification he realizes the difficulty of the feat but resolves upon it.

I am desirous to be generally understood, and shall therefore studiously decline the dialect of grammarians; though, indeed, it is always difficult, and sometimes scarcely possible, to deliver the precepts of an art, with out the terms by which the peculiar ideas of that art are expressed, and which had not been invented but because the language already in use was insufficient. If therefore I shall sometimes seem obscure, may be imputed to this voluntary interdiction, and to a desire of avoiding that offence which is always given by unusual words.

In the last *Rambler* he ranked "criticism .. among the subordinate and instrumental arts." He said elsewhere: "An art cannot be taught but by its proper terms, but it is not always necessary to teach the art."

iii

It is a truth verging on paradox that Johnson's favorite words, the "philosophic" or scientific words which we discussed in an earlier chapter, should be special and technical just as much as the hated words of art. Both terms of art and philosophic terms have a tone of recondite currency; they suggest the accuracy of a special familiarity or erudition. This much "marling" and "tarpawling" have in common with "adscititious" and "equiponderant." Johnson himself is aware of the affinity in the following important passage from the *Idler* in defence of "hard words."

The state of every ... art is the same; as it is cursorily surveyed or accurately examined, different forms of expression become proper. In morality it is one thing to discuss the niceties of the casuist, he that instructs the farmer to plough and sow, may convey his notions without the words which he would find necessary in explaining to philosophers the process of vegetation.

Here "Morality" as well as "agriculture" is considered as an art, and the experts in agriculture and "philosophers."

The same passage is further important as it suggests the question how Johnson himself thought he was using words in his essays. Was he discussing the "niceties of the casuist" in philosophic terms, or was he directing the "practice of common life" in common terms? The answer must be that he conceived himself as doing neither simply, but as combining the means of the former with the purpose of the latter: that is, he was turning philosophic diction to the purpose of moral instruction or discussion of general truths. We have his own words for it, unmistakably, in the last *Rambler*.

When common words were less pleasing to the ear, or less distinct in their signification, I have familiarized the terms of philosophy, by applying them to popular ideas.

Johnson, therefore, approved philosophic terms in elegant prose, though terms of art he did not. The antithesis lies in the various degrees of generality and hence comprehensibility, significance and dignity, which the various arts, sciences, or philosophies, possess. If we construct a scale of four examples, sailing,

agriculture, chemistry, morals, it is impossible to say that the terms of any upper group of these sciences would have been for Johnson "philosophic" and those of the lower, "terms of art." But it may be said that he would have tended to use the terms of the upper end of the scale, accepting the whole vocabulary of morals, picking and rejecting in chemistry and agriculture, and shunning nautical terms, as he wished that Dryden and Milton had done. The point is that the less a set of principles and facts and their terms were the business of practical and active men and the more they were the object only of study and the creation of learning, the more generally comprehensible and applicable were the terms—and of course the more worthy of the attention of learned or intelligent men outside the particular science. Further, and not so obviously, the comprehensibility of such scientific terms had a kind of inevitability and sanction—whereas the words growing from the rub of active life, the need to refer to this or that thing or part of a special business, were adventitious and bastard; they came from without the authority and tradition. "These accidental and colloquial senses are the disgrace of language, and the plague of commentators," Johnson once wrote. And while he was not referring here to term of art, the association of "accidental" and "colloquial" is telling. He made this even clearer in the *Preface to the Dictionary*.

Of the laborious and mercantile part of the people, the diction is in a great measure casual and mutable; many of their terms are formed for some temporary or local convenience, and though current at certain times and places, are in others utterly unknown. This fugitive cant, which is always in a state of increase or decay, cannot be regarded as any part of the durable materials of a language, and therefore must be suffered to perish with other things unworthy of preservation.

If meanings which arose colloquially, from the actual use of men, were "accidental," what kind of meanings were not accidental? What kind existed by prescription of inherently? One must presume that Johnson had in mind meanings fixed or derivable from the etymology of words—that is, meanings determined by *ancient* rather than by *recent* colloquial use. These were meanings so long established that they were capable of modulation, combination and extension into new meanings that demanded recognition, were not accidental, but inherent in the word roots. "It is my serious opinion," Johnson once said, "that our living languages must be formed quite slavishly on the model of the classics, if our writings are to endure." This attitude of Johnson's is part of an attitude general among eighteenth century grammarians, that language is a logical institution, pristinely perfect but debased through usage and needing to be restored and preserved by reason. Johnson is here closely akin to Horne Tooke, who would by etymology reduce all parts of speech to nouns and verbs; to George Campbell, who attempts (despite his disavowal of the principle) to determine by etymology the "proper signification" of words.

The meaning of a word like "marling" depended on the usage of sailors, and hence was accidental, limited, insignificant, undignified, and incapable of modulation and extensions. The meaning of a word like "adscititious" depended on a form of the Latin verb *adsciscere*, which in turn was an inceptive form of the verb *scire*, whose meaning was one of the most basic and simple of our ideas. Such a word as "adscititious" may itself not have been current in any science, but it might have been or ought to have been; it was formed on the pattern of scientific words; it was a term of the most universal science, that of generality, *Allerlei-Wissenschaft*; it was of the native vocabulary of philosophers. "Marling" was a word which many might understand but which few needed or ought to understand. "Adscititious" was a word which few might understand, but which all should understand—all who knew the roots of the language and could put two and two together. For the same reason the learned man might invent his "three or four" words, provided they were of the philosophic language, not inventions at all, but extensions.

Et nova fictaque nuper habebunt verba fidem si

Graeco fonte cadant, parce detorta.

And it followed that philosophic words, being of inherent literal validity, should have a strong claim to metaphorical use, and hence that their currency in the language should increase. "As by the cultivation of various sciences, a language is amplified, it will be more furnished with words deflected from their original sense; the geometrician will talk of a courtier's zenith, or the eccentric virtue of a wild hero, and the physician of sanguine expectations and phlegmatick delays." Johnson himself, as we have seen in our

analysis of his writing, relied continually on both the literal and figurative use of philosophical diction, on "foundations" and "momentaneous excursions," on "Catharticks of vice, or lenitives of passion." As Boswell puts it, "He delighted to express familiar thoughts in philosophical language."

More simply Johnson accounted for his usage with the formula: big words for big meaning. He that thinks with more extent than another will want words of larger meaning." Thus he expresses it in the *Idler* in defence of "hard words." And Mrs. Piozzi writes: "Though he was accused of using big words as they are called, it was only when little ones would not express his meaning as clearly, or when perhaps the elevation of the thought would have been disgraced by a dress less superb." Johnson's notion is echoed at length by Boswell in conversation with a young Scotch friend.

He mentioned the Ridicule ... called *Lexiphanes*, written by one Campbell. "Sir," said I, "nothing can be more unfair. Mr. Johnson's language is suitable to his sentiment. He gives large words because he has large ideas. If Campbell clothes little paultry ides with these big words, to be sure the effect must be ridiculous. The late King of Prussia's tall Regiment looked very stately with their large grenadier caps. If Campbell had taken these caps and clapped them on the heads of a parcel of blackguard children in the street, it would be highly ridiculous; but dose that prove anything against the caps when properly applied? No, Sir, Mr. Johnson has gigantick thoughts, and therefore he must be allowed gigantick words." This was quite in Mr. Johnson's own stile.

