Dr. JOHNSON'S CRITICAL ASSUMPTIONS

IN THE

PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE:

AN ESSAY IN

DESCRIPTIVE METHOD

by

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1 : Introduction 1

Chapter 2 : The Conditions of Experience 28

Chapter 3 : Represented General Nature 62

Chapter 4 : The Conditions of Evaluation 80

Conclusion 125

Bibliography 136

LIST OF SHORT TITLES

OF

JOHNSON'S WRITINGS

Dictionary : A Dictionary of the English Language . . . By Samuel Johnson, A.M. 2 vols. 2nd ed. London: For J. and P. Knapton, et al., 1755.

Lives : Lives of the English Poets. By Samuel Johnson, LL.D. Ed. George Birkbeck Hill. 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905.

Works (London): The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. Ed. Sir John Hawkins, et al. 15 vols. London: for J. Buckland, et al., 1787-89.

Works : The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson. Gen. eds. Allen T. Hazen and John H. Middendorf. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1958-.

Life : Boswell's Life of Johnson, Together with Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides and Johnson's Diary of a Journey into North Wales. Ed. George Birkbeck Hill; rev. L.F. Powell. 6 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934-1950.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> His criticism may be considered as general or occasional. In his general precepts, which depend upon the nature of things and the structure of the human mind, he may doubtlessly be safely recommended to the confidence of the reader: but his occasional and particular positions were sometimes interested, sometimes negligent, and sometimes capricious.[1]

With certain qualifications, it would be the opinion of those critics[2] who share a great admiration of the man that this statement might well have been made of Johnson himself. There are those, however, whose esteem of Johnson is perhaps not so great. One thus finds Alan Tate writing:

> One is constantly impressed by Johnson's consistency of point of view, over the long pull of his self-dedication to letters. There is seldom either consistency or precision in his particular judgements and definitions -- a defect that perhaps accounts negatively for his greatness as a critic: the perpetual reformulation of his standards, with his eye on the poetry, has done much to keep eighteenth century verse alive in our day. His theories (if his ideas ever reach that level of logical abstraction) are perhaps too simple for our taste and too improvised; but his reading is disciplined and acute.[3]

Tate is eager to perpetuate the notion of Johnson as a critic with a massive common sense and little more, an imputation which Johnson would not only resent, but dismiss as short-sighted.

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[1] Lives, I, 413 (Life of Dryden).

[2] One thinks here particularly of Walter Jackson Bate, William R. Keast and Jean H. Hagstrum. Reference will be made later in the process of argument to the various studies by these critics.

[3] "Johnson on the Metaphysical Poets," in Samuel Johnson: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Donald J. Greene (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 98-99.

The great Doctor is unfortunately not available to refute his modern detractors, and in his absence it would be presumptuous of any one else to usurp his style. The present study will therefore concern itself with the facts of the case rather than any final evaluation. The argument will, however, proceed initially from an analysis of an accusation first formulated by René Wellek and later compounded by Emerson R. Marks:

> He [Johnson] is . . . one of the first great critics who almost ceased to understand the nature of art, and who, in central passages, treats art as life. . . . Art is no longer judged as art but as a piece or slice of life.[4]

Both writers attribute this vulgar error to Johnson's adherence to the principles of realism, moralism, and generality or abstractionism.

The problem with Wellek's position is that it assumes what is as yet unproved, that the nature of literature is both known and determined. It assumes that criticism is an atemporal activity taking place, as it were, in the academic chambers of some twentieth century Platonic heaven. In order to rectify, or at least reconsider, this conception two sets of questions need to be asked, the one definitional, the other methodological. In the first instance, is there either any value or logical validity in the assumption that life and literature or art may be distinguished? Can one legitimately demand that all critics, even those of a different age, should adhere to such distinctions, when it is possible that they are either not aware of them or, even more importantly, have no use for them? Is critical history, therefore, to be conducted in terms of a particular ruling hypothesis, by means, that is, of the dialectical principle that the past must be

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[4]René Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism, vol. I: The Later Eighteenth Century (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), p. 79. Marks' discussion appears in The Poetics of Reason: English Neoclassical Criticism, Random House Studies in Language and Literature No. 22 (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 110-45.

interpreted in terms of the present? The methodological question is thus: How does one approach the historical documents of criticism?

I

The purpose of the present essay is to make some tentative suggestions towards the development of a method for interpreting critical discussions which have been taken into an historical perspective.[5] What, at times, seems to be absolute statement should be regarded as having taken this stance for polemical reasons only. Criticisms of particular writers' ideas must therefore be seen as part of the dialectical means rather than a dismissal of opinions which have been taken out of their context.

> The history of critical discussion could be written in terms of a small number of words, which with their cognates and synonyms have moved back and forth from obscurity to prominence in the aesthetic vocabulary, or from neighbouring vocabularies to criticism, or from one significance to another in different modes of criticism.[6]

Any person with even a superficial knowledge of the subject would affirm this. One is faced with a term like "imitation" which is used at one time to command, at another to disparage, to designate ideal entities at one time and real ones at another, to provide a minimal description or again a sufficient one, on other occasions to clarify relationships between entities, and still on others to provide modal descriptions for a whole range of variously identifiable logical

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[5]The following argument involves the development of methodological principles which in some respects are very similar to those adumbrated by R.S. Crane in "On Writing the History of English Criticism, 1650-1800," in University of Toronto Quarterly, XXII (July, 1953), pp. 376-391.

[6]Richard McKeon, "The Philosophic Bases of Art and Criticism," in R.S. Crane, ed., Critics and Criticism, abridged ed., Phoenix Books no. 15 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 251.

objects; it may even be used to embody these concepts at once. One is therefore faced with a major problem of interpretation and understanding.

In attempting to spell out the complexities of the problem, the Wittgensteinian concept of a language game can be useful. If, for the sake of simplicity, one assumes that a single word or term is used consistently and coherently within one particular language game, say that of Aristotle, there is a very real sense in which we will not be able to understand Aristotle's meaning if we are not able to play his game with him. Unfortunately, there are historical as well as technical reasons why this is difficult, if not impossible. In the first place, we are not sure that we have sufficient evidence, both internal and external, for claiming that we have a complete knowledge of the workings of the game. In the second place, we cannot divorce ourselves sufficiently from our own language game(s) and conceptual schemes to allow for a complete immersion of our thoughts in his. It is more than even dubious, as well, whether this is desirable, since we would then find ourselves hermetically sealed within one particular game. Simple translation rules from one game to another -- under the false assumption that one game is equivalent to another -- would only result in a useless restriction of Aristotle's game to the limitations of the game into which it has been translated, for Aristotle translated in this way is not Aristotle at all, but that into which it has been translated. What is required is a means of comprehending all possible language games of a particular allegiance, in fact, a methodology which is within itself theoretically neutral, and which cannot falsify the intent of any particular conceptual scheme by the imposition of preconceptions as to the valid range of discourse, the nature of the objects involved, or the principles and

methods proper to such discourse.

As preliminaries to the attempt of setting up such a method, I wish firstly to discuss a relatively unsophisticated attempt,[7] following this, to make some further distinctions about discourse before attempting to examine a more sophisticated systematic approach to the same topic.[8]

At the outset it must be admitted that Abrams concedes his approach to be subject to pragmatic consideration at all times, since its simplicity is claimed to allow for ease of application and the generation of broad initial generalisations, as well as an openness to qualification and refinement during the process of particular application. It would be very easy to question his whole approach after such an admission, since, given his premises, he is allowing for the case where the material to which his method is applied may influence the nature and content of the approach itself, thus implying that it cannot be impartially administered. Abrams' ideas cannot however be rejected on the grounds of a quibble over his use of the approach, or at least his circumspection as to the systematic thoroughness of it. What needs to be examined is the theoretical implications and viability of his particular solution to the methodological problem.

The suggested approach is via a schema consisting of four elements: work, artist, universe and audience. These he arranges diagramatically:

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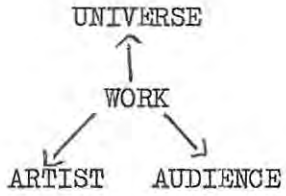
[7] M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition, The Norton Library, no. N102 (1953; rpt. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1958), pp. 6 - 7.

[8] Richard McKeon, ibid.



On this basis, attempts to explain the nature and worth of art may be seen to fall into four categories -- those which, each in turn, relate the remaining three items to the work itself, and the fourth which treats the work as a thing-to-itself. Each of these co-ordinates is to be regarded as a limited variable, so that the term "universe" is allowed to range freely over a wide variety of items, from physical objects to Platonic Ideas, anything, that is, which does not include the self or states of the self.

The first criticism to be made is an internal one. Abrams sets up his schema so that he does not show a relationship between the artist and the universe, mainly, of course, since the co-ordinate of Universe is intended to mean something like universe-through-the-poem. For the same reason, he shows no relationship between the co-ordinates of Universe and Audience. This internal inadequacy may however have serious repercussions when the schema is applied. In a critical theory often associated with the Romantic movement, poet and audience are not different in type, only in degree, since all men are in some sense poets, so that the schema will not show up any discrepancy. In the case of Aristotle, however, this convergence is not valid, since neither the assumed audience nor the poet are assumed to be part of the poetic universe. In fact, the notion of a poetic universe would not have been entertained. Later, it is hoped, a difference in type between Romantic and Aristotelian critical theory, a difference which this particular schematic approach conceals rather than identifies, will become apparent.

The next criticism arises from the fact that the proposed methodology is based on a schema which, by its nature, reveals only what it was built for. In this particular case the co-ordinates consist of four entities (logical nouns) and the three or four possible relationships (logical adjectives). If any theory were to be modal, or built around logical adverbs, then the schema would be totally inadequate. The tendency of schematic treatment is therefore to lose, or at best obscure, the dynamics of the material it is used to analyse.

A further point which follows from the fact of the schema being set up in terms of statics, is that the concern is always for the "what" or matter of the topic under consideration. The categories limit the information available, and do not consider those aspects which are perhaps far more interesting for the concern of understanding -- the "Why" and the "How".

Schemas generally, and Abrams' in particular, are designed not so much as interpretive tools as means of comparison. This, despite the fact that interpretation and comparison are most often simultaneous, and that the one logically presupposes the other. We cannot therefore expect to use this or any other similar schematic device as an adequate interpretive tool.

In the process of attempting to construct an adequate methodology, it is not permissible to make a series of pragmatic assumptions as Abrams does. He claims, for instance, that critical theories are "attempts to explain the nature and worth of a work of art."[9] What appears to be a very reasonable statement carries a number of implications which must not go unnoticed, since, deliberately or not, it implies a limitation on the nature of critical theory, or what could,

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[9] Ibid., pp. 6 - 7.

in a particular case, be counted as a critical theory. Any attempt to account for the nature and worth of poetry or art, as opposed to a particular poem or work of art, would be invalidated. To regard such a criticism as a mere quibble over the use of words, does not remove the problem, since there is a very great difference between particulars such as poems and paintings and that which is referred to by a state or condition word like "art". Confusions of this kind cannot be allowed.

To prevent falsifying assumptions about entities and relationships, let us make the minimal assumption that our main concern is with discourse. Then, if criticism is taken to be talk about literature, either generally or specifically, critical theory may be regarded as talk about talk about literature.[1] The present discussion will therefore be at least at a third remove from the phenomena of literature. (Were it not that the first-order language utterances make up the object language, the second order statements consist of principles or rules for conducting the object language discourse, and the possible third-order statements describe the way in which the phenomena discussed, the object-language and the meta-language mutually determine each other, an infinite regress would undermine the validity of the exercise.) For the purposes of completeness we have to contemplate at least one further level of discourse -- where the possibility of the establishment of a method for discussing critical theories arises.

By making these distinctions we are made aware that there are at least two logically distinct categories to be considered -- those of

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[1]The consideration of Wittgenstein's tentative suggestion of the possibility of behavioural criticism would only complicate the discussion unnecessarily. See L. Wittgenstein, Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief, ed. by Cyril Barret (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966).

phenomena and language; and that area of discussion ranges over the relevant phenomena, an object language for treating these phenomena, and a meta-language which supplies the principles governing the use of the object-language. One may also note that as one proceeds from one level of discourse to the other, the previous level always provides the subject matter, in some sense, for the one following, and that although each level is made up of language, each is of a distinct logical type or status.

We are now in a position to make a preliminary distinction between normative and non-normative discourse. Of the two levels of discourse so far distinguished, normative discussion can only legitimately appear in the object-language, since its only purpose is to make judgements about the phenomena of literature. Non-normative language, however, appears in the object as well as the meta-languages. This appears to be a contradiction of an earlier claim that it is always the function of the meta-language to supply the principles according to which the object language is conducted. The principles of normative discussion are, however, not of a different logical type from particular normative claims, only more general, and we have thus to make a distinction of degree, not of kind. Principles are there to support particular claims, not to determine how particular judgements are made.

In a succinct and comprehensive discussion of ethical theory, William K. Frankena makes the following useful distinctions about the nature of meta-ethical theory:

> As usually conceived, meta-ethics asks the following questions. (1) What is the meaning or definition of ethical terms or concepts like "right", "wrong", "bad"? Or, what is the nature, meaning or function of judgements in which these and similar terms or concepts occur? Or, what are rules for the use of such terms and sentences? (2) How are moral uses of such terms to be distinguished from non-moral ones? What is the meaning of "moral" as contrasted with "non-moral"?

> (3) What is the analysis or meaning of related terms or concepts like "action", "conscience", "free will", "intention", "promising", "excusing", "motive", "responsibility", "reason", "voluntary"? (4) Can ethical and value judgements be proved, justified, or shown to be valid? If so, how and in what sense? Or, what is the logic of moral reasoning and of reasoning about value? Of these (1) and (4) are the more standard problems of meta-ethics; but (2) and (3) have been receiving much attention lately.[2]

All of this can be applied mutatis mutandis to the discussion of literary theory. The concerns of literary theorists have, because of their interest, centered round the description of particulars, been with (2) and (3), in contrast with those of the moral philosophers. For our present purposes we would probably rewrite (2) to read: "What is the difference between a poem and other entities? What is the meaning of 'poetry' when contrasted with 'non-poetry' or 'the non-poetic'?" For (3) we could substitute: "What is the analysis or meaning of related terms or concepts like 'unit', 'plot', 'action', 'symbol', 'myth', 'space', 'time', 'intention', 'imitation', 'pleasure', 'nature', and so on?"

Having made these distinctions, we should now be in a position to cope with McKeon's[3] far more subtle approach to the problem of providing a methodology for the analysis of critical theory. Any criticism offered will not succeed in dismissing the range or value of the insights arrived at in many cases, as the intention is merely to question the validity of certain primary assumptions and point out the limitations of the proposed approach. Because of the high level of sophistication in the argument which takes almost eighty pages to develop, a brief exposition will of necessity involve a

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[2]William K. Frankena, Ethics, Foundations of Philosophy Series (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. 78 - 79.

[3]Richard McKeon, "The Philosophic Bases of Art and Criticism," in R.S. Crane, ed., Critics and Criticism, abridged ed., Phoenix Books no.15 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 191-273.

certain degree of misrepresentation. In an attempt to avoid this as much as possible I shall quote what seems to be the key passage in the argument before continuing with a more general delineation.

> The subject matter of discussion of art is determined by three considerations which bear on things and which depend on principles: First, the determination of the kind of things appropriate to the discussion is stated in general philosophic principles; second, the determination of the mode of classifying such things depends on the methodological definition of principles; third, the determination of the characteristics relevant to the evaluation of such things is stated in the principles of criticism. The meaning and subject of any critical judgement depend on all three considerations, although writers who use the same or similar terms may agree on one or more, while differing on other determinations of their meanings. Plato and Aristotle, thus, seek general philosophic principles in the nature of things, while Bacon and Kant seek them in the human understanding, and Horace and Tolstoy seek them in operations. Yet each of these pairs, although associated in choice of philosophic principles, is divided by the methodological determination and use of their principles and by the principles of criticism determined by them. For all the similarities of their statements, therefore, the six philosophers treat six distinct, though intricately related, subject matters in their analyses of art.[4]

McKeon distinguishes two methods of defining terms, the analogical or dialectic mode and the literal:

> By the use of the analogical method a trait or some traits suggested by the poem, the poet, or by the audience are used to explain all three -- as life is explained by synecdoche, poems by actions, and poets by qualities intended to distinguish man from the brute and assimilate him to God -- and all aspects of poetry are included in one analysis. By the use of the literal method the aesthetic analysis of poetry is concentrated on characteristics properly attributed to the poem, and other problems are treated in other sciences -- the ideas and emotions which the poet sought to express or those which a given audience experienced are treated in psychology, if it is a question of the thought of the poet or the reaction of the audience, or in rhetoric, if it is a question of means and medium, while the moral and political consequences of the poem, if they are considered, require analysis in terms of virtues, actions, and institutions; and the poem as conceived

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[4] Ibid., p. 206.

> in terms of its various causes and effects is distinct from the poem conceived in terms of structure and form.[5]

While his concern is with showing how the subject matter and terms of critical discussion are determined by philosophic principles and the chosen methods of employing them, McKeon's methods of approach are seen to the best advantage. When, however, he attempts to establish a typology by means of these assumptions,[6] we are forced to realise that, in itself, the suggested approach is not quite adequate.

The suggestion is that six modes of criticism may be differentiated. The first is the dialectical mode considered as a whole, though it is possible to distinguish three subdivisions, where the dialetic is in terms of things, faculties and processes respectively. As examples of each of the three one finds Plato, Kant, and Comte. Five literal modes are then distinguished: the "scientific", the "poetic", the "scholarly", the "technical", and the "formal". Of these, the first is exemplified by Aristotle who finds his principles in things: next, we have Poe and T.S. Eliot classified as "poetic" critics, and Dover Wilson as an exponent of the "scholarly" method which derives its principles from the nature of faculties; finally, "technical" criticism is given to Horace, Vida and Boileau and "formal" criticism left to I.A. Richards and "some of his various rival semanticists."[7] This last group derive their principles from the nature of processes.

For the purposes of substantiating the allegation that McKeon's approach is unsatisfactory, let us examine his characterisation of

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[5] Ibid., p. 201.

[6] Ibid., pp. 258 - 65.

[7] Ibid., p. 265.

one particular mode of criticism, the technical:

> "Technical" criticism, which is developed in "arts" of poetry, constructs its precepts about what pleases or instructs audiences in terms relevant to thought and expression in a manner similar to poetic criticism. Yet the terminology which these two largely share is put to different applications and assumes different significances. The concern of poetic criticism is with the sublime and elevated moments achieved by literature; the concern of technical criticism, as practised by Horace, Vida, or Boileau, is with any device which achieves a pleasant or profitable effect. Therefore, the criterion for thought and expression is not the loftiness of thought, of expression, or of both together, but the decorum which relates them to each other and to the audience; its application is not limited to isolated moments, since it may apply significantly to the structure and unity of a work; and its incidence falls less upon content than upon devices and style.[8]

In order for his typology to succeed, McKeon has to be able to distinguish "poetic" from "technical" criticism on the grounds of a difference in what he calls principles; in this case a difference resulting from an interpretation of terms by means of a concept of "faculty" on the one hand, and "process" on the other. It is very difficult to see how he can satisfy this demand, especially as he has placed Longinus in the first group and Horace in the second. Both are concerned with the problem of production of items of literature, though Horace is more comprehensive. This suggests that there is not an essential difference between the two writers, only one of degree.

From what McKeon has to say about the degeneration of the "poetic" mode into random impressionism,[9] it would seem as if a quarrel with his particular example is misleading. His distinction between the two modes does not however turn on a more substantial difference, that which arises from differentiation of critical purposes, those of

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[8] Ibid., p. 265.

[9] Ibid., p. 271.

interpretation and production.

Having questioned the efficiency of the approach as a whole, it is necessary to examine McKeon's primary terms. Part of the problem with a set such as "thing", "faculty" and "process", is that it is to some extent arbitrary - one does not know where it comes from, and, having no other justification than that of imposition, there is every good reason for wondering whether the set is complete or sufficient for the purposes. In the way McKeon applies it, one is further led to question the individual validity of the terms. In order to be used effectively as a means of comparison, such terms must be used at least once univocally; for instance, Horace and Tolstoy are said to define the nature of art in terms of processes while employing their uses of these principles literally and analogically respectively.

> Although Horace and Tolstoy both consider the processes by which a poet fashions a work and the work influences an audience, the processes are entirely different in their respective treatments. For Horace they are external and causal: the poet uses any appropriate materials, old or new, in appropriate verbal form to win the approval of a select, though heterogeneous, audience. For Tolstoy the processes are internal and organic to mankind as a whole: the artist finds his material in feelings, and makes that material intelligible to all by the form of his statement, in which the feelings are made infectious and by which mankind is united and improved.[1]

The problem is that the notion of process is being applied to such different circumstances that if the one is allowed to be a process, the other cannot be. A valid and informative comparison cannot thus be made.

From his use of the terms "literal" and "dialectical" or "analogical" it appears as if they have equivalent status. McKeon's use

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[1] Ibid., pp. 208-209.

of the term "dialectical" is no different from that of another writer, Robert Marsh,[2] who characterises dialectical criticism as follows:

> The dialectician discusses poetry (and most other things as well) primarily by means of broad analogies and syntheses, rather than by literal differentiation and analysis, and he does so within the context of a controlling a priori disjunction or opposition between two realms or conceptions of the whole of things - the higher or better ultimate reality and the lower "sublunary", "merely human", or "common" world . . . The dialectical theorist, in other words, invokes transcendant or comprehensive values, patterns, and ideals for poetry that are said to reside in God himself, or to exist in a providential emanating system of spiritual essences, or to be embodied in nature, mind, language, or history -- or some kind of combination or fusion of these.[3]

From this it is obvious that dialecticians' statements, made within a reductionist, metaphysical framework, are inevitably evaluative. When he talks about the nature of poetry, he is not attempting to offer a description, or to supply sets of rules for the use of a word such as "poem", nor is he, as Aristotle is, attempting to set up a minimal definition of a poem by establishing the necessary conditions for the existence of a poem, all of which are meta-critical activities. His purpose is rather to establish a sufficient condition for poetry considered as a condition to which all poems aspire. The simple sentence form "Poetry is . . ." or "A poem is . . ." can therefore be "systematically misleading"[4] since it can function both as a definitional sentence, and one indicating what poetry should or should not be. Once this distinction is realised, a falsifying and invalid comparison

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[2]Robert Marsh, Four Dialectical Theories of Poetry: An Aspect of English Neoclassical Criticism (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

[3]Ibid., pp. 11 - 12.

[4]I refer to Gilbert Ryle's use of this expression in his essay "Systematically Misleading Expressions," Logic and Language: (First Series), ed. by Anthony Flew (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), pp. 11-36.

of the two modes of utterance will not arise.

One may note, in passing, that the analogical or metaphorical use of terms need not form part of a reductive scheme at all. Metaphor often supplies the want of suitable "literal" terms, and as such is a recognition of the distinctive nature of the object to which the metaphor is applied. It is therefore essential to establish whether the use of catachresis does, in a particular case, involve a reductive intent.

The particulars of McKeon's approach being found wanting, the rationale of it needs to be considered. The notion that critical utterances may be illuminated by a set of categories is not very different from Abrams' schematic approach. The same criticisms of pre-selection and imposition on the material, as well as a loss of the dynamics of any particular set of utterances to which they may be applied still hold, since the concern is still with the "what" of the material rather than the "why" or the "how".

The inherent limitations of McKeon's approach become more apparent if one returns to the notion of language games. McKeon has attempted to set up a language game into which all others are translatable. Like all artificial languages, it attempts to reduce discourse to a system of constants and operators -- philosophic principles and methodological ones. In such cases it is always possible to question the validity of the significance of the content given to these determinants in the light of the material to which they are applied. More importantly, one has to question the validity of an attempt, as a whole, which assumes that it can do justice to the comprehensiveness of debate by means of a scheme which implicitly evades the recognition of that complexity. It is so often the case that theorists precipitate themselves into the task of constructing systems for a means of comparison

before attending to the primary task of interpreting.

