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Samuel Johnson and the Journals of the Romantic Period.

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SAMUEL JOHNSON AND THE JOURNALS OF THE ROMANTIC PERIOD:
HIS REPUTATION AS A LITERARY CRITIC

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

Dorothy George
B.A., Louisiana State Normal College, 1936
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1937
May, 1950
MANUSCRIPT THESES

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. A. J. Bryan for his guidance in the writing of this dissertation. Also, I am much indebted to Dr. R. B. Heilman, now of the University of Washington, because of whose encouragement and assistance the study was begun.
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ABSTRACT

Prevalent among students of literary criticism today are two assumptions about the reputation of Dr. Samuel Johnson during the Romantic period. The first is that, after having occupied the position of virtual literary dictator in his own age, Johnson was either condemned or ignored in the following one. This assumption is based on the belief that the antagonism exhibited toward him by the major critics between 1800 and 1832 -- Coleridge, Wordsworth, Hazlitt, DeQuincey -- was shared by the rest of the literary world. The second assumption, one which actually contradicts the first, is that the periodicals of those years, as survivors of eighteenth-century habits of thought, accepted Johnson unquestioningly merely because he was commonly considered the standard-bearer of traditional neoclassicism. Since to hold completely to either of the two assumptions would mean necessarily an oversimplification of the picture, it is to be expected that the truth lies somewhere between the two extremes. And it was the purpose of this study to examine the hitherto unexplored body of evidence in the journals of the Romantic period and to determine Johnson's position as a literary critic in them.

The periodicals investigated were limited to sixteen of the most representative ones of the time. They were
representative in that some were quarterly, some monthly, and some weekly publications; in that some were conservative and others liberal in religion, politics, and literature; in that some followed the traditional pattern of the magazine, others that of the review, and still others that of the journal of belles-lettres. The list included the Gentleman's Magazine, the Scots Magazine, the Monthly Review, the British Critic, the Edinburgh Review, the Quarterly Review, the Westminster Review, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, the London Magazine, Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country, the Literary Gazette, the Examiner, the Indicator, the Liberal, the Literary Examiner, and the Companion.

The material resulting from the investigation of these sources was organized according to Johnson's chief contributions to literary criticism -- his Shakespearean analyses (Chapter II), his Miltonic criticism (Chapter III), and the views expressed in the remaining Lives of the Poets (Chapter IV). Chapter V had a two-fold purpose -- the presentation of general comments about Johnson as a critic, and a summary of the attitudes of the individual journals toward his criticism.

Chapter VI presented the general conclusions emerging from the study. One of these was that, although it must be admitted that there were fewer references to Johnson between 1800 and 1832 than there were in the period immediately following his death, still his name occurred more frequently than that of any other English critic of the past or the contemporary
period; and this situation was true in the face of such new literary forms as prose fiction and of a new attitude toward authority and of a new conception of criticism as appreciation rather than evaluation.

Actually, very few of the reviewers followed the example of Coleridge, whose policy was one of accepting absolutely nothing in Johnson's criticism. On the other hand, very few of them manifested a passive acceptance of his views. The general tone was that of an effort to determine what part of his criticism was still valid and useful and what part must be rejected. More attention was directed to the negative than the positive portions of it; the praise he awarded was for the most part accepted as a matter of course, but unfavorable comments were meticulously weighed. This attitude accounted for the fact that the general criticism of his work in Shakespeare and of The Lives of the Poets was favorable at the same time that qualifications and exceptions were defined.

Some of the qualifications arose from the conviction that Johnson had allowed personal or religious or political prejudice to enter into his criticism — notably that of Milton and Gray. Others arose from the fact that almost without exception the reviewers saw in Johnson an exponent of the vague and the general as the proper material of literature and considered him incapable of making minute sensuous distinctions. Similarly, they considered erroneous his definition of genius as a general power of the mind.
On the question of whether Johnson was deficient in the kind of imagination and sublimity of spirit necessary to the full comprehension of Shakespeare and Milton, opinion was not unanimous. Although to many reviewers Johnson's sober and modest praise of their idols represented a cold, inadequate appreciation, others singled him out as the critic who had paid noblest tribute to them.

On still other points the periodicals unanimously accepted him — his repudiation of the unities of time and place, his insistence on probability of action and character, and his definition of the purpose of poetry. Furthermore, almost all granted his supremacy in the realm of human motives and passions; his discerning interpretations of character won that position for him.

Finally, this study demonstrated that, consciously or unconsciously, the journals of the Romantic period recognized the diversity and breadth of Johnson's criticism and paid him tribute because of those qualities. After all the objections had been raised and all the qualifications defined and all the unacceptable portions of his criticism sifted out, there was still much that was universally considered valuable. It was not only that periodicals with avowedly conservative leanings — the Gentleman's, the Scots, the British Critic, the Quarterly, and the Literary Gazette — that manifested an attitude predominantly favorable to Johnson; such liberal organs as the Monthly, the Edinburgh, Blackwood's, and the
London shared their approval of him. And even those periodicals evincing most antagonism -- the Westminster, Fraser's, and the Examiner in the latter part of the period -- found occasionally something in him to commend. In other words, it cannot be said that the antagonism shown Johnson by the major figures of the Romantic period was imitated by the journals, nor can it be said that his reputation was the result of servile admiration in journals still adhering to eighteenth-century neoclassical standards.
TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

Because of the frequency of their appearance, the following sources are assigned abbreviations:

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<td>ER</td>
<td>Edinburgh Review</td>
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<td>FM</td>
<td>Fraser's Magazine</td>
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<td>GM</td>
<td>Gentleman's Magazine</td>
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<td>Literary Gazette</td>
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CHAPTER I
THE PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Among students of English criticism it is a commonplace that Samuel Johnson was the last of the great literary dictators of England. His death in 1784 marked the end of an era in which it was possible for one man, through sheer power of intellect, to shape and control the literary opinion of his milieu; in other words, he occupied the position once held by Ben Jonson and Dryden and Pope, and by virtue of his dominating personality and his brilliant conversational ability, he wielded an influence over his contemporaries that no one man since his day has been able to duplicate.

The literary times in which he and his predecessors lived were conducive to the maintenance of such authority. Out of the welter and confusion of political and social and religious upheaval preceding and following the Restoration emerged a strong desire for order and restraint, for uniformity and conformity, for sanity and stability, for a pattern according to which life might be lived and intelligible and meaningful literature written. Naturally, the man who could formulate standards for either life or literature would be assured of a following, and Samuel Johnson was recognized in both areas. Rasselas and the essays in the Rambler and the
Idler earned for him the title of "our great Moralist," as the Dictionary was his contribution to the regularizing of the English language, and the edition of Shakespeare and The Lives of the Poets embodied his formal literary criticism. Furthermore, the intellectual life of the eighteenth century centered in London — in the coffee houses and taverns and clubs and drawing-rooms and theatres — and London was Johnson's proper element. Given, then, this literary background and the character of the man, it was virtually inevitable that Boswell in 1785 should be able to write in A Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides:

Dr. Samuel Johnson's character, religious, moral, political, and literary, nay his figure and manner, are, I believe, more generally known than those of almost any man. ¹

When one traces the course of that reputation in the years following 1784 and comes to the turn of the century, he discovers a challenging dichotomy of opinion about Johnson's position as a literary figure in the Romantic period. On the one hand, there is the assumption that since the day of the literary dictator was gone and since the spirit of the age was one of a relaxation of rules, of absence of restraint, of reliance upon the judgment of the individual critic rather than upon authority, of inexplicable appreciation rather than a critical evaluation of faults and merits, Samuel Johnson became the object of universal contempt or, at best, was simply

Ignored. This assumption, of course, is based on the prominence customarily and naturally given in studies of literary criticism to the views of the front-rank Romantics — Coleridge, Wordsworth, Hazlitt, DeQuincey, Lamb, Leigh Hunt, and Sir Walter Scott. What these men believed must be essentially what the rest of the literary world believed.

Certainly, if this assumption could be proved true, Johnson's reputation in the Romantic period would be negligible. When Coleridge and Wordsworth set about formulating and establishing a new theory of the art of poetry, they saw as obstacles to their plan neoclassical dogmatism and rationalism; and because of his tremendous contemporary reputation, Samuel Johnson was to them the epitome of those qualities. Consequently, they and their cohorts attacked Johnson and his principles at every opportunity; furthermore, they even on occasion created the opportunity. As T. W. Raysor says of Coleridge in the preface to his edition of Coleridge's Shakespearean criticism, "... his general policy in defending Shakespeare against the critics of the eighteenth century was to admit absolutely nothing." Wordsworth, primarily concerned as he was with analyzing and defending his own creative processes, did not seek battle with Johnson so avidly as Coleridge did; but when he found himself on the battlefield, there was little doubt of his antagonism. Hazlitt and DeQuincey were second only to Coleridge in their unflagging zeal to disparage Johnson.

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particularly his criticism of Shakespeare and Milton. It is true that their violence was tempered somewhat by the light touch of Lamb and the solid respect paid Johnson by Scott in his editions of Dryden and Pope, but the dominant impression still is that in the Romantic period Johnson was generally repudiated as a literary critic.