And "We may," says Boswell also, "with the utmost propriety, apply to his learned style that passage of Horace, a part of which he has taken as the motto to his Dictionary." A smaller part of the same passage had been taken already by Johnson as the motto of *Rambler* No. 88, on Milton's versification. And part of this we may quote:

Audebit quaecunque minus splendoris habebunt,
Aut sine pondere erunt, et honore indigna ferentur,
Verba movere loco.

and with it the translation by Creech, which Johnson adds:

what words appear
Too light and trivial, or too weak to bear
The weighty sense, nor worth the reader's care,
Shake off.

For the big thoughts and the big words the proper organ was the big voice, a part of Johnson's technique well recognized by his contemporaries. "His *bow-wow way*," Lord Pembroke called it. Boswell described it more respectfully. "He had a loud voice, and a slow deliberate utterance, which no doubt gave some additional weight to the sterling metal of his conversation." And in a note he offers another figure:

The *Messiah*, played upon the *Canterbury organ*, is more sublime than when played upon an inferior instrument . . . While therefore Dr. Johnson's sayings are read, let his manner be taken along with them.

On the island of Skye, Ulinish heard Johnson talk of tanning and milk and making whey and said: "He is a great orator, Sir; it is musick to hear this man speak."

CHAPTER VIII

Antecedents of Johnson's Style

WE have detached Johnson from the rest of English letters, so far as such a thing is possible, and have discussed his theory of style as it *in vacuo*. When we compared him to Addison and Hazlitt, we refrained from chronological implications. To complete a study of Johnson's style, it is just these implications which would have to be explored; but to do so would be to undertake not so much the completion of the present study as a sequel to it. Such a work would have to make more general, more exclusive statements, be based on a far wider canvass of negative evidence. In the fullest sense it is a task probably not worth doing—for example, if it includes finding out how many newspaper writers of the latter half of the eighteenth century assumed Johnsonian manners. In this chapter and the next I pretend to say only some things relevant to the history of the Johnsonian style.

The question how Johnson's style was formed has not of course had to wait until now for answers. Johnson himself made some suggestions, perhaps jocular, perhaps but careless. His biographers made more. Sir John Hawkins was the least restrained; in scattershot statements he named the "old English writers" More, Ascham, Hooker, Spenser, Sandys, Jewel, Chillingworth, Hales of Eton; "the divines and others of the last century," Sanderson, Taylor, Sir Thomas Browne, Cowley. Boswell too delivered a broadside opinion.

The style of Johnson was, undoubtedly, much formed upon that of the great writers in the last century, Hooker, Bacon, Sanderson, Hakewell, and others.

Altogether fourteen writers, and "others" not named. But how far Johnson "owed his excellence," as Hawkins phrases it, to these divines and others of the last century and others of the country before that, how far he formed on their style a "new one" or was inspired by them to "original phrases and new combinations of integral parts of sentences," might admit a wide solution. He himself told Boswell "that Bacon was a favourite authour with him; but he had never read his works till he was compiling the English Dictionary, in which" Boswell "might see Bacon very often quoted." In the preface to the Dictionary he thought that the "terms of natural knowledge" might be "extracted" from Bacon alone. He did quote Bacon often in the Dictionary and quoted him or referred to him on numerous other occasions. (Perhaps the cut or sectional structure of Bacon's Essays their curt Senecan style, had something to do with the Ramblers.) It is to be remarked that when read in the folio edition, with separated paragraphs and capitalized initial words of paragraphs, the Ramblers assume clearly a character somewhat disguised by more continuous printing. They seem then to read, each one not so much a single essay as a collection of paragraphic essays, sometimes parallel, sometimes antithetic. Perhaps also Johnson recruited some of his vocabulary from Bacon's "terms of natural knowledge." And so for Hooker, from whose work and the Bible Johnson thought the "language of theology" might be "extracted."

Hawkins was right in stressing Johnson's interest in the "divines...of the last century," "the great English church-men." Johnson wrote:

Our own language has, from the reformation to the present time, been chiefly dignified and adorned by the works of our divines, who, considered as commentators, controvertists, or preachers, have undoubtedly left all other nations far behind them Of morality little is necessary to be said because it is comprehended in practical divinity, and is perhaps better taught in *English* sermons than in any other books ancient or modern.

Sir Edmund Gosse thinks that we ought to regard Johnson in the Rambler as "taking up the task of a lay-preacher, and as deliberately competing with the popular theologians of his youth," in whose hands the sermon at "the beginning of the century had been as popular as the novel is to-day. Johnson's own sermons, laden with the peculiarities of his style, were apparently preachable enough in his own day. It is

strange that Hawkins, with his attention upon the divines, failed to mention certain sermon-writers more nearly contemporary with Johnson. South, for example, a copy of whose sermons was given away by Johnson in his last illness and upon whom Johnson seems a number of times to draw. Or Clarke, whose sermons Johnson "valued above all other" and in his last illness recommended to the Deist Dr. Brocklesby. Sermon, by various divines, and other religious writing seem to have claimed a good deal of Johnson's attention, though many of these, such as *Law's Serious Call*, must have had little if any effect on his notions of literary excellence. In the Hebrides Johnson read aloud and praised Ogden's sixth sermon on prayer, from which Boswell quotes a "specimen of Ogden's manner," a specimen which does not, one must concede, promise a rich yield of Johnsonian antecedents.

ii

AMONG the writers of the seventeenth century, however, there was one other whom Boswell reserved for separate mention.

Sir Thomas Brown, whose life Johnson wrote, was remarkably fond of Anglo-Latian diction; and to his example we are to ascribe Johnson's sometimes indulging himself in this kind of phraseology.

The same theory was advanced by Murphy.

How he differed so widely from such elegant models [Cowley, Dryden, Tillotson, Temple, Addison, Swift, Pope] is a problem not to be solved, unless it be true that he took an early tincture from the writers of the last century, particularly Sir Thomas Brown. Hence the peculiarities of his style, new combinations, sentences of an unusual structure, and words derived from the learned languages.

And earlier than this Vicesimus Knox, as Boswell points out in his footnote, had selected from the *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* some examples of learned diction such as he thought must have been Johnson's model in the *Rambler*.

Intellectual acquisition is but reminiscential evocation.

We hope it will not be unconsidered that we find no constant manuduction in this labyrinth.

a faraginious concurrence of all condition

Being divided from truth themselves, they are yet further removed by advenient deception.

That there is some resemblance between the diction of Johnson and that of Browne's scientific writing, especially the *Pseudodoxia*, cannot be denied. Johnson himself confessed that Browne had "augmented our philosophical diction." But the resemblance may perhaps be qualified in one important way, a way suggested by such words in Knox's examples as "manuduction" and "faraginious" and clerely illustrated when Johnson himself censures Browne's diction.

[He] poured in a multitude of exotick works; many, indeed, useful and significant, which, if rejected, must be supplied by circumlocution, such as *commensality* for the state of many living at the same table, but many superfluous, as a *paralogical* for an unresasonable doubt; and some so obscure, that they conceal his meaning rather than explain it, as *arthritical analogies* for parts that serve some animals in place of joints.