One historian of criticism, at least, has attempted to break out of what he calls the "Tidy School of critical history", which assumes that "criticism is, with some embarrassing exceptions, a single activity, and that its history is the story of successive critics offering different answers to the same questions."[5] In writing a history of English criticism, he has found that the only thing common to all criticism is "a reasoned concern for poetry." He does, however, attempt to distinguish three kinds of critical discussion: legislative criticism, whose purpose is to teach the poet how to write, and how to write better; theoretical criticism, or literary aesthetics; and descriptive criticism, the analysis of existing literary works.[6] Since his concern is with tracing the history of descriptive criticism, he does not pay much attention to the other kinds, but what he says of the one may be applied to all three. He suggests that one needs to examine criticism from at least two points of view, the one substantive, the other verbal. These aspects may be expressed as two questions: "What kinds of questions does the critic ask?" and "What kinds of terms does he use?".

The value of this approach comes from the realisation that criticism is a human activity, and subject, therefore, to considerations of historical purpose. One is thus required to pay some attention to the modes of discourse -- descriptive, prescriptive and theoretical[7]

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[5]George Watson, The Literary Critics, Pelican Books (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962), p. 10.

[6]See ibid., pp. 11 - 16.

[7]This is what I take to be the import of his distinction between the three types of criticism, though at times he seems to deviate from such usage, in an attempt to force the distinctions on to an historical pattern.

-- and a great deal to the peculiar concerns of the particular critic.

I wish to suggest a more formal approach to the subject, though it will be based on the same, very primitive, assumption that any statement may be treated as an answer to a question, and therefore that the significance and relevance of the statement may only be realised once the question has been articulated. Applying this to the range of critical language, we may ask what particular problems faced particular theorists and how they solved them. Even in cases where lengthy critical statements are not available it should still be possible to delineate the particular concerns with which any utterance was attempting to cope.

Some preliminary distinctions about the nature of discourse have already been made.[8] We have allowed for such minimal conceptions as literary phenomena without committing ourselves to any notion of any actual existence -- the particulars must be conceived of as logical ones. We allowed for an object language to talk about these particulars. This object language provides for at least two kinds of utterance, normative and non-normative. In addition, a meta-language must be provided for, where the function of the object language may be discussed and settled. This meta-language is not merely restricted to reference to the object language, and has direct access to the phenomena insofar as they are related to the object language: that is, for example, there is no sense in attempting to define a word unless it is possible to stipulate what it is to which that word refers - if it is a word which refers.

We are now in a position to delineate at least some of the areas in which problems may occur. The most logically primitive one, though

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[8] pp. 8-10 above.

probably the one demanding the most sophisticated responses and techniques, arises from a recognition of a logical void at the phenomenal level. The kind of question which is bound to arise is, "What is a poem?" or even more sophisticatedly, "How is the word 'poem' used?" This ontological worry is either met directly by the method of direct theoretical considerations, or deviously. Sometimes talk about literature may avoid it altogether, and then speculative discussion may be indulged in as to how this problem could be met, since all talk depends on what we make our objects of discourse: whether we talk about literature in one way or the other, thus determining what we would regard as appropriate or inappropriate. The concern is thus with the establishment of necessary conditions, though we should be aware of the fact that at times it is possible for discourse merely to masquerade as talk about the establishment of essential characteristics. Ontological worries rarely appear so baldly. The intention behind the concern has to be found. It could be that there is a concern as to how a poem is produced, how it is to be "interpreted",[9] or how it may be evaluated, if any one of these procedures is at all relevant. If there is an ontological concern, one has to ask why it is there. Should there be no overt reference to such questions, an awareness of them may often be indicated by an attempt to cope with literary objects as phenomena existing in a temporal continuum, with the idea of literature having a past, present and future, so that normative "definitions" would be inappropriate. It has already been noted[1] that the search for <u>sufficient</u> conditions is inevitably connected with

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[9] One has of necessity to use such a term conjecturally, since it already carries certain ontological implications.

[1] pp. 15 - 16 above.

such normative considerations which, in themselves, are not at all to be considered illegitimate.

Logical bones need to be fleshed -- once the concern with essential characteristics is established, one must logically consider the question of differentiae. In other words, although one cannot stipulate what non-essential characteristics a logical entity must have it is essential that it does have them. Despite the fact that we cannot stipulate what particular weight a person must have to exist, we must insist that persons have some weight or other. This general concern is reflected by the vast array of critical terms available in the object-language. Some of these are directly related to the possible ontological solution -- what one could call structural concepts, such as that of unit, which is often related to a normative interest, as it is in Aristotle's Poetics, where a concern for numerical identity is completely inappropriate.

Once again, the method of interrogation must apply. We need to ask for the reasons for the admission of terms into the object language, what role they play. It may be to help identify a particular; there may be a concern with the production of a particular; or it may be that it is used to "interpret" a particular, in which case we could say that the question of epistemology has arisen; or yet again, the emphasis or purpose might be normative, in which case we need to ask ourselves how particular terms help identify the normative interest of a specific discussion.

Finally, we need to look at what has been termed the normative concern. As it has been used so far, the term "normative" has been used to indicate not only the area of discussion where questions of the good and the bad and indifferent have arisen, but where consideration of areas of interest is important. The question of norms is not always apparent and often appears in an

indirect form in the revelation of certain predilections; for instance, in the production of particulars, while a tendency to produce entities of one type rather than of another may be said to evince a certain amount of normative activity. It is at this juncture that metaphysical reductive schemes become operative, and in the consideration of literary discourse it is therefore very necessary that attention be paid to overt as well as covert normative concerns.

I have attempted to show that in considering the logical implications of each item of literary utterance one is continually forced to relate one area of interest dynamically with the other. If a particular sample of literary discussion betrays evidence of parasitism, it means that the sources have to undergo a similar form of logical interrogation. Because of the open-endedness of the method, only an application of it will reveal its potentialities, and the best test of it will be material which does not in itself pretend to be systematic.

With all these possibilities in mind, one has to approach a critical statement in very much the same way as one would any literary text. The relevance of a direct statement may only be revealed by the realisation of its obliquity.

II

Before proceeding with the task of analysis, some preliminary remarks need to be made about problems arising from the nature of the material, and about the limitation of the scope of the present study.

In the preface to what is by far the most comprehensive and illuminating study of Johnson, Walter Jackson Bate provides an acute analysis of the problems facing a writer on the topic.

> To try to discuss Johnson as a whole . . . has an advantage that makes the task very simple, but which can create problems embarrassing to any writer who tries to rephrase or interprets him. Both the advantage and the difficulty is that almost every aspect of his thought is so intimately connected with all the others. The problem comes in trying to discuss it consecutively and yet honestly. For as soon as we pick up one corner of the blanket, we suddenly find the whole of it brought directly in our arms. Still, one point has to be taken up before another.[2]

This inherent complexity of Johnson's thought thus provides an initial difficulty for any descriptive method as outlined in the previous section. A topical approach courts dangers arising from the possibility of arbitrary pre-selection. On the other hand, the distribution of Johnson's critical writings places great difficulties in the way of a purely consecutive approach. Thus the intermittent critical discussions of the periodicals always need to be seen in the general context of the rhetorical stance Johnson assumes, while The Lives of the Poets, in addition to involving the difficulties arising from a series of critical statements, require the consideration that they are critical statements which developed out of what was originally intended to be biographical material. The difficulties which arise from the consideration of the questions of context and decorum are not insuperable, and, as it will appear in the course of the present study, much valuable information may, in fact, be gained from taking account of these considerations of ambience. The fragmentary nature of the criticism, however, does not lend itself so easily to discursive treatment, especially when the complex inter-relationship of Johnson's thought as a whole is considered.

The Preface to Shakespeare[3] is the only part of Johnson's

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[2] The Achievement of Samuel Johnson (1955; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. vii.

[3] Hereafter referred to as Preface.

criticism which provides a complete and sustained critical argument. Most, if not all, of the critical issues raised in the periodical essays may be found in the Preface, if not in their particular, then in their general form. As Arthur Sherbo indicates, "the working critical vocabulary employed in The Lives of the Poets exists, almost in its entirety, in the notes to the edition [of Shakespeare]."[4] It is therefore to be expected that a discussion of the critical material of the Preface will illuminate much of Johnson's other critical discussion. An examination of the Preface, however, has this one advantage that, in paying attention to the shape of Johnson's argument, one is able to establish some kind of perspective on the criticism by seeing how one kind of statement is related to the other.

In the attempt to treat the Preface as a structured argument, and thus indirectly displaying the systematic, as opposed to systematised, nature of Johnson's thinking, one cannot be expected to limit the discussion to a piecemeal consideration of the text, as if it were an object for practical criticism. One has continually to relate particular concerns, topics and vocabulary to relevant considerations as they appear in Johnson's other writings -- as well as his reported conversations -- for the purposes of clarification and amplification.[5]

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[4]"Johnson as Editor of Shakespeare: The Notes" [an abridgement of Chapter V of Samuel Johnson, Editor of Shakespeare. With an Essay on the Adventurer, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, vol. 42 (Urbana: University if Illinois Press, 1956)] in Samuel Johnson: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Donald J. Greene (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 124-37. It is to be regretted that Sherbo's complete study, along with certain other important texts, is not available, being out of print and not obtainable in this country.

[5]The unstated assumption that, apart from variations resulting from emphasis, Johnson's thought on critical matters is substantially consistent throughout, must at this point be taken for granted, though the subsequent proof of it will emerge in the process of this study.

In doing so, one is able to retrieve and establish Johnson's critical assumptions; one is able to answer not only the question why he chooses to proceed in one way rather than another, but also the question of what makes it possible for him to take up one position instead of another.

There appears to be only one attempt to analyse the Preface structurally.[6] George Watson[7] has proposed that seven sections may be distinguished. Although this division tends to sacrifice accuracy for convenience and economy, especially in the penultimate section, it may be regarded as a fairly accurate, though disproportionate, representation of the factual concerns:

(1) Shakespeare considered as a poet of nature (pp. 59-66, pars. 1-15).[8]

(2) The defence of tragi-comedy (pp. 66-70, pars. 16-29).

(3) Shakespeare's "central" style (pp. 70-71, pars. 30-31).

(4) Shakespeare's defects (pp. 71-74, pars. 32-44).

(5) The general attack on the unities (pp. 74-81, pars. 45-63).

(6) Historical background (pp. 81-101, pars. 64-125).

(7) Editorial policy (pp. 101-113, pars. 126-162).

To his summary analysis Watson adds a brief comment to the effect that

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[6]Walter Jackson Bate, in The Achievement of Samuel Johnson (1955; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), Chapter V, "Johnson as a Critic," does however demonstrate the interdependence of certain concepts and arguments, but is prevented, by his topical approach, from doing more.

[7]In The Literary Critics (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1962), p.90.

[8]Page references are to Works, vol. VII. The references are supplied only as conjectures as to Watson's intent. It is therefore very likely that the last division occurs at p.92, par. 98, since certain historical considerations influence editorial policy.

sections (1) - (4) and (6) may be regarded as an extended essay in descriptive criticism, section (5) as a major exercise in theoretical criticism, and section (7) as a substantial appendix on editorial method. Although these comments are not mistaken, they are misleading, by being inadequate, since the argumentative tenor of the Preface is not accounted for. The present study will therefore attempt to rectify this by discussing the relevant material under three heads: (1) The conditions of experience, pars. 1-6 and 45-63; (2) Represented general nature, pars. 7-31; (3) The conditions of evaluation, pars. 32-44 and 64-98.[9]

At this point it is perhaps appropriate to register some regrets. Because the present study has set out to examine the shape of Johnson's argument in the Preface, little attention has been given to the notes to the edition itself. A fuller treatment of Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare should, however, undertake an examination of Johnson's specific responses in the light of both his critical principles and any relevant normative predispositions, especially those which bear on the nature and use of language. Johnson's attitudes to figurative language in general, and metaphor in particular, require far more attention than has yet been given them.[1] By doing so, it is possible

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[9]Within the confines of the present study, the material concerns of pars. 99-162 have been assumed to be not directly relevant.

[1]Donald J. Greene's informative article "'Pictures in the Mind': Johnson and Imagery," in Johnson, Boswell and their Circle. Essays Presented to Lawrence Fitzroy in Honour of his Eighty-fourth Birthday, ed. by Mary Lascelless, et. al. (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 135-58, would be a good starting point, though certain of Green's conclusions may require qualification. Part of Greene's purpose is to refute the persistent misconception of Johnson's "abstractness" in both style and the kind of image he prefers exemplified in literature. The most recent champion of this latter view has been W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., in The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1941), and Philosophic Words: A Study of the Style

that a great deal of information may be gained in the process of observing the complex inter-relationships between normative assumptions, the selection of critical terminology, and notions governing the methods and purposes of criticism. It is also probable that much is to be gained from an analysis of Johnson's editorial policy seen in relation to his particular applications of it on the one hand, and his deviations from it on the other. His criticisms of previous editors, seen as an application of his principles of textual criticism, will be found to confirm the findings of the present study with regard to the methods proper, in Johnson's opinion, to criticism generally. Johnson's rare deviations from his principles may provide some

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and Meaning in the "Rambler" and Dictionary of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948). It should be noted that in the earlier study Wimsatt (pp. 100-103) establishes that Johnson, despite the terminology he uses, cannot be regarded as an ornamentalist either in practice or theory.

M.H. Abrams' brief discussion of Johnson's (restricted) "reading" of metaphors in "Dr. Johnson's Spectacles" in New Light on Dr. Johnson: Essays on the Occasion of his 250th Birthday, ed. by Frederick W. Hilles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) pp. 177-87, is unfortunate in that it is based on the analysis of only two examples. The first of these is Johnson's remarks on some lines from Thomas Gray's "On a distant Prospect of Eton College," (Lives, III, 435). Abrams ignores the point that Johnson's criticism of Gray's variation ("gales . . . redolent with joy and youth") of a Dryden metaphor ("And bees [bring] their honey redolent of spring") as "beyond common comprehension," stems from the very fact of this variation. Much eighteenth century poetry works by means of allusion, but Gray's use of this technique simply confuses the reader by redirecting attention, rather than using the allusion to broaden or clarify a particular perception. The issues at stake are therefore more than the metaphorical nature of the expression. The second example is Johnson's note to Macbeth V.iii.22-23 (Works, VIII, 991-92). Johnson proposes that "My Way of life" be emended to "My May of life / Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf." Abrams confuses a conjectural note with an actual emendation; it is Steevens, in the 1778 edition, who emends the text. Abrams' claim, (p.180) that, by imposing his views on Shakespeare's language -- "There is no relation between the 'the way of life,' and 'fallen into the sear'," -- Johnson does not adhere to his own very strict principles of textual criticism, is thus unfounded. Abrams also fails to take account of the last part of Johnson's note, where it is indicated that on several other occasions Shakespeare uses "May" in a similar metaphorical way -- in the Dictionary, Johnson cites Much Ado About Nothing and Henry V for exemplifications of this use.

interesting, though circumstantial, evidence of his normative preoccupations. Investigations of this latter kind, however, must be pursued with the utmost caution. Perhaps the most fruitful area for exploration would be that involving concerns of textual integrity, authorial intention and textual intentionality.

The meta-critical problems suggested in the previous paragraph are, of course, not unique to studies of Johnson. It is, however, rare to find one man making major, if not original, contributions in the fields of "practical criticism", literary theory, and textual criticism. It is, in part, for this reason, that Johnson's writings prove such a formidable challenge to any student of critical history.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONDITIONS OF EXPERIENCE

What may be called the tone is an aspect of the Preface which is often either ignored or misrepresented; and as with most of Johnson's other writings this is due, on the one hand, to the stupefaction, admiring or otherwise, induced by the fulsomeness of his prose style, and on the other, to a restricted response to Johnson's language as a virtuoso display of vocabulary and syntax, so that continual reference is made to the magisterial sonority of his writings. And all this results in a misleading amplification of the notion of Johnson as a literary dictator, "the Great Cham". As a step towards modifying these ideas, one will have to look at Johnson's self-consciousness as a writer, and more especially as a critic, as well as consider the question of his originality.

I

In the last number of The Rambler (No. 208) Johnson concerns himself with what the aims of his periodical essays have been: "It has been my principal design to inculcate wisdom or piety. . . ."[1] To the modern reader this utterance, if applied to literature, may be regarded as a statement of all that is bad in criticism; for someone attempting to understand Johnson, such preconceptions are irrelevant. One has to pay attention to the fact of Johnson's seeing himself as a teacher, someone who, being informed, sets out to inform others. In such a role, especially when the concern is with the

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[1] Works, V, 319.

criticism of literature, ex cathedra statements on what is or is not the case, what is proper and what is not, would, by themselves, be merely out of place. Thus, in

> . . . the disquisitions of criticism, which . . . is only to be ranked among the subordinate and instrumental arts, . . . arbitrary decision and general exclamation . . . [are to be] . . . carefully avoided, by asserting nothing without reason, and establishing all . . . principles of judgement on unalterable and evident truth.[2]

The critic is thus not ever the mere disseminator of opinions. In fact, in this role he is highly dangerous.

> Much mischief is done in the world with little interest or design. He that assumes the character of the critick, and justifies his claim by perpetual censure, imagines that he is hurting none but the author, and him he considers as a pestilent animal, whom every other being has a right to persecute; little does he think how many harmless men he involves in his own guilt, by teaching them to be noxious without malignity, and repeat objections which they do not understand; or how many honest minds he debars from pleasure, by exciting an artificial fastidiousness, and making them too wise to concur with their own sensations. He who is taught by a critick to dislike that which pleased him in his natural state, has the same reason to complain of his instructor, as the madman to rail at his doctor, who, when he thought himself master of Peru, physicked him to poverty.[3]

This responsibility to audience has to be reflected, then, in an inculcation not of opinions,[4] but of the means by which true opinions may be arrived at. What may appear to be the dictatorial attitude derives from the equally valid responsibility of teachers -- their "courage to tell, and authority to propagate their opinion."[5]

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Works, II, 12 (Idler No. 3), p. 12.

[4] Johnson's refusal to follow previous editors of Shakespeare in marking out for attention "the beauties" of the poet, appears to be motivated by his concern for not wishing to reduce himself to a purveyor of opinions. See Works, VII, pp. 57-58 and p. 104.

[5] Works, II, 496 (Adventurer No. 138).

That this is a continual concern for Johnson is seen from his rather outrageous commendation of a passage in Congreve's The Mourning Bride (Act II, sc. i) on the grounds that it is more poetic and sustained than anything in Shakespeare; he was of course teasing Garrick, and admitted later that he did so because ". . . these fellows know not how to blame, nor how to commend."[6]

Johnson, both as essayist and critic, will not restrict himself within the academic closet of specialists. After a lengthy section in The Life of Pope in which he has been discussing the various corrections made by the poet in the process of translating The Iliad, he suddenly cuts himself short with ". . . but most other readers are already tired, and I am not writing only to poets and philosophers."[7] His concern lies with the wideraudience. The criticism is thus not that of an aristocrat, either in a severe form as in Plato, or an urbane one as in Sidney, neither does it pretend to be academically Aristotelian, and least of all does it adopt the exculpatory stance so often favoured by Dryden. Johnson speaks with the courage and authority of his convictions to a public whom he regards it as his duty to inform. There seems no other reason, apart from the trivial one of the indulgence of vanity in display, why Johnson's preface should be so markedly different in approach from those of his predecessors,[8] in the way he deliberately sets about de-

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[6] Johnsonian Miscellanies, ed. by G.B. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), I, 186.

[7] Lives, III, 126.

[8] See D. Nichol Smith, ed., Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) for the prefaces of Rowe, Pope, Theobald, Hanmer, and Warburton. It is interesting to note the initial similarity of Johnson's opening to

monstrating the reasons for his opinions hardly differing, in their verbal form, from those of previous writers, all in terms which had been the stock-in-trade for generations of critics. In order to remove the misconception of Johnson as a literary dictator, one cannot however introduce the equally naive image of him as a benign, though pompous, schoolmaster repeating the platitudes of the past. He must be seen as an authority on a subject making an attempt to bring a knowledge of that subject to a wider public. This, however, still leaves the question of his originality in the balance.

Although the Preface is very much involved with the question of critical principles, it is not in itself, because of its ostensive purpose as well as because of Johnson's fundamental conceptions of the nature of literature and criticism, an extended theoretical treatise or disquisition. It is, however, as a result of such deliberate exercises in theorising that "Copernican revolutions" in thought are brought about, so that startling innovations of a certain kind are not to be expected in Johnson's discussion.

Since the purpose of the present study is not to characterise Johnson's criticism within an historical perspective as such, the matter may well be left there. One feels, however, coerced into going beyond such rear-guard academic timidity. One may adopt the Johnsonian sentiment that truth can often bear the repeating, and that in the case of a writer who does so memorably, the question of

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Warburton's:

> "It hath been no unusual thing for Writers, when dissatisfied with the Patronage or Judgement of their own Times, to appeal to Posterity for a fair Hearing. Some have even thought fit to apply to it in the first Instance; and to decline Acquaintance with the Public till Envy and Prejudice have quite subsided. But, of all the Trusters to Futurity, commend me to the Author of the following Poems, who not only left it to Time to do him Justice as it would, but to find him out as it could." (Ibid., p. 89).

novelty is merely inconsequential.[9] Taken as it stands, this position could be seen merely as a praise of Johnson as a stylist and a consequent reduction of the preface to a work of art. It is, however, that, and no more. To realise this, we have only to compare it with Pope's Essay on Criticism. Before Johnson, one may find a conglomeration of loosely connected intuitions; but through his writings, these intuitions, or some of them, are refined into the limber instruments of systematic thought.

II

The first six paragraphs of the Preface have as their topic the test of time, but the brevity of this consideration, and the facility with which Johnson handles his material, should not be allowed to mislead one into taking it lightly. What Johnson is doing is confronting head-on the central question of much critical theory -- the problem of the just allocation of praise. In order to do this he has to enumerate the assumptions of all his criticism.

A brief analysis of the "argument" would be as follows:

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[9]See Bertrand H. Bronson in his introduction in Works, VII, xxxviii:

> "What one is moved to say ... about [Johnson's] originality on the subject [of Shakespeare] mainly concerns the great Preface to his edition. It is little more than one might say of the originality of the ideas in Shakespeare's sonnets. In the final reckoning, their novelty is not the thing that matters. If an author's writing abounds, to quote Johnson in a different context, 'with images which find a mirror in every mind and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo'; and if, in addition, he succeeds in giving his discourse a living body that, as we read, we seem to come into the possession of the full meaning of these ideas now for the first time, and in so felicitous and authoritative a form that we have neither power to better nor wish to change it, we may then credit him with the highest and most difficult originality of all, which subsumes and supersedes earlier statements and compels later ones into its own channel. To this kind of originality, in its best pages, Johnson's Preface attains. It is not to be superseded, and it is indespensable."

1. The objection to the test of time as a measure of literary merit, that people praise something merely because it is old and not because it is good, is one raised by persons who want to say something clever without having understood what is involved, or by writers who feel that their merit has been slighted by their contemporaries. These objections thus cannot be taken seriously.

2. On the other hand, there are others who wish to evade their responsibility of giving praise where praise is due, those who refuse to confront excellence outright, and will condemn their contemporaries on that mere fact while giving their allegiance to earlier works for the equally spurious reason that their attention has been drawn to them by the minimal fact that they are old.

3. The proper reason for accepting the test of time arises from a consideration of the nature of the things to be judged. Literary works are not good by definition; rather, they are good only as they are related to human experience. Since, however, in the act of judging, we are talking about the object judged and not a particular person's experience of it, the only way we can be true to the objectivity and universality implied by a value judgement, is to rely on the accumulated evidence of many human experiences of that object.[1]

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[1]To some extent this is a misrepresentation of the third paragraph, since it is a development of only one strand of the argument. The very complex nature of Johnson's thought at this point forces one into this. I do not think, however, that I have been untrue to the gist of the matter.