For instance, George Saintsbury in *A History of English Criticism* says:

They [Coleridge and his companions] all show, as he does, though in varying degrees, the revolt or reaction from the hidebound failure of the baser kind of Neo-classic to appreciate -- the effort really to taste, to enjoy, and so to deliver that judgment which without enjoyment is always inadequate. And it would be unjust to regard them as merely the sports and waifs of an irresistibly advancing tide. There is something of this in them, -- the worst of the something being the uncritical scorn with which they sometimes regarded even the greatest of the departed or departing school -- the astonishing injustice of Coleridge himself to Gibbon, and Johnson, and the Queen Anne men; of many of them to Pope; of Hazlitt even to Dryden. But they were not only carried, they swam, -- swam strongly and steadily and skilfully for the land that was ahead. Their appreciation is not mere matter of fashion; it is genuine.3

And C. M. Bowra in *The Romantic Imagination* sees "the Romantics in general" agreeing with the views of William Blake rather than with those of Johnson.4 Even a Johnson specialist such as R. W. Chapman says:

In his lifetime he was never a very popular writer. Only some 4000 copies were sold of his *Journey*. Ever.

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Rasselas and The Rambler had no sensational sale. But his reputation was great, and for forty years after his death the possession, if not the perusal, of his Works [italics mine] was a common object of ambition. About 1825 he was dethroned by the Romantics, and his works have not since been edited as a whole.

What reputation Johnson possessed was a passive, not an active force.

That is one assumption, but it does not take into consideration all the material available about Johnson in the period. There is another body of criticism which has not yet been examined with such care as that of the avant-garde Romantics, the conscious rebels — that which appeared in such journals of the period as the Monthly Review, the British Critic, the Quarterly Review, the Edinburgh Review, the Gentleman's Magazine, and Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine. And it would seem profitable in any study of literary reputation to discover how the subject fared in those circles.

As soon as one begins to examine the evidence here, again he discovers an assumption about Johnson's reputation — the second one in the dichotomy of opinion which originally prompted this study. Interestingly enough, it contradicts the primary assumption. The substance of it is that the reviews and magazines of the Romantic period were survivors of the eighteenth century, trailing along in the wake of neoclassical traditionalists — Johnson, for instance.

J. J. Welker in an article called "The Position of the

5R. W. Chapman, Two Centuries of Johnsonian Scholarship (Glasgow: Jackson, Son, and Company, 1945), pp. 22-23.
Quarterlies on Some Classical Dogmas recognizes this attitude and objects to it:

Students of the Romantic Period often favor the quarterlies with their attention and commonly proceed upon certain assumptions concerning the attitude of the reviews toward Romanticism. The almost unanimous impression seems to be that the reviews were throughout the period inimical to Romantic principles and to Romantic writers. While it is acknowledged that the attitude of the reviewers was mixed, their criticism is agreed to be, by and large, a heritage of the eighteenth century.

It is not easy to find outright statements of these views, as most comments on the quarterlies are rather vague, and the meaning is elusive. Professor Hugh Walker, however, speaks with welcome precision:

"The lessons of the Edinburgh and Quarterly Review critics are more by way of warning than of example to us, while the critics of the other school are still rich in positive instruction.... The absurd mistakes of the old school were due to the fact that their standards were utterly incongruous with that to which they were applied."

More recently, Professor Newman Ivey White has described the periodical reviewing in much the same terms. He sees "in the best critics of the age... a down-at-heels literary traditionalism inherited from eighteenth-century critical practice."

In the course of his article, Welker examines the attitudes of the quarterlies toward the questions of classical rules, the imitation of models, and the careful revision of one's writings; and he discovers that the Quarterly and the Edinburgh at any rate were no servile followers of eighteenth-century neoclassicism. His results are an indication that this second assumption about Johnson's reputation in the Romantic period would bear a closer examination.

It is, therefore, the purpose of this study to determine Johnson's position as a literary critic in the journals

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6 *Studies in Philology, XXXVII (July, 1940), 542-3.*
of the Romantic period. Since to hold completely to either one of the two assumptions which have been advanced would mean necessarily an over-simplification of the picture, it is to be expected that the truth of the matter lies somewhere between the two extremes — that Johnson was neither repudiated entirely by the periodicals as a result of the antagonistic views of the major critics nor accepted unquestioningly by them merely because he was commonly considered the standard-bearer of traditional neoclassicism.

Then, of course, the very practical problem of how to limit the study presents itself. First, there is the matter of time. In several instances already the term the Romantic period has been used, but actually it is unsatisfactory as a definite limitation. After all, the reaction against neoclassical criticism was apparent long before the day of Coleridge and Wordsworth and The Preface to the Lyrical Ballads. Addison had maintained that genius is the basis of all art and so heralded the Romantic exaggeration of the importance of the individual; Young had vehemently attacked imitation of earlier classics and as vehemently defended original composition, reliance upon oneself; Burke had presented his views of the sublime which were to lead to the Romantic intoxication with infinity; and Johnson himself had repudiated the unities of time and place, and incidentally the neoclassical idea of literal delusion on the part of the audience, thus unknowingly anticipating the breaking down of other sacred rules and looking forward to Coleridge's theory of the "willing suspension
of disbelief." And it would be equally impossible to determine precisely when the Romantic period ended. A natural consequence of these difficulties is the arbitrary choice of the conventional dates of 1800 and 1832 as the temporal limitations of the study.

Secondly, there is the obvious limitation of the material about Johnson to that pertaining to his reputation as a critic. Naturally there was reference after reference to him as a lexicographer (his Dictionary was still the standard one), as a man (his eccentric personal habits fascinated the Romantics, much given to "numbering the streaks of the tulip"), as a man of letters in his own right (his prose style particularly was widely discussed), and as a moralist (Rasselas and the Rambler essays were greatly admired). However, since these references are valuable only indirectly, only in so far as they indicate that Johnson was in the public eye, they are excluded from the present study.

And finally there is the limitation of the periodicals investigated to sixteen of the most representative ones of the time. They are representative in the sense that some are quarterly, some monthly, and some weekly publications; in the sense that some are conservative and others liberal in religion and politics and literature; in the sense that some follow the traditional pattern of the magazine, others that of the review, and still others that of the journal of belles-lettres. For convenience in discussing them here, the classifications set up by Walter Graham in his English Literary
Periodicals have been used: the early magazines, represented by the Gentleman's Magazine and the Scots Magazine; the early reviews, represented by the Monthly Review and the British Critic; the reviews with a strong political bias, represented by the Edinburgh Review, the Quarterly Review, and the Westminster Review; the later magazines, represented by Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, the London Magazine, and Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country; and the weekly journals of belles-lettres, represented by the Hunt brain-children (the Examiner, the Indicator, the Liberal, the Literary Examiner, and the Companion) and the Literary Gazette.

At this point, it should be noted that no absolute division can be made between the major critics of the period and the contributors to the journals, for the very simple reason that on occasion the major critics were contributors to the journals. Hazlitt particularly was and DeQuincey too; Leigh Hunt was himself the editor of many journalistic efforts; and Sir Walter Scott was a moving force first in the Edinburgh and then in the Quarterly. However, for the most part, the material in the journals was supplied by a body of anonymous authors, and it was this fact which made the journals peculiarly important in their time. As Arthur Elliott in the Cambridge History of English Literature puts it:

The system of anonymous reviewing in periodicals under the guidance and control of responsible editors, themselves men of strong individuality, soon led to the

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7Walter Graham, English Literary Periodicals (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1930).
review acquiring a distinct personality of its own. By ninety-nine out of every hundred readers, the criticism expressed would be accepted as that of the review — of the Edinburgh or the Quarterly — and they would enquire no further. Among regular contributors, as, of course, with the editor, the feeling prevailed that articles in the review represented something more than the opinion, at the moment, of the individual writer. They were intended, in some sort, to give expression to the views of able and intelligent men who, generally speaking, had the same outlook on public affairs. Naturally, some contributors would gravitate toward Jeffrey and the Edinburgh, whilst others would turn to Gifford and the Quarterly. Without the practice of anonymity, combined with responsible and vigorous editorship, a lasting corporate personality could not have been acquired; and the chief reviews, though they would still have fulfilled a useful purpose, could not have become influential organs of public opinion.

Because the reading public of the period accepted the views expressed in the journals as the views not just of individual authors but of the journals themselves, no great attention has been directed in this study to the identification of authorship; when one of the major critics is known to be the author of a review, naturally that fact is noted, for his influence might be felt in the general editorial policy, but otherwise the practice followed here is the practice of the contemporary reader — an acceptance of the journal as an entity.

Just what sort of attitude the various journals developed toward Johnson's criticism during the years from 1800 to 1832 remains, of course, to be seen, but the development will be easier to follow against a background of facts concerning the founding of them and, in the case of those conceived before 1800, their progress previous to that date. Again,

Walter Graham's *English Literary Periodicals* is a convenient source of information.