"Arthritical analogies is such a philosophical term as we shall not find in Johnson, partly because, as he says, it is so unusual as to conceal meaning, but further because it has a quality of meaning quite different from that of Johnson's usual philosophic term. "Arthritical analogies" is a philosophic term which refers not to anything abstract or very general, but to so particular and concretely tangible a class of objects as "parts that serve some animals in place of joints." This is not Johnson's way. "Wit," it will be recalled, he changed to "vitality," and he once changed "drunken" to "vinous," but, speaking of a bulldog's

shape, he changed "tenuity" to thin part."²³ He selects his philosophic terms from the range of the more abstract sciences, or if he takes from the others, it is for a metaphorical use. His terms are those of that broad science of which we spoke, the philosophy of things in general, by which he achieves the "grandeur of generality." Browne too uses terms within this range, as some of the examples adduced by Knox illustrate. But his tendency is constantly the other way, toward the particular, the recondite, the freakish, the unheard-of. He deals in the bric-a-brac of philosophic terminology. And even his terms of general philosophy are so mixed with Pharaoh and mummy or the power of the golden calf, or spotted with scorpion and salamander, that the whole texture of the writing suggests strange places and bizarre experiences. He deserves the name "exotick" which Johnson himself. Where Browne uses remote terms to make us think of remote things, Johnson "familiarizes." One of the strongest impressions we receive on reading Johnson's work is that we know where we are. No matter how philosophic his words become, we know all along that he is talking about quite common things. Such is the friendly office of generality.

While it is plain that the chief resemblance between Browne and Johnson seen by Boswell, Murphy, and Knox was in vocabulary, yet Murphy speaks of "new combinations, sentences of an unusual structure." One might be most tempted to compare Johnson's inverted substantive clauses with those of Browne. The chief difference between them seems to be in the direction of emphasis. Browne's are falling or fading inversions. They express hesitation or doubt or mere perfunctory affirmation. When the substance of the clause has been presented, it is left suspended, as if only hypothesized, or with perhaps a whisper of a statement following.

But whether the virtuous heathen, who lived better than he spake, or erring in the principles of himself, yet lived above Philosophers of more specious Maximes, lye so deep as he is placed; at least so low as not to rise against Christians, who be loving or knowing that truth, have lastingly denied it in their practise and conversation, were a quary too sad to insist on.

Here is a termination subdued out of all positiveness, buried beneath the mournful weight of the sentence's whole problem, expressive of reluctance, of reverence, of a bowed head before a profound and somber mystery. For contrast we take the opening sentence of our *Rambler* No. 2.

That the mind of man is never satisfied with the objects immediately before it, but is always breaking away from the present moment, and losing itself in schemes of future felicity; and that we forget the proper use of the time now in our power, to provide for the enjoyment of that which, perhaps, may never be granted us, has been frequently remarked; and as this practice is a commodious subject of raillery to the gay, and of declamation to the exaggerated with all the amplifications of rhetorick.

"Has been frequently remarked"—but Johnson will not leave his inverted clauses here; they were not introduced for this purpose. With "this practice," referring immediately to "frequently remarked,;" he catches up the syntactic end before it is well dropped, and marches forward to the peak of his sentence, holding his emphasis to the last thumping "amplifications of rhetorick."

iii

To say that Johnson went back to Sir Thomas Browne for philosophic diction may be to seek too remote and too literary a source. It may be rather that Johnson and Browne derived their diction from the same kind of source—the physician and scientific speculator, from his proper scientific reading, and the moralist, philosopher and chemical dabbler, from departments of his own reading. This would best account for the result—the similarity and the difference between the dictions of the two so different doctors.

Johnson's interest in physical science, his experiments, his late oratories, are so well known that we need no more than mention them. The general interest of cultivated people during that time in physical sciences and the effects of this interest on writing can hardly be described in brief. Smollett says of the reign of George II: "Natural philosophy became a general study; and the new doctrine of electricity grew

into fashion... the art of chemistry was perfectly understood and assiduously applied to the purposes of sophistication." At the time when Johnson frequented the Ivy Lane Club, says Hawkins, "Dyer was going through a course of chemistry under Dr. Pemberton, of Gresham College, and would sometimes give us such descriptions of processes as were very entertaining, particularly to Johnson, who would listen to them attentively." Bishop Watson's chemical lectures at Cambridge from 1766 to 1769 had crowded audiences "of persons of all ages and degrees, in the University." In the carriage on the way to Southill in 1781 Johnson divided his attention between his own *Prince of Abyssinia* and the Bishop's *Chemical Essays*.

"The anatomist and chemist," confesses Gibbon, "may sometimes track me in their snee." Johnson never made a similar confession. But he says of his collecting authorities for the *Dictionary*: "I... extracted from philosophers principles of science; from historians remarkable facts; from chymists complete processes; from divines striking exhortations..." And Murphy believed that Johnson's "pomp of diction... was first assumed in the *Rambler*" because in compiling the *Dictionary* at the same time "he grew familiar with technical and scholastic words." Johnson was familiar with such writers as "the learned, philosophical and pious Dr. Cheyne," whose *Essay of Health and Long Life* appeared in 1724 and *English Malady*, in 1733. Johnson recommended both of these books to Boswell and was fond of referring to the second. On page after page of either book he could have read passages like the following:

A certain Degree of Heat, in the same *Fomentation*, will *dissolve* and *dissipate* a Tumor, and higher Degree of it will harden and make it *schirrous*; and thus, Mercury, in moderate Doses, will break, *dissolve*, and *attenuate* the Blood and Juices, whose *Viscidities* and consequent *Compression* on the Nerves, *interrupt* their *Vibrations* and Action, and so produce a Palsy which a gentle *Salivation* will remedy and *antidote*.

Johnson knew a score or so of other books on medicine, electricity, pharmacy and the like. The references to them may be found sprinkled through his writing and conversation. And many of them he might have read as a very young man. Professor Cooper has quoted from Arbuthnot's *Essay Concerning the Nature of Aliments* a passage which he says Johnson copied piecemeal as illustration for the *Dictionary*.

Barley is *emollient*, moistning and expectorating. Oats have some of the same qualities. Barley was chosen by Hippocrates as proper food in *inflammatory distempers*. Rice is the food of, perhaps, two thirds of mankind; it is most kindly and *benign* to human *constitutions*, proper for the *consumptive*, and such as are subject to *haemorrhages*. Next to rice is wheat, the bran of which is highly *acescent* and stimulating; therefore the bread that is not too much *purged* from it is more wholesome for some *constitutions*. Rye is more acid, *laxative*, and less nourishing than wheat. Millet is *diarrhoeticks*, cleansing, and useful in diseases of the kidneys. Panick *affords* a soft *demulcent nourishment*, both for *granivorous* birds and mankind. Mays *affords* a very strong *nourishment*, but more *viscous* than wheat. Pease being *deprived* of any *aromatick* parts, are mild, and *demulcent* in the highest degree; but being full of *aerial particles*, are *flatulent* when *dissolved* by *digestion*. Beans resemble them in most of their qualities. All the forementioned plants are highly *acescent*, except pease and beans.