4. At this point we return to considerations which may underlie the attitudes of those persons mentioned in the second paragraph. Because of the reasons for adopting the test of time, we can now see that it is adopted not from a confidence in the past for its own sake, or an equivalent lack of it in the present.

5. What the test of time achieves, is an isolation of literary works which have real merit, not those which have the limited appeal of topicality, something which is not a constant and cannot, therefore, be considered as relevant to objective judgements. At this point Johnson complicates the matter by introducing the very complex notion of pleasure; the reason why one work is preferred to another, is that it is responsible for a greater pleasure. The partially subjective nature of pleasure is thus the reason for the position adopted in the third paragraph.

6. Because of the fallibility of human judgement, especially in relation to the considerations so far mentioned, it is necessary to account for the approbation, over a long period of time, given to Shakespeare. The reasoning behind this is that praise arising from pleasure received must always be praise resulting from pleasure at <u>some thing</u> -- pleasure always has an object. If this object cannot be stipulated, then there is good reason to believe that the pleasure is merely subjective.

We may now proceed with a detailed examination of the issues involved.

The first question one may ask is why Johnson, instead of being so pedantic, does not simply state that the nature of works of literature is to give pleasure, and that therefore those works which

give the most pleasure are the ones most deserving praise. The simple answer, at one level at least, is that there is no other way of telling, objectively, that a work gives pleasure than that it continues to please. At a more profound level, the answer is that such an approach would be completely alien to Johnson's whole way of proceeding.

When Johnson asserts of Boerhaave that he

> . . . reflects, with just severity, upon those arrogant philosophers, who . . . , possessed with too high an opinion of their own abilities, rather choose to consult their own imaginations, than enquire into nature, and are better pleased with the charming amusement of forming hypotheses, than the toilsome drudgery of making observations,[2]

he is inveighing against a purely deductive method. To start any discussion about literature, then, with a definition of any kind, would be wrong, and it would be wrong because any definition restricts and falsifies the concerns -- "Human experience . . . is constantly contradicting theory."[3] To base a theoretical discussion on even so innocuous a premise as that art is the imitation of nature, is mistaken, as far as Johnson is concerned, since it means that one already knows what art is, that it may be distinguished from nature, and that art may be discussed apart from the human experience of it, as if it were some kind of biological specimen. To claim outright that literary works may be defined teleologically, in the sense that their end is the production of pleasure, is already to assume that one knows what pleasure consists of, when in actual fact this is precisely what one is attempting to find out. It is therefore not surprising that Johnson should studiously avoid preclusive definitions, as when he

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[2]Works (London), IV, 343.

[3]Life, I, 454.

replies to Boswell's question asking for a definition of poetry: "Why, Sir, it is much easier to say what it is not. We all know what light is; but it is not easy to tell what it is."[3a]

That he eventually seems to arrive at the point of claiming that the aim of writing is to please, does not undermine his position at all. His use of the notion of pleasure is often so vague as to be almost circular -- "that which pleases" is used synonymously with "that which attracts attention,"[4] so that that which attracts people is that which attracts them. Such tautological evasiveness does not reflect a simple-mindedness on Johnson's part -- on the one hand, he is using this lack of definition to draw attention to the reciprocal nature of the situation where one has a thing in which pleasure is taken, and an agent which takes pleasure, and thus to point out that we need to consider the human desire for pleasure in our final assessment; and on the other, he is very carefully replacing the quality of antiquity, as something in itself which attracts our attention, with the action of something more ample. It is only when more substance is given to the notion of pleasure, by means of such concepts as general nature and experience, that one realises that an apparent indulgence in preselective judgement was not allowed to occur.

Since he refused to gain access to his material by deductive means, Johnson has to find an inductive method. The most obvious way would be through a direct confrontation with the works of Shakespeare, yet he refuses this as well, and to this extent he shows himself not to be a direct descendant of Locke's empirical tradition. The conditions he sets about to examine are the facts of Shakespeare's continued survival as a writer of esteem. Faced with this phenomenon,

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[3a] Life, III, 38.

[4] See Works, V, 129 (Rambler No.168), Lives, I, 458; III, 233.

he feels himself obliged to explain as well as defend it. Whenever he considers the phenomenon of literature, Johnson always insists on viewing it only in relation to human experience of it.[5] The central terms of Johnson's discussion therefore become "judgement" and "experience".

> Judgement is forced upon us by experience. He that reads many books must compare one opinion or style with another; and when he compares, must necessarily distinguish, reject, and prefer.[6]

The act of evaluating is thus inseparable from the reading, or experiencing, of literature, even though this evaluation may only be of the performative kind involved in rejecting and preferring. We must therefore examine what Johnson makes of the situation in which the individual reader is confronted with a particular item of literature.

(One may note, in passing, that "experience", as Johnson is using it at this point, is not to be confused with Locke's sense of it as immediate sense-perception, or, in an extended sense, as first-hand observation. For Johnson, experience is what occurs in a process of time; it is thus an accumulation of "events" within one person, and as such it has more of the meaning we give to the term when we use it in an expression such as "He is a man of much experience." In this sense, experience involves memory.

> Memory is, among the faculties of the human mind, that of which we make the most frequent use, or rather that of which the agency is incessant or perpetual. Memory is the primary and fundamental power, without which there can be no other intellectual operation. Judgement and ratiocination suppose something already known, and draw their decisions only from

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[5] See Works, IV, 301 (Rambler No. 125): "If the two kinds of dramatick poetry had been defined only by their effects upon the mind, some absurdities might have been prevented. . . ."

[6] Lives, III, 94.

> experience. Imagination selects ideas from the treasures of remembrance, and produces novelty only by varied combinations. We do not even form conjectures of distant, or anticipations of future events, but by concluding what is possible from what is past.[7]

It is difficult to see how one can, on the basis of this, make a case for Johnson's acceptance of Lockean epistemology and empiricism, since for Locke the memory is only a store-house of "ideas".[8] If one wishes to be fanciful, though not idly so, one can trace philosophical parallels with Johnson's analysis of the place of memory in Kant, who regards memory -- "reproduction" and "recognition" -- as a prerequisite to all experience.[9]

For Locke, "judgement" was merely a distinguishing faculty, but even in Johnson's non-evaluatory sense this is not the case, since for him judgement cannot take place without memory.[1])

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[7] Works, II, 137 (Idler No. 44).

[8] John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. by Alexander Campbell Fraser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894), I, 194:

> "But, our ideas being nothing but actual perceptions in the mind, which cease to be anything when there is no perception of them, this laying up [memory] of our ideas in the repository of the memory signifies no more than this: that the mind has a power in many cases to revive perceptions which it has once had, with this additional perception annexed to them, that it has had them before."

[9] Immanuel Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason, tr. by Norman Kemp Smith, Papermac 47 (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1964), pp. 131-38.

[1] See Robert Voitle, Samuel Johnson the Moralist (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), p . 1-21, and Jean H. Hagstrum, Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 3-20 and 182-83. Both attempt to demonstrate Locke's influence.

III

The implication of the test of time, that human experience, considered as the extension of personal existence through a temporal dimension, does not involve the mere passivity of the human being in the face of external impressions, arises from the realisation that works, by this test, deserve reverence, not because the works themselves have continued to exist as discrete entities through an extended period of time, but because they have continued to be objects of experience; and they have been that because people have gone out of their way to experience (read) them, not because they have been forced upon the attention. To consider the reading of literature as "confrontation" is thus a falsification, since it reduces the situation to something analogous with the Lockean concept of experience, where the person is subject to the ineluctably observable. For Johnson, this is trivially true, so that the real compulsion of experience arises out of the necessity to judge, which is a complete inversion of Lockean epistemology. The nature of human beings is then such that they return to certain works of literature, and by this perform an act of judgement. In order to find out why they return, one has to ask why they go in the first place. The kind of answer Johnson gives, may be seen from his analysis of what happens under ideal circumstances.

> If mankind were left to judge for themselves, it is reasonable to imagine, that of such writings, at least, as describe the movements of the human passions, and of which every man carries the archetype within him, a just opinion would be formed.[2]

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[2] Works, II, 496 (Adventurer No. 138). See also Works, III, 280 (Rambler No. 52): ". . . the common voice of the multitude uninstructed by precept, and unprejudiced by authority, . . . [is], in questions that relate to the heart of man, . . . more decisive than the learning of Lipsius. . . ."

One possible inference to be drawn from this passage could be that what is involved in the (deliberate) "confrontation" between a person and a work of literature is very similar to the situation model which provides the basis for a correspondence theory of truth -- two elements, the one objective and the other verbal, are "compared", and if the verbal element "corresponds" with the objective state, the verbal element is judged to be "true". The correspondence theory of truth has, with time, lost its adherents, but the element of comparison, that a statement should be corroborated by the state of affairs it refers to, is still valid for certain kinds of statement -- the descriptive ones. As long as one realises that this is all Johnson is referring to in this passage, one will not commit the blunder of inattention so prevalent among writers on Johnson.[3]

That this situation, where the person is in some way at a remove, as an observer, from the two elements to be compared, is not an adequate model for what happens when a person brings his attention to works of literature such as the plays of Shakespeare, Johnson makes abundantly clear. Works which deal with verifiable matters may be seen as falling into two categories. Firstly, there are those which work in terms of objective description and make use of words like "round" or "square", so that the means of verification depends on knowing what is said and relating it to the facts; there are also those which are verifiable on grounds of self-consistency, such as the works of mathematics. Secondly, there are those which are related to human experience in one of two ways; on the one hand, one finds

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[3]See, for example, René Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism, I (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), 79-82, where Johnson's criticism is discussed in terms of "realism".

those which refer to non-human existence, but which can only be spoken of in terms of human experience of them, so that the terms are always on the models of "spacious" and "lofty"; and on the other, there are works which take as their subject human nature itself. Of works in the second category, Johnson's point would thus be that, even if such works are descriptive, judgement cannot be immediate and infallible. Thus it is not the case that decisive opinions are possible even in cases where people come to works solely for instruction. W.R. Keast, in his analysis of the third paragraph of the Preface,[4] tends to over-emphasise the fact that absolute statements about literature are not immediately possible because works of literature considered as forms of human activity are not available for such judgements, the limits of human enterprise not being finite.[5] This analysis, however, fails to accommodate the subtler implications of Johnson's statement, that the appropriate terms of description for works of literature are experiential ones. Such experiental terms are refined in accuracy only through a repeated application in the process of time, since experience is never temporally discrete.

Despite this, one must not forget that Johnson's starting point is always that human judgement, left to itself, is always right, and that this is particularly the case of works which are closely related to human nature and experience. This apparent contradiction arises out of Johnson's conviction of the reasonability of human beings: not that they are always rational, but that they are always amenable to

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[4]"The Theoretical Foundations of Johnson's Criticism," in Critics and Criticism, abridged ed., ed. by R.S. Crane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 176-77.

[5]Further discussion of this point will be found in sec. IV and ch. 4, sec. V below.

reason, that there is always a reason for their opinions and attitudes, and that these opinions are always criticisable. It is this which lies behind Johnson's incessant incredulity.

Although the model set up for a correspondence theory of truth is relevant, it is finally inadequate for works such as those of Shakespeare. Because people do not go to them for instruction, the court of appeal is not, in the first place, a factual situation to which the work relates. The comparison shifts from that between statement and thing, to that between statement and statement, so that one statement is better or worse than another, not true.[6] If this were put into "process" terms, it would imply that the end is already agreed upon, but that the means of achieving it are being graded.[7] This situation arises out of the nature of the work being considered, where the nature of the work is defined in terms of why it is read.

> Books which have stood the test of time, and been admired through all the changes which the mind of man has suffered from the various revolutions of knowledge, and the prevalence of contrary customs, have a better claim to our regard than any modern can boast, because the long continuance of their reputation proves that they are adequate to our faculties, and agreeable to nature.[8]

The point is that great works of literature, being "adequate to our faculties," are not available as statements verifiable in a third-person form involving a comparison of two things already known. They are in some way "in tune" with, as well as satisfying to, our

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[6]The difference being that between (comparative) evaluative judgements and descriptive ones.

[7]This terminology would, to a certain extent, be foreign to Johnson, but it is used in order to point out the direction in which his thought moves.

[8]Works, IV, 122 (Rambler No. 92). Emphasis mine.

experience and our way of experiencing. Concomitantly, they are "agreeable to nature"; that is, in some way or other, "true", by being true to our experience.[9]

When the point is reached where it is possible to say that works ". . . are read without any other reason than the desire for pleasure, and therefore praised only as pleasure is obtained. . . ,"[1] it is obvious that the concern is not with mere titillation or gratification. This is confirmed by the analysis of what it is that may be regarded as the source of pleasure. Johnson examines the conditions of evaluation, through a simultaneous consideration of what is judged and the process of judging, and arrives at a position which cuts right across the traditional dichotomy of the subjective and the objective.

The happy state of affairs when ". . . the reader, . . . free from personal prejudices, takes . . . [a book] up with no other intention than that of pleasing or instructing himself . . . [and] accommodates his mind to the author's design . . ."[2] rarely exists, precisely because of the very human nature the reader brings with him. Optimum conditions would render criticism superfluous, but since these are rarely achieved some form or other of criticism, with the status of a ". . . subordinate and instrumental . . ."[3] art, must be allowed. It is at this point that evaluation moves from the performative to the discursive.

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[9]The implications of this will be examined in the following chapter.

[1]Works, VII, 61 (Preface, par. 5).

[2]Works, III, 127 (Rambler No. 23).

[3]Works, V, 319 (Rambler No. 208).

IV

Against the assertion that ". . . men may be convinced, but they cannot be pleased, against their will . . . ,"[4] must be held the realisation that people are often pleased by something for the wrong reasons. Some of these are listed in the fifth paragraph of the Preface: topicality, personal association with the author, the use of a work for gratifying personal or factional desires. The reason why they are wrong is that they involve attention to accidental considerations. To praise a work is not only to praise it for yourself, since any value judgement is a statement about the thing judged not about the one who judges[5] -- when one claims that something is good, one claims, by implication, that others will find it good for the same reasons.

Praise might, however, not be forthcoming because of sheer indolence.

> If a new performance happens not to fall into the hands of some, who have the courage to tell, and the authority to propagate their opinion, it often remains long in obscurity, and perhaps perishes unknown and unexamined.[6]

For these non-starters, the critic has some real value.

One needs to consider those who refuse to be pleased as well. "Mankind is in general more easily disposed to censure than to admiration."[7] This tendency most generally takes the form of a refusal, on the part of the reader, to allow the author to choose his

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[4] Lives, II, 217.

[5] Evaluative statements are logically more akin to "The tomato is red" rather than "I like tomatoes."

[6] Works, II, 496 (Adventurer No. 138).

[7] Works, II, 483 (Adventurer No. 131).

own method, and comes as a result of false conceptions as to the nature of literature. One of these prejudices is the refusal to accept the work on the grounds that it is not old. Much of Johnson's criticism is levelled against these misconceptions; in the Preface, for instance, his arguments against false decorums, the false distinctions between tragedy and comedy, the inhibitions resulting from adherence to the unities of place and time, are evidence for his continual preoccupation with proper critical method. In this instance, he is discussing them from the point of view that rationalisations of that nature are invalidated by the process of continued consideration and understanding.

It is very necessary to realise that the thorough interrogation Johnson makes of the test of time does not only arise from his concern for establishing an acceptable means of evaluating literature. He is very much concerned with literature as a recurrent phenomenon, so that, while he has to argue for the justice of esteeming works of antiquity, he finds it essential to set up argument in such a way as to give ample consideration to contemporary writing, both as something read and something written. He thus has to quash the notion that works of antiquity require our esteem on those grounds alone, since this justifies readers in believing that they need not pay attention to contemporary literature, with the result that these works would become non-starters in the process of recognition, while critics would be reduced to claiming that nothing more could be written, and authors intimidated into the futility of repetitive imitation. The test of time is never allowed to become an excuse for evading the duty of either reading or writing literature.

V

At least one criticism has been made of Johnson's notion of the test of time, and it is worthwhile considering it in order to see exactly how functional Johnson's methods are.

> The final criterion of worth, he [Johnson] is fond of repeating, is how long a literary work continues to be read and admired. But this is no more than a truism that evades the question of literary excellence by posing it anew.[8]

Marks is perhaps a little precipitate. He should have realised that the test of time, considered as the workings of a performative value judgement, is never elevated into a principle of discursive evaluation. Respect must be paid to time because of the nature of literature and the literary response, but at best it remains merely a pragmatic test, a means by which the critic or reader is presented with his material. Johnson realises that "time has sometimes co-operated with chance,"[9] and that continued approbation may also be continued prejudice, and therefore immediately sets about to find reasons for the phenomenon of continued esteem.

> It is . . . the task of criticism to establish principles; to improve opinion into knowledge; and to distinguish those means of pleasing which depend upon known causes and rational deduction, from the nameless and inexplicable elegancies which appeal wholly to the fancy, from which we feel delight, but know not how they produce it, and which may well be termed the enchantresses of the soul. Criticism reduces those regions of literature under the dominion of science, which have hitherto known only the anarchy of ignorance, the caprices of fancy, and the tyranny of prescription.[1]

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[8]Emerson R. Marks, The Poetics of Reason: English Neoclassical Criticism, Studies in Language and Literature (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 114.

[9]Works, VII, 57 (The Preface, par. 2).

[1]Works, IV, 122 (Rambler No. 92).

This does not mean that the test of time may be set aside. To do this, is to make the same mistake about criticism as some critics have made about literature. Criticism is just as tentative as literature. It is essential that it should never be allowed to become fossilised into absolute utterance. For this reason, critical discussion, for Johnson, consists of a dialectic with the past, whether criticism takes place in either its performative or discursive form. From there, the dialectic must be pursued into the future.

These assumptions about criticism as a continual dialogue are partly responsible for the often irritating self-assurance in Johnson's critical utterances. As he points out, "a few, a very few, commonly constitute the taste of the time; the judgement which they have once pronounced, some are too lazy to discuss, and some too timorous to contradict."[1a] His concern is always to challenge people into response, and thus provoke that discussion which is essential for the continuation of responsible criticism.

VI

W.R. Keast[2] has argued that the uniqueness of Johnson as a critic lies in his conception of literature as a mode of activity.

> One of the chief distinctions of Johnson from his predecessors in criticism is in [the] careful reduction of the realm of art, and [his] habit of regarding literature as a natural process, set in the context of other natural processes such as social behaviour, and thus amenable to treatment in relation to its psychological causes and effects, its natural materials, and its circumstantial determinants.[3]

[1a] Works, II, 496 (Adventurer No. 138).

[2] "The Theoretical Foundations of Johnson's Criticism" in Critics and Criticism, ed. by R.S. Crane (Abridged edition; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 169-187.

[3] Ibid., p. 175.

The consequences of treating literature as a mode of activity are that

> the limits of human ability cannot be specified; the relation of works of art to nature is not immediate but relative to the powers of poets and to the natural desires of readers; the excellence of literature is therefore "tentative," "gradual," and "comparative," and probably rather that demonstrative is the utmost attainable by the critic.[4]

(The relationship of this second passage to the third paragraph of the Preface is obvious.)

The very neatness of this classification makes it very appealing. Unfortunately, Keast has to pursue his discussion of Johnson's criticism, not in terms of this premise, but by introducing the four traditional terms of the literary process -- "author, work, nature, and audience."[5] This, in itself, is sufficient to question the adequacy of the original premise. John Hardy,[6] however, has argued that by introducing this schema, Keast is misled into giving an inadequate representation of Johnson's reasons for rejecting religious poetry. Keast is led to believe that Johnson's reasons were "aesthetic",[7] in this way ignoring what Hardy calls "Johnson's personal response and individuality as a reader."[8] While agreeing with Hardy's initial insight, it is difficult to accept the conclusions he wishes to impose. The introduction of the technical

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[4] Ibid., p. 177.

[5] Ibid., p. 179.

[6] "Two Notes on Johnson; (1) A suggested approach to the criticism" in Johnsonian Studies, ed. by Magdi Wahba (Cairo, 1962; distributed outside the U.A.R. by Oxford University Press), pp. 223-226.

[7] Ibid., p. 225.

[8] Ibid.

terminology will inevitably distort the complexity of Johnson's opinions. We cannot for this reason fall back on the old, and hopelessly safe, critical position of explaining everything in terms of the mythic Johnsonian personality. One should rather question the validity of the original premise which demanded the introduction of a falsifying schematism.

In the first place, the notion of "mode of activity" is largely unrefined. Activities may be viewed as both tasks and achievements -- there is both the running and the winning of a race.[9] Literature considered as a condition and a process by which certain kinds of things such as poems and essays are produced does seem to be regarded by Johnson as a mode of activity in the task sense. This is, however, not true of individual works, which are viewed as achievements: "when once a book is in the hands of the public, it is considered as permanent and unalterable."[1] The individual phenomena are modes of activity, not in the sense in which the climbing of Mount Everest is an activity, but in the sense in which the conquest of it is. If there is any sense in which Johnson views individual works as modes of activity, it is as products of activity, so that they are, in a sense, to be regarded as monuments of some kind or other. There is substantial evidence for this in the third paragraph of the Preface. It is thus difficult to accept Keast's view that Johnson refuses to identify works of literature as things. Johnson's refusal lies in not attempting to identify works

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[9]For the original use of this distinction see Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind, Peregrine Books (1949; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), passim.

[1]Works, III, 127 (Rambler No. 23). Johnson's habitual turn of phrase of books being "pushed out into the world," may be regarded as further evidence.

of literature in terms of a series of criteria; that is, he does not regard works of literature as numerically and qualitatively identifiable in the way other ontological items are, because, by their very nature as items of human achievement, they are, in some sense, unique. Works of literature are identifiable as things, but only ostensibly so.

The purpose of the introductory paragraphs of the Preface, then, is not to set up criteria for defining works of literature ontologically, but rather to eliminate certain kinds of misleading ontological considerations. Johnson's purpose in suggesting that the phenomena of literature may be regarded as human achievements, has more of a negative aim than a positive one. Faced with the works of Shakespeare, he is forced to deal with them discursively. He sees that certain kinds of approach have, in the past, led to misconceptions about them, and he therefore attempts to discuss the situation in the least restrictive way. The vocabulary he eventually chooses is, to a large extent, inapplicable to human activities considered either as tasks or achievements, which is an indication that he does regard literary works as having a distinct nature. For Johnson, the question of asking what that nature is, is both futile and distracting.

VII

The previous sections have been concerned mainly with the use Johnson makes of his analysis of the conditions of experience to invalidate certain kinds of critical approach to literature. At various other stages in the argument of the Preface, Johnsn argues, on the grounds of a more specific characterisation of dramatic experience, that certain criticisms levelled against Shakespeare are

invalid. The principal instance of this is his refutation of the alleged necessity for maintaining the unities of time and place. Although this particular argument is delayed, for rhetorical effect, until the argument of the Preface is quite far advanced, a consideration of it at this point would be appropriate, since it demonstrates Johnson's characteristic discursive resources.

The history of the dramatic unities is so complex that, by the time Johnson turned his attention to them, first in Rambler No. 156 (1751)[2] and later in the Preface,[3] they had been so well accommodated within a variety of critical modes as to make it almost impossible to isolate any single, unequivocal and characteristic use of the set of terms used to designate what are generally known as the dramatic unities. At least three such areas of use may be distinguished: the concerns of analytic description, neo-classic norms and Platonic metaphysics. These three areas are not of necessity mutually exclusive, nor should the listing of them be regarded as an attempt to define a complete list of categorical differences. It may even be possible that aspects of all three enter, in one way or another, into Johnson's discussion.

The term "action" may be used purely as a descriptive tool for referring to what happens in a play; if, however, it is used in conjunction with strict mimetic principles, it would be used to refer to what happens in a play as it is related to real human activity. One thus has minimal and cumulative uses of a term. A minimal use of "unity" would seem to involve a token numerical identity and some

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[2] Works, III, 65-70.