Of the two eighteenth-century magazines included here, the *Gentleman's* of course was the older, having been founded in 1731 by Edward Cave. Its purpose had been to reprint the best from all serials and half-sheets of the day, and beyond this there was also a miscellany of popular material. Among this last, one recalls, were Samuel Johnson's Parliamentary debates. By 1752 most of the essays from other sources had been discontinued, and the magazine became a publication of original material with a "Review of Books" section. It was the original essays which theoretically distinguished the magazine as a type from the review, composed primarily of accounts of current books. The editors during the Romantic period were John Nichols (to 1826) and John Bowyer Nichols.9

The *Scots Magazine*, founded in 1758 and modelled after the *Gentleman's*, had as its primary purpose the presentation to Scotch readers of an impartial view of affairs in Europe. Its literary material was included matter-of-factly as a part of the general nature of the magazine. Among its contributors could be found Edward Young, James Beattie, Boswell, and later John Leyden, Hugh Murray, and Hector Macneil.

Of the two eighteenth-century reviews included here, the *Monthly* was the older, dating from 1742. It was begun as

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9Except where otherwise noted, Graham's information has been used for all the journals.
a collection of abstracts, and the first number had five of them in its eighty pages. This plan was followed until 1783, when, at the suggestion of Samuel Babcock, the review began to "direct readers to works of most merit." By 1790, there was an effort made to review all publications of a month, and the format had changed to a dozen long articles followed by a "Monthly Catalogue." Throughout its life and particularly during the years from 1793 to 1824 it was characterized by a general air of high liberality; it was the Monthly reviewers, one recalls, whom Johnson designated as "Christians with as little Christianity as possible." One of its guiding spirits after 1793 was William Taylor of Norwich, whose philosophical criticism Hazlitt saw as influencing that of the later Edinburgh. Incidentally, for a year or two, before he became too much occupied with his own editorial duties, Francis Jeffrey was a contributor to the Monthly.10

The British Critic, founded in 1793, is called by Graham "an instrument of the Tory and High Church faction." Actually, its reviewers were supposed to defend the Crown and the Established Church against any attacks from any quarter of the opposition. The articles tended to be rather long, usually twelve appearing in some seventy-odd pages.

Then there are those reviews with a strong political bias, first among them chronologically being the Edinburgh. Originally it was not intended as a party organ; its founders

— Sydney Smith, Francis Jeffrey, Francis Horner, and Henry Brougham — merely desired a lighter tone, wit and fun, in journalism, but soon "witty whiggery" came to be the order of the day. There was no pretence at reviewing all books published during the month; selectivity was the word instead, and authors frequently gave their own views on a subject suggested by the book being reviewed. The list of those contributors included many distinguished names — Sir Walter Scott, Thomas Campbell, Hazlitt, T. R. Malthus, Francis Palgrave, Thomas Arnold, Macaulay, and Carlyle. But the moving spirit was Francis Jeffrey, who held the editorial post from 1802 to 1829. Though not all his reviewers sympathized with his opinions — strict party-line that they were — he put his stamp on the journal. In fact, it was his immoderate adherence to party views which led to the estrangement of many readers and, partially at least, to the establishment of the rival Quarterly.

Scott and Southey were among those contributors to the Edinburgh who eventually reacted against its political and literary policy and joined with the Cannings of the Administration and John Murray, the publisher, in founding the Quarterly Review in 1809. Although the Edinburgh and the Quarterly had much in common politically in the interests of the landed gentry, their rivalry led to a divergence in literary attitudes, the Quarterly taking a liberal tone to counteract the dogmatism of Jeffrey. Oddly enough, despite the liberal views, the Quarterly reviewers came to be known for their vituperative
style. Among them were John Wilson Croker, J. G. Lockhart, John Taylor Coleridge, William Gifford, and James Russell. Gifford held the editorial post from 1809 to 1825, J. T. Coleridge to 1826, and Lockhart for the rest of the period.

In 1824 James Mill founded the Westminster Review as a Benthamite organ and attacked the Edinburgh reviewers as political trimmers and the Quarterly ones as obstinate conservatives. His supporters were such people as Carlyle, Bulwer, Harriet and James Martineau, Mazzini, and W. J. Fox. The usual single number of the publication had ten long reviews and six to ten shorter critical notices — after the Monthly pattern, of course.

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, the first of the nineteenth-century crop of that kind, was begun because its founders saw the need of a Tory organ more pert and nimble than the Quarterly to oppose the Whig Edinburgh. Its editors, John Wilson (“Christopher North”), James Hogg, and Lockhart, though often consciously impudent and flippant, encouraged sound literary criticism from such men as Sir Walter Scott, Henry Mackenzie, and even Coleridge; and by 1831, Blackwood's was a modern magazine with original articles, fiction, and poetry.

The familiar criticism of this journal prompted the founding in 1820 of the rival London Magazine to serve the southern group of literati. John Scott, the editor until his unfortunate death in the notorious duel of 1821, began the magazine as a miscellany but devoted more than the usual amount of space to writers and books. DeQuincey, Lamb, and Hazlitt were
prominent among his essayists. When Taylor took over in 1821, the London began to decline, for he would not give his reviewers a free hand.

*Fraser's Magazine* figures very slightly in this study, since it was not begun until 1830. Founded by two bohemians, William Maginn and Hugh Fraser, it was an imitation of *Blackwood's* and frequently adopted the rebellious and outrageous tone of its model. But it too encouraged front-rank contributors, among them Thackeray and Ruskin.

Among the weekly journals of *belles-lettres* those of Leigh Hunt and his brother John are the most significant. The *Examiner*, however, is the only one of them providing this study with much material; founded in 1808 as a Saturday weekly with three sections -- the "Political Examiner," the "Theatrical Examiner," and the "Literary Examiner" -- it continued throughout the period. Although, until Keats and Shelley needed defending from the *Quarterly* group, literary criticism was almost ignored except for the theatrical section, still much of Shelley was first published there. The other journals were short-lived. The *Indicator* appeared on Thursdays for seventy-six weeks (1819-1821); the *Liberal*, in which Byron collaborated, was issued only four times, in 1822; the *Literary Examiner*, instigated by John Hunt with Leigh Hunt as an occasional contributor, lasted for twenty-six numbers (1823); and the *Companion*, a Wednesday weekly with Leigh Hunt as editor, survived for twenty-nine numbers (1828).
The Literary Gazette, the remaining weekly contributing to this study, was edited by William Jerdan from its beginning in 1817 until 1850. Usually in each issue there were two long reviews with copious extracts, shorter notices, poetry, letters, and gossip about books and authors. George Crabbe, Mary Russell Mitford, and Barry Cornwall were among those who wrote for it fairly regularly.

So much then for the sources of the material about Johnson and his literary criticism.

The plan of the study represents a compromise between a chronological approach and a treatment according to central issues of Johnson's literary criticism. In other words, the material in the three succeeding chapters has first been organized on the basis of Johnson's chief contributions to literary criticism -- his Shakespearean analyses, his Miltonic criticism, and the views expressed in the remaining Lives of the Poets; then within each of the chapters and sections of chapters, the arrangement of the references is chronological. Chapter Five has a two-fold purpose -- the presentation of general comments about Johnson as a critic which do not fall within the scope of the earlier sections, and a summary of the individual attitudes of various journals toward Johnson's criticism; here again the arrangement within sub-sections is chronological.
CHAPTER II
THE EDITOR AND CRITIC OF SHAKESPEARE

Of all the facets of Dr. Johnson's reputation as a literary critic in the Romantic period, the one most frequently discussed in the journals of the time was his position as an editor and critic of Shakespeare. That fact alone would warrant the choice of it as the point of departure of this study, but there are additional reasons for so beginning. For one thing, although Johnson had earlier made his mark as a man of letters with the Parliamentary debates, the Dictionary, Rasselas, and the Rambler and Idler essays, not to mention London and The Vanity of Human Wishes, his contemporary reputation as a literary critic was not established until the publication in 1765 of his edition of Shakespeare; the treatment here, then, parallels roughly the chronology of his criticism. And another reason for so beginning is one of expediency — the fact that, since many of the central issues of the literary criticism of the period arose in connection with opinions of Johnson as a Shakespearean critic, an early discussion of them means a minimum of repetition in the subsequent sections of the study.
i. The Function of Critics and Criticism

One preoccupation of the periodical reviewers which is revealed by an examination of the comments on Johnson was the qualifications of the editor and critic — with the intellectual, physical, and psychological equipment he should bring to his task. That was by no means a new preoccupation in criticism, of course. Plato had pointed out that the critic must not be simply one of the mob but a man possessed of knowledge of the original work, knowledge of the correctness of the copy of the work he was to criticize, and knowledge of the technical skills involved; and although Cicero in antiquity and Castelvetro in the Renaissance had defended the judgment of the mob, most of the critics from the classical period to the age of neoclassicism — Aristotle, Horace, Vida, Sidney, Jonson, and Dryden among them — had concurred in Plato's statement. Naturally, from time to time variations on the theme had been sounded and new notes introduced — for instance, the emphasis on appreciation of beauties which was to be found in the writings of Sidney, Temple, Dennis, and Addison. Thus it is not at all surprising to discover among the periodical reviewers an insistence on training or knowledge, on innate sensibility, and on imagination in the critic of literature.