The italics are mine. A harvest of philosophic words. "Such books as these," says Professor Cooper, "would dispose the mind of Johnson to be what we call 'scientific' "

Johnson's own *Dictionary* was not the only one on which he worked. There was Dr. James's *Medicinal Dictionary*, published in 1743, to which Johnson seems to have contributed lives of physicians and part of an article on botany. Under the title "Aer" in this *Dictionary* is inserted a large section of Boerhaave's lectures on *Air*, from his *Chemistry*, and the life of Boerhaave in the *Dictionary* is an expansion of the *Life* which Johnson contributed to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1739. The great scientist Boerhaave, deeply religious and orthodox, antagonistic to the philosophies

of Hobbes and Spinoza, may well have been something like a hero for the young Johnson, such an exponent of rhetoric as well as of physical and metaphysical sciences as Johnson set himself to become. "Nor was he unacquainted with the art of recommending truth by elegance," runs the *Life*, "and embellishing the philosopher with polite literature." And Boerhaave's Latin account of his dropsy and shortness of breath, so like Johnson's own later memoranda, "deserves not only to be preserved as an historical relation of the disease which deprived us of so great a man, but as a proof of his piety and resignation to the divine will."

Whether or not Johnson drew from Boerhaave's Latin or the English of Arbuthnot or Cheyne, it is apparent that some of his words are derived directly from scientific reading. At times he uses them raw, unassimilated, as they came from their original context, torn bleeding. Thus in a letter to Mrs. Thrale:

The two vesicatories which I procured with so much trouble did not perform well, for, being applied to the lower part of the fauces, a part always in motion, their adhesion was continually broken.

At times they are partly assimilated, by metaphorical use or shading with the context, as in *Rambler* No. 156:

Every government, say the politicians, is perpetually degenerating towards corruption, from which it must be rescued at certain periods by the resuscitation of its first principles, and the re-establishment of its original constitution. Every animal body, according to the methodick physicians, is, by the predominance of some exuberant quality, continually declining towards disease and death, which must be obviated by a seasonable reduction of the peccant humour to the just equipoise which health requires.

It is such terminology which Johnson usually succeeds in depriving of its medical or laboratory flavor, denaturalizes, as it were, and employs in his writing to produce the general philosophic character, the tone of the man who knows whereof he speaks.

iv

PROBABLY it was sentence structure which Johnson had in mind when he once told Boswell that "he had formed his style upon that of Sir William Temple, and upon Chambers's Proposal for his Dictionary," or more specifically, "upon about twenty lines" of Chambers' Proposal. Tyers says that Johnson "set for his emulation," not Chambers' Proposal, but the Preface to Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*, and fixes the beginning of this emulation, on Johnson's authority, at the time of the *Plan of a Dictionary*. Boswell says of both Johnson's suggestions, "He certainly was mistaken," and adds: "Or if he imagined at first that he was imitating Temple, he was very unsuccessful; for nothing can be more unlike than the simplicity of Temple, and the richness of Johnson."

Dr. Hill could find no copy of Chambers' Proposal, and the "most Johnsonian" passage he could find in the Preface inclines one to agree with Boswell that Johnson was mistaken, or to decide that he had his tongue in his cheek. For Temple a better case may be made. A number of times Johnson shows himself to be specifically familiar with Temple's works. In a passage from the *Life* which I have quoted in Appendix D, where Johnson says it was Temple who gave cadence to English prose, and where he implies that cadence means putting the emphasis at the end of the sentence, Johnson indicates in what respect he may have considered himself indebted to Temple. The passages from Temple selected by Dr. Hill⁵³ show at least that the indebtedness is possible. Temple, like Dryden, is careful of the ends of his sentences. Sometimes he uses the reinforcement of a doublet. He has, furthermore, a considerable antithetic tendency.

But again it seems to me unnecessary to find Johnson's antecedents in any single author. There is another possibility, so obvious a part of neoclassic literature as to be easily overlooked. "We may wonder," writes Sir Edmund Gosse, "that, while his early verse owes so much to the teaching of Pope, his early

prose shows no tincture of Steels or Swift." To which Johnson might have replied, as he did once to Boswell, "Sir, you *may* wonder." Swift's whole way of writing, we have seen, was repugnant to Johnson; Steele's perhaps but little less. The one who could teach him something was Pope—or rather it was the whole school of couplet writers.

For more than a century a special rhetoric had been evolving which the young Johnson was to find ready to his needs—a rhetoric from which the rhetoric of Johnson seems to proceed by a very short step, across the line from verse to prose. The rhetoric of the neoclassic couplet had been in its origins related to the curt form of Senecan prose, the style of writers like Bacon and Feltham. With the triumph of "plain" prose style in the second half of the seventeenth century, the more pointed rhetoric survived and was developed chiefly in the couplet; it became distinctly a verse style. A didactic and epigrammatic purpose first shaped the tendency toward closure in the couplet, toward emphatic completeness. As early as 1589 we find Puttenham describing the chief means of closure, three rhetorical figures, *antimelabole* or inversion, *antitheton* or antithesis, and *partson*. "Parison involves the notion of balance as well as parallelism, for it means similarity of *form* between the equal rhythmic members of *isocolon*" "Punish my fault, or pitie mine estate," writes Drayton in "Rosamond to Henry." Fairfax, translating Tasso into English *ottavarima*, constantly falls into "lines and pairs of lines built on co-ordinated parallelism." "A common extension is the balanced antithesis with reversed order." "High were his thoughts, his heart was bold in flight." Such is the rhetoric of which Waller and Denham became the first thoroughgoing exponents, and which reached its perfection in Pope—the rhetoric of parallel, of antithesis, of chiasmus.

In his earliest efforts Johnson shows his interest in these characters of the couplet. When he is perhaps nineteen years old, "Thy form more lovely, more adorn'd thy mind." he writes "To a Young Lady on her Birth-Day." "Bless with a smile, or with a frown destroy," he writes for some other young ladies; "Each youth admires, though each admirer dies"; "Vex ev'ry eye, and every bosom tear"; "No maid to flatter, and no paint to hide." The whole piece has a *Rape-of-the-Lock* tone. A few years later the "Verses to a Lady, on receiving from her a sprig of Myrtle" contain a further assortment. "Now grants, and now rejects a lover's prayer." "The myrtle croens the happy lovers' heads, The unhappy lovers' grave the myrtle spreads." "Soon must this bough, as you shall fix his doom, Adorn Philander's head, or grace his tomb." And so through Johnson's two great neoclassic satires one may pick out specimens.

LONDON

1. I praise the hermit, but regret the friend.
2. Let such raise palaces, and manors buy,
Collect a tax, or farm a lottery.
3. Others with softer smiles, and subtler art,
Can sap the principles, or taint the heart;
With more address a lover's note convey,
Or bribe a virgin's innocence away.
4. Spurn'd as a beggar, dreaded as a spy,
Live unregarded, unlamented die.
5. Behold the warrior dwindled to a beau.

THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISHES

6. Increase his riches and his peace destroy.
7. Dart the quick taunt, and edge the piercing gibe.

8. Hate dogs their flight, and insult mocks their end.
9. The golden canopy, the glitt'ring platec
The regal palace, the luxurious board,
The liv'ried army, and the menial lord.
10. The festal blazes, the triumphal show,
The ravish'd standard, and the captive foe,
The senate's thanks, the gazette's pompous tale.
11. His fall was destin'd to a barren strand,
A petty fortress, and a dubious hand.
12. The fruit autumnal, and the vernal flow'r.

To copy every specimen, even every more regular one, would be to copy a greater part of the poems. Here are antithesis, chiasmus, and several degrees of parallel making the very texture of the composition. The parallels in the later poem become more frequent and more complicated. Examples 7 and 8 above are doublets of three elements of implicit parallel. In 9 there are six members of two elements, a degree of parallel very rare, perhaps not found in his prose. In 10 he reaches four members, then changes the syntax of the elements. In 11 he offers a pretty example of the triplet of two parallel elements so common in his prose, but rather disguised here by the trenchancy of the nonphilosophic diction and the effect of the rhyme falling at the end of the first and third members and setting up another parallel pattern (the couplet). The last two members of the triplet are put against the first member and the sentence stem from which the triplet branches. It is this possibility of various counter patterns which makes the rhetoric of parallel and antithesis susceptible of more subtlety in the couplet than in prose and which lends to make it seem a different thing in the couplet. Perhaps Johnson never stated the identity to himself. But in his couplet satires he was employing a rhetoric which needed only to be taken out of verse and inflated to solemnity by philosophical diction to become the rhetoric of his *Ramblers*.

v

IF the antecedents of Johnson's prose style lie chiefly in books of natural philosophy and in the neoclassic couplet, that is, in writings outside the course of English literary prose, one may consider how far other writers of English literary prose, before Johnson, contemporary with and after him, were affected by the same antecedents, whether Johnson was alone in borrowing a strange idiom for prose or but went to a conspicuous extreme where others ventured moderately; and so, whether some writers who followed him chronologically were really his imitators.

In Johnson's time, thinks Leslie Stephen, Addison is "still a kind of sacred model," but "the best prose writers are beginning to aim at a more complex structure of sentence, fitted for the expression of a wider range of thought and emotion." Johnson's own friends Hawkins and Murphy were aware of this difference but spoke of the new writing only as Johnson's. A writer in the *Monthly Review* for December 1793 gives us a fortunate glimpse at an opinion of more scope.

During our course of earlier labours, which have now continued through nearly half a century, we have had occasion to remark a gradual change in the public taste with respect to style. At the time when our work commenced, Addison and Swift were esteemed our best models in prose writing; perspicuity, ease, and harmony, were the chief point at which our most classical writers aimed; and, provided these excellencies were attained, unnecessary diffuseness, feebleness, and even colloquial inelgance, were scarcely perceived to be faults. After this time, a stricter attention to precision and elegance of expression prevailed, through a set of writers among whom Mr. Melmoth makes a principal figure; till, by degrees, a fastidiousness of taste has been introduced, which shrinks from familiar and idiomatic phraseology, and which can only be gratified by a closely-condensed and highly-ornamented diction, as remote as possible from the

ease of colloquial discourse. Our great masters in this style are the late Dr. Johnson and Mr. Gibbon.

It will be noted that the writer considers the new style to have been originated not by Johnson but by an earlier "set or writers," among whom the principal figure was Mr. Melmoth, and that the mastery of the style is shared by Johnson with Gibbon. It was Melmoth, as we have already noted whose *Letters ...* by . . . *Sir Thomas Fitzosborne* were likened by Lady Hervey to the *Rambler*. But as a model for Johnson's style Melmoth's would be scarcely more satisfactory than that of Chambers. The following passage shows more resemblance than most.

To say truth, my friend, the longer I lived in the high scenes of action, the more I was convinced that nature had not formed me for bearing a part in them : and though I was once so unexperienced in the ways of the world as to believe I had talents, as I was sure I had inclination, to serve my country, yet every day's conversation contributed to wean me by degrees from that flattering delusion.

Where we need not expect to find models for Johnson's style, we may, however, find at work the same expressive tendencies as had full scope in his style. Melmoth, even Chambers, may to some extent illustrate this. Where the illustration is to begin and end is indeed dubious. The whole range of writers from the age of Anne to the late Johnsonian era is open to suspicion. What, for example, of Pope himself? If the writing of couplets could affect Johnson's prose, might it not affect Pope's? It would seem that it did, not so much in parallel multiplications, but markedly in antitheses. In his letter to Mr. Bridges, for example, he writes :

It is more advantageous to a scribbler to be improved in his judgment than to be soothed in his vanity, as much celebrated for their knowledge of the original, as ... decried for the badness of their translations. Men ... never approve any other's sense, but as it squares with their own.

In the second year of Johnson's *Rambler* we find the obscure scribbler Robert Shiels writing a description of Edinburgh :

They may be said to be hospitable, but not complaisant, to strangers. Insincerity and cruelty have no existence among them; but if they ought not to be hated they can never be much loved, for they are incapable of insinuation, and their ignorance of the world makes them unfit for entertaining sensible strangers. They are public-spirited, but torn to pieces by factions. A gloominess in religion renders one part of them very barbarous, and an enthusiasm in politics so transports the genteeler part, that they sacrifice to party almost every consideration of tenderness.

"Consciously or unconsciously," says Sir Walter Raleigh, this author "had formed his literary style wholly on the Johnsonian model." Lord Chesterfield, writing in the *World* one year later on Johnson's *Dictionary*, had not formed his style on the Johnsonian model, but he furnishes this example.

I presume that obedience can never be expected when there is neither terror to enforce, nor interest to invite it.

Just as readily as Johnsonian constructions, Johnsonian philosophic diction might be accumulated to surfeit from the first half of the century. Foote is said to have come before Dr. Gower of Worcester College bringing a large dictionary in which to find the meaning of the Doctor's words. As early as 1714 in *Spectator* No. 617, occurs a criticism of the humor which consists in "the affectation of strained and pompous expressions, fetched from the learned languages." The example which is given is certainly not Johnsonian, but it contains phrases like this : "If any one at the Board could have so far articulated, as to have demanded intelligibly a Reinforcement of Liquor, the whole Assembly had been by this time extended under the Table." Or there is the more amusing because more serious use of big words in Blackmore's *Lay Monastery*. These essays record the conversations of a group of retired and pensive gentlemen, of whom the intellectual leader is, oddly enough, a Mr. Johnson. (See the *Life of Blackmore*

for our Johnson comment on this fictitious prototype.) In no. 31 Mr. Johnson and the writer are taking a walk and see a rainbow. "This prospect" gives the writer "occasion to mention Sir I. Newton's Principles.

You see ... in this instance, that the beams of the sun being intercepted, modified, and refracted by the black surface of the cloud, can no longer keep their complication entire; but the coalition is dissolved, and the parts are actually disunited. Here we plainly discern the threads of this shining aggregate unravelled, and displayed in their native colours.

This is philosophic diction in the raw.