[3] Works, VII, 74-81 (pars. 45-62).

kind of qualitative consistency, the most primitive form of which would not be very much different from the unity Berkeley demanded from his tree in the quadrangle. Once the terms "action" and "unity" are used in conjunction, the possibilities of signification are tremendous. Johnson uses "plot" and "action" interchangeably, so the Aristotlian distinction is not applicable. Since he does not subscribe to mimetic principles, a sense of "unity of action," in which an imitated real action provides the qualitative consistency necessary for some kind of unity, in that it involves the observation of a series of events through one continuum of time, is not congenial to him. He would also not accept another cumulated use of terms based on organic interpretive principles, sinc e he would find very little justification for an approach which sets up a work of literature as a thing-in-itself, and which manipulates a seemingly descriptive technique in such a way as to elevate it into a normative principle by using it to disallow certain works of literature, such as the topographical poem or the history play.

Johnson is in search of a minimally descriptive term which will obviate any possible normative implications. To do this he avoids any objective interpretation of the term "unity." He thus defines the term pragmatically. The requirement of unity is satisfied in the history plays by the fact of all changes being prepared for and understood; the other plays are said to be unified if they raise expectations which they satisfy -- ". . . The end of a play is the end of expectation."[4]

Within the neo-classic language game, the notion of the three unities can function on a purely descriptive level. But the principles

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[4] Ibid., p. 75 (par. 48).

underlying these unities function normatively, in that they enumerate the ideals which particular kinds of work should attain. In itself, this cannot be criticised, since every creative artist has some norms according to which he shapes his work, whether he makes them explicit or not. The norms which neo-classic writers attempted to satisfy, were once related to the human desire for order as expressed in art and for rational immediacy of effect. It is impossible to deny the validity of such notions, especially as one would not be able to understand particular works if one had no conception of what they are aiming at. The problem arises when such notions, which adequately express particular writers' intentions, are allowed to become prescriptive, and thus rules both for what all writers should aim at as well as how such ends may be achieved, and thus rules for judging what is good and bad. Any writer whose aims differ from those for whom the rules are effective will be definitionally rejected.[5]

After he has enumerated the claims of critics who have established neo-classic compositional aims as norms of appreciation, Johnson is able to say:

> Such is the triumphant language with which a critick exults over the misery of an irregular poet, and exults commonly without resistance or reply. It is time therefore to tell him, by the authority of Shakespeare, that he assumes, as an unquestionable principle, a position, which, while his breath is

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[5]See Elmer H. Duncan, "Arguments Used in Ethics and Aesthetics: Two Differences," in Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XXV, (1967), 427-31. The two differences Duncan notes are: 1. Moral judgements lead to action, aesthetic judgements do not. He does not regard the theory of composition as an aesthetic concern. 2. In aesthetics it is possible that a work satisfies all the rules, but that approbation may legitimately be withheld. This is not the case with ethical judgements. This distinction only holds if the aesthetic "rules" are inadequate, or if there has been a change in sensibility or "culture period" -- that is, if the writer's aims are different. See Works, VII, 80 (Preface, par. 61), where Johnson draws a distinction between adequate and inadequate rule-formulation.

> yet forming it into words, his understanding pronounces to be false.[6]

The reason for Johnson's use of pragmatic definition is evident from this: since the limits and variety of human endeavour cannot be defined by the use of certain, restrictively objective concepts, one has to recur to the actual instances of human achievement, with the realisation that these achievements in no way preclude the possibility of others. The vitality and relevance of criticism is maintained by continual vigilance and self-consciousness.

When Johnson points out that one supposed need for the adherence to the unities of place and time is the requirement of credibility, he is drawing attention to the fact of a demand for acquiescence to the Platonic dogma which requires of literature a truth by correspondence. Johnson also demands truth from literature, but he sets up his criteria in such a way as to avoid all the pitfalls of the Platonic dilemma. He is thus aware of the dangers of representationalism and representational truth and the concomitant notion of illusion and "delusion," and therefore sets about attacking what he takes to be the arguments for maintaining the unities of place and time by a process of reductio ad absurdum.

The passage in which this argument occurs has led many eminent Johnsonian scholars astray, not excluding Walter Jackson Bate, who is completely taken in by Johnsonian irony. It is perhaps best to cite the relevant material as well as the paragraph following, since it is the context which helps to establish the irony.

> The objection arising from the impossibility of passing the first hour at Alexandria, and the next at Rome, supposes, that when the play opens the spectator really imagines himself at Alexandria, and believes that his walk to the theatre has been

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[6] Works, VII, 76 (Preface, par. 52).

> a voyage to Egypt, and that he lives in the days of Antony and Cleopatra. Surely he that imagines this may imagine more. He that can take the stage at one time for the palace of the Ptolemies, may take it in half an hour for the promontory of Actium. Delusion, if delusion be admitted, has no certain limitation; if the spectator can once be persuaded, that his old acquaintances are Alexander and Caesar, that a room illuminated with candles is the plain of Pharsalia, or the bank of Granicus, he is in a state of elevation above the reach of reason, or of truth, and from the heights of empyrean poetry, may despise the circumscriptions of terrestrial nature. There is no reason why a mind thus wandering in extasy should count the clock, or why an hour should not be a century in that calenture of the brains that can make the stage a field.
>
> The truth is, that the spectators are always in the senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players. They come to hear a certain number of lines recited with just gesture and elegant modulation. The lines relate to some action, and an action must be in some place; but the different actions that compleat a story may in places very remote from each other; and where is the absurdity of allowing that space to represent first Athens, and then Sicily, which was always known to be neither Sicily nor Athens, but a modern theatre[?] [7]

Bate takes Johnson's meaning to be that "so far as truth or credibility is concerned, the real leap of the imagination is made at the start. If once we are asked to believe that we are at Alexandria, we can surely go on, in the next act, and imagine ourselves at Rome."[8] He then skips part of Johnson's argument and arrives at the positive part of Johnson's claims, thus inadvertently conflating opinions which Johnson rejects with those of which he approves. Johnson implies, in fact, that once the notion of delusion is admitted it is absurd to make realistic demands, since delusion is not even limited by the

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[7] Works, VII, 76-77 (Preface, pars. 54-54). Emphasis mine.

[8] The Achievement of Samuel Johnson (1955; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 202. For similar mis interpretations see also Augustus Ralli, A History of Shakespearean Criticism (1932; rpt. New York: The Humanities Press, 1959), I, 58; and David Daiches, Critical Approaches to Literature (London: Longmans, 1956), p. 191. The present interpretation follows that of Jacob H. Adler in "Johnson's 'He that Imagines This'," in Shakespeare Quarterly, IX (1960), pp. 225-28.

ludicrous. As far as he is concerned, this is to avoid the Platonic charge that poets are deceivers by accepting the equally invidious alternative that they are mad.

Jacob H. Adler notes Johnson's ironical rejection of the argument from illusion, but concludes that this rejection arises from Johnson's "classico-realistic theories of art" and that

> far from exalting the imagination in this section of the Preface to Shakespeare, Johnson reduces it to the least possible function, severely limits -- indeed very nearly abolishes -- illusion as an element in stagecraft, and takes a position almost totally unempathic. I can see nothing in this particular passage to suggest a conclusion more positive than that reached a good many years ago . . . that on the whole (though with certain exceptions) Johnson considred the imagination a necessary evil. Indeed, for the specific process of enjoying drama on the stage, it seems to be no more than barely necessary.[9]

There are good grounds for disagreeing with Adler on this point, since he is merely reiterating the old misconception of Johnson's supposed distrust of the imagination. He tends to underplay Johnson's positive assertions, while not appreciating that Johnson refuses to accept a pseudo-psychological, affective interpretation of fictionality which implicitly denies the difference between literature and reality by reducing the experience of literature to the experience of reality.

The question of the unities is not one raised directly either by Johnson's assumptions or his methods, but is occasioned by the realisation that much critical attention has been devoted to them, especially in so far as Shakespeare is considered as a transgressor against their essential validity. The critical antiquity of the three unities is thus a direct challenge to the literary antiquity of Shakespeare. Facedwith such an alternative, Johnson cannot but argue

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[9] Ibid., p. 228. See also R.F. Kaul, Notes and Queries, IX (July, 1962), pp. 261-64, where it is demonstrated that Johnson's position is radically different from that of Lord Kames, who accepts a notion of dramatic illusion very similar to that which Johnson rejects.

that the antiquity of the rules is specious -- it is necessary to distinguish "that which is established because it is right, from that which is right only because it is established."[1] Presuppositions about the objects of literary experience must necessarily be evaluated in terms of the experience of those objects themselves. Since the question of the unities is incidental to his purposes, Johnson adopts a negative form of argument which disallows the validity of the unities of place and time by questioning their argumentative premises, but allows for as wide a range of possibilities as his original, open-structured assumptions will permit.

Johnson's primary point is a logical one -- delusions are such because the person subject to them does not know that his experiences have an objective reality: on the other hand, fictional presentation must always be known to be such if it is at all to be regarded as anything other than deception or delusion. In making this claim, Johnson is not doing away with the imagination, but showing that the concept of fiction must not be based primarily on imaginative response, and that there are certain logical conditions which must hold before any valid imaginative response can take place.[2]

Once the unities of space and time are shown not to be essential conditions of art, since they do not follow as a logical consequence from an adequate concept of fictionality, they can no longer be used

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[1] Works, V, 70 (Rambler No. 156).

[2] Johnson's analysis of the necessary conditions for fictionality is very close to that of Sir Philip Sidney: "Now, for the poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth. . . . What child is there that, coming to a play, and seeing Thebes written in great letters upon an old door, doth believe it is at Thebes?" An Apology for Poetry in English Critical Texts : 16th Century to 20th Century, ed. by D.J. Enright and Ernst de Chickera (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 31.

for the task they were principally designed for, that of accounting for the coherence of a play. This unity is found in the "story", through which "the drama exhibits successive imitations of successive actions . . . connected . . . [in such a way] that nothing but time can be supposed to intervene."[3] It is at this stage that the imagination, if it can be called the imagination, makes the leap from reality. Coherence is thus not a matter established within the objective material of literature, but by the interplay between that material and the discursive imagination in the process of understanding a "story".

The conception of fiction as illusion is designed to explain how it is possible for a theatrical performance to evoke, from an audience, responses which are normally only appropriate in certain real life situations. Although Johnson finds himself obliged to reject illusionism, he is still bound to provide some solution to the original problem. Johnson's answer is that the audience responds empathically to an hypothetical or parenthetically presented situation: what the auditor " . . . would himself feel, if he were to do or suffer what is there feigned to be suffered or to be done. The reflection that strikes the heart is not, that the evils before us are real evils, but that they are evils to which we ourselves may be exposed." "Imitations produce pain or pleasure, not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind."[4] The notion of imaginative response required by Johnson's position is thus far more sophisticated and complex than that which is demanded by the concept of fiction as illusion. Johnson rejects a concept of aesthetic

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[3] Works, VII, 78 (Preface, par. 55).

[4] Ibid., pars. 56-57. Emphases mine.

anaesthetic in favour of an actively integrated imaginative response. Some of the implications of this will be explored in the following chapter.

Fiction is thus no longer either a primary or necessary notion in criticism, but merely incidental.

> The chief advantage which . . . [fictional works] have over real life is, that their authors are at liberty, tho' not to invent, yet to select objects, and to cull from the mass of mankind, those individuals upon which the attention ought most to be employ'd; as a diamond, though it cannot be made, may be polished by art, and placed in such a situation, as to display that lustre which before was buried among common stones.[5]

James B. Misenheimer, Jr., in his discussion of Johnson's notion of fiction,[6] does not deal so much with the notion of fictionality as with the particular kinds or uses of fiction of which Johnson either approved or disapproved. On the one hand there is ". . . a fiction so far-fetched, unrealistic, and false that nothing good can come of it, and [on] the other a fiction of truth in which man can identify himself, a fiction which promotes learning and enables the reader to see that self-betterment is both good and possible."[7] Through the process of his argument Misenheimer attempts to show ". . . that it is both interesting and worthwhile to note that . . . [Johnson's] didactic aesthetic is at work in . . . [his] view of literary fiction."[8] Valuable as such distinctions and the attempts to place them within the context of Johnson's criticism as a whole

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[5] Works, III, 22 (Rambler No. 4).

[6] "Dr. Johnson's concept of Literary Fiction," in Modern Languages Review, LXII (October, 1967), pp. 598-605.

[7] Ibid., p. 598.

[8] Ibid., p. 604.

may be, Misenheimer partly misrepresents Johnson's views by not being entirely free from the myopic critical tradition which regards the concept of fiction as primary. One is therefore led to believe both that Johnson is incapable of understanding the notion of fictionality, and also that his "inadequate" concept of fiction plays an important part in his critical thinking.

In paragraphs fifty-four and fifty-five of the Preface one is provided with such a purely analytic description of the notion of fiction, that it is difficult to bring objections against it. What Johnson at other times refers to as fiction, and objects to, is not the fact of fiction -- that which is not mistaken for reality -- but the use to which fictional material may sometimes be put. In such cases his remarks take the form of supplying reasons why particular works fail. Fiction, considered merely as a matter of ontological status, is irrelevant; what is important is the relationship between what is written or presented and human experience. When a work fails to be relevant to the reader's experience, Johnson sets about establishing the reason for this, and as often as not lights upon the fact of misused fictionality. He follows much the same procedure in dealing with factual material.[9] At this level, "fiction" is used as a portmanteau word to censure literature which fails to achieve a required standard. The condemnation of Cowley's amatory verse is a case in point.

> [The] . . . obligation to amorous ditties owes, I believe, its original to the fame of Petrarch, who, in an age rude and uncultivated, by his tuneful homage to his Laura, refined the manners of the lettered world, and filled Europe with love and poetry. But the basis of all excellence is truth: he that

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[9]See below, p.

> professes love ought to feel its power. Petrarch was a real lover, and Laura doubtless deserved his tenderness. Of Cowley we are told by Barnes, who had means enough of information, that, whatever he may talk of his own inflammability and the variety of characters by which his heart was divided, he in reality was in love but once, and then never had the resolution to tell his passion.[1]

This is often taken as an illegitimate demand for authorial veracity,[2] while, in fact, Johnson is merely attempting to locate the reason for the vapidity of Cowley's love poem. It is thus seldom noticed that these remarks appear in the biographical section of the Life, and differ to a large degree from those in the critical section, where the poems themselves are considered. These love poems ". . . are written with exuberance of wit, and with copiousness of learning. . . . But, considered as the verses of a lover, no man that has ever loved will much commend them. They are neither courtly nor pathetick, have neither gallantry nor fondness."[3]

> The compositions are such as might have been written for pennance by a hermit, or for hire by a philosophical rhymer who had only heard of another sex; for they turn the mind only on the writer, whom, without thinking on a woman but as the subject for his talk, we sometimes esteem as learned and sometimes despise as trifling, always admire as ingenious, and always condemn as unnatural.[4]

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[1] Lives, I, 6.

[2] See René Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism, I (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), 81.

[3] Lives, I, 40.

[4] Ibid., p. 42.

CHAPTER 3

REPRESENTED GENERAL NATURE

Any attempt to provide a more searching analysis of Johnson's conception of human experience than has already been presented in previous studies would be both trivial and futile.[1] All of these studies stress Johnson's concern for the active nature of human experience as it arises from the incessant "hunger of the imagination" which attempts to achieve satisfaction in the face of the continual and essential "vacuity of life." This perennial preoccupation of Johnson's with the notion that the human mind is continually in search of fulfilling experience is only momentarily made explicit in the Preface;[2] it nevertheless underlies most, if not all, of what he has to say about literature. It is therefore natural to expect all these writers to touch on the other central concern of Johnson's discussions of literature, "general nature". Since their immediate purposes are elsewhere, however, none of these writers offer an

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[1] In addition to Walter Jackson Bate's The Achievement of Samuel Johnson (1955; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), I refer to Arieh Sachs, Passionate Intelligence: Imagination and Reason in the Works of Samuel Johnson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967) and Rodman H. Rhodes, "'Idler' No. 24 and Johnson's Epistemology," in Modern Philology, 64 (August, 1966), pp. 10-21.

[2] Paragraph 7: "The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight a-while, by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest; but the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth." This kind of utterance is often taken to be a rejection of human imagination. If attention were paid to Johnson's use of "irregular" and "sudden wonder", this misconception would soon be dispelled.

explicit analysis of the concept of "general nature".[3]

A further incentive for wishing to indulge in an examination of this term is that, because so much attention has been paid to various concepts such as "nature" and "generality" in the process of critical history, it is often extremely difficult to extricate oneself from the import of such discussions and bring an unbiassed understanding to Johnson's use of the two terms, "nature" and "general", simultaneously. A sentence such as, "In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species"[4] is thus very easily misconstrued. One writer at least[5] has succumbed to the temptation of isolating one moment in Johnson's manipulation of the term "general nature" in the process of the Preface, and taking that for the final significance of the term. Unfortunately, his choice was limited by his preconceptions. In order to minimise the dangers of such approaches, it is best to look beyond the confines of the Preface to material where Johnson uses similar terminology.

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In the Dictionary Johnson provides eleven definitions for

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[3]The absence of such an analysis is especially significant in Bate, ibid., pp. 198-99 and p. 240, n. 30, when one considers that this discussion is a withdrawal of his previous views in From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England, Harper Torchbook No. 1036 (1946; rept. New York: Harper and Row, 1961), ch. III.

[4]Works, VII, 62 (Preface, par. 8).

[5]René Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), ch. 5. Bate in From Classic to Romantic, ch. 3, makes the same error by placing too much reliance on the famous tulip passage in Rasselas and attempting to relate Johnson's views to Reynolds'.

"Nature":

1. An imaginary being supposed to preside over the material and animal world.
2. The native state or properties of any thing, by which it is discriminated from others.
3. The constitution of an animated body.
4. Disposition of mind; temper.
5. The regular course of things.
6. The compass of natural existence.
7. Natural affection, or reverence; native sensations.
8. The state of operations of the material world.
9. Sort; species. ["A dispute of this nature. . . ."]
10. Sentiments or images adapted to nature, or conformable to truth and reality.
11. Physics; the science which teaches the qualities of things.

The first and ninth definitions may be excluded as not immediately relevant to the present discussion, though one should note that the idea of nature being the material and animal world, a notion which gained ascendancy in later usage, is part of the import of the first definition, which is in this way partly related to the eighth. Johnson was later to use the term in this sense in his Life of Thompson.[6]

The seventh definition covers the moral and evaluative use of the term. The illustration given is from Pope.

> Have we not seen
> The murd'ring son ascend his parent's bed,
> Thro' violated nature force his way,
> And stain the sacred womb where once he lay?

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[6] Lives, III, 299 : "His descriptions of extended scenes and general effects bring before us the whole magnificence of Nature. . . ."

It is now possible to draw a broad distinction between the tenth definition and all those which remain. Johnson wishes to reserve one particular use of "nature" for literature only or art generally. He recurs to this distinctive use in the Life of Pope:

> What is meant by 'judge of nature' is not easy to say. Nature is not the object of human judgement; for it is vain to judge where we cannot alter. If by nature is meant, what is commonly called nature by the criticks, a just representation of things really existing and actions really performed, nature cannot be properly opposed to art; nature being, in this sense, only the best effect of art.[7]

For the sake of convenience, the remaining seven definitions may be classified into three groups. The first is constituted by numbers 2, 3, and 4. They may be put together on the grounds that they are concerned with particulars, though they may not in themselves be particular. The second group is made up of numbers 8 and 11, in that they involve an aggregation of the particulars considered in the first group when seen from the point of view of principles. The third group consists of numbers 5 and 6 -- the aggregation of the particulars when viewed as objects of experience; that is, nature as the whole range of human experience.

In its widest sense, then, nature is all that of which human beings may possibly have experience, which includes other human beings as well. It is thus the undifferentiated raw material of experience, all of which may enter into literature.

Because Johnson makes use of the traditional metaphor of literature as a mirror to explain the way in which external reality (nature) enters into literary works, it is useful to look at two of his Dictionary definitions of that term: (1) "A looking-glass; anything which exhibits representations of objects by reflection"; (2) a

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[7] Lives, III, 255.

"pattern; for that on which the eye ought to be fixed; an exemplar; an archetype." Examples of both these possibilities are found in Johnson. The second is satisfied by Shakespeare. An example of literature as a mirror in the first sense may be found in the popular romances.

> If the world be promiscuously described [as something which is promiscuous, not in the sense of something described with promiscuous intent] , I cannot see what use it can be to read the account; or why it may not be as safe to turn the eye immediately upon mankind, as upon a mirror which shows all that presents itself without discrimination.[8]

In the process of common experience the human mind does not function simply as a receptacle, but imposes, in a discursive way, an order on the material to which it is exposed. Broadly speaking, two methods of achieving this may be distinguished; the one by abstracting principles or definitive qualities or essences, the other by moving from one experience to the other and noting recurrent elements. For want of better terms, these may be designated respectively as the rationalistic and experiential methods. In this way, we can see that "nature" as it is defined in 2, 8, and 11 is arrived at by rationalistic means, while 3, 4, and 5 come as a result of an experiential approach. All of them involve some form of general nature, since the means of arriving at them are both methods of producing generality.

If literature were to be regarded simply as reportage, the two extreme forms in which nature, considered as that which is external to any one particular experiencing agent, can enter into it are as what is directly transcribable, on the one hand, and as what is reportable by means of abstract terms, on the other. The first kind is, as has already been noted, of no value as far as Johnson is concerned. One

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[8] Works, III, 22 (Rambler No. 4).

form, at least, of the possibility suggested by the other extreme Johnson has very great reservations about as well. In the final number of The Rambler, he summarises his purposes as follows:

> As it has been my principle design to inculcate wisdom or piety, I have allotted few papers to the idle sports of the imagination. Some, perhaps, may be found, of which the highest excellence is harmless merriment, but scarcely any man is so steadily serious, as not to complain, that the severity of dictatorial instruction has been too seldom relieved, and that he is driven by the sternness of the Rambler's philosophy to more cheerful and airy companions.[9]

He is very much aware that literature which is related to experience in a highly discursive way is not capable of fixing one's attention in the same way as, say, Shakespeare; and since this is not what he intended in writing the periodical essays, he is not particularly perturbed about it. Literature which does set out to ensnare attention by provoking some kind of imaginative response must therefore take up the experienceable world in a form which lies between the two extremes.

In the world of common experience the mind is continually in search of some new object, a particular upon which it may fasten. This is what Johnson repeatedly refers to as the "hunger of the imagination." In Rasselas his particular concern is to demonstrate the absurdity of becoming preoccupied with one individual idea, to the exclusion of everything else, as well as the foolishness of believing that the human mind is capable of being perfectly satisfied with any one set of circumstances. The imagination constantly demands something new and different. Much of what is often regarded as Johnson's dismissal of the imagination, is an expression of his awareness that this capacity of the mind for closeting itself away from the more ample

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[9] Works, V, 319 (Rambler No. 208).

atmosphere of comprehensive experience involves a suffocation of the greater human potentiality. For Johnson, the imagination is not an image-forming faculty.[1] When writing of Pope, he says,

> he had Imagination, which strongly impresses on the writer's mind and enables him to convey to the reader the various forms of nature, incidents of life, and energies of passion, as in his Eloisa, Windsor Forest, and the Ethick Epistles.[2]

The imagination is therefore primarily concerned with the vitality of intercourse between the human mind and its external reality.[3] It is this capacity of the human mind with which literature is required to accommodate itself.

Nothing throws more light on Johnson's ideas of the general relevance of particulars, and thus of literature as a whole, than his discussion of biography and its methods in Rambler No. 60. At the risk of being tedious and derivative, a large portion of the essay will be cited.

> Those parallel circumstances, and kindred images, to which we readily conform our minds,[4] are, above all other writings,

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[1]This is not to deny that Johnson sometimes does view the imagination in terms of something approximating this. For instance, in the Life of Butler one finds: "Imagination is useless without knowledge: natures gives in vain the power of combination, unless study and observation supply materials to be combined." (Lives, I, 212). One must realise that he is in the process of discussing Butler's wit, Even in this context one is made aware that the imagination is involved with the vividly realised particular, and that its function is only proper within an integrated mind.