The first notation on the subject of knowledge came in the form of a complaint voiced by a commentator on Shakespeare in the Gentleman's Magazine for July, 1804:

Almost every sentence in Shakspeare has had a comment on it; but, as criticism cannot be better employed than
in drawing forth the hidden beauties, and endeavouring
to clear the obscure passages, of this immortal author,
I will beg, Mr. Urban, that your correspondents will
favour me with their opinions on another passage from
the play of Hamlet, which I think by no means satisfac-
torily explained by Dr. Johnson; it is in the scene
between Hamlet and his mother, at the conclusion of
which Hamlet, begging of her not to disclose to the
king that his madness was not real but assumed, adds
ironically,

"No; in despight of sense and secrecy,
Unpeg the basket from the houses' top;
Let the birds fly, and, like the famous ape,
To try conclusions in the basket creep,
And break your own neck down."

Now, I will thank any of your correspondents for
the history of this famous ape.1

It was the business of the critic to be aware of the histori-
cal and literary and cultural context of the object of his
criticism; in other words, he should possess information neces-
sary to the clarification -- "the illustration" -- of difficult
passages, and Johnson did not possess it.2 Several months
later in the same department of the same magazine a similar
instance occurred; as explanation of Ophelia's line in Hamlet,

1LXXIV, 625.

2But Johnson agreed in principle, although his commenta-
tor did not so credit him. Once he said: "To judge rightly of
an author, we must transport ourselves to his time, and examine
what were the wants of his contemporaries, and what were his
means of supplying them. That which is easy at one time was
difficult at another" (Samuel Johnson, "Dryden," The Lives of
the Poets, 2 vols.; London: Oxford University Press, 1906, I,
299). And at another time he reiterated his faith in the his-
torical approach: "In order to make a true estimate of the
abilities and merit of a writer, it is always necessary to
examine the genius of his age, and the opinions of his contem-
poraries" (Arthur Murphy, ed., The Works of Samuel Johnson,
"Some say the owl is a baker's daughter," a correspondent offered a long and involved popular fairy tale about a young girl who had been transformed into an owl. He concluded:

That Shakspeare has frequent allusions to such popular stories is a fact well known; and I think, Sir, you will agree with me, that the old lady who told me this story has illustrated Shakspeare better than the learned Doctor.3

Three years later the author of an article entitled "The Authenticity of Rowley's Poems Defended" cited as part of his defense the "summer snow" metaphor; this metaphor, he maintained, was well derived from "the showers of artificial snow, not unfrequently seen in the midsummer games of our ancestors," and was related to the "midsummer madness" of Twelfth Night, which Dr. Johnson had failed to interpret properly, because, presumably, he was not aware of those games.4 In August, 1819, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine printed a letter in which a subscriber called the editor's attention to a volume entitled "Remarks, critical and illustrative, on the Text and Notes of the last edition of Shakspeare":

It is an amusing book, and Hitson belabours the commentators in a way that does one's heart good to behold. He does not confine himself, however, to the dull ones of the herd, but kicks and cuffs Steevens and Johnson with great spirit and alacrity. Hitson was a bit of good stuff, though he never eat [sic] animal food, and often knocks the Doctor about the ring with the gloves, in a manner highly creditable to a sparrer of his weight and inches. As the book is not a common one, a few specimens of it may amuse your readers....

Hamlet. - P. 258.

"Ham. Then came each actor on his ass.

3LXXIV (November, 1804), 1003-4.

4GM, LXXX (September, 1810), 213.
"This, says Dr. Johnson, seems to be a line of an old ballad. He has, therefore, caused it to be printed in the Italic character. But there appears no other ground for the supposition, than the good doctor's opinion, which is not sufficient in these matters to authorise an alteration in the type."

However, it must not be assumed that all the evidence was on one side. Although from time to time Johnson stood accused and convicted of lacking specific pieces of scholarly and popular information, he was commended almost frequently for his logical and perspicacious understanding in general.

For example, when in January, 1807, the British Critic reviewed *The Plays of William Shakspeare, in Twenty-one Volumes, with the Corrections and Illustrations of various Commentators; to which are added, Notes, by Samuel Johnson and George Steevens*, which had been revised in this fifth edition by Isaac Reed,

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5EEM, V (August, 1819), 576-7. Coleridge also, it will be remembered, pointed out on occasion -- though in not such a good-natured fashion as Mr. Ritson had done -- what he considered deficiencies in Johnson's criticism. One such instance was this comment on *Cymbeline*: "What, however, is meant by "our bloods no more obey the heavens?" -- Dr. Johnson's assertion that "bloods" signify "countenances," is, I think, mistaken both in the thought conveyed (for it was never a popular belief that the stars governed men's countenances,) and in the usage, which requires an antithesis of the blood, -- or the temperament of the four humours, choler, melancholy, phlegm, and the red globules, or the sanguine portion, which was supposed not to be in our own power, but, to be dependent on the influences of the heavenly bodies, -- and the countenances which are in our power really, though from flattery we bring them into a no less apparent dependence on the sovereign, than the former are in actual dependence on the constellations" (CSC, I, 116)." And Hazlitt, too, charged Johnson with ignorance of the reputation of the writers of the age of Elizabeth and, furthermore, with false judgment resulting from that ignorance (A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover, eds., *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, 12 vols.; London: J. M. Dent and Company, 1902-4, V, 179).
the reviewer quoted approvingly Reed's preface, in which the editor gave Johnson credit for "illustrating Shakspeare by the study of writers of his own time" and thereby eliminating all sorts of misinterpretations. Another tribute to Johnson's critical abilities came in the form of "Remarks on Mr. Pye's Comments on Shakspeare" in the October, 1807, issue of the Gentleman's Magazine; the commentator admitted that although he had derived "no inconsiderable degree of pleasure" from reading in Pye such discriminating and tactful observations as "Johnson's explanation is absurd in the extreme," he himself held a different opinion. Still further evidence that Johnson was numbered among the reliable editors of Shakespeare was the following comment of the reviewer of Octavius Gilchrist's An Examination of the Charges maintained by Messrs. Malone, Chalmers, and others, of Ben Jonson, &c. towards Shakspeare:

He begins with tracing this scandal against honest Ben to its source. It first was insinuated by Rowe, who soon retracted his assertions. In the notes and prefaces of Theobald, Warburton, and Johnson, no such accusation is to be found.

A somewhat later critic in the Examiner, referring approvingly to Johnson's criticism of King John, went on to say that this, like all of Johnson's criticism, consisted of "assertions very well founded, but careless of all proof" -- a piece

6BC, Series I, XXIX, 33.
7LXXVII, 926-7.
8G bulletin, LXXIX (January, 1809), 53.
9June 3, 1810, p. 344.
of acute analysis which might very well explain why later editors and commentators felt constrained to correct Johnson's interpretations of certain isolated passages. Much later, still another reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* revealed Johnson's reputation -- quite indirectly, it is true -- by noting in surprise that Johnson, who was usually quite logical, had failed to comment on what the reviewer considered an instance of illogic in *Henry VIII.*

Thus it is quite apparent that one scholarly qualification demanded of the critic by the early nineteenth century periodical reviewers was understanding of a work of art based on a sound knowledge of its historical and cultural background.

The second scholarly requirement which concerned these reviewers, one so closely allied to the first that it might almost be considered a part of it, was a knowledge of linguistics. Early in 1808 Francis Douce brought out his *Illustrations of Shakespeare, and of antient Manners,* which received considerable attention in literary circles not only because of the general interest in Shakespeare himself, but also because in his preface Douce systematically gave his evaluation of earlier editors. The first article to appear on the work was in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of April, 1808; the commentator first outlined the editorial innovations of Douce:

He farther thinks that every word or passage introduced into Shakspeare's text as substitutes for the original

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10*XC (December, 1824), 584.*
should be marked by Italicks, and assigned to the Editor to whom they belong, with their reasons for the alteration.

And he concluded with a quotation from the preface itself in which Douce respectfully but firmly denied Johnson any standing as a textual editor.\(^{11}\) Apparently the reviewer accepted Douce's judgment and felt no necessity of offering his readers any of Douce's proofs. The *British Critic* three months later chose the same passages as sufficiently interesting to warrant being quoted, and followed the *Gentleman's* in not elaborating on the matter.\(^{12}\) But when the *Monthly Review* came on the scene in October with a lengthy article full of copious examples, it was more explicit. Douce had devoted part of his preface to the problem of the ultimate value in criticism of supplying what the reviewer called "collateral information," had reached the decision that linguistic information shed light on obscure passages, and had listed Steevens, Malone, Tyrwhitt, and Mason as contributors to a fuller understanding of Shakespeare's genius. To all that, the reviewer agreed and then added:

> Mr. Douce himself will certainly hold a distinguished station hereafter in this catalogue, from which he has excluded Dr. Johnson, on account of his want of skill in obsolete customs and expressions.\(^{13}\)

In the long series of passages quoted from the *Illustrations*, Douce was shown to have singled out Johnson for giving correct

\(^{11}\)LXXVIII (April, 1808), 329.