CHAPTER IX

Effects of Johnson's Style

WHATEVER the Number of writers who were trifling with philosophic diction or parallel or antithesis, one fact remains indisputable, that Johnson's style, from the time it had its first full opportunity in the *Rambler*, was recognized by his contemporaries as something extraordinary, a prodigy or monstrosity, a huge phenomenon—of grandeur or at least of pomposity, "A large party," says Macaulay, "pronounced the style perfect, so absolutely perfect that in some essays it would be impossible for the writer himself to alter a single word for the better. Another party, not less numerous, vehemently accused him of having corrupted the purity of the English tongue."

Those who found fault with the style were partly those whom we have had occasion to quote in earlier chapters, partly others more vituperative, but less enlightening, a variety of professional critics, parodists, and satirists. There was the irresponsible William Kenrick in 1766, with his *Defence of Mr. Kenrick's Review of Dr. Johnson's Shakespeare*; there was the clumsy Archibald Campbell in 1767, with his *Laxiphanes*. J. Thomson Callender in 1782 selected for publication *The deformities of Dr. Johnson*. A more distinguished enemy was Horace Walpole, who for a period of nine years, in his letters from 1773 to 1782, noticed Johnson's style with a scorn which he gathered into a "General Criticism of Dr. Johnson's Writings" for his collected works in 1798. Vicesimus Knox, a writer on the whole well disposed toward Johnson, in his *Essays Moral and Literary* had to confess that he found Johnson guilty of "an affected appearance of pomposity" and "perpetual triplets." The Reverend Robert Burrowes, for whose criticism we have shared Boswell's respect, was perhaps the only one who censured with sobriety and precision. During Johnson's life and for a while after it, the casual objections to his style are too numerous to be accounted for.

Those who wrote in praise of Johnson's style were chiefly such as we have quoted in earlier chapters, his friends and biographers, the members of his literary set and of adjacent sets—Boswell, Hawkins, Mrs. Piozzi, Towers, Murphy, and others. The casual praises of Johnson's style are, like the censures, far too numerous to be accounted for. We may quote Shenstone, who in 1760 writes; "I have lately been reading one or two volumes of the *Rambler*; who, excepting against some few hardnesses in his manner, and the want of more examples to enliven, is one of the most nervous, most perspicuous, most concise, most harmonious prose writers I know. A learned diction improves by time." A reviewer of the *Lives* in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for May 1781 knew not "which most to admire, the sense or diction, the elegance or penetration." Finally, as there were the *Deformities*, so there were the *Beauties of Johnson*, which appeared in 1781 and 1782 in two parts, the first of which was reprinted twice before the end of 1782.

ii

As the sincerest form of flattery is imitation, we might expect to find among Johnson's closest friends and warmest admirers those who imitated his style most closely. Hawkesworth comes immediately to mind—Hawkesworth, who like Johnson had his amateur interest in science, who denied that he was an imitator of Johnson, but was thought to be so by Johnson himself and was praised for the happiness of his imitations by Boswell. Miss Talbot was deceived into writing *of the Adventurer*: "I discern Mr. Johnson through all the papers that are not marked A, as evidently as if I saw him through the keyhole with the pen in his hand." Perhaps as early as 1744 Hawkesworth had in taking over the *Debates in Parliament* in the *Gentleman's Magazine* begun to model his style upon Johnson's. By the time he came to edit the *Adventurer* he was able, where there was occasion to generalize, as at the beginning or end of an essay,

or in introducing or taking leave of the series, to produce some paragraphs of Johnsonian writing. The following from the last *Adventurer* is a fair example.

As I was upon these principles to write for the young and the gay; for those who are entering the path of life, I knew that it would be necessary to amuse the imagination while I was approaching the heart; and that I could not hope to fix the attention, but by engaging the passions. I have, therefore, sometimes led them into the regions of fancy, and sometimes held up before them the mirror of life; I have concatenated events, rather than deduced consequences by logical reasoning; and have exhibited scenes of prosperity and distress, as more forcibly persuasive than the rhetoric of declamation.

Beyond this there is little that can be called imitation by the men of Johnson's circle. Johnson was surprised that Croft wrote the *Life of Yound* so well. A few crabbed sentences are Johnsonian. "All the nodosities of the oak without its strength," said Burke. Sir Joshua Reynolds was notably "of Johnson's school." Of a passage in the *Discourses* Johnson once observed, "I think I might as well have said this myself." But Reynolds' style on the whole could scarcely be taken for Johnson's. One might expect that Boswell, whose mind was so "strongly impregnated with the Johnsonian aether," would have cultivated Johnson's style more than he appears to have done. He thought that some of his own sentences in the *Hypochondriack* were as good as some in the *Rambler*. But the fact is that Boswell's style in the *Hypochondriack* is hardly for a sentence Johnsonian. More suggestive of Johnson are occasional pieces of philosophic diction in the *Life*, Johnson's spirit is "grievously clogged by its material tegument." In a china factory at Derby "a boy turned round a wheel to give the mass rotundity." In the Hebrides Johnson's stick was of great use for their "wild peregrination."

Johnson's three female collaborators in the *Rambler*, Miss Talbot, Miss Mulso, and the learned Mrs. Carter, hardly attempted his style. Yet there were other ladies who did. The one who had been closest to Johnson, Mrs. Piozzi, wrote for the most part a chit-chat style, or could write, as in the Preface to her *Anecdotes*, a sort of Euphuism, what Walpole called "high-varnished". But in the midst of chit-chat she succumbed often to the temptation to be dignified.

If, however, I ventured to blame their ingratitude, and condemn their conduct, he would instantly set about softening the one and justifying the other.

His talk therefore had commonly the complexion of arrogance, his silence of superciliousness.

And poor old Johnson's "auricular organs...never could perform their functions." The Swan of Lichfield, Anna Seward, did not tune her voice for Johnson's sake, but she praised him for his "strength and glow of ... fancy," and in the prose of her letters there are frequent workings of a kind of Johnsonian masculinity. The short biography of her by Mr. Hesketh Pearson needs no other source of humor than its plentiful studding of her philosophic phrases. "Domiciliary dilapidation," "umbrageous eminences," "nineteen oceanic immersions." Or one may be reminded of something better in Johnson by "the native gaiety of my spirit eternally eclipsed." And all the world knows that by far the most deplorable effect of Johnson's style was upon that young member of the Streatham set, Fanny Burney. The change from the maiden graces of *Evelina* to the mature pretensions of *Cecilia*, *Camilla*, *The Wanderer*, and the *Memoirs of Dr. Burney* has become through Macaulay a notorious event in the history of the English language.

It is a curious evidence both of the susceptibility of the human mind and of the hypnotic power of Johnson's patterns of emphasis that among his imitators may be listed not only his friends but his critics and among the latter the most severe. The Reverend Robert Burrowes, as Boswell remarks, was not only an acute critic of Johnson's style but an imitator of it. We may illustrate Boswell's statement with a quotation from Burrowes' "Essay". Who will not be reminded of the *Preface to the Dictionary*?

The distinctions of words esteemed synonymous, might from his writings be accurately collected. For thoughts the most definite, he has language the most precise; and though his meaning may sometimes be obscure, it can never be misunderstood.