[2]Lives, III, 247.

[3]Thus, in Rambler No. 60 (Works, III, 318-19): "All joy or sorrow for the happiness or calamities of others is produced by an act of the 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."

[4]All emphases mine.

> to be found in narratives of the lives of particular persons; and therefore no species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, since none can be more delightful or more useful, none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistible interest, or more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of condition.
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> . . . . . .
>
> There are many invisible circumstances which, whether we read as enquirers after natural or moral knowledge, whether we intend to enlarge our science, or increase our virtue, are more inportant than publick occurences. Thus Sallust, the great master of nature, has not forgot, in his account of Cataline, to remark that "his walk was now quick, and again slow," as an indication of a mind revolving something with violent commotion. Thus the story of Melancthon affords a striking lecture on the value of time, by informing us, that when he made an appointment, he expected not only the hour, but the minute to be fixed, that the day might not run out in the idleness of suspense; and all the plans and enterprizes of De Wit are now of less importance to the world, than that part of his personal character which represents him as "careful of his health, and negligent of his life."

Johnson then proceeds to outline the possible defects to which writers of biography are liable.

> If now and then they condescend to inform the world of particular facts, they are not always so happy as to select the most important. I know not well what advantage posterity can receive from the only circumstance by which Tickell has distinguished Addison from the rest of mankind, "the irregularity of his pulse": nor can I think myself overpaid for the time spent in reading the life of Malherb, by being enabled to relate, after the learned biographer, that Malherb had two predominant opinions; one, that the looseness of a single woman might destroy all her boast of ancient descent; the other, that the French beggars made use very improperly and barbarously of the phrase "noble Gentleman," because either word included the sense of both.

Failure to achieve the proper ends of biography is then accounted for.

> There are, indeed, some natural reasons why these narratives are often written by such as were not likely to give much instruction or delight, and why most accounts of particular persons are barren and useless. If a life 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. We know how few can portray a living acquaintance, except by his most prominent and observable particularities, and the grosser features of his mind; and it may be easily imagined

> how much of this little knowledge may be lost in imparting it, and how soon a succession of copies will lose all resemblance of the original.[5]

Nature, considered as external reality, is always available to be "generalised" in one way or another by the discursive functions of the mind. If the rationalistic method is chosen, it is inevitable that the particular vividness of experience will be lost; the prolonged effort required by the experiential mode, on the other hand, is something which few beings can sustain without either giving way or starting off in another seemingly more stimulating direction. Both approaches are in some way or other involved in our everyday experience.

From the passages just cited, one can see that literature in general, and biography in particular, can fulfil the experiential demand for a satisfying object by means of providing particulars structured and selected in such a way that the whole process of arriving at the essential nature of each is done away with. This is achieved not by means of an abstraction and the avoidance of particulars, but by the choice of a relevant particular, and the presentation of it in such a way as not to allow any distractions from that sense of relevance. General nature as it enters into literature is thus not an abstraction from experience, but an intensification of it. When literature fails to function adequately and forces the mind to take upon itself the whole process of generalisation, it becomes, of necessity, tedious and unrewarding.

> The business of the poet, said Imlac, 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 <u>recall the original to</u>

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[5] <u>Works</u>, III, 319-23.

> every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for those characteristicks which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness.[6]

Because nature is a phenomenal reality, any distinctive features of events, actions or things will not be ones arrived at by definition or even Aristotelian essences, but characteristics which are common in the repeated processes of individual human experiences. What is general in nature will therefore be so because many persons have already had, or could have, experience of it. Thus there is a further sense in which generality involves intensification, since it not only draws on an amalgamation of immediate experience, but demands the response of any individual's own previous experience. Once again, there is a return to the notion that "nature", as it appears in literature, is that which is accommodated to the human faculties.

When Imlac outlines his programme for the writing of poetry he is often taken to be arguing for literature of a highly stylised and abstract nature.[7] To some extent, this is true. It must be realised that his discussion is relevant to eighteenth century poetry, and that, in this sense, he is arguing for what poetry should be. At a descriptive and non-normative level, his concern is with the process by which an aspiring poet achieves a given end. In Rambler No. 60 and the Preface Johnson considers extant literature, and asks why it functions in the way it does and why it fails to achieve its ends, and to answer either of these questions he does not revert to an abstractionist explanation.

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[6] Works (London), XI, 31 (Rasselas, Ch. 10). Emphasis mine.

[7] See, for instance, William K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Cleanth Brooks in Literary Criticism: A Short History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), pp. 313-36.

A further explanation of the tendency to discover platonic strains in Johnson's criticism may be found in the misleading nature of the tulip image itself. The simple fact is that it is an image of something static. This induces one to consider only a single aspect of the process of artistic selection, the principle by which things are excluded. Biography, involving a description of something which is inherently dynamic, is discussed from the point of view of what is included. It is because of, and through, the particulars that the reader is able to arrive at the general. One thus realises that when Johnson refers to Shakespeare's characters as being a "species", he is talking not of "images" which have been produced by a process of abstraction, but of the effect of their particularity.

II

If one wishes to be naively literal, the notion that literature is re-presentation of the experienceable world would involve one in the acceptance of the notion that literature involves a simple repitition of what is already known. Poetry, which should inform, would be no better than painting which only illustrates.[8] The first response which needs to be made is one concerning the nature of the human mind. "The human mind is so limited, that it cannot take in all the parts of a subject. . . ."[9] This limitation is the condition out of which the "eternal hunger of the imagination" results. Literature, by satisfying this "hunger" in some way or other, does so because it enables the mind to transcend its limitations without ever removing it from

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[8]See Life, IV, 321.

[9]Life, I, 444.

the reality of its experience. This is especially the case when the representation is of human nature, of which each person carries an archetype within himself. Literature can then reach into human experience and bring it to a more ample awareness of what is already there, but of which the limited mind is not capable of realising by itself. Literature is thus not something which is judged by the accuracy with which it mimics something external. To do this, the object imitated would always need to be present. When Johnson criticises the topicality of Butler's Hudibras, he does so on the grounds that "our grandfathers knew the picture from the life; we judge of the life by contemplating the picture."[1] Only in so far as the life is represented in terms of general human nature can it be relevant to one, since from such representations one can learn more about oneself as a human being. As such, represented general nature becomes a source of self-knowledge.[2]

As an experiential concept, represented general nature satisfies the conditions set by Johnson's notion of experience as a dynamic process involving a vivifying interplay between the objects of experience and the experiencing mind, between the present, the past and possibly the future, and between the familiar and the new. With regard to this last polarity, one has only to remember that the fifth definition of "nature" in the Dictionary is "The regular course of things," to realise that the representation of nature extends and is

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[1] Lives, I, 214.

[2] See John Hardy, "The 'Poet of Nature' and Self-Knowledge: One Aspect of Johnson's Moral Reading of Shakespeare," in University of Toronto Quarterly, XXXVI (January, 1967), pp. 141-60. Hardy arrives at his interpretation by referring to other eighteenth century critics, and does not relate his findings to Johnson's critical thinking as a whole.

extended by the notion of probability, since that which does not contradict human expectations of the course of things, may, in some way, extend those expectations.

> Shakespeare approximates the remote, and familiarises the wonderful; the event which he represents will not happen, but if it were possible, its effects would probably be such as he has assigned; and it may be said, that he has not only shewn human nature as it acts in real exigencies, but as it would be found in trials, to which it cannot be exposed.[3]

In addition, represented general nature brings a further dimension to the dynamics of experience: the interplay of the particular and the general.

A brief glance at some examples will, however, best substantiate the claim that Johnson regards represented general nature as a source of self-knowledge. In many cases he does not merely note instances of what is natural, but makes them relevant by means of a personal pronoun; for instance: "This . . . is in agreement with our daily experience. . . ." or "This is according to nature. We imagine no evil so great as that which is near us."[4] Johnson's many notes about "touches of nature" are, as Jean H. Hagstrum remarks, "signals to the reader that the critic is about to match the author's experience with his own and to draw the reader's attention to that fund of common but varied experience from which the literary effect is drawn."[5] This is particularly true of those cases where it is possible to relate

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[3] Works, VII, 65 (Preface, par. 13). See also Lives, III, 233: "In this work [Pope's The Rape of the Lock] 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."

[4] Works, VII, 298 and 423. In this and all subsequent citings of the notes to Johnson's edition, line references to Shakespeare's plays are those given at the beginning of each entry in Works, vols. VII and VIII.

[5] Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 61.

Johnson's remarks to certain aspects of biographical material. The note to Richard II, III.ii.207, reflects the petulent outbursts of a perturbed and despairing mind so frequently recorded by Boswell.

> RICHARD. By Heav'n, I'll hate him everlastingly,
> That bids me be of comfort any more.
>
> This sentiment is drawn from nature. Nothing is more offensive to a mind convinced that his distress is without a remedy, and preparing to submit quietly to irresistible calamity, than these petty and conjectured comforts which unskilled officiousness thinks it virtue to administer.[6]

The relevance of the notion of self-knowledge to Johnson's moral and evaluative principles will be discussed in the following chapter. There is, however, one aspect of this moral concern for self-knowledge which is so easily misconstrued that it can quite relevantly be discussed at this stage of the argument. There are some occasions in the notes when Johnson writes as if certain events in the plays may be treated as moral exempla. If Johnson's statements are accepted at face value, there may well be grounds for characterising him as a moralizer, and not a critic with moral concerns. A careful examination of the relevant material reveals, however, that the superficial impression given by Johnson's verbalisations is somewhat misleading.

It is extremely important to realise that Johnson employs such a variety of syntactic formulae[7] for drawing attention to dramatic material directly relevant to the representation of general nature, that one cannot with certainty claim that all these devices are immediately transparent. If, in addition, it is granted that the representation of general nature has a didactic function, then it is

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[6] Works, VII, 441-42.

[7] For example, "Such was this writer's knowledge of the passions ...," "This is a just observation..." or "a just picture...," "Falstaff speaks like a veteran in life."

not inconceivable that material which is seen to function as a moral *exemplum* can be brought under the same aspect as material which is said to be a representation of general nature. The note to *Richard III*, I.i.28, provides a primary instance of an implicit moral concern:

> Shakespeare very diligently inculcates, that the wickedness of Richard proceeded from his deformity, from the envy that rose at the comparison of his own person with others, and which incited him to disturb the pleasures that he could not partake.[8]

The remarks about Richard may well have been prefaced by: "Shakespeare here shows his knowledge of human nature . . . ."

If one now turns to the specific instances where Johnson appears to be drawing a moral, it will be found that a similar rephrasing of his syntax will allow the material he is discussing to be considered merely as further evidence of Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature. In the general observations to *King Lear* one finds:

> The injury done by Edmund to the simplicity of the action is abundantly recompensed by the addition of variety, by the art with which he is made to co-operate with the chief design, and the opportunity which he gives the poet of combining perfidy with perfidy, and connecting the wicked son with the wicked daughters, to impress this important moral, that villainy is never at a stop, that crimes lead to crimes, and at last terminate in ruin.[9]

Johnson is obliged to formulate his observation in this way because he is referring to something which is more than a mere "touch" or "stroke" of nature.

René Wellek writes of the note to *Othello* III.iii.210: "He [Johnson] even endorses Iago's warning to Othello . . . , solemnly moralising on deceit and falsehood as 'obstacles to happiness'."[1]

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[8] *Works*, VIII, 613.

[9] *Works*, VIII, 703-4.

[1] *A History of Modern Criticism*, I (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), 83.

The complete note reads as follows :

> IAGO. She did deceive her father, marrying you;
> And when she seem'd to shake, and fear your looks,
> She lov'd them most.
>
> This and the following argument of Iago ought to be deeply impressed on every reader. Deceit and falsehood, whatever conveniences they may for a time promise or produce, are, in the sum of life, obstacles to happiness. Those who profit by the cheat, distrust the deceiver, and the act by which kindness was sought, puts an end to confidence.
>
> The same objection may be made with a lower degree of strength against the imprudent generosity of disproportionate marriages. When the first heat of passion is over, it is easily succeeded by suspicion, that the same violence of inclination which caused one irregularity, may stimulate to another; and those who have shewn, that their passions are too powerful for their prudence, will, with very slight appearances against them, be censured, as not very likely to restrain them by their virtue.[2]

Had Johnson written: "Who has not seen this observation verified?"[3] as a prologue to his remarks, Wellek would probably not have given a second thought to the note. Othello, as a sensitive being, is subject to all human frailties; he is not a perfect creature inhabiting a perfect world where neither morality nor tragedy have any place. By reacting to his situation as a normal human being, he initiates a series of activities which can only culminate in disaster. Had Othello been perfect, and dismissed Iago's arguments, he would not have been a tragic hero, nor would he be the object of an audience's imaginative sympathy. Since we are all potential Othellos, it is best that situations of deceit and disproportionate marriage are not allowed to develop.

It is not always necessary, though, that literature be presentational. The highly discursive nature of much eighteenth century poetry

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[2] Works, VIII, 1032-33.

[3] See Works, VIII, 1008 (Note to Hamlet IV.iv.140).

demonstrates this. Johnson's London and The Vanity of Human Wishes are as much subject to the considerations of generality as the plays of Shakespeare, but since they derive from a different rhetorical basis their means of arriving at generality will naturally be different. The choice of the particulars and the manner in which they are presented are subject to considerations imposed by the choice of a discursive mode, so that they are found for the most part in the form of exempla. The most important aspect of this manipulation of particulars, and of the high level of generality of both diction and thought, by means of which the poems work, is the demand that is made upon the reader's experience. Without it, the poems cannot function, since they set out to shape and formulate the particular knowledge of any given reader. On these assumptions, it is not possible to bring a mind considered as a tabula rasa to literature.

Johnson's use of the concept of general nature as applied to literature is thus a highly complex one. As well as being highly sophisticated, it is very specialised. Although Johnson uses as his starting point human experience in general, the concept of general nature is designed solely to cope with human experience of literature--it is simply impossible for any person to have an experience of general nature. Because of this exclusive applicability, it functions purely as a non-reductive descriptive term.

Other features of the concept which are remarkable, are its abilities to by-pass many of the traditional dichotomies of literary criticism. It is impossible, for instance, to claim that it makes demands which are either subjective or objective, cognitive or affective. It ignores entirely the distinction between fictional and non-fictional literature; and yet, by collapsing this distinction, it does not impose upon the phenomena of literature any conceptual scheme

which would make them anything other than what they are.[4] That works of literature exist, and that people read them, is enough to justify them as far as Johnson is concerned.

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[4]The difference between fictional writing and any other is merely functional. Writing of romances, Johnson says: "The chief advantage which these fictions have over real life is, that their authors are at liberty, tho' not to invent, yet to select objects, and to cull from the mass of mankind, those individuals upon which the attention ought most to be employ'd." Works, III, 22 (Rambler No. 6).

CHAPTER 4

THE CONDITIONS OF EVALUATION

The argument of the Preface begins with an attempt to explain the historical fact of Shakespeare's continued popularity. This is done by means of the concept of represented general nature. At one level, such an argument remains unobjectionably simple. In order to set it up, however, Johnson introduces a set of additional theoretical assumptions, the implication of which has so far been ignored. The first of these is that the representation of general nature is taken to be part of Shakespeare's intention, his design. This question of intentionality is not at all strange, since Johnson is an inheritor of the rhetorical tradition of Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, in the sense that he accepts a large number of their philosophical presuppositions rather than their particular judgements, or their limited idea that rhetoric is concerned only with the art of composition. By making use of such notions as he finds acceptable, Johnson is able to argue against the validity of the decorums and for that of tragi-comedy.[1] In this, Johnson may be seen at work with a viable,

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[1]The rudiments of Johnson's thought on the Rules may thus be found in Quintilian:

> "Let no one however demand from me a rigid code of rules, or ask me to impose on students of rhetoric a system of laws immutable as fate. . . . [rules] which some speakers follow as though they had no choice but to regard them as orders and as if it were a crime to take any other line. If the whole of rhetoric could be thus embodied in one compact code, it would be an easy task of little compass: but most rules are liable to be altered by the nature of the case, circumstances of time and place, and by hard necessity itself."

The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian, Loeb Classical Library (1920), I, pp. 289-91.

though unspecified, concept of "work-intentionality" which assumes that any literary work has a human origin, and is thus, in some sense, "directed". One cannot, however, make a case for Johnson's perpetrating the "intentional fallacy". It is hoped that subsequent discussion will reveal the extent to which Johnson's criticism is influenced by the notion of intentionality.

The second set of assumptions used to augment Johnson's consideration of the concept of represented general nature is more relevant to the immediate topic for discussion, Johnson's normative principles and means of evaluation. The fact of people returning to Shakespeare because of the represented general nature is not on a par with the fact of people returning to rivers because of the water -- water assuages thirst, but no parallel, factual, circumstance can be stipulated for the requirement of general nature. The reason for this is that the concept satisfies certain normative requirements. Johnson's argument is not simply of the form: people repeatedly turn to Shakespeare for represented general nature; what people return to is great; therefore plays written by Shakespeare are great.[2] Certain suppressed assumptions, about human nature and about the people who are observed to re-read Shakespeare's plays, have yet to be examined. Once these assumptions are made explicit, the reasons for the acceptability of represented general nature will be even more apparent. Such

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[2]One cannot accept at face value a further form of this argument: What people return to is great, people return to represented general nature, therefore represented general nature is great. As it stands, this syllogism involves an argument from observed facts to evaluative statement - with a concealed normative claim in the first premise - in such a way as might lead one to believe that an identification of fact and value has taken place, a logically inadmissable derivation and identification, which, in ethical theory, is known as the naturalistic fallacy.

hardly enter the reader of the Preface's consciousness, since he normally either supplies the absent transitional arguments, or mistakes the nature of Johnson's concern, which is finally evaluative. The simple questions to ask, therefore, are why Johnson finds it satisfactory to account for Shakespeare's greatness by means of the concept of represented general nature, and why he does not find it necessary to make his supporting arguments explicit.

I

When Johnson enumerates what he considers to be Shakespeare's faults, it would be very easy to dismiss his attempts with the comment that he is simply continuing the rather obtuse neo-classical critical procedure of assessing a writer in terms of beauties and faults. Apart from the fact that such a comment derives from an "external" approach rather than an "internal" one which attempts to avoid the interpretation of material by means of the preconceived categories of an established critical apparatus, there are other reasons, based on the unqualified significance of the terms themselves, for rejecting the claim as uninformative. One is not told, for instance, in what way these terms are related to a method of evaluation, nor how they function as evaluative tools.

The idea that Johnson's criticism is of the "beauties and faults" kind may easily lead one to believe that it is a parade, consisting of enthusiasms and animadversions, through the plays. Such criticisms may be found in Pope's edition (1725), in which remarkably fine passages and scenes are marked with marginal commas and asterisks respectively. Subsequent editors continued this practice, but Johnson declined to follow suit:

> The poetical beauties or defects I have not been very diligent to observe. Some plays have more, and some fewer judicial observations, not in proportion to their difference

> of merit, but because I gave this part of my design to chance and to caprice. The reader, I believe, is seldom pleased to find his opinion anticipated; it is natural to delight more in what we find or make, than in what we receive. Judgement, like other faculties, is improved by practice, and its advancement is hindered by submission to dictatorial decisions, as the memory grows torpid by the use of a table book. Some initiation is however necessary; of all skill, part is infused by precept, and part is obtained by habit; I have therefore shewn so much as may enable the candidate of criticism to discover the rest.[3]

This attitude of remaining as editorially unobtrusive as possible is in keeping with Johnson's principle of allowing and encouraging, as far as possible, the individual reader's immediate unintimidated response to the work before him:

> Particular passages are cleared by notes, but the general effect of the work is weakened. The mind is refrigerated by interruption; the thoughts are diverted from the principle subject; the reader is weary, he suspects not why; and at last throws away the book, which he has too diligently studied.[4]

Apart from the danger that a reader's attention may be dissipated by frequent editorial intrusion by way of comment or explanation, there is also the possibility that the interference occasioned by remarking either beauties or faults may contravene assumptions with regard to what have been called the conditions of experience.

> Parts are not to be examined till the whole has been surveyed; there is a kind of intellectual remoteness necessary for the comprehension of any great work in its full design and its true proportions; a close approach shews the smaller niceties, but the beauty of the whole is discerned no longer.[5]

This general point of principle is of particular importance with regard to Shakespeare, since Johnson's claim is that the plays are of such a kind that they cannot be recommended by means of fragments,

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[3] Works, VII, 104 (Preface, par. 134).

[4] Ibid., p. 111 (par. 158).

[5] Ibid., par. 159.

but only by the consideration of them as objects of sustained attention.[6]

There is also a problem of definition, since one is not always sure of what "beauties" can be predicated. It appears, however, as if Johnson does not always relate those things he most definitely points out as particularly felicitous to the one quality which distinguishes Shakespeare -- represented general nature. As has already been noted, Shakespeare's presented general nature is intimately related to Johnson's conception of the sustained dramatic texture of the plays, so that the neglect of purple passages in favour of a comprehensiveness of perception would be in keeping with Johnson's primary recommendations. It will, however, be necessary to examine Johnson's treatment of the "poetical" aspects of the plays in a subsequent section.

By far the most important reason for rejecting the ascription of a restricted "beauties and faults" approach to Johnson's criticism, is the possible implication that "beauties" may be weighed up against "faults", that they each have, in some sense, an equivalent logical status. If this were the case, one would expect Johnson to talk in terms of specific qualities and their opposites, or the absence of such qualities. Although he does on many occasions note both felicities and infelicities, this is not his major concern.[7] The opposite of the representation of general nature would be the representation of particular nature, or the representation of non-nature. The first Johnson does not accuse Shakespeare of, while the second, as it is found in Shakespeare's "fabulous" scenes, is not regarded as a fault. Johnson

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[6]See Works, VII, 62 (Preface, par. 9).

[7]It is very easy to be misled by the dichotomies inherent in Johnson's critical vocabulary. Out of context, one can set up his critical terms in a pattern of stark contrasts. Thus "natural", "proper" and "just" may be opposed to "absurd", "ridiculous" and "far-fetched"; "striking" and "pathetic" might find their contraries in "cold" and "frigid"; while "easy", "elegant", "smooth" and "harmonious" are only too easily opposed to "harsh", "forced" and "strained".

does, however, mention that Shakespeare at times neglects certain possible opportunities for "instructing", but he neither makes a great issue of this, nor relates this to a failure to represent general nature.

Instead of what may be termed "opposite" faults, Shakespeare is seen to have "detracting" ones, in much the same way as one person's positive virtue of honesty is detracted from by a certain inconsiderate bluntness, or a politician's astuteness may be disregarded because of his lack of a charismatic personality. In these examples, the detracting faults are indirectly related to the commendable qualities, in the sense that the persons of which both faults and virtues are predicated are conceived of as being in primary evaluative contexts -- mismanaged probity is socially disturbing, while retiring personalities do not generally encourage electors.

The section which follows will be an attempt to describe what Johnson regards as the primary evaluative context of literature. Subsequent sections will deal with the particular kinds of detracting faults attributed to Shakespeare, as well as the mitigating factors of judgement, what may be called the conditions of authorship, considerations which supply the conditions, though not the material, of evaluation.

II

Failure to accept the essentially humanistic nature of Johnson's thought inevitably results in misunderstanding. To prove this, however, it is necessary to overcome the great difficulties of definition which surround such terms as "humanist" and "humanism", especially since there are many who would grant that Johnson is a humanist of sorts, but who would yet refuse to attribute the underlying coherence of his

thought to a rigorous, though often inexplicit, commitment to humanistic assumptions. Vague, commendatory terms are seldom rejected, but as soon as one attempts the process of refining them into effective descriptive tools, petty cavils and partisan objections are inevitable. It is, however, useful to have a label for a demonstrably coherent set of beliefs. Whether or not these beliefs have an historical validity is perhaps not the immediate concern of the present study, as an attempt to describe Johnson's criticism apart from the historical process of critical thought; to the extent to which Johnson does make use of traditional assumptions, however, the evaluative aspect of his thought is best understood when it is shown to be other than idiosyncratic.