\(^{12}\)XXXII (July, 1808), 16.

\(^{13}\)LVII (October, 1808), 114.
readings of words and again for failing to explain adequately. 14

So much, then, for Douce and his critics. They still respected Johnson's judgment, but they recognized his deficiency in linguistic knowledge.

Another publication which gave occasion for comment on this topic was Colman's edition in 1814 of old English plays, loosely and grandiosely entitled Ancient Drama. Again the Monthly Review was in the forefront:

Above all, let the critic bear in mind, with a view not to justify bold and unnecessary deviations from printed texts, but to the free exercise of a sound judgment, the words in which Johnson so admirably sums up the requisites of the editorial office:

"The duty of a collator is dull, yet, like other tedious tasks, is very necessary; but an amendatory critic would ill discharge his duty, without qualities very different from dulness. In perusing a corrupted piece, he must have before him all possibilities of meaning, with all possibilities of expression. Such must be his comprehension of thought, and such his copiousness of language. Out of many readings possible, he must be able to select that which best suits with the state, opinions, and modes of language prevailing in every age, and with his author's particular cast of thought and turn of expression. Such must be his knowledge, and such his taste. Conjectural criticism demands more than humanity possesses, and he that exercises it with most praise, has frequent need of indulgence."

We should apologize to the present editor [Colman] for thus referring him to the established rules of criticism, could we discover any mark of his having duly prepared himself for the task which he has undertaken by consulting the experience of Shakspeare's commentators. 15

Obviously, Johnson's theory bore the stamp of approval; whether his practice was equally favored the reviewer forebore mentioning.

14 Ibid., 118-121 passim.

15 LXXV (November, 1814), 230.
Essentially the same attitude as that emerging from the comments on Douce was indicated in a few brief notices appearing between 1817 and 1824. After that date there was silence on the point, the issue presumably being considered settled.

As the interest in Samuel Johnson's scholarly attributes gradually declined, another aspect of his qualifications as a critic became increasingly prominent in the discussions of him by the various journals — his imaginative equipment. It is a commonplace among students of the period to point out the tremendous emphasis which the Romantic poets placed on the imagination, an emphasis which certainly represented a marked departure from the attitude of the neoclassical poets, and an emphasis which was paralleled in criticism. And one reason for that difference in attitude lay in the changing definition of the word, which had early found a place in English critical terminology. In the seventeenth century Thomas Hobbes was largely responsible for establishing the dualism of judgment and fancy for which Bacon had laid the groundwork, a dualism in which judgment referred to the capacity to recognize


17 For the sake of completeness, it is interesting to note that DeQuincey, writing the article on Pope for the 1838 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, said of him as a Shakespearean editor: "For the year 1720, he is no otherwise below Theobald, Hanmer, Capell, Warburton, or even Johnson, than as they are successively below each other, and all of them as to accuracy below Steevens, as he again was below Malone and Read" (Collected Writings, IV, 267).
differences in like objects or ideas, and fancy referred to the capacity to recognize similarities in unlike objects or ideas. Then Addison virtually equated fancy and imagination and limited them almost entirely to visual impressions and metaphors. It was not until the time of Coleridge and his associates that the imagination acquired generally the characteristics of a creative force. This résumé is, of course, an over-simplification of the problem, but as Francis Gallaway puts it:

The minute distinctions that have been made between imagination and fancy, and the imagination and memory, as well as the subtle investigations of the exact function performed by the imagination in the mental make-up of mankind, fall under the purview of the historian of classical psychology. For the historian of critical opinion two aspects of the imagination are important -- the imagination as a free creative faculty molding a picture of the world which does not correspond with reality, and the imagination as an associative power opposed to judgment, which is a power of distinction.  

As a preliminary move in understanding what the Romantic reviewers thought of Johnson's ability to criticize imaginative creations, it might be well to establish just what Johnson's position was in this dichotomy. In an article entitled "Johnson's Distrust of the Imagination" Raymond D. Havens makes a detailed study of all the evidence available in Johnson's own writings and concludes that on the whole Johnson belonged among the adherents of the second variety of imagination cited by Gallaway. However, Havens does point out that in addition to the expected visual functions of the imagination, Johnson

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recognized another — the power of evoking images of what one has never seen through a process of combining and altering what one knows, has seen, or has seen pictures of. And furthermore, Havens maintains, it was in the recognition of this additional function that Johnson's wariness of the imagination lay, for he feared it would result in the subjection of the understanding to the imagination and in an emphasis on novelty rather than "the stability of truth."¹⁹

Against this background, then, appeared the evaluations of Johnson.

The publication of Francis Douce's Illustrations of Shakespeare was the occasion in this connection too for a comment by the Monthly Review. Of Douce's preface it was said:

... A warm eulogy is pronounced not only on his [Johnson's] masterly preface, but also on his "sound and tasteful characters of the plays of Shakespeare."

To the former part of this praise no man can refuse to subscribe; but that the latter part should ever have been uttered by any attentive student and zealous admirer of Shakespeare, is to us a matter of astonishment.²⁰

The reviewer proceeded to substantiate his judgment by pointing out that, although Douce had been quite right in castigating Johnson's "frigid praise" of The Winter's Tale, he had not gone far enough. Other plays too had been treated unjustly —

Henry VIII and Henry V, for example. Then the Monthly continued.

Johnson has thought it proper to pass exaggerated compliments on several of the inferior plays; but among

¹⁹"Johnson's Distrust of the Imagination," ELH, X (September, 1943), 243-8 passim.

²⁰LVII (October, 1808), 114.
those which have commanded the most absolute applause of all the rest of mankind, it may be questioned whether he has done justice to more than Macbeth, Othello, and the two parts of Henry IV. His intimate knowledge of the human heart qualified him completely to appreciate Shakspeare's merit in portraying character and passion; but the wit, the fancy, the romantic flights, and the high excellence, of the inspired bard, appear to have escaped his phlegmatic censor; the general acquiescence in whose opinions on this subject is, perhaps, one of the strongest examples of the influence of great names.\textsuperscript{21}

Several conflicting attitudes were there implied which are extremely significant in the present study and consequently worthy of further examination. In the first place, it was apparent that Douce approved not only Johnson's preface to Shakespeare but also his interpretations of the plays, and in the second place, it was equally apparent that his views were shared by a large part of the public, as "the general acquiescence in [Johnson's] opinions" would witness. On the other hand, although the Monthly reviewer concurred in Douce's praise of Johnson's preface and granted the critic an "intimate knowledge of the human heart" which enabled him to "appreciate Shakspeare's merit in portraying character and passion," he denied his having composed "tasteful characters of the plays" and denied him also the ability to grasp "the wit, the fancy, the romantic flights, and the high excellence of Shakspeare." From the juxtaposition of the two denials it becomes obvious that if taste and imagination were not synonymous in the mind of the reviewer, they were very closely allied. It was also quite possible that Douce meant by "tasteful characters of the

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, 115.
plays" what the reviewer meant by the appreciation of "character and passion," and that consequently they were differing in terminology rather than principle. Still other implications can be found in the last sentence of the passage -- a recognition of the vitality of Johnson's authority, a belief that those who acquiesced in his opinions did so out of sheer respect for him rather than real conviction, and a regret that the authority existed. And furthermore, the whole tone of the passage implied a willingness to refute that authority.

The Edinburgh Review, with Francis Jeffrey in the role of reviewer, employed a different approach in its notice of Douce's volume. The entire account was a scathing attack in Jeffrey's best style on the pedants and "purblind annotators" who used Shakespeare's reputation as an excuse for foisting off on the public "that miserable erudition, which would otherwise have gone to enrich the Gentleman's Magazine, or to add weight to some county history." In the unusually long article (twenty pages) Jeffrey painstakingly and generously pointed out specific examples of Douce's inanities, among them one concerning Johnson and Steevens. Douce had expressed surprise that a note on the harmful effect of music had come from Steevens, "whose ordinary speech was melody," and not from Johnson, "disorganized as he was for the enjoyment of music," had decided that Steevens was simply defending "his great colleague" there. It is significant to note that Jeffrey made no comment

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22xII (July, 1808), 449-50.
at all on Johnson's lack of appreciation for music, apparently seeing no issue there, but confined his censure to Douce's comment on Steevens' motive.23

The question of Johnson's ear for music, his innate sensibility, was to arise again and again in the period, not only in conjunction with his Shakespearean criticism but also in relation to his later treatment of Collins and Gray and Thomson. Perhaps the best known of the discussions of it and its bearing on his critical judgment is that of Hazlitt's preface to his Characters of Shakespear's Plays, published in 1817. After announcing his consciously rebellious preference of Schlegel's "testimony... in behalf of Shakespear" to Johnson's, Hazlitt proceeded to develop his reasons for that choice:

An overstrained enthusiasm is more pardonable with respect to Shakespear than the want of it; for our admiration cannot easily surpass his genius. We have a high respect of Dr. Johnson's character and understanding, mixed with something like personal attachment; but he was neither a poet nor a judge of poetry. He might in one sense be a judge of poetry as it falls within the limits and rules of prose, but not as it is poetry. Least of all was he qualified to be a judge of Shakespear, who "alone is high fantastical"...