As late as 1802 William Mudford in his *Critical Enquiry into the Moral Writings of Dr. Samuel Johnson* compared Addison and Johnson in an antithetic passage which strongly recalls Johnson's comparison of Dryden and Pope. "Johnson possessed powers unattainable by Addison; and Addison moved in a circle where Johnson could not approach. Addison is gay and lively; Johnson grave and sententious," and so forth. Hazlitt himself, most vigorous of all critics of Johnson's style, in the very stride of his criticism, falls into the Johnsonian manner.

He dares not trust himself with the immediate impressions of things, for fear of compromising his dignity; or follow them into their consequences, for fear of committing his prejudices. His timidity is the result, not of ignorance, but of morbid apprehension.

And the Earl of Oxford, in his ultimate "General Criticism of Dr. Johnson's Writings"—had he for a moment fallen under the spell?

He destroys more enemies with the weight of his shield than with the point of his spear...he excites no passions but indignation : his writings send the reader away more satiated than pleased.

The logic of Johnson's style, exactly what is attacked, its settled pattern and answering of part of part, exercises a mastery and strong sway. The critic of less ponderous mind in attempting to describe the great motion, to keep time with the majestic rolling, is caught up and carried with it. He begins to rebuke Johnson in his own language. He finds himself enlisted in a mode of thinking and compelled into a method of rhetoric. Without seeing the heresy he has embraced a new ritual. He does not censure by analysis, but defines by parody. He derives his momentum from the force which he is attempting to resist, and contributes as much to sustain the school of Johnsonian style as the most earnest admirer, the most energetic defender, or the most obsequious imitator.

iii

WHEN we pass from the circle of those who in some way immediately attach themselves to the name of Johnson, either his personal friends or enemies, or the critics of his writing, we pass into the wide field of English prose history. Here the influence of Johnson is diffused and mingled with similar forces or shaded by the various motives that were working toward romantic prose. Here, as much as in the period before Johnson, must be considered the direct effect of popular "philosophic" reading and the general prose absorption of the neoclassic couplet rhetoric. Johnson's share in the style of a given writer is very difficult to estimate. Nathan Drake named Robertson, Blair, Gibbon, Burke, Leland, Madame D'Arbaly, Ferguson, Knox, Stuart, Parr, Gillies, Nares, Mackenzie, Chalmers, Roscoe, and Anderson "as having in a greater or less degree, founded their style on that of the author of the Rambler." Boswell quotes from Robertsons History of America, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, Nares's *Elements of Orthoepy*, Mackenzie's *Mirror* and Knox's *Essays* passages which suggest in varying degrees either that Johnson's writing was the model, or that the forces which had affected him were widely prevalent. Robertson confessed that he had read Johnson's *Dictionary* twice over. Johnson spoke once of "the verriage of Robertson" and another time said, "Sir, if Robertson's style be faulty, he owes it to me, that is, having too many words, and those too big ones." Of all the Johnsonian school Gibbon and Burke were the most elastic and sinewy. "Many experiments," Gibbon tells us, "were made before I could hit the middle tone between a dull chronicle and a rhetorical declamation." Like Johnson he is not content with the chronicle, the list of facts, but the is more cautions than Johnson of the epithetical elaboration of facts, the multiplication of notions. To Burke it seemed that Robertson composed "in a dead language" Which he understood but could not Burke was the inspiration of the youthful Hazlitt and model of his style. He had, says Hazlitt, "nothing of the set or formal style. The measured cadence, and stately phraseology of Johnson, and most of your modern writers."

From the first time I ever cast my eyes on any thing of Burke's (which was an extract from his letter to a Noble Lord.....in 1796), I said to myself, "This is true eloquence: this

is a man pouring out his mind on paper." All other style seemed to me pedantic and impertinent. Dr. Johnson's was walking on stilts; and even Junius's (who was at that time a favourite with me) with all his terseness, shrunk up into little antithetic points and well-trimmed sentences, but Burke's style was forked and playful as the lightning, crested like the serpent. He delivered plain things on a plain ground; but when he rose, there was no end of his flights and circumgyrations.

One might suppose that in the field of the periodical essay the Rambler would cast a long shadow, but it seems doubtful that it did. Boswell was able to find in *Mirror* No. 16 a passage which has something of Johnson's regular structure (though certainly little of his diction), but Mackenzie and the friends who projected the *Mirror* and the *Lounger* were men of sentiment and sensibility, who aimed on the whole at an Addisonian suavity and lightness. Mackenzie's style, says his biographer, "has the polish of Addison with the tenderness of Steele." And after all he is called not the Johnson but the Addison of the North. What Mackenzie and the other periodical writers of that time seem to owe to Johnson is an occasional parallel or pointed antithesis and much more occasionally a philosophic word—and of so much they were probably conscious. They *Country Spectator* of 1793 is perhaps one of the clearest examples. In his farewell paper, after a strongly Johnsonian complaint that the papers have been "written during short intervals stolen from continued interruption, when the spirits were exhausted with fatigue or the mind sickened with disgust," the *Spectator* confesses :

I have sometimes endeavoured to lead the Reader into abstract speculation, and sometimes I have prattled about the nonsense of the day :in some instances I have paid regard to the rotundity of periods and correctness of composition; in others I have attempted to be colloquial, and have been negligent from design.

But the Chief series in the second half of the century, the *Mirror* and *Lounger*, the *World*, the *Connoisseur*, the *Observer*, and most of the minor ones, seem, with the exception of a paragraph here and there (principally in papers on Johnson) to have avoided the mighty effort of the *Rambler* and to have continued clear in the prattling town-talk tradition of the *Spectator* and *Taller*.

To what extent Johnson deflected the course of common English prose cannot easily be reckoned. Malone said that "Johnson had made an era in the English language. Every body wrote a higher style now, even Christie in Advertisements." Boswell said that the imitation of Johnson had been so general that even the newspaper writers aspired to it, and the two examples which he offers are to the point. Hawkins said : "Some of the most popular orators of this country now living, have not only proposed ... [Johnson's style] to themselves as a model for speaking, but for the purpose of acquiring the cadence and flow of his periods, have actually gotten whole essays from the *Rambler* by heart." To me it seems that among those most influenced by Johnson may have been the antiquarian and philological writers. Tyrwhitt, for example, would say of conjectural criticism : "When it assumes an air of gravity and importance, a decisive and dictatorial tone; the acute Conjecturer becomes an object of pity, the stupid one of contempt." Or Thomas Warton would wind up his *Enquiry into ... Thomas Rowley* with the strong assertion that "external arguments have seldom served to any other purpose, than to embarrass our reasoning, to mislead the inquisitive, and to amuse the ignorant."

About the turn of the century there were still some who thought Johnson had changed English prose style. Anderson, Chalmers and Drake write to this effect. "The attempt to imitate him... has elevated the style of every species of literary composition.... He not only began a revolution in our language, but lived till it was almost completed." And in 1835 Carlyle could speak of "the whole structure of our Johnsonian English breaking up from the foundations."

Perhaps Johnson's sway over certain classes of minor writers, philological clergymen, for example, or juridical lecturers, continued far into the nineteenth century. Certainly the sturdy weed of philosophic diction still flowered. Among major writers, one may mention Scott in an occasional moment of grandiloquence, or Ruskin as disciples of Johnson.