Modern usage allows any concern with human values to be called humanistic. One thus finds humanism defined as "a philosophy of joyous service for the greater good of all humanity in this natural world and advocating the methods of reason, science, and democracy."[8] In this sense, humanism may be regarded as an ultra-rationalistic humanitarianism, a far cry from what the term has been used for at various times in the past. The historian, Paul Oskar Kristeller, in an attempt to establish a working definition of Renaissance humanism, expresses his regret at the tendency to impose modern interpretations on the term:

> Many historians, knowing that the term "humanism" has been traditionally associated with the Renaissance, and seeing that some of the features of the modern notion of "humanism" seem to have their counterparts in the thought of that period, have cheerfully applied the term "humanism" in its vague modern meaning to the Renaissance and to other periods of the past, speaking of Renaissance humanism, medieval humanism, or Christian humanism, in a fashion which defies any definition and seems to have little or nothing left of the basic classicist

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[8] Corliss Lamont, The Philosophy of Humanism, 5th ed., rev. and enl. (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1965), p. 12.

> meaning of Renaissance humanism. This seems to me a bad example of that widespread tendency among historians to impose the terms and labels of our modern time upon the thought of the past. If we want to understand the philosophy of the Renaissance or of any other period, we must try not only to separate the interpretation of the authentic thought of the period from the evaluation and critique of its merits, but also to recapture the original meaning in which that period employed certain categories and classifications which either have become unfamiliar to us, or have acquired different connotations.[9]

Kristeller argues[1] that Renaissance humanism must be regarded as a cultural and educational programme taking its origin from the careful study of classical literature, and studies in the descriptions of grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy, rather than as a distinct philosophy. As such, the humanist is to be regarded as more of a rhetorician than a dialectition, one who undertakes to talk about everything, rather than one who thinks about things.[2] Apart from the study and use of the humanities, other distinguishing characteristics of human thought are an "emphasis on man, on his dignity and privileged place in the universe,"[3] the preference for the stylistic virtues of neatness and perspicuity, and the proliferation of classical sources, quotations and ideas. It is these ideas, especially in so far as they were concerned with the idea of human nature, which percolated through, and dominated, European thought from the fifteenth to

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[9] Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanistic Strains, Harper Torchbooks (New York, Evanston and London: Harper & Row, 1961), p.8. It should be noted that Kristeller's cautionary remarks involve assumptions very similar to the methodological principles of the present study.

[1] Ibid., pp. 10-23.

[2] The relevance of this to Johnson is obvious, since he is perhaps the last example of the Renaissance ideal of the great man as polymath.

[3] Ibid., p. 20.

seventeenth centuries, and which form the basis of Johnson's thought, not as a system of defined beliefs, but as a very distinctive Weltanschauung. If any research into Johnson's sources were to be pursued, one would have to turn to the great humanists of an earlier age, such as Erasmus and Hooker, and to classical literature, rather than the immediate context of late seventeenth and eighteenth century writings. Such an examination would reveal, for instance, why there is such a similarity between Sidney's Apology and certain aspects of Johnson's critical thought, despite the fact that Johnson seems to have no knowledge of that document. It will also demonstrate the relationship between neo-classical thought and humanism, and that what is often thought to be Johnson's revitalization of neo-classical criticism is a return to the argumentation of classical rhetoricians.

In the Dictionary, Johnson defines a humanist as "a philologer, a grammarian." This is very much in keeping with the primary meaning of the term as Kristeller wishes to see it applied to the Renaissance scholars. Unfortunately, this does not allow much licence for applying the term to Johnson in its more comprehensive signification. The attempt to do so would seem to be open to the objection that it involves the invalid imposition of external interpretive structures on the material. It is the present writer's contention, however, that humanistic concerns are such that they are never explicitly stated as such by any writer within that tradition. They can, nevertheless, not be neglected if one is to come to an understanding of those writers who depend on the tradition. Had the present century still been fully of the humanistic persuasion, it would not now be necessary to provide a name for a set of primary metaphysical convictions.

Paul Fussell[4] provides a useful summary of the characteristics which distinguish humanistic thinkers in general and eighteenth century writers in particular. Since extensive use is made of Fussell's classification, one general acknowledgement will have to suffice. Despite the inconvenience as regards exposition, the material will be listed in the order he provides it, since by doing so one is made aware of the pervasive atmosphere of humanistic thought.

1. "The humanistic either possesses or affects such broad and historical awareness of actual human nature as to justify grave doubts about the probability of any moral or qualitative 'progress'."[5] Human nature is thus always the same, irrespective of time or place. Such an assumption is central to Johnson's notion of general nature. For some writers and critics, the idea of the uniformity of human nature becomes a justification for the permanence of the genres, since each of these genres is thought to be directed at one particular area of the human consciousness. Johnson gives only a qualified acceptance to this particular rider of the axiom. He accepts that a particular genre may be directed at a single area of human experience:

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[4] The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 4-10.

[5] See Rambler No. 43:

> "Yet as every step in the progression of existence changes our position with respect to the things about us, so as to lay us open to new assaults and particular dangers, and subjects us to inconveniencies from which any other situation is exempt; as a publick or a private life, youth and age, wealth and poverty, have all some evil closely adherent, which cannot be escaped but by quitting the state to which it is annexed, and submitting to the incumbrances of some other condition; so it cannot be denied that every difference in the structure of the mind has its advantages and its wants."
> (Works, III, 232-33).

> Any man's reflections will inform him, that every dramatick composition which raises mirth is comick; and that, to raise mirth, it is by no means universally necessary, that the personages should be either mean or corrupt, nor always requisite, that the action should be trivial, nor ever, that it should be fictitious.
>
> If the two kinds of dramatick poetry had been defined only by their effects upon the mind, some absurdities might have been prevented. . . .[6]

What is rejected is the assumption that genres may be defined simply in terms of themselves. To do so would be to divorce them from human nature in such a way that the definitions become the arbitrary dictates of custom; generic rules are then those of convention, not nature. Similar arguments are used in the defence of Shakespeare's tragi-comedy. Johnson's rejection of pastoral poetry as an imitative mode is partly based on the claim that it is a genre which fails to satisfy any given area of possible human experience in ways other than classical pastoral. Pastoral as a static mode is not acceptable.

2. "The humanist believes that most human 'problems' cannot be solved, 'failure and defects', as Johnson says in Rambler 43, 'being inseparable from humanity'."[7] "And yet at the same time the humanist will argue passionately on behalf of the nobility of human nature, for

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[6] Works, IV, 301 (Rambler No. 125).

[7] Works, III, 233. See also Rambler No. 175:

> "The depravity of mankind is so easily discoverable, that nothing but the desert or the cell can exclude it from notice. The knowledge of crimes intrudes uncalled and undesired. They whom their abstraction from common occurrences hinders from seeing iniquity, will quickly have their attention awakened by feeling it. Even he who ventures not into the world, may learn its corruption in his closet. For what are the treatises of morality, but persuasives to the practice of duties, for which no arguments would be necessary, but that we are continually tempted to violate or neglect them? What are all the records of history, but narratives of successive villanies, of treasons and usurpations, massacres and wars?"
> (Works, V, 160).

he finds that man's paradoxical 'dignity' is in part the result of his being the only creature whose consciousness apprehends -- or contrives -- problems too complicated for solution." The whole of Rasselas is concerned with the tragically absurd implications of this.

3. "The humanist assumes . . . that it is both the index and the privilege of the human consciousness to be largely a construction of man's own imaginative making, and that, therefore, the mind and the imagination -- what perhaps can be called the symbol-making power -- are the quintessential human attributes. This is to insist that man becomes fully human, or properly realized, only when he uses his mind in a uniquely human way. . . . One sign of the humanist . . . is an apparently immoderate love of 'human learning' (that is, literature). To Johnson's Imlac, in Chaper XXX of Rasselas, 'learning and ignorance . . . are the light and darkness of thinking beings'." Thus one finds in the Life:

> The subject of quotation being introduced, Mr. Wilkes censured it as pedantry. JOHNSON. 'No, Sir, it is a good thing; there is a community of mind in it. Classical quotation is the parole of literary men all over the world.'[8]

4. "The humanist betrays so habitual and profound a concern with the act of evaluation that it often grows into what can be described as 'the evaluative obsession'." There is always an attempt to rank things, so that, for Johnson, the epic is considered as superior to tragedy. The compulsion to evaluate is so strong as to become a fact of experience as far as Johnson is concerned. Certain kinds of "negative capability" are thus impossible, with the result that the humanist will often be regarded as a caviller since he refuses to

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[8] Life, IV, 102.

avoid noticing defects. Where there is room for improvement, a humanist finds himself compelled to draw attention to the fact. It is only when this is realised that one appreciates why Johnson insists upon taking up the role of judicial critic. As far as criticism as a whole is concerned, he is quite aware that the mere ranking of literary works is not sufficient: "Barely to say that one performance is not so good as another, is to criticise with very little exactness."[9]

5. "The humanist is pleased to experience a veneration, which often approaches the elegiac, for the past, a feeling accompanied by a deep instinct for the tested and the proven in the history of human experience. This reverence for the experience of the past is inseparable from the humanist belief in the historical uniformity of human nature." Percy Hazen Houston, writing of Johnson, claims that ". . . he rested his principles largely upon the authority of tradition. He was, in fact, not a positivist but a traditionalist, and therefore fell short of the humanistic ideal."[1] Two clarifying points need to be made. Firstly, the differences between the two views, the one by Fussell and the other by Houston, are only apparent, since one must take cognisance of the primary point that the humanist does not forego his own right to exercise his own judgement in the face of historical opinions, but only that he rejoices when his own judgement coincides with that of the past. When this occurs, the humanist finds himself within a community of equal spirits, and thus affirms his belief in the reassuring fact of the uniformity of human nature.

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[9] Works (London), XV, 471.

[1] Doctor Johnson: A Study in Eighteenth Century Humanism (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1923), p. 251.

Secondly, Houston's particular judgement hardly appears justified in the light of the circumspect appraisal Johnson makes of the test of time in the Preface. The criticisms of the decorums and unities are not easily construed as those of a blind idolator of the past, while The Lives of the Poets, seen as a determined effort to do justice to the merits of contemporary poetry, must surely give the lie to the notion of Johnson as a hide-bound traditionalist. As Walter Jackson Bate indicates,[2] Johnson's persistent demands for novelty are the best measure of his conservatism.

6. "The humanist assumes that ethics and expression are closely allied. It is this assumption that makes possible Johnson's unique fusion of biographical, ethical, and aesthetic criticism in The Lives of the Poets." Although Johnson does cherish the notion of the poet as the good man, he is never so naive as to erect this sympathy into a critical principle:

> The biographer of Thompson has remarked that an author's life is best read in his works: his observation was not well-timed. Savage, who lived much with Thompson, once told me how he heard a lady remarking that she could gather from his works three parts of his character, that he was 'a great lover, a great swimmer, and rigorously abstinent'; but, said Savage, he knows not any love but that of the sex; he was perhaps never in cold water in his life; and he indulges himself in all the luxury that comes within his reach.[3]

It has been noted earlier that Johnson makes use of biographical material only to explain certain literary inadequacies. In a subsequent section, it is hoped to demonstrate the real assumptions behind the fusion of material in the Lives.

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[2]The Achievement of Samuel Johnson (1955; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 192.

[3]Lives, III, 297-98 (Life of Thompson).

7. "The humanist is convinced that man's primary obligation is the strenuous determination of moral questions; he thus believes that inquiries into the technical operation of the external world ('science') constitute not only distinctly secondary but even irrelevant and perhaps dangerous activities. Johnson stresses the primacy of man's moral nature by insisting, in the Life of Milton, that 'We are perpetually moralists, but we are geometricians only by chance' . . . . He sees man not primarily as a maker or even as a knower, but rather as a moral actor. Prescription rather than description is the humanist's business." The satire of the astonomer in Rasselas is, in part, concerned with these ideas. For the humanist, no sphere of human activity is exempt from moral judgement.

8. "The humanist is convinced that human nature, for all its potential dignity, is irremediably flawed and corrupt at the core. . . . Self-distrust thus becomes a central humanist experience, and satire becomes a central literary action." Consequently, a premium is set on the virtue of self-knowledge, a concern for which dominates Johnson's verse satires and Rasselas. The achievement of self-knowledge taken as a primary moral principle is thus the justifying notion for the representation of general nature.

Human dignity lies in the recognition of human limitation and incompleteness. Literature, both by the fact of its expression and its achievement, involves the recognition of, and the attempt to overcome, this limitation, and is thus amongst the noblest of all human accommodations.

9. "The humanist tends to assume that the world of physical nature is morally neutral and thus largely irrelevant to man's actual -- that is, his moral -- existence." With regard to this assumption,

one has only to consider Johnson's continual contempt for "scenery" to realise how seriously he took such concerns. It is probable that Johnson's avoidance of the sublime as a primary critical notion may be traced to his conviction that the proper sphere of attention is humankind.

10. "The humanist tends to be suspicious of theories of government or human nature which appear to scant the experienced facts of man's mysterious complexity. To the humanist, man's most dangerous temptation is his lust to conceive of his nature as simpler than it is. And this temptation often prompts man to conceive of his nature, erroneously, as entirely 'rational'." It is for this reason that Johnson refuses systematised definition, and demands that criticism proceed by means of observation and consideration. Since man is a complex creature, literature, which is both the result and expression of that complexity, refuses all reductive and systematic definitions. It is for this reason that Johnson is able to combine both the notion of complexity and limitation by saying:

> 'Human experience, which is constantly contradicting theory, is the great test of truth. A system, built upon the discoveries of a great many minds, is always of more strength, than what is produced by the mere workings of any one mind, which, of itself, can do little. There is not so poor a book in the world that it would not be a prodigious effort were it wrought out entirely by a single mind, without the aid of prior investigators'.[4]

What such statements demonstrate, above all else, is that there exists a vast area of reasoned belief, by way of an unexplored hinterland, to much of what are commonly called Johnson's "common sense" pronouncements.

11. "The humanist assumes that, because of man's flaw and his consequent need for redemptive assistance, man's relation to literature

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[4] *Life*, I, 454.

and art is primarily moral and only secondarily aesthetic. The eighteenth-century humanist is given to uttering and re-uttering the classical commonplace that the office of literature is to teach, but to teach through the agency of aesthetic delight. Johnson on pastoral poetry is typical: a man will not, he asserts, 'after the perusal of thousands [of pastorals], find his knowledge enlarged with a single view of nature not produced before, or his imagination amused with any new application of those views to moral purposes'. (Rambler 35).[5] Only if man were not flawed could the humanist justify a literary aesthetic of pure pleasure."

At this point one is at the core of Johnson's thinking about criticism as a judicial exercise. It is only by seeing this moral assumption in the context of the whole humanistic mode, however, that its relevance can be appreciated.

The particular example Fussell chooses is perhaps unfortunate in that it misrepresents the complexity of Johnson's views. The context of the passage requires consideration:

> Our inclination to stillness and tranquillity is seldom much lessened by long knowledge of the busy and tumultuary part of the world. In childhood we turn our thoughts to the country, as to the region of pleasure, we recur to it in old age as a port of rest, and perhaps with that secondary and adventitious gladness, which every man feels on reviewing those places, or recollecting those occurences, that contributed to his youthful enjoyments, and bring him back to the prime of life, when the world was gay with the bloom of novelty, when mirth wantoned at his side, and hope sparkled before him.
>
> The sense of this universal pleasure has invited "numbers without number" to try their skill in pastoral performances, in which they have generally succeeded after the manner of other imitators, transmitting the same images in the same combination from one to another, till he that reads the title

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[5]The reference is actually to Rambler No. 36 (Works, III, 197).

of a poem, may guess at the whole series of the composition.[6]

The objection is thus not to pastoral poetry in principle, but to the imitation of it. Johnson's point is that any form requires constant revitalisation, in order to retain the immediacy of the literary experience. It is not the moral efficacy of pastoral poetry that is being questioned, but the fact that there is not any "new application" of pastoral images to "moral purposes". One has therefore to keep Johnson's notion of literature as a form of human enterprise in mind -- there is little sense to building replicas of Westminster Abbey.

12. "Finally, the humanist believes that man is absolutely unique as a species. This is the belief from which all the others seem to depend." The humanist will thus scorn any reductive attempt to draw analogies between men and animals, though he may himself indulge in such analogies with satirical intent: " 'Sir, a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprized to find it done at all.' "[7]

"Man's dignity depends on his belief that he has a free power of choice sufficient to overcome the apparent determinisms of environment and physical nature." Johnson's adherence to this belief may be seen from his scornfully incisive criticism of determinism in A Review of Soame Jenyns' "A Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil", as well as his frequent remarks on the influence of the weather:

> Surely nothing is more reproachful to a being endowed with reason, than to resign its powers to the influence of the air, and live in dependance on the weather and the wind, for the

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[6] Ibid., pp. 196-97. Fussell's quotation proceeds from this point.

[7] Life, I, 463.

> only blessings which nature has put into our power, tranquillity and benevolence. To look up to the sky for the nutriment of our bodies is the condition of nature; to call upon the sun for peace and gaiety, or deprecate the clouds lest sorrow should overwhelm us, is the cowardice of idleness, and the idolatry of folly.[8]

Johnson's avoidance of an affective aesthetic may definitely be traced to his conviction of the freedom of human will. He would also instinctively be aware of the inherent deterministic commitment of associationist theory, a commitment which eventually led Coleridge to abandon his allegiance to Hartley.

III

The moral aspect of Johnson's criticism is perhaps the most difficult to deal with. Although only one paragraph of the Preface is taken up by overt moral concerns, the moral involvement of Johnson's thought is so strong that one can only separate Johnson the critic from Johnson the moralist at the expense of deliberate falsification. The complex relationship between moral preoccupation and critical insight in Johnson's deployment of the concept of represented general nature has already been noted. It is now necessary to examine the implications of the thirty-third paragraph of the Preface.

Perhaps the primary consideration to keep in mind in approaching the moral aspect of Johnson's criticism is his constant (humanistic) refusal to compartmentalise his thinking, ". . . for he that thinks reasonably must think morally."[9] As a humanist he finds himself obliged to think as a whole man, and if he thinks about human

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[8] Works, II, 38 (Idler No. 11). See also Life, I, 426 and 452; II, 358; and Lives, I, 118 (Life of Milton).

[9] Works, VII, 71 (Preface, par. 33).

activities, these must be treated in such a way as to make them completely human. Any claim that Johnson is primarily a moralist and secondarily a critic is not so much mistaken about the facts of the case, but about the categories by means of which the facts are presented. Johnson would find little use for the distinction, since moral questions are for him unavoidable -- to set critical activities over against moral ones merely involves a false opposition. What is more, the frame of reference from which his critical ideas take their relevance is exactly the same one which grants him the licence of exercising a constant moral awareness. This does not mean that Johnson is not aware that any subject may be approached in a specialist manner, only that he refused to treat a topic merely in its own restricted terms. There are at least three occasions when Johnson is explicit on this point. In the Life of Browne, referring to the possible charge of atheism or deism, he writes: "There remains yet an objection against the writings of Browne, more formidable than the animadversions of criticism."[1] A more tempered formulation of the same position may be found in the discussion of Akenside's "The Pleasures of the Imagination", but this leniency must be ascribed to the context rather than a specific withdrawal of the earlier, more stringent demands: "With the philosophical or religious tenets of the author I have nothing to do; my business is with his poetry."[2] The note to The Merry Wives of Windsor IV.v.109 reads: "The great fault of this play is the frequency of expressions so profane, that no necessity of preserving character can justify them. There are laws of higher

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[1] Works (London), IV, 613.

[2] Lives, III, 417.

authority than those of criticism."[3] Although Johnson takes this seemingly uncompromising stand on moral issues, it should be noted that he only turns his attention to the presence or absence of explicit moral content in the process of his final assessment. His initial response is always registered as a concern for the efficiency of plays as literature. This does not imply that there is an artificial distinction between the literary and the moral; rather, the distinction implies an order in which certain kinds of questions should be asked. This, in part, explains the status of moral pronouncements in the criticism.

The rationale of the content of such judgements would be as follows. Shakespeare, as Johnson has made clear, is primarily a moral poet, and is such on specifically literary criteria. The demands which Johnson now makes are that Shakespeare should be, or could have been, more explicitly a moral writer. Johnson is, however, aware of the order in which to apply his criteria. "That book is [morally] good in vain which the reader throws away."[4] The whole question of moral considerations would not arise but for the fact of Shakespeare's ability to enchain the imagination.

As far as the status of principles is concerned, it would be futile to ask of Johnson, or any other humanist, whether he is an idealist or a realist. Such distinctions do not apply. The most that can be said is that he is not a relativist. Having affirmed a set of values, he is aware that they will, and can, always be only the expression of the possibilities of achievement.

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[3] Works, VII, 339.

[4] Lives, I, 454.

It is for this reason that, after Imlac has given his description of the task of the poet, Rasselas is made to cry out: "Enough! thou hast convinced me, that no human being can ever be a poet."[5] In the light of this, Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare's apparent neglect of moral concerns must be seen more as an expression of regret that Shakespeare did not gain the highest reaches of perfection than a condemnation. The true perspective of Johnson's estimation of Shakespeare may be gauged from a remark appended to the end of Two Gentlemen of Verona:

> That this play is rightly attributed to Shakespeare, I have little doubt. If it be taken from him, to whom shall it be given? This question may be asked of all the disputed plays, except Titus Andronicus; and it will be found more credible, that Shakespeare might sometimes sink below his highest flights, than that any other should rise up to his lowest.[6]

While Shakespeare is morally culpable, he does not commit the worst of literary crimes, that of ennobling and recommending vice:

> Many writers, for the sake of following nature, so mingle good and bad qualities in their principal personages, that they are both equally conspicuous; and as we accompany them through their adventures with delight, and are led by degrees to interest ourselves in their favour, we lose the abhorrence of their faults, because they do not hinder our pleasure, or, perhaps, regard them with some kindness for being united with so much merit.[7]

Thus Johnson is able to write: "His vicious characters sometimes disgust, but cannot corrupt, for both Cressida and Pandarus are detested and contemned."[8]

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[5] Works (London), XI, 32 (Rasselas Ch. XI).

[6] Works, VII, 173.

[7] Works, III, 23 (Rambler No. 4).

[8] Works, VIII, 938.

> There is always danger lest wickedness conjoined with abilities should steal upon esteem, though it misses of approbation; but the character of Iago is so conducted, that he is from the first scene to the last hated and despised.[9]

The defects to be found in the plays are thus ones resulting from omissions rather than commissions. This is clearly so, since the many "precepts and axioms" to be found in the play do not appear to be part of a deliberate moral purpose. Previously,[1] Johnson seems to indicate that such maxims are a functional aspect of Shakespeare's representation of general nature. From the present context, this would mean that the representation of general nature is prompted by nothing more than the desire to please, and thus that the interpretation given previously to that concept is entirely misleading. If, however, one examines some of the material to which paragraph thirty-three refers, it will be found that Johnson must be taken to mean that Shakespeare at times attempts to please by means which do not derive from the representation of general nature. One has, therefore, to make allowances for the dogmatic, often outrageous, tone which Johnson affects in many of his pronouncements.

As an example of what Johnson considers as Shakespeare's occasional preference for pleasing rather than instructing, a statement from the short strictures on Twelfth Night is fairly representative:

> The marriage of Olivia, and the succeeding perplexity, though well contrived to divert on the stage, wants credibility, and fails to produce the proper instruction required in the drama, as it exhibits no just picture of life.[2]

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[9] Works, VIII, 1047.

[1] Works, VII, 62 (Preface, par. 9).

[2] Works, VII, 326.