We do not say that a man to be a critic must necessarily be a poet; but to be a good critic, he ought not to be a bad poet. Such poetry as a man deliberately writes, such, and such only will he like. Dr. Johnson's preface to the edition of Shakespear looks like a laborious attempt to bury the characteristic merits of his author under a load of cumbrous phraseology, and to weigh his excellences and defects in equal scales, stuffed full of "swelling figures and sonorous epithets." Nor could it well be otherwise; Dr. Johnson's general powers of reasoning overlaid his critical susceptibility

23 Ibid., 455-6.
... He was a man of strong common sense and practical wisdom, rather than of genius or feeling. He retained the regular, habitual impressions of actual objects, but he could not follow the rapid flights of fancy, or the strong movements of passion.24

To begin with, here was found very definitely again the conception of criticism as enthusiastic praise of beauties in an author, a conception which is closely associated with the criticism of the Romantic poets as a whole. As a concomitant of that conception came the rejection of Johnson as even an adequate critic of Shakespeare; his insistence on a balanced view put him outside the circle of the sensitive ones. And finally, here the attitude of the earlier Monthly reviewer of Douce was carried a step further: Johnson was denied not only the ability to "follow the rapid flights of fancy" but the power of comprehending "strong movements of passion" as well.

Johnson, however, was not undefended. The two journals which noted the attack on his imaginative faculty felt that Hazlitt's position was not well taken. The Literary Gazette, with what was unusual courage for it (ordinarily it disclaimed any interest in either side of a controversy), printed a reply to Hazlitt's argument:

Sir, In the recent perusal of a work entitled, "Characters of Shakspere's Plays," I was astonished at the absurdity of a position, which, were it supported by reason and practical experience, would reduce Shakspere to an unadmired author, and Milton to a dead letter; and the more, at the circumstance of this position originating with one who evidently proclaims himself, in limine, an enthusiastic admirer of

24 Works, I, 174-5.
the great poet of nature. The passage I allude to is as follows:—"Such poetry as a man deliberately writes, such and such only will he like." (I do not remark on the cacophony of thrice-repeated such.) — This assertion is made by the author for the purpose of establishing how unqualified was Dr. Johnson for a judge of Shakespeare, or generally of any "poetry unless it fall within the limits and the rules of prose." How then does Mr. Hazlitt become the judge and the admirer of Shakespeare?... If he be incapable of such performances; if he can only enjoy, without emulating Shakespeare, by what right does he assume that office, which his own unqualified rule denies to others?25

The correspondent went on to cite examples of critics — Blackwell on Homer, Wharton on Virgil, and Addison on Milton — who had "felt, admired, and recorded the beauties of those whose works they reviewed, and... never 'deliberately written such poetry' themselves...."26 Then he concluded:

Ironically enough, Hazlitt there stood accused of that very same professional jealousy which supposedly motivated Johnson's attitude to Shakespeare.

The other comment on Hazlitt's attitude to Johnson appeared a month later in the British Critic:

The substance of the book is a farrago of disjointed remarks, tacked together by very copious quotations; a preface is added, consisting of a short extract from Pope's Preface, a long one from M. Schlegel's work, a few common-place objections to the want of feeling, to the "cumbersome phraseology and rhetorical declamation" of Dr. Johnson, and thus is ushered into the world 350

25I (December 20, 1817), 391-2.
26Ibid.
The reviewer felt it scarcely worthwhile to devote more attention to the volume. It is to be noted, however, that the objection to Johnson's "want of feeling" was commonplace; evidently, Hazlitt was not alone in his views.

Blackwood's in September, 1821, published an article entitled "Why are Poets indifferent Critics?" in which there was an echo of one of Hazlitt's points. The reviewer said:

If we come a little nearer our own time, and examine the literary opinions of Gray, Johnson, and Horace Walpole, we shall find the same narrowness in their critical decisions.... The Doctor would discourage quotations from the works of a man, of whose admirable expressions, numbers have become idiomatic in the language, by saying that he who brings a passage from Shakespeare as a specimen of his powers, is like the pedant, who brought a brick as a sample of the building.... The poet of "London" was not likely to relish Tasso, Guarini, or Allan Ramsay. Nor was he a very fair judge of Ossian, or even Dr. Percy's ballads.

The poetry Johnson could not write he could not appreciate properly, for he had not sufficient imagination to project himself into a situation he had not actually experienced.

Throughout the following years, brief notices and incidental remarks indicated that opinion on the subject was fairly evenly divided. The *Monthly Review* in an August, 1819, article on Drake's *Shakspeare and his Times* echoed its earlier stand thus:

... we also advise the omission of Pope's and Johnson's prefaces, which are properly preserved among their

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27 Series 2, IX (January, 1817), 16.
28 X, 184.
respective works, but do not display that higher point of view, as to Shakespeare, which modern criticism has attained. 

Exactly what "that higher point of view" consisted of, however, the commentator unobligingly neglected to outline. Then a month later the *Literary Gazette* quoted approvingly Johnson's description of Shakespeare as having "exhausted worlds, and then imagined new."  But later a reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* intimated vaguely that Johnson lacked imagination in his criticism of *Henry IV*. 

When Samuel Singer's edition of *The Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare with a Life of the Poet* by Charles Symmons was published in 1826, the *Literary Gazette* devoted considerable space to it, recounting among other items of interest the "unmeasured and rather uncurteous terms" in which Dr. Symmons referred to previous biographers and critics of his subject. Symmons did condescend to call Johnson one of the "superior men... who have enlisted themselves in the cause of Shakespeare" but later added:

Johnson was of a detracting and derogating spirit. He looked at mediocrity with kindness; but of proud superiority he was impatient; and he always seemed pleased to bring down the man of the ethereal soul to the mortal of mere clay.... In the pre-eminence of intellect, when it was immediately in his view, there was something which excited his spleen; and he exulted in its debasement.

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29 LXXIX, 367-8.
30 September 11, 1819, p. 590.
31 XCIV (July, 1824), 37 passim.
32 Quoted in the *Literary Gazette*, May 13, 1826, 236-7.
Of this harsh treatment the Literary Gazette discreetly said:

Upon these criticisms we do not venture to offer our judgment.33

Consequently, although it is not possible to be certain that the Gazette concurred in Symmons's stand, neither is it difficult to see that there was no great sympathy for Johnson in the reviewer or surely he would have called Symmons's language something more than "uncourteous." There is still another possibility -- a feeling on the part of the reviewer that Symmons had enough supporters to make taking issue with him unwise.

Similarly, when the Garrick letters came out in 1831 and included one in which a Doctor Brown wrote to the effect that Johnson "was as improper a critic for that great poet as any that have yet appeared. No feeling or pathos about him!" the Gazette merely noted with no indication again of its own view:

We find several other of Garrick's correspondents expressing similar opinions upon Johnson's work.34

The author of an essay "On the Character of Hamlet" in Blackwood's showed the pendulum swinging back again from Symmons's extreme:

The character of Polonius, though far less abstruse and profound than that of Hamlet, has been far more grossly misrepresented — at least on the stage — where he is commonly exposed to the gods as a mere doodle, a drivelling caricature of methodical, prying, garrulous, bleary-eyed, avaricious dotage; in fact, as all that Hamlet, between real and counterfeit madness,

33 Ibid.
34 August 13, 1831, p. 533.
describes him.... The Danish Chamberlain is indeed superannuated -- a venerable ruin, haunted with the spectre of his departed abilities. But he has been already sufficiently vindicated by Dr. Johnson, who was seldom wrong, when acute observation of life and manners, unaided by extensive imagination, could set him right. 35

Although he, like the earlier reviewer in the Monthly, would not grant Johnson imagination, he did acknowledge his perception of human motives.

The final statement in this particular area of the investigation was included in an article on Greek drama in the August, 1831, number of Blackwood's. The essayist there took issue with those -- and apparently there were many -- who found Johnson wanting a sympathetic appreciation of Shakespeare.

It is the fashion, we perceive, to sneer at Samuel Johnson. But he had a soul that saw into Shakspear's. How else could he have written these words?

"Each change of many-colour'd life he drew --
Exhausted worlds -- and then imagined new.
Existence saw him spurn her bounded reign;
And panting Time toil'd after him in vain!" 36

Word by word, then, and with a gusto so exaggerated that his tongue-in-cheek tone soon emerged, he analyzed the lines. At the end he admitted to having indulged in "philosophical frivolities" but justified them on the basis of need for relief from "all the solemn stuff that has been written" about the "Swan of Avon." 37 A plea for sanity, this might be

35BEM, XXIV (November, 1828), 589.

36Ibid., XXX (August, 1831), 352-3. The last line is the one, it might be recalled, which DeQuincey wrote disparagingly of in his essay on Richter in the London Magazine of December, 1821, p. 267.