But even by the turn of the century the vanguard writers were occupied with far different ideals.

Contemporary with Chalmers' and Drake's preservative efforts comes the first of Hazlitt's indignant condemnations. And "I rather believe," ventures old Richard Cumberland, "The style of... [the *Ramblers*] is not now considered as a good model."

iv

WE may conclude our discussion on an affirmative note by adverting to the numerous intentional imitators or parodists of Johnson. It seems safe to say that no other English writer (with the possible exception of Burton) has sustained so large a school. The earliest of these, though one of the least effective, was Bonnell Thornton, of whose *Rambler* No. 99 in the third issue of the *Drury Lane Journal* the best part is the title. Others achieved at least a hilarious lavishment of philosophic diction, as in the anonymous newspaper ode to Mrs. Thrale, "Cervisial coctor's viduate dame." There were genteel efforts, like the elder George Colman's "Letter from Lexiphanes; containing Proposals for a *Glossary* or *Vocabulary* of the *Vulgar Tongue*" There were attempts like the Lexiphanees of Campbell, not only crude but impolite. "I could caricature my own style much better myself," said Johnson of one which he distinguished as best among a "rude mass" of criticisms of the *Western Islands*. "Bombast in them is the sublime in three," wrote Johnson's admirer the Reverend Percival Stockdale.

Another time Johnson said, "No. Sir; the imitators of my style have not hit it," but he added, "Miss Aikin has done it the best; for she has imitated the sentiment as well as the diction." Miss Anna Laetitia Aikin, later Mrs. Barbauld, in her essay "On Romances, An Imitation" had indeed "imitated the sentiment" in the sense that she had set out quite seriously to develop a suitable theme, the appeal of romances, and to do so in the Johnsonian manner. The essay is an altogether humorless, flat-footed procession of Johnsonian doublets, triplets, and antitheses in an array of Johnsonian diction that includes the word "adscititious" and the phrase "frigid indifference," Johnson might admit, if he liked, that she had imitated his sentiment, but certainly it was without any of his conviction.

There was another lady who undertook to imitate Johnson not in an essay but through the course of a whole book, a continuation of *Rasselas*. Miss Ellis Cornelia Knight's *Dinarbas* appeared in 1790 and enjoyed a number of editions, being printed with *Rasselas* as late as 1846. "inundation having subsided, the prince and princess, with their companions, left Cairo, and proceeded on the way to Abissinia." On the "long and tedious" journey—and through the whole tedious book—they entertained wuch "reflections" as that "activity is natural to man; and he who has once tasted the joys of liberty and action will ... (not) be contented with perpetual rest and seclusion." It is to be suspected that the Johnsonian school of lady imitators was more enduring than the history of published parodies can ever show. Let us deviate from this history long enough to recall one of the last of the Johnsonian ladies, who lived at Cranford, but was doubtless typical of a spirit that in 1853 was lingering in many places throughout England. Miss Deborah Jenkyns was the daughter of a deceased rector of the town. "On the strength of a number of manuscript sermons, and a pretty good library of divinity, [she] considered herself literary." she despised Mr. Boz, and when *The Pickwick Papers* were read aloud at her party, she said: "Fetch me 'Rasseals,' my dear, out of the bookroom." And after she had read out a counterblast, "Dr. Johnson's style," she said, "is a model for young beginners. My father recommended it to me when I began to write letters—I have formed my own style upon it."

In so far as that which is parodied must be familiar, we have good evidence that for nearly thirty years after his death Johnson's style was a vivid part of the literary consciousness of educated people. In 1812 Horace and James Smith selected the "Ghost of Dr. Johnson" to deliver one of their *Rejected Addresses* for the reopening of Drury Lane Theater. The next year appeared Eaton Stannard Barrett's *Heroine*, in which the burlesque of Gothic novels is diversified by the Memoris of the poet James Higginson, one of the cleverest and most telling of all Johnsonian parodies. The circumstances of Johnson's own early life are hinted in a narrative that shows all the Johnsonian traits but particularly the short statement and inversion of oblique cases which are most noticeable in the *Lives*.

Of genius, the first spark which I elicited, was my reading a ballad in the shop, while the woman who had sold it to me was stealing a canister of snuff. This specimen of mental abstraction shewed that I would never make a good tradesman; but it also evinced, that I would make an excellent scholar. A tutor was accordingly appointed for me; and during a triennial course of study, I had passed from the insipidity of the incipient *hic, haec, hoc*, to the music of a Virgil, and to the thunder of a Demosthenes.

My first series of teeth I cut at the customary time, and the second succeeded them with sufficient punctuality. This fact I had from my mamma.

The exploit remained feasible throughout the nineteenth century and even in the twentieth has had revivals. Herbert Vivian thought British politics of the years 1901 and 1902 needed the voice of "Toryism" in *Ramblers* No. 209 to 260. True, there was, particularly in the later numbers, not much Johnsonism besides a few big words and the original folio format and eighteenth-century type. But in No. 209 a letter from Johnson among the shades was a more sustained effort at Johnsonian construction and diction and included the word "adscititious." "The true Function of a Government," warns Johnson, "is to govern, not to proceed from Error to Error by persistent Subjection to the Demands of popular Vacillation.

There can be little doubt that even in the present day the number of Johnsonian parodies is such that "a deeper search, or wider survey" might collect a considerable chrestomathy. Hugh Kingsmill, for example, contributes to the *English Review* for November 1931 some "Remarks by Dr. Johnson on Certain Writers of the Present Age, Collected by J-m-s B-sw-II Esquire." "Shavv;s frenzy is of the mind alone. His notions are vehement, his feelings are cool. To the characters in his plays he cannot impart what he lacks himself: They have nothing of passion, and little of life." Kingsmill's parody has the excellence of being a genuine expression. He says of Shaw, Wells, Chesterton, Belloc, and Inge something appropriate and something like what Johnson would have said.

The most recent parody of Johnson to come to my notice is in the *Oxford Magazine* for 9 June 1938. The Reverend Canon Adam Fox has been elected to the Professorship of Poetry. Apropos of the event appears a considerable extract "From Johnson's *Life of Fox*" I suppose that almost every sentence of this parody has a prototype somewhere in the works of Johnson. By the election of Fox "no rival was mortified and no faction embittered."

Since the modes of error are agitated-by continual change while truth remains always the same, his poetry now shines with undiminished lustre when the false wit of the *Fantasticks* is neglected by the polite, condemned by the judicious, and read by the learned with frigid indifference.

"Frigid indifference" From Miss Aikin to the *Oxford Magazine*, the use of such a doleful term or of a hard word like "adscititious" is a chief reliance of the Johnsonian parodist. The last two examples from which we have quoted are certainly of a more refined sort than the parody which flourished in Johnson's own day. Yet if Johnsonian parody which flourished in Johnson's own day. Yet if Johnsonian parody is capable of advancement, it is restricted too by the fact that it must conform to its model. That which is read with admiration in the pages of Johnson, may be discovered with amusement in the imitations of his immediate successors, but the further the imitation is protracted by posterity, the greater must be the danger that the effort will excite but a murmur of polite disgust or a smile of frigid indifference.