Although there is much more to be said about it, Twelfth Night is a festive play in which the continuity of action is sustained by means of the theatrical convention of mistaken identities, which to an audience would be a source of entertainment, and to a reader an obstacle of credibility. Since the edition is primarily for the reader, this factor is not inconsiderable. One should also remember that if there is a concern for great literature, there is a constant demand for more than entertainment. Johnson is not blind to the fact of entertainment, he is just not satisfied with that as an end in itself. Imlac gives some idea of the stringency of these demands, and, as Mrs. Thrale reports, "His [Johnson's] idea of poetry was magnificent indeed."[3]

It is generally assumed that paragraph thirty-three of the Preface refers to Shakespeare's neglect of poetic justice, without there being any attempt to understand what Johnson could have meant by such a notion. The eighteenth century expectation of justice is to some extent of an aesthetic nature. The concept of poetic justice thus has an internal rather than an external, moral, significance -- when justice is visited upon all, the tensions set up in the process of the play are resolved. For this reason, the requirement of poetic justice is seen as a further example of neo-classic norms in so far as they may be regarded as an expression of the desire for order. Very little of this primary significance is to be found in the remarks at the end of King Lear, which are the major instance of Johnson's general complaint about the lack of poetic justice.

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[3]H.L. Piozzi, Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, ed. by S.C. Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p.130. Cited by John Hardy in "The 'Poet of Nature' and Self-Knowledge: One Aspect of Johnson's Moral reading of Shakespeare" in University of Toronto Quarterly, XXXVI (January, 1967), p. 155.

> Shakespeare has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause, contrary to the natural ideas of justice, to the hope of the reader, and, what is yet more strange, to the faith of chronicles. Yet this conduct is justified by the Spectator, who blames Tate for giving Cordelia success and happiness in his alteration, and declares, that, in his opinion, "the tragedy has lost half its beauty." Dennis has remarked, whether justly or not, that, to secure the favourable reception of Cato, "the town was poisoned with much false and abominable criticism," and that endeavours had been used to discredit and decry poetical justice. A play in which the wicked prosper, and the virtuous miscarry, may doubtless be good, because it is a just representation of the common events of human life: but since all reasonable beings naturally love justice, I cannot easily be persuaded, that the observation of justice makes a play worse; or, that if other excellencies are equal, the audience will not always rise better pleased from the final triumph of persecuted virtue.
>
> In the present case the publick has decided. Cordelia, from the time of Tate, has always retired with victory and felicity. And, if my sensations could add any thing to the general suffrage, I might relate, that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor.[4]

The whole of this part of the "short stricture" may be seen as a reasoned affirmation of popular opinion. Johnson clearly separates the expectations of the reader from the moral issue, though both these considerations, as well as the secondary one of Shakespeare's divergence from the reported historical facts, count against Shakespeare's treatment of Cordelia. Once these elements have been separated, Johnson subjects them to a theoretical consideration by referring to the case of Addison's Cato.[5] He grants that as a representation of general nature a play need not be expected to conform to the demand for equitable justice. A less stringent argument therefore takes the place of either an aesthetic or moral requirement for justice;

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[4] Works, VIII, 704.

[5] See Lives, II, 135, where Johnson defends the lack of poetic justice in Cato: "The stage may sometimes gratify our wishes; but, if it be truly the mirror of life, it ought to shew us sometimes what we are to expect."

if nothing substantial is affected, there is no reason why the general human need for the assurance that justice is "even-handed" should not be satisfied.[6] This subsidiary, though substantial, formulation is the substance of Johnson's "moral" demand for poetic justice.

If one takes into consideration, both that Cordelia is not the protagonist of the play, and that Johnson's own sensitivity reacts to a degree which the twentieth century is unused to -- and not always commendably so -- one is forced to realise that the moral demands of the Preface do not arise from arid speculation imposed on literary material, but are those of a moral sensibility. Johnson assumes, like any other humanist, that moral concerns have as great a reality as perception.

Because Johnson's "personal" reaction has to be considered, there is much that cannot be accounted for within the limitations of the present study; for instance, a definite strain of eighteenth century sentimentalism may be detected in Johnson's attitudes -- all accounted for by him as misdirected justice -- towards the fates of three innocent and virtuous women in Shakespeare's tragedies, Cordelia, Desdemona and Ophelia. Of the scene in which Desdemona meets her end, he writes: "I am glsd that I have ended my revisal of this dreadful scene. It is not to be endured."[7] The last statement in the "short stricture" on Hamlet is as follows:

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[6]The angle of argument obscures the fact of this statement being a complementary form of the claim that the writer is obliged to "make the world better."

[7]Works, VIII, 1045.

> The gratification which would arise from the destruction of an usurper and a murderer, is abated by the untimely death of Ophelia, the young, the beautiful, the harmless, and the pious.[8]

The same general point may be made with regard to Johnson's general preference of comedy to tragedy, and thus, to some extent, of Shakespeare's comedies to his tragedies. The eighteenth century does not seem to be able to cope with what has come to be recognised as "tragic vision". Although this might be a result of the general spirit of cosmic optimism evident in much of the thought of the period -- a tendency to which humanistic thought is strictly antithetical -- this cannot be used to explain Johnson's position. Part of the solution may be found in views put forward by Bertrand H. Bronson in his fairly comprehensive study of Johnson's Irene:

> We feel with Aristotle, that there should be a discrepancy in favour of the protagonist between his deserts and his fate, pity being our spontaneous testimony to the fact; and that the resolution of that emotion should reaffirm or restore our sense of an underlying moral or ethical order in the universe, and at the same time vindicate human dignity and worth. As has been recognised before now, the Christian view of existence made it impractical to emphasize the aberration of justice, and devised two evasions of the tragic dilemma. In the one, the re-establishment of order is postponed to another life, while fortune or chance is allowed a comparatively free rein on earth. At the same time, earthly life is relegated to an inferior importance, and the function of pity is no longer paramount. In the alternative scheme, the protagonist's desert tends to be equated with his misfortune, in which case the emotion of pity becomes correspondingly impertinent. When great tragedy is nevertheless achieved, as by Shakespeare, it sidesteps the Christian point of view, and approximates the Greek attitude; or it ostensibly accepts the equation of blame and suffering, and achieves the sense of pity by loading the human value of the individual -- thereby, as in the case of Macbeth, tacitly denying the equation on another level. Where the Christian viewpoint is squarely faced and accepted, pity must be secured by adventitious means. The tragic key is blunted into the pathetic.[9]

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[8] Works, VIII, 1011.

[9] Johnson Agonistes & Other Essays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946), p. 147.

The condemnation of Johnson for failing to accommodate himself to a "tragic world" would be impertinent, since it both fails to pay due regard to Johnson's justifiably orthodox Christian premises, and fails to take account of a definite shift in sensibility which has occurred since the eighteenth century.

This must not, however, be allowed to obscure Johnson's continually evidenced ability for analysing a literary situation and then rejecting it on the grounds of further considerations.[1] Although the statement, "He carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance," may to some extent refer to the comedies, it contains an implicit realisation of what is central to the poetic tragic vision. What is even more important, is Johnson's tendency to describe as moral inadequacies certain dramatic phenomena for which he is not critically equipped. If a reader or critic makes demands of high moral awareness, and is thus predisposed to moral judgements, it is natural to expect "explanations" of situations not comprehended to be conducted in moral terms. A particularly good example of this is the note to Measure for Measure V.i.444, which involves a case of the charge of Shakespeare's not exhibiting his virtuous characters as possessed of complete moral awareness, as well as an instance of the failure to bring retribution on the guilty:

> That Angelo has committed all the crimes charged against him, as far as he could commit them, is evident. The only "intent" which "his act did not overtake," was the defilement of Isabel. Of this Angelo was only intentionally guilty.
>
> Angelo's crimes are such, as must sufficiently justify punishment, whether its end be to secure the innocent from wrong, or

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[1] One thinks specifically of the analysis of "wit" in the Life of Cowley, which has subsequently proved the basis of twentieth century criticism of the metaphysical poets.

> to deter guilt by example; and I believe every reader feels some indignation when he finds him spared. From what extenuation of his crime can Isabel, who yet supposes her brother dead, form any plea in his favour. "Since he was good 'till he looked on me, let him not die." I am afraid our varlet poet intended to inculcate, that women think ill of nothing that raises the credit of their beauty, and are ready, however virtuous, to pardon any act which they think incited by their own charms.[2]

Coleridge's remarks on this particular scene and the play as a whole provide an interesting means of gaining a perspective on Johnson's views:

> This play, which is Shakespeare's throughout, is to me the most painful -- say rather, the only painful -- part of his genuine works. The comic and tragic parts equally border on the . . . [hateful], the one disgusting, the other horrible; and the pardon and marriage of Angelo not only baffles the strong indignant claim of justice (for cruelty, with lust and damnable baseness, cannot be forgiven, because we cannot conceive of them as being morally repented of) but it is likewise degrading to the character of woman.[3]

While Coleridge dislikes the play in its entirety, this is not so of Johnson, who does not register the contents of his note in the general observation at the end of the play:

> Of this play the light or comick part is very natural and pleasing, but the grave scenes, if a few passages be excepted, have more labour than elegance. The plot is rather intricate than artful.[4]

Johnson's prefatory remark to the play should also be noted:

> There is perhaps not one of Shakespeare's plays more darkened than this by the peculiarities of its author, and the unskilfulness of its editors, by distortions of phrase, or negligence of transcription.[5]

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[2] Works, VII, 213.

[3] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism, Everyman's Library, 2nd ed., ed. by Thomas Middleton Raysor (London: Dent, 1961), I, 102.

[4] Works, VII, 216. Johnson proceeds with a discussion of the time-scheme of the play.

[5] Ibid., p. 174, n. 1.

Not only do these latter remarks indicate the importance Johnson attaches to "moral" defects, but they go part of the way to an explanation as to why two critics, each with such seemingly different critical assumptions, make critical statements so closely related. By claiming that the serious parts of the drama "have more labour than elegance," Johnson has succeeded in isolating those aspects of the play, even if symptomatically, which have led later critics to number it amongst Shakespeare's "problem plays". To the extent to which it involves more of a dialectic structure concerning notions of justice, punishment and forgiveness and less of an outright representation of general nature, and to the extent to which the elements of dialectic and representation do not quite cohere in the totality of the play, Johnson is correct in finding the non-comic parts "laboured".[6] Since the forgiveness of Angelo by both the Duke and Isabel does not form part of the realistic representation, Johnson finds his expectations disappointed, with the result that he registers his detection of the inconsistency in the texture of the play in the form of moral criticism. By going

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[6]Thus one finds J.W. Lever in the introduction of the Arden edition (London, 1965) writing:

> "In Measure for Measure the tragicomic solution was brought about through the direct, explicit, and continuous intervention of 'the demi-god authority'. The vast speculative themes were knit together, the complex characters guided towards the middle path of virtue, through the transcendent wisdom of a Jacobean paragon. But the price to be paid was a substitution of precept and example for inner development and spontaneity. The dramatic poetry of the first half of the play, with its free-ranging, esemplastic imagery and flexible speech-rhythms, gave way to sententious prose, stiff gnomic couplets, and a blank verse which, though generally dignified, was basically uninspired. The Duke's Apollonian intellect resolved all conflicts in society and stilled all tumults in the soul; but in the process the autonomy of the individual was lost, and with it his innate right to choose as between evil and good. At the same time the Duke himself, a prisoner of his own exemplary image, failed as an authentic human being and remained a stage device, midway between personality and type." (p. xcvii).

beneath the surface of Johnson's statements, one is made to realise that his "moral" reading is not quite as obtuse as it initially appears.

So far the discussion has been concerned with the notes which are directly related to the claim, in the Preface, of Shakespeare's moral neglect. There remains one item, perhaps the prime one, which is used to substantiate the charge of Johnson as a moraliser.[7] This is the note to Romeo and Juliet IV.iii.1:

> JULIET. But, gentle nurse,
> I pray thee, leave me to myself to-night;
> For I have need of many orisons
>
> Juliet plays most of her pranks under the appearance of religion; perhaps Shakespeare meant to punish her hypocrisy.[8]

Too much can be made of this note if one mistakes the tone. Although the observation might not deserve the merit of being elevated into a critical note, the indulgent casualness of it -- ascribable to one word, "pranks" -- in comparison with the severity of Johnson's other "moral" strictures comes as a surprise, a surprise amplified to astonishment by the claim that Johnson is either taking Shakespeare or Juliet to task. The misunderstanding may, however, arise from a misinterpretation of the second half of Johnson's sentence. He does not mean that Shakespeare may have intended, but failed, to punish Juliet, but that Juliet's fate may somehow be connected with the way in which she managed her affairs. In this, Johnson cannot be entirely mistaken. Finally, one should not overlook the tentative form of the observation, which is of a piece with so many others which begin: "I should like to read. . ." or "It is to be wished. . . ."

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[7] See René Wellek, A History of Modern Criticism, I (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955), 82-83.

[8] Works, VIII, 953. It should be noted that Wellek cites only the second half of the sentence of the note.

IV

The purpose of the present section is to examine the material of paragraphs 34-44 in order to establish on what grounds Johnson regards Shakespeare's defects as such, as well as the implications such assumptions have for Johnson's criticism as a whole.

Sir Walter Raleigh, writing in 1910 with the intent of re-establishing Johnson's reputation as a critic after more than a century of neglect and ridicule, finds himself able to claim that "the detailed analysis of [Shakespeare's] faults is a fine piece of criticism, and has never been seriously challenged."[9] With the increasing interest in, and admiration of, Johnson, and a contemporaneous change in Shakespeare criticism, Raleigh's opinion itself has come to be seriously challenged, or at least admitted only with serious qualification. Of the material which has never been challenged, perhaps because Johnson is absolutely right, the enumeration of Shakespeare's dramatic lapses in paragraphs 34 and 35 is the primary instance. Merely because the twentieth century seems to be of the same opinion as Johnson as to the facts of the case, and does not therefore have an immediately exterior point of observation from which to gauge Johnson's point of view, it would be foolish to conclude that a common vantage point is defined by common assumptions, especially since it is not always clear, either that the twentieth century is able to recognise its assumptions, if it is at all possible for any age to be fully aware of its critical axioms, or that these assumptions are at all uniform. In cases such as the present, the best method of procedure is to remain initially non-commital, and, relying on the belief that the criticisms are

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[9] Six Essays on Johnson (London: Oxford University Press, 1910), p. 87.

consistent as regards critical stance, produce back the lines of argument from cases where the material is more amenable, in order to establish the argumentative assumptions of material where this is not immediately possible. Much that will be said of Johnson's treatment of Shakespeare's other faults, may be applied mutatis mutandis to the material in paragraphs 34 and 35.

These two paragraphs deal with the structural faults of the plays, and, as such, are criticism of means rather than ends. Despite the statements being couched in genetic terminology, the criticism that Shakespeare is not always diligent in pursuing his ends of instructing and delighting, and careless about the endings of some of the plays, is based upon the experiential fact that certain plays, in certain parts, do not evoke the required fixity of attention, with the result that the reader's expectations are disappointed.

The most remarkable aspect of such criticism is the functioning of the genetic mode of expression at a secondary level of explanation. Johnson is not content to note a fault, it must be explained; and because such faults are characterised as failures to achieve a given end, explanations must be made by reference to a human agency. As this claim may appear rather trivial, an example is in order. A man is observed tying his shoe-lace. Two kinds of explanation of this event may validly be offered. He may have tied his shoe-lace because it was loose, or he may have tied it because he forgot to fasten it. In the first case no additional information is used in the explanation, while in the second, information about the man, as a human agent, is supplied. In much the same way, Johnson is not prepared merely to note a moment in the play in which he finds his attention not fully retained. He resorts to an explanation requiring facts of human agency, rather than facts which simply refer to an alteration in dramatic "texture" or

intensity. The object of this exercise will become apparent in the last section of the present chapter.

Paragraph thirty-six deals with the subject of anachronisms. It is surprising that Johnson does not mention the geographical inconsistencies in the plays as well, since he conscientiously notes them as they occur.[1] Within the context of Johnson's critical assumptions, factual errors are objected to on the grounds that to a sufficiently informed and attentive audience they will be irritating distractions. Although he is prepared to argue vigorously against criticisms of Shakespeare's Romans as not sufficiently Roman on the grounds that the plays are not representations of Romans but of human nature, he cannot accept factual inconsistences on the same grounds. For Johnson, the reader or audience must bring a total intelligence and sensibility to a literary work, and, as is inevitable, considering the interpretation of dramatic fiction Johnson espouses, there cannot be a loss of mental acuity in an unconcerned state of o altitudo.

A further consideration has, however, to be born in mind. There is the whole tradition of criticism which concerned itself with enumerating Shakespeare's faults. All the previous editors indulged themselves in this exercise, and it is therefore incumbent on Johnson, both as a scholar and editor, to take cognizance of this, and, where he cannot, on his own principles, disallow previous criticism, accept it. This seems the only possible explanation for the failure to mention the geographical inconsistencies in the Preface, or Shakespeare's habit of relying on the cuckold's horns as a source of humour. That Johnson is aware of the traditional catalogue of Shakespeare's faults is

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[1]For instance, Two Gentlemen of Verona I.iii.25; The Merchant of Venice II.i.24; and A Winter's Tale III.i.1. Works, VII, 163-64; 220; and 295.

vouched for by his playing on his reader's expectations by delaying the discussion of the unities until after paragraph forty-four.[2]

Johnson accepts the fact that there are anachronisms in the plays, but his contextualisation of the facts is not the same as that of the previous critics. Pope, as Johnson mentions, attempts to lay the blame on earlier publishers and printers. John Dennis argues on the grounds of Shakespeare's lack of formal learning.[3] Lewis Theobald explains the presence of anachronisms in a way which would probably be more acceptable to modern readers, as the effects of poetic licence.[4] Although this view is implicit, to some extent, in Johnson's historical explanation that anachronisms are a common feature of Elizabethan literature, this would be granting too much, since it succeeds in explaining away a genuine demerit.

Johnson's attitude towards anachronisms raises the whole question of the relevance of historical knowledge in criticism. Whenever he is faced with an obscurity in the text of a play, Johnson either attempts an explanation or admits his lack of knowledge. Thus the note to As You Like It II.i.13:

> . . . the toad, ugly and venomous,
> Wears yet a precious jewel in his head

> It was the current opinion in Shakespeare's time, that in the head of an old toad was to be found a stone, or pearl, to

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[2]See Works, VII, 74-75 (Preface, par. 45):
"It will be thought strange, that, in enumerating the defects of this writer, I have not yet mentioned his neglect of the unities; his violation of those laws which have been instituted and established by the joint authority of poets and of criticks."

[3]In On the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare (1712), in Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, ed. by D. Nichol Smith, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 30.

[4]In Preface to "The Works of Shakespeare", 1773 (2nd ed., 1740), ibid., p. 71.

> which great virtues were ascribed. This stone has been often sought, but nothing has been found more than accidental or perhaps morbid indurations of the skull.[5]

In doing this, Johnson is exercising the virtue of critical diffidence for which he argues in Adventurer No. 58[6] where he demonstrates by reference to examples from classical literature that seemingly obscure passages may be illuminated by historical knowledge. The assumptions of this method are that the reader presumes he understands an historical text in much the same way as a reader who is contemporary with the material; only when difficulties of comprehension arise, is it assumed that certain historical information is necessary. This would seem to involve the triviality that one understands something until it is clear that one does not, but taken in the context of the discussion of an historical text, it means that Johnson assumes a play to be contemporary with himself, except in so far as he has to allow that certain historical information is required to elucidate certain aspects of it. A most striking instance of this assumption may be found in the note appended to the first scene of Macbeth:

> A poet who should now make the whole action of his tragedy depend upon enchantment, and produce the chief events by the assistance of supernatural agents, would be censured as transgressing the bounds of probability, be banished from the theatre to the nursery, and condemned to write fairy tales instead of tragedies.[7]

The point is that Shakespeare's use of the marvellous and supernatural is excused, not explained. It is precisely because Johnson conducts his judicial criticism on this particular atemporal basis that he is able to say of Shakespeare's neglect of explicit moral utterance:

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[5] Works, VII, 246-47.

[6] Works, II, 371-77.

[7] Works, VIII, 752.

> This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independant on (sic) time or place .[8]

Although Johnson continually affirms the humanistic belief in the (moral) uniformity of human nature, he simultaneously maintains a view of history as evidencing some kind of material, cultural, and intellectual progress, and possible degeneration. "The natural progress of the works of men is from rudeness to convenience, from convenience to elegance, and from elegance to nicety."[9] The process of maturing intellectually from infancy to adulthood is thus often used as an image for historical process. One is therefore not surprised by Johnson's justification for reading romances:

> Yet there are good reasons for reading romances; as -- the fertility of invention, the beauty of style and expression, the curiosity of seeing with what kind of performances the age and country in which they were written was delighted: for it is to be apprehended, that at a time when very wild and improbable tales were well received, the people were in a barbarous state, and so on, the footing of children, as has been explained.[1]

Such beliefs would not allow for cultural relativity, and thus an alternative atemporal basis of criticism.

The reasons for regarding the presence of anachronisms as defects are thus complex, even though the presence of such faults are explained by means of historical material, since the age which sanctions them is itself judged. The term "fault" has thus an added significance.

Because the plays are directly relevant to the audience by the

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[8] Works, VII, 71 (Preface, par. 33).

[9] Works, II, 196 (Idler No. 63).

[1] Lives, IV, 16-17. The explanation is:
"Spanish plays, being wildly and improbably farcical, would please children here, as children are entertained with stories full of prodigies; their experience not being sufficient to cause them to be so readily startled at deviations from the natural course of life." (ibid., p. 16).

representation of general nature, the presence of any (factual) allusions or beliefs which obscure, or detract from, the immediate impact of the plays is regarded as a fault. For this reason, the lack of refinement in some of the comic exchanges is censured, despite the possibility that licentiousness of language may have been socially acceptable in the period the play was written.[2] The stylistic faults of the tragedies give rise to similar complaints. The terms of censure, "tumour", "meanness", "tediousness" and "obscurity", reflect this.[3]

The one consideration essential to the understanding of this aspect of the Preface is the assumption that judicial criticism of historical material is possible. Once this is admitted, it is inevitable that the ideals and values, and the supporting arguments, of the age in which such judgements are made will be reflected in such evaluative utterances. Once notions of cultural and historical relativism are entertained, the whole judicial exercise collapses.

It is, however, not possible to accept Johnson's stylistic norms as those of his age. As an Augustan humanist, Johnson not only knew his classics, but lived them. It does not therefore come as a surprise to find the following passage in Quintilian:

> Oratory possesses a natural mien, which while it is far from demanding a stolid and immovable rigidity should as far as

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[2]It should be remembered that for Johnson refinement was simultaneously a social and literary norm.

[3]The Dictionary definitions are: tumour -- "Affected pomp; false magnificence; puffy grandeur; swelling mien; unsubstantial greatness"; meanness -- "Want of excellence"; "Want of dignity"; "Lowness of mind"; "Sordidness"; tediousness -- "Wearisomeness by continuance"; "Prolixity; length"; "Uneasiness; tiresomeness; quality of wearying"; obscurity -- "Darkness of meaning".

> possible restrict itself to the expression with which it is endowed by nature. But it is of the first importance that we should know what are the requirements of time, place and character on each occasion of speaking. For the majority of these figures [of speech] aim at delighting the hearer. But when terror, hatred and pity are the weapons called for in the fray, who will endure the orator who expresses his anger, his sorrow, or his entreaties in neat antitheses, balanced cadences and exact correspondences? Too much care for our words under such circumstances weakens the impression of emotional sincerity, and wherever the orator displays his art unveiled, the hearer says: "The Truth is not in him."[4]

The kind of reasoning Quintilian uses is very similar to that used by Johnson in paragraphs forty and forty-three of the Preface, because they have similar psychological assumptions. These assumptions may, for various reasons, mislead Johnson at times, but at others, they are the source of startling insights; for instance, the note to Macbeth II.iii.110:

> MACBETH: Here, lay Duncan;
> His silver skin laced with his golden blood

> It is not improbable, that Shakespeare put these forced and unnatural metaphors into the mouth of Macbeth as a mark of artifice and dissimulation, to show the difference between the studied language of hypocrisy, and the natural outcries of sudden passion. This whole speech so considered, is a remarkable instance of judgement, as it consists entirely of antithesis and metaphor.[5]

V

The evaluation of works of literature as they appear to Johnson and his contemporaries is only one aspect of Johnson's involvement in critical activity. Far more congenial to the amateur chemist, the man who travelled to Scotland to examine a different "system of life," the eternally curious humanist who measured the growth of his

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[4] The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1922), III, pp. 505 and 506.