37Ibid.
called; at any rate, it is on this rather humorous note that the discussion of the intellectual and emotional attributes of the critic must end.

It has been seen that the periodical reviewers lent their support to the traditional view that a critic must possess training or knowledge, must be physically capable of responding to sensory impressions, and must have an active imagination. On the whole, they granted Johnson -- in spite of linguistic deficiencies and lapses in scholarly care -- competence in the area of knowledge and training; they leaned toward the view that he was physically handicapped in sensuous perception; and they denied him imagination in its creative sense while allowing him judgment and understanding.

It was in the emphasis on these elements that the new reviewers differed from the tradition. At the beginning of the period they were much concerned with the correctness or incorrectness of Johnson's background material and his linguistic information as well as with the comprehensiveness of his spirit; as the period advanced, their interest in the intellectual attainments decreased as their interest in the soul became more intense. And that shift in the relative importance of a critic's characteristics was, of course, a reflection of a changing view of the function of criticism itself -- a view which included the critic's seeing the author against the background of his own time, but which insisted more and more on "drawing forth the hidden beauties" of the work.
ii. The Materials of Literature

Naturally, if the function of criticism was under dispute, it followed that the question of what comprised the materials of literature, the proper subject matter of the poet, would also be contested. Again, that quarrel was not a new one, and down through the ages it had resolved itself essentially into an opposition between the general and the particular — between those who considered themselves followers of the classical principle of universality and those who upheld the poetical effectiveness of dealing in specific details. And just as it is a commonplace to look upon the Romantics as the great proponents of the imagination as a creative force, so it is customary to view them as the defenders of particularity against the attacks of such neoclassicists as Samuel Johnson. C. M. Bowra in The Romantic Imagination expresses that opinion:

[Blake] has none of Samuel Johnson's respect for the "grandeur of generality," and would disagree violently with him when he says, "nothing can please many and please long, but just representations of general nature." Blake thought quite otherwise:

"To Generalize is to be an Idiot."

Blake believed this because he lived in the imagination. He knew that nothing had full significance for him unless it appeared in a particular form. And with this the Romantics in general agreed.38

Similarly, George Saintsbury identifies Johnson with "false classicism" when in reference to Aristotle on the materials of

38 Pp. 10-11.
poetry he says:

And yet the "corruption" which dogs "the best" followed on this [the dictum that poetry does not necessarily deal with the actual but with the possible] also. For it was on this dictum that false classicism based its doctrine that the poet ought not to count the streaks of the tulip -- that he must conventionalize and be general.39

As a matter of fact, Johnson was much closer to Aristotle and genuine classicism on this point than he was credited with being, and both he and Aristotle recognized the importance -- indeed, the necessity -- of particularizing as a basis for generalizing. That literature was essentially the imitation or representation or re-creation of actual human life and thought they both maintained; and they agreed that it should be the imitation of the thoughts, actions, and feelings of a general and universal humanity. However, that general character must be kept faithful to the accidental requirements of whatever human category the individual fitted into, i.e. have "propriety."40

The most famous, of course, of Johnson's many treatments of the fundamental object of a poet's attention was the Rasselas one in which Imlac was made to say:

The business of a poet is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades of the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits


40 For Aristotle's views in this connection see S. H. Butcher's translation of the Poetics, as reprinted in J. H. Smith and E. W. Perks, eds., The Great Critics (New York: Norton, 1932), Chapters IX and XV.
of nature such prominent and striking features as recall the original to every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness. As Scott Elledge points out in a recent study, there is, in the phrase "such prominent and striking features as recall the original to every mind," a recognition of the value of particularity but a recognition which is almost lost in the conflicting emphasis on the negative statement that the poet "does not number the streaks of the tulip." Certainly Hazlitt and Coleridge saw nothing but the negative element.

Undoubtedly the most perceptive exegesis of the attitude of Johnson — among others — toward the general is James Sutherland's in A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry. In reference to Wordsworth's complaint that "between the publication of Paradise Lost and The Seasons there had been scarcely a single new image of external nature," nor an image already familiar which would indicate that 'the eye of the Poet had been steadily fixed upon his object,' he says:

It would not be difficult to disprove this rash statement from the works of Pope alone; but surely Wordsworth is refusing to allow for what is primarily a question, not of observation but of method, of what the poet does with the materials which his observation supplies. The idea that the eighteenth-century poet was

41 Works, ed. cit., II, 11-12.

42 "The Background and Development in English Criticism of the Theories of Generality and Particularity," SELA, LXXII (March, 1947), 168. This article also points out very convincingly the relationship between Johnson's attitude toward the general in literature and his attitude toward the current theories of the sublime, which will be discussed somewhat later.
less observant than the average Boy Scout of the twentieth century is one that will not bear examination: if he did not fill his poems with sharply individualized descriptions of nature it must have been — it was — because he considered that as a poet something more difficult and more profitable was expected of him. From his own varied experience he distilled those elements which appeared to him to be common to all individual instances. His general, in fact, was the essence of many particulars; he would have considered that mere observation of particular instances was the lowest form of mental life, and he would not have been far wrong. No doubt some second-rate poets and some inferior painters wrote or painted without having familiarized themselves with their object, but that may happen in any age. At all events, such slovenliness received no support from Johnson or Reynolds.

Whether the writers for the periodicals grasped completely the complexity of Johnson's position remains to be seen.

The first reference to Johnson relevant to this problem appeared in the Monthly's notice of Hints for a Young Princess:

Comparing the periodical essays of Addison and Johnson, the author makes this sound and able criticism: "It is less from Johnson than from Addison that we derive the interesting lesson of life and manners; that we learn to trace the exact delineations of character, and to catch the vivid hues, and varied tints of nature. It is true, that every sentence of the more recent moralist is an aphorism, every paragraph a chain of maxims for guiding the understanding and guarding the heart. But when Johnson describes characters, he rather exhibits vice and virtue in the abstract, than real existing human beings: while Addison presents you with actual men and women; real life figures, compounded of the faults and the excellencies, the wisdom and the weaknesses, the follies and the virtues of humanity."


\[44\] XLVII (June, 1805), 186.
Although the primary concern there was not Johnson the critic but Johnson the writer of moral essays, the passage quoted was significant as an indication that in the minds of both the reviewer and his author Johnson was identified as an advocate of the abstract or the general apparently in opposition to and excluding any relationship to reality or particularity.

Hazlitt in his essay "On the Ideal," published in The Champion early in 1815, carried that identification into the field of criticism. He wrote:

Dr. Johnson, proceeding on the same theoretical principles as his friend Sir Joshua, affirms, that the excellence of Shakespeare's characters consists in their generality. We grant in one sense it does; but we will add that it consists in their particularity also [italics mine]. Are the admirable descriptions of the kings of Thrace and Inde in Chaucer's Knight's Tale, less poetical or historical, or ideal, because they are distinguished by traits as characteristic as they are striking; -- in their lineaments, their persons, their armour, their other attributes, the one black and broad, the other tall, and fair, and freckled, with yellow crisped locks that glittered in the sun.45

45 Works, XI, 226. This was only a prelude to the much more damning treatment Hazlitt afforded his predecessor in the preface to Characters of Shakespeare's Plays. After declaring with the very dogmatism he himself deplored in Johnson that "Such poetry as a man deliberately writes, such, and such only will he like," and disposing of that issue, he continued with the charge that might well have been expected: "The shifting shapes of fancy, the rainbow hues of things, made no impression on him; he seized only the permanent and tangible. He had no idea of natural objects but "such as he could measure with a two-foot rule, or tell upon ten fingers": he judged of human nature in the same way, by mood and figure: he saw only the definite, the positive, and the practical, the average forms of things, not their striking differences -- their classes, not their degrees.... Thus he says of Shakespeare's characters, in contradiction to what Pope had observed, and to what every one else feels, that each character is a species, instead of being an individual. He in fact found the general species or didactic form in Shakespeare's characters, which was all he
It was quite obvious that Hazlitt saw himself as the conscious rebel introducing a new idea into Shakespearean criticism.

sought or cared for; he did not find the individual traits, or the dramatic distinctions which Shakespear has engrafted on this general nature, because he felt no interest in them. Shakespear's bold and happy flights of imagination were equally thrown away upon our author. He was not only without any particular fineness of organic sensibility, alive to all the "mighty world of ear and eye," which is necessary to the painter or musician, but without that intenseness of passion, which, seeking to exaggerate whatever excites the feelings of pleasure or power in the mind, and moulding the impressions of natural objects according to the impulses of imagination, produces a genius and a taste for poetry" (Works, I, 175-6).

Johnson was well on his way to being typed as a man incapable of numbering the streaks of the tulip and consequently uninterested in them. It is ironical that the typing was being instigated by one who prided himself on his ability to perceive minute discriminations of character.

Later in that part of the Table-Talk dealing with Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses Hazlitt casually ascribed to Johnson -- or perhaps it was Burke, he said -- "a spurious metaphysical notion that art was to be preferred to nature, and learning to genius" (Works, VI, 130). In just what sense Hazlitt was using the terms art and nature is not certain, but probably he was referring to the selectivity of art in opposition to the unselected reality of nature. In his life of Milton, Johnson specifically denied a conflict between art and nature, but his terms had not Hazlitt's meanings. For him, nature was synonymous with truth, and art was the means whereby the truth was to be presented. First he said: "In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new." Then again in the same vein he declared: "If by nature is meant, what is commonly called nature by the critics, 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" (Lives, I, 115-6). Hazlitt was careless, either of his source or of his interpretation of that source.
Granted the fact that his stronger emphasis on specific details was new, still Johnson and his contemporaries had not been entirely unaware of them.

At virtually the same time that Hazlitt was formulating and publicizing his critical approach, there was appearing evidence that Johnson was not without followers. A commentator in *Scots Magazine* noted on Paisly's "Essay on Original Composition":

> There must be nothing local in the nature of his the author's subject; nothing which depends upon temporary circumstances; nothing which is not universally interesting; for, as Dr. Johnson has well remarked, "nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature." 46

This was a matter-of-fact acceptance of the idea that an author's lasting fame depended upon his picturing the universal detail. The probability that an author in doing so would follow in well-trod paths was also accepted by a reviewer for the *Gentleman's*:

> Johnson, an authority of distinguished weight, speaks the same sentiments [as La Bruyere] -- "A writer," says he, "in this age of the world can scarcely expect to produce novelty; if a just or a beautiful thought chance to escape him, he will most probably find it has in some shape been announced to the world long before; if, therefore, his sentiment be of genuine and real worth, he must expect it to have been pre-occupied, and by this test he may judge of its lustre or importance." 47

Then another reviewer for the *Gentleman's* remarked in connection

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46 *LXXVII* (September, 1816), 659. Cf. an approving quotation of Johnson's "Occasional poetry must often content itself with occasional praise" in the *Literary Gazette*, November 13, 1819, p. 735.

47 *LXXXVIII* (June, 1818), 602.
with a performance of the _Eunuchus_ of Terence:

The characters of Terence are characters of human nature, not of any particular age or costume; and what Dr. Johnson says of those of our own Shakespeare, may, in a great degree, be applied to his. "They are not modified by the customs of particular places unpractised by the rest of the world, by the peculiarities of studies or professions which can operate but upon small numbers or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions; they are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply, and observation will always find."48

Not only did the reviewer approve the principle of generality as the subject of art but he approved the form which Johnson's praise of Shakespeare took.

Another reflection of Johnson's emphasis on the end result rather than on a part -- and a concurrence in that emphasis by the critic -- appeared in the _Monthly:

"Shakespeare's real power," says Johnson in his admirable preface, "is not shown by the splendour of particular passages, but by the progress of the fable and the tenor of the dialogue; and he that tries to recommend him by select quotations will succeed like the pedant in Hierocles, who, when he offered his house to sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen."49

Still later the name of Johnson was used by the _Quarterly_ reviewer as support of his definitely neoclassical opinion of "Miss Edgeworth's Comic Dramas":

"Here we have little of the character of genuine comedy. Such conversation may, doubtless, be expected from coachmen and footmen, but does not deserve to be recorded by the pen of Miss Edgeworth. "Nothing," says Johnson, "can please long and please many, but just delineations of general nature."

48 LXXXVI (December, 1816), 516-7.

49 LXXV (November, 1814), 227. Cf. similar comments in _Gii, LXXXVI_ (June, 1816), 583, and _Gii, VI_ (May, 1820), 446.
Grammatical inaccuracies paint neither character nor passion; they are proofs merely of ignorance and want of education. They give no pleasure to the reader, and therefore a writer of taste should reject them; they are a work of no difficulty, and therefore a writer of talents should despise them. 50

This was the usual eighteenth-century distrust of what was merely odd or eccentric.

The next reference to the matter was in a Scots Magazine discussion of critical differences in English poetry. The essayist said:

Yet, in opposition to this opinion [that Shakespeare's characters are individuals], Dr. Johnson is known to have maintained, that the characters of Shakespeare differ from those of all other poets, in being not individuals but species, and that this is the reason why there is so much discussion and so much contrariety of opinion respecting the particular manner in which even his most striking characters ought to be represented. 51

Even though the critic was avowedly impartial in his presentation of the differences, it was quite clear that he classified Johnson as a proponent of generality who could not recognize individual characteristics.

Beginning with the Monthly Review's comment on Hazlitt's Characters of Shakespeare's Plays -- a comment, incidentally, which it took the Monthly three years to get around to making -- the tone of Johnsonian criticism on this point definitely changed to one of condemnation. Firmly the reviewer maintained:

The subject is introduced by a preface including severe but just observations on Dr. Johnson's well-known critique, which contains the glaringly erroneous

50 XVII (April, 1817), 103.
51 III (July, 1818), 6.
assertion that, "in Shakspeare, each character is a species instead of being an individual." This proposition is convincingly refuted; and it must be acknowledged that in general Dr. Johnson's ideas were rather distinct than correct, and have often more vivacity than truth of colouring.92

It is a temptation to point out that for all the proof he offered of that final statement, the reviewer's own ideas might be considered to have "more vivacity than truth of colouring." But at any rate, Johnson was there unquestionably cast as the villain of the piece.

Another echo of Higlitt, if not evidence of his direct influence, appeared in an observation made by the author of an essay "On the Life and Writings of Johnson" in the London Magazine:

He took little delight in those appearances either of nature or art, for which the poet ought to have the eye of the painter.53

Again, Johnson was found insensible to minute distinctions of impression.

Much more explicit and detailed was the treatment of him incidental to an analysis of French comedy in the Quarterly for July, 1823. The essayist began:

Dr. Johnson, in his preface to Shakspeare, has said, "that in the writing of other poets, a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakspeare, it is commonly a species." This opinion, which Dr. Johnson delivered as a eulogium, would have been the most derogatory that could have been devised to the merit of our great bard, had it been true; but fortunately for those who admire his plays, it is

52XCII (May, 1820), 53.
53VIII (August, 1823), 185.
altogether unfounded; and in order to give it either sense or justice, it must be reversed. The prodigious excellence of Shakspeare, that which raises him above every other poet, is that all his characters are individuals. They do, indeed, belong to some class, and so do all men; but, besides the generic attributes which mark that class, each has his own peculiar qualities, which distinguish him from every other individual appertaining to it.  

After citing as examples of his point the characters of Macbeth and Richard, who were both in the class of ambitious men but who differed remarkably in individual peculiarities, he continued:

Individuals in real life neither do nor can represent classes; and it would be a strange imitation which would give to the copy properties which the original could not possess. It is juster praise to say that in the writings of some poets, a character is too often a species, whereas in those of Shakspeare it is always an individual.... The poetry which does but describe, may, indeed, occupy itself upon genera and species; because the entire world, with all its modes and beings, may be pictured by description; yet even descriptive poetry receives additional charms from the precision with which individual objects are painted. But the poetry which acts, cannot for a single instant act otherwise than men do.  

Once more, Johnson was seen as not having accepted on any ground whatsoever the use of particular details in character depiction.

Although the tone was somewhat softer and more respectful, essentially the same attitude was expressed by the reviewer of Milman's Anne Boleyn, who observed:

Dr. Johnson would, probably, have approved both the conception and execution of this character [Caraffa]; at least, he praises Shakspeare's characters, upon the ground of their being species, not individuals.

54XXIX, 416.

55Ibid., 417-8.
Johnson could not, from some strange peculiarity in the constitution of his great mind, perceive the individual traits induced upon the general nature presented by the poet. All the persons of the play of Henry the Eighth are, in a remarkable degree, individuals: this constitutes its greatest charm; though, most likely, it was the thing that occasioned the contemptuous criticism thereon pronounced by our great critic. "The meek sorrows," says he, "and virtuous distress of Katherine have furnished some scenes, which may be justly numbered among the greatest efforts of tragedy. But the genius of Shakspeare comes in and goes out with Katherine. Every other part may be easily written." We cannot subscribe to this verdict. 56

Again, in justice to Johnson, let it be recalled that he viewed the particular as the basis, the source of the general; it was not that he failed to see the minute at all but that he considered it not the end of art, but a means to that end. Furthermore, it might be worth noting that a later portion of this same review echoes very distinctly views earlier expressed by Hazlitt — a definite indication of his influence. 57

Finally, then, so far as Johnson's position in relation to the general and the particular is concerned, two conclusions are clear. In the first place, by far the majority of those expressing views saw themselves as defenders of the particular against what they considered Johnson's disparagement of it or attack on it. In the second place, those who defended him

56 CR, XXXV (March, 1827), 358.

57 Cf. "In our opinion, the genius of Shakspeare is equally exhibited in Cardinal Wolsey; nor is it hidden in Buckingham, notwithstanding the brevity of the part. The speeches of the Duke, as he is led out to execution, are among the most touching in Shakspeare" (Ibid.). "For instance, the scene of Buckingham led to execution is one of the most affecting