[5] Works, VIII, 773-74.

finger-nails, is the study of literature as a form of intellectual history.[6] Although this form of criticism does not cease to be evaluative, it tends to be more descriptive by not being judicial; it aims at assessing human achievement and consequently provides a means towards the greater understanding of literature in general, and of the distinctive qualities of particular literary works, by focussing attention on the author and his milieu. Thus one finds Imlac saying:

> To know any thing . . . we must know its effects; to see men we must see their works, that we may learn what reason has dictated, or passion has incited, and find what are the most powerful motives of action. To judge rightly of the present we must oppose it to the past; for all judgement is comparative, and of the future nothing can be known.
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> . . . . . .
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> There is no part of history so generally useful as that which relates the progress of the human mind, the gradual improvement of reason, the successive advances of science, the vicissitudes of learning and ignorance which are the light darkness of thinking beings, the extinction and resuscitation of arts, and the revolutions of the intellectual world. If accounts of battles and invasions are peculiarly the business of princes, the useful and elegant arts are not to be neglected; those who have kingdoms to govern, have understandings to cultivate.
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> . . . . . .
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> When the eye or the imagination is struck with any uncommon work, the next transition of an active mind is to the means by which it was performed. Here begins the true use of such contemplation; we enlarge our comprehension by new ideas, and perhaps recover some art lost to mankind, or learn what is less perfectly known in our own country. At least we compare our own with former times, and either rejoice at our improvements, or, what is the first motion towards good, discover our defects.[7]

This form of criticism has the final humanistic justification, in that it is regarded as a means to self-knowledge.

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[6] See, for example, Life, IV, 16-17, for Johnson's reasons for reading romances, cited above, p.116.

[7] Works (London), XI, 85-87 (Rasselas ch.XXX, misnumbered as ch. XXXIX).

It is often not realised that in paragraph sixty-four of the Preface the criticism takes a new turn, moving from a consideration of whether a book is good or bad, to questions of greater scope:

> Every man's performances, to be rightly estimated, must be compared with the state of the age in which he lived, and with his own particular opportunities; and though to the reader a book be not worse or better for the circumstances of the author, yet as there is always a silent reference of human works to human abilities, and as the enquiry, how far man may extend his designs, or how high he may rate his native force, is of far greater dignity than in what rank we shall place any particular performance, curiosity is always busy to discover the instruments, as well as to survey the workmanship, to know how much is to be ascribed to original powers, and how much to casual and adventitious help. The palaces of Peru or Mexico were certainly mean and incommodious habitations, if compared to the houses of European monarchs; yet who could forbear to view them with astonishment, who remembered that they were built without the use of iron?[8]

Only if this is seen as an argument for a new and relevant kind of investigation, can the material discussed in paragraphs 65-94 be regarded as other than an unnecessary repetition of previous discussion. The argument is now not concerned with the represented general nature to be found in the plays, or with the objections readers and audience might take to them, but that Shakespeare overcame the obstacles of a barbaric age, a lack of literary precedent, an insufficient education, and a mean birth, by means of his native abilities. His capacity to observe, and learn from, nature supplied the wants of his learning, his genius enabled him to make use of his learning to overcome the literary and dramatic deficiencies of his age. Thus "Othello is the vigorous and vivacious offspring of observation impregnated by genius."[9]

What is meant by "genius" is perhaps best understood by the definitions of the term in the Lives: "The true Genius is a mind of large

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[8] Works, VII, 81.

[9] Ibid., p. 84.

general powers, accidentally determined in some particular direction."[1] Genius is thus not a quality peculiar to poets -- Johnson believed that he could quite easily have turned his hand to law rather than literature; Newton could equally well have become an epic poet. This means of course that literature is never divorced from any other human activity, nor is the poet ever an outcast. The Life of Pope contains at least two definitions:

> 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 imagining something greater than it knows, always endeavouring more than it can do.[2]

and

> Genius . . . that quality without which judgement is cold and knowledge is inert; that energy which collects, combines, amplifies, and animates.[3]

Genius is thus that comprehensiveness of mind which explains why a man is able to transcend the limitations of his own age, and is therefore the human attribute most deserving of praise. It is that quality which, evidenced in a writer's work, evokes a similar comprehensiveness of attention in the mind of a reader. It is an endowment which allows "the heroes of literature to enlarge the boundaries of knowledge by discovering and conquering new regions of the intellectual world."[4]

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[1] Lives, I, 2 (Life of Cowley).

[2] Lives, III, 217. It should be remembered that Johnson is to some extent defending Pope's reputation as a poet in a period which is already anticipating the Romantic antipathy to that poet.

[3] Ibid., p. 222.

[4] Works, IV, 362 (Rambler No. 137).

Although the language of faculty psychology sometimes appears in Johnson's writings and conversations, the general tendency of his thought is to think of the human "mind", in which all the human faculties or potentialities are integrated: "It is ridiculous to oppose judgement to imagination; for it does not appear that men have necessarily less of one as they have more of the other."[5] Thus he writes of Pope:

> Pope had, in proportions very nicely adjusted to each other, all the qualities that constitute genius. He had Invention, by which new trains of events are formed and new scenes of imagery displayed, as in The Rape of the Lock, and by which extrinsick and adventitious embellishments and illustrations are connected with a known subject, as in the Essay on Criticism; he had Imagination, which strongly impresses the writer's mind and enables him to convey to the reader the various forms of nature, incidents of life, and energies of passion, as in his Eloisa, Windsor Forest and the Ethick Epistles; he had Judgement, which selects from life or nature what the present purpose requires, and, by separating the essence of things from its concomitants, often makes the representation more powerful than the reality; and he had colours of language always before him ready to decorate his matter with every grace of elegant expression, as when he accommodates his diction to the wonderful multiplicity of Homer's sentiments and descriptions.[6]

All these qualities Johnson finds, to a greater degree, in Shakespeare.

Johnson's purpose in analysing these subjective qualities is to explain literature as a product of human endeavour, and evaluate it as such. He would not be interested in depth-psychology analyses, nor would he be misled into thinking a study of the man living at Stratford relevant to his purposes -- in the Lives he separates the biographical material from his summary of the man's character as a poet. On such assumptions he is able, in part at least, to account for the deficiencies of the plays by referring to Shakespeare's carelessness

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[5] Lives, I, 235 (Life of Roscommon).

[6] Lives, III, 247.

and lack of ambition, evidence for which is to be found in Shakespeare's obvious disregard for the fate of his manuscripts.

Once it is assumed that authors are to be regarded as heroes, as men of monumental abilities, it becomes possible to compare authors in relation to their achievements, not only in terms of their works. Some remarks recorded by Boswell are extremely relevant in this regard, as they show Johnson capable of making evaluative judgements at two levels:

> He said, the dispute as to the comparative excellence of Homer or Virgil was inaccurate. 'We must consider (said he) whether Homer was not the greatest poet, though Virgil may have produced the finest poem. Virgil was indebted to Homer for the whole invention of the structure of an epick poem, and for many of his beauties.'[7]

In much the same way Shakespeare's production of Othello is compared with Addison's Cato.[8] Addison falls short, because, although Cato is the more finished product, it is not the outcome of the conjunction of genius and knowledge, but of judgement and learning.

Johnson's consuming interest in assessing human capabilities, especially with regard to literature, has two extremely important consequences for the cast of his criticism as a whole. It leads him, as has been noted earlier, to be extremely cautious about the kind and method of evaluation proper to literature, since the limits of human endeavour are never finite and the only way of establishing a standard is through the accumulated experience of human beings. This assumption also leads to the consideration of mitigating circumstances in the case of particular evaluative judgements. The second consequence of this approach is that literature is not seen as a series of

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[7] Life, III, 193-94.

[8] Works, VII, 84 (Preface, par. 73).

discrete phenomena, but as a field in which human beings exercise their abilities. Because of this Johnson is able to move freely against the critical dogmas of the age.

This analysis of Johnson's discussion of the conditions of authorship is in agreement with the findings of William R. Keast.[9] Unfortunately, Keast tends to regard this aspect of Johnson's criticism as primary. The present writer's contention is that Johnson regards the consideration of the author's abilities and circumstances as considerations of conditions preliminary to and subsequent to the evaluative task. Johnson's findings in the field of intellectual history are used, negatively, to disallow certain kinds of misleading evaluation, and positively, to explain the failures in the process of literary production. The judicial enterprise needs to be given as much emphasis in a description of Johnson's critical activities as any other. By failing to do so, Keast is unable to account for the didactic and moral element in the criticism. Jean H. Hagstrum wishes to attribute Keast's omission to an inadequate interpretation of the concept of general nature.[1] Although Hagstrum argues convincingly that Keast's interpretation is misleading, the alternative he proposes is equally open to objections. The initial point is, however, well taken, once it is accepted that he has isolated something -- the interpretation of "general nature" -- which is symptomatic of Keast's more basic oversight, the failure to register the multiplicity of Johnson's critical activities.

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[9] In "The Theoretical Foundations of Johnson's Criticisms," in Critics and Criticism, abridged ed., ed. by R.S. Crane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 169-87; and "Johnson and Intellectual History," in New Light on Dr. Johnson: Essays on the Occasion of his 250th Birthday, ed. by Frederick W. Hilles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 247-56.

[1] In a review of Keast's "The Theoretical Foundations of Johnson's Criticism," in Philological Quarterly, XXXII (July, 1953), 276-78.

CONCLUSION

Johnson's initial problem in the Preface is an evaluative one; that of justifying the continued esteem of Shakespeare's works. Because of his conception of the nature of human beings and their works, Johnson argues that the only reliable means of evaluating of literary works is the very fact of their continued esteem. Some of the considerations which lead him to adopt this kind of performative evaluation, encourage him in the attempt of explaining Shakespeare's greatness by reference to some peculiar quality in the plays. The concept in terms of which this quality is realised has to satisfy not only certain conditions established by Johnson's analysis of the nature of human experience and the structure of the human mind, but also those which derive from normative principles implicit in his acceptance of certain humanistic assumptions about human nature and the human condition. Johnson's initial attempt to provide some kind of deductive means of evaluation would be vitiated by the introduction of such seemingly extraneous evaluative principles, were it not for the fact that normative humanistic assumptions purport to derive from a study of the whole human experience. Johnson's initial assumptions are thus also humanistic ones.

To make a case for Shakespeare as an Ancient is basically a comparative task, and Johnson therefore brings the highest of all humanistic evaluative principles into play, that of the achievement of self-knowledge. In The Lives of the Poets, however, he is concerned only with the attempt of finding as much as possible to recommend in each of the poets, with the result that the notion of general nature and the ideal of self-knowledge are less predominant features of the critical discussion.

The final part of the strictly critical portion of the Preface turns from an evaluation of the plays to an evaluation of Shakespeare in terms of his historical perspective. This is done both for its own sake, and as a means of tempering certain negative criticisms levelled against the plays. The entire discussion of the Preface thus takes place within an evaluative framework, but this does not mean that every aspect of the discussion is in itself evaluative. One has to appreciate, however, that Johnson would regard any serious discussion which does not terminate in evaluative assessment as intellectually irresponsible.

Although the assumptions and implications of Johnson's critical statements have been examined fairly extensively through the process of the preceding three chapters, the task of organising such findings into a coherent structure still remains. In the two sections which follow, some attempt at a discursive arrangement of the material will be made, firstly by discussing the concerns of the Preface in terms of three possible areas of critical involvement suggested in the introductory chapter, and secondly by enumerating the varieties of criticism established by the Preface and exemplified in the notes to the plays.

I

Ontological problems and their solution held little attraction for Johnson, not only because his critical energies were directed elsewhere, but also because he would have regarded the exercise of asking questions such as "What is literature?", and "What is a poem/play?", as both ill-conceived and futile. In itself, this attitude of Johnson's is informative, since it indicates in a negative way which critical pursuits he found valuable, but it does not invalidate

an investigation of the possible ontological assumptions implicit in Johnson's criticism.

It is feasible to entertain the theoretical possibility that the manner in which one talks about an object is in part determined by the nature ascribed to it. If, therefore, one were able to analyse critical discussion in such a way as to establish the nature ascribed to this determining object, one would have good grounds for assuming that one had achieved some insight into the "depth structure" of that particular area of critical discourse. In the light of Johnson's deliberate avoidance of ontological definition, the critical discussion and practice in the Preface and notes would provide an excellent testing-ground for such an hypothesis. It should however be remembered that the use of such an hypothesis is strictly limited. Firstly, any critical discussion which does not refer to particular objects could not be examined in terms of it unless a further hypothetical method were introduced. Secondly, the verification and application of such an hypothesis is not to be regarded as the total concern of meta-critical investigation. Thirdly, the validity of such an hypothesis is subject to the consideration of its usefulness.

Although Johnson reiterates the ancient dogma that art is the imitation of nature, he in fact pays very little attention to it, since he consistently refuses to draw distinctions between art (or literature) and nature. The notion of fictionality implicit in the concept of imitation is thus also relegated to the periphery of his critical vocabulary. Aristotle's concept of imitation is primarily designed for the purposes of identification, and it is thus used to make sense of generic terms such as "tragedy", "comedy", and "epic". In the history of criticism, Aristotle's descriptive identifications

came to be treated as definitional, and therefore as prescriptive, ones. Much of Johnson's criticism is concerned with the rejection of this prescriptive use of definition on the grounds that it inhibits the production of literature.[1] Johnson's reaction appears to arise from the realisation that definitions of works of literature as objects in themselves tend to elevate necessary qualities into sufficient ones, with the result that such definitions are implicitly evaluative and thus inadequate to the original purpose.

As far as the dramatic genres are concerned, Johnson repudiates the attempt to make distinctions on the Aristotlian model, and suggests that more valid ones may be arrived at by examining differences of effect. (Implicit in Johnson's proposal is a refusal to accept any ontological definition which assumes that works of literature are discrete objects.) Johnson does not have a similar position with regard to the non-dramatic genres. In fact, he discusses Paradise Lost in terms of the "rules" for epic poems. He does, however, criticise the poem for its lack of human interest, which perhaps indicates that, since he cannot discuss the poem, except prejudicially, in terms of his own primary critical assumptions, he resorts to descriptive methods with which he is not wholly satisfied rather than reject the poem. Johnson's dismissal of generic imitations may, however, be regarded as a criticism of the uses to which Aristotlian methods of definition may be put.

While rejecting a definitional method, Johnson has to establish an alternative means of performing the task of identification for which that method is designed. The considerations which provide

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[1] This is perhaps a sufficient indication that Johnson has his own notion of the actual nature of literature.

the basis of Johnson's criticism of "Aristotlian" approaches lead him into the acceptance of an ostensive method of identification. It is nevertheless a peculiar form of ostensive identification, based on the notion of accumulated human experience. The notion of the test of time is thus central to Johnson's thinking, and his use of it marks him out as essentially a practical critic, though not a naive, un-theoretic one.

Any description of Johnson's ontological assumptions will have to conform to certain conditions established by the process of his rejection of an "Aristotlian" method. This consideration will have to be borne in mind in the examination of those aspects of Johnson's critical discussion which relate to epistemological concerns on the one hand, and normative assumptions on the other.

The use of the term "epistemology" and its cognates in the present context requires some explanation. The concepts which are brought into play by the use of terms such as "represented general nature", "unity of action", "tedious", "absurd", "striking", and "affected", are said to be epistemological in that they mediate the knowledge of a work of literature for a reader. Such concepts could also be classified as descriptive. This alternative classification, however, tends to favour objective, Aristotlian ontological interpretations. It is also not sufficiently explicit, since there are at least two different uses to which descriptive terms may be put -- for the purposes of inter-pretation on the one hand, and for those of production on the other.

Because Johnson's critical discussion does not take place within a reductionist framework, it is not possible to draw any direct ontological inferences from his critical terminology. The only area of critical concern where non-literary, moral criteria are brought to

bear is the normative one, but since Johnson is aware of the critical status of moral claims in relation to the rest of his critical discussion it is not necessary to bestow any further attention on this particular impingement of non-literary concerns on his critical involvement. An examination of Johnson's deployment of his critical terminology also reveals that it is never used to describe a discretely existing objective state of affairs. His choice of epistemological concepts allows him to avoid the establishment of a dichotomous relationship between the objective and the subjective. By appropriating certain technical distinctions developed by the American semiotician C.W. Morris, this point may be clarified by claiming that Johnson's critical terms have a primary "pragmatic", rather than a "referential", function.[2] The only inference which can thus be drawn from Johnson's use of his critical terms is that they have reference to an experiential object, not in the tautological sense that they refer to an object of which it is possible to have experience, but in the sense that their reference must be accounted for in terms of human responses to an object. The critical terms therefore return one to the conditions of experience rather than any kind of object.

One of the conditions of experience is that the reader, his mind devoid of discursive presuppositions, comes to a work of literature (in this case poetry) for the purpose not only of understanding what is written, but of satisfying, even momentarily, the "hunger" of his imagination. The particular reader's expectations may be disappointed, but it is the assumption that they can be met which gives

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[2] Foundations of the Theory of Signs (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), passim.

literary works their peculiar nature.

In the Preface, Johnson maintains that a Shakespeare play is capable of seizing a reader's attention in such a way as to make the experience of "delight" (through amplitude) concomitant with the process of "instruction" (through the expansion of the individual reader's awareness of human nature). This is made possible by the representation of general nature. The presence of this quality is not, however, fortuitous, but part of Shakespeare's intention. The failure of a reader to accommodate his mind to Shakespeare's "design" will thus inevitably result in a failure to understand the plays, and thus in an attempt to apply inappropriate critical criteria. Johnson's analysis of the conditions of experience therefore assumes that works of literature have an intentional nature, that they are a means to an end, and that they are, or should be, recognised as such by readers. The relationship between this assumption and classical rhetorical theory is obvious. It is possible to trace the adaptation of rhetorical theory for literary critical purposes as far back as Horace and Longinus, but in Johnson's criticism one finds a systematic subversion of the entire compositional theory into a theory or set of assumptions concerned with the epistemology of literature, in which the notion of persuasion as an end is replaced by a more ample, psychogogic principle. Because rhetoric deals only with the art of persuasion, it does not allow for objects by means of which its end is achieved. Critical discussion, as Johnson conceives it, must of necessity proceed by way of reference to objects. Such objects may be identified ostensively, but Johnson also implicitly attributes to them a specific ontological status, that of intentional objects which function by means of clearly recognised conventions.

Johnson's primary normative principle that "the end of poetry

is to instruct by pleasing,"[3] is thus entirely in keeping with his ontological assumptions, by allowing for a means/end relationship between a work of literature and its audience. The intentional attributions made to literary works are not ones related to autobiographical facts about an author, but to the conventional means which an author employs. Should an author deploy conventional means inadequately, the result would be a poor work of literature, and Johnson then finds it quite proper to refer to autobiographical material in order to explain authorial failure. It is also quite appropriate to attribute great efficacy to some conventions than others. Thus Johnson is able to regard Milton as the master of "the Sublime", and Pope of "the Beautiful", while yet giving preference to "the poet of Nature". In normative judgements such as this, Johnson displays his humanistic assumptions most clearly. His assumption that moral judgements may quite appropriately be made of literature is also quite easily accommodated by the notion of the intentional function of literature, since, in the final analysis, literature is something directed at one human being by another.

Certain other aspects of Johnson's criticism are rendered more explicable, if the notion of an intentional object is regarded as a "depth" principle in his literary discussions. The notion of literature as a form of human activity is found to be more than the formulation of the theoretically naive observation that literature is produced by human beings. The validity of this fact is taken into account, but it is not allowed to mislead the critic into committing what has latterly become known as the "intentional fallacy". Its function is merely to

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[3] Works, VII, 67 (Preface, par. 20).

disallow certain kinds of critical approach. The notion of literature as a form of human achievement does, however, also allow for the extension of critical discussion into the sphere of intellectual history.

The notion of an intentional object also allows one to appreciate the flexibility of Johnson's attitudes to conventions. For him, the continual reappraisal of conventions by authors is evidence of a healthy state in the literary world. On the other hand, he continually vents his acrimony on writers of pastoral imitations, since he regards them as repeating conventions for their own sake and thus neglecting the inherent intentional functions of those conventions. It is also possible for a reader to mistake, or be unaware of particular conventions. On occasion this happens to Johnson, but a consistent feature of these "lapses" is his persistence in manufacturing a conventional significance for the material he cannot understand. He is also quite capable, as in his analysis of Metaphysical "Wit", of comprehending a convention and rejecting it as worthless.

II

Even a cursory reading of Johnson's criticism forces one to acknowledge his refreshing ability for reinstating the obvious. It is therefore not surprising to find him stating that the primary concern is for the reading and understanding of literature, and in almost the same breath regretting that such understanding is not always immediately possible. Because of these considerations, the first task of the critic lies in the clearing of difficulties which beset the reader. The notes to the plays are for the most part criticism of this kind. Synonyms are provided for difficult or obscure words,

and paraphrases for obscure passages, while historical information, if available, is used to explain allusions or historical beliefs.

The second role which a critic may adopt is that of guide. Criticism so conceived aims at teaching a reader how to read. "The eye of the intellect, like that of the body, is not equally perfect in all, nor equally adapted in any to all objects; the end of criticism is to supply its defects . . . ."[4] The notes which draw attention to "poetical beauties and defects", and the "general strictures" attached to the end of most of the plays, are intended to fulfil this function. The ultimate purpose is, however, not to supply the reader with a list of particular judgements, but to acquaint him with the means of achieving insight into literature. To recur to the terminology of the theoretical discussion in the previous section, this kind of criticism may be described as the attempt to equip a reader with an epistemological terminology which is adequate to the task of appreciating a particular author's design, and to inculcate in the reader the method by which such a terminology is to be employed.

The critical self-consciousness requisite of the second kind of critic gives rise to the third mode of criticism whose task is the establishment of principles. The purpose of such scientific criticism is to prevent arbitrary pronouncements on literary subjects. It is difficult to ascertain whether Johnson would have regarded the theoretical discussions in the Preface and most of the periodical essays on literary topics as criticism of this kind, or only as preliminary forays, since he commends Burke's Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful as "an example of true criticism."[5] As an essentially practical critic

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[4] Works, V, 166 (Rambler No. 176).

[5] Life, II, 90.

Johnson is very wary of theoretical preoccupations, and tolerates such critical activities only in so far as he finds them conducive to the understanding of existing works of literature: "Rules are the instruments of mental vision, which may assist our faculties when properly used, but produce confusion and obscurity by unskilful application."[6]

The fourth function of the critic is that of monitor. The purpose of evaluative criticism, the task of the literary monitor, is to set the taste of the period, not only by assessing contemporary works, but by recommending older ones, or rescuing them from oblivion. Any critic who takes up this task rarely does so with impunity to himself, but for Johnson it is a duty which neither laziness nor timidity will abrogate.[7] It is unfortunate, however, that for a long time the predominant image of Johnson was that of the presiding Guardian of the Republic of Letters, whom none could emulate but many either parody through inept admiration, or dismiss as an irrelevant outdated superstition.

Finally, the critic may treat of literature as an historian of intellectual achievement. Although this activity is sufficient to itself, Johnson regards it as having the indirect function of enabling the reader to reconsider his atemporal evaluations of literary works in terms of the historical perspective which such an endeavour provides. In this final form, criticism subsumes all the others and achieves the dignity of a study for its own sake by engaging the mind with the perpetual and salutory questions of human achievement and human worth.

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[6] Works, V. ibid.

[7] See Works, II, 496 (Adventurer No. 138).

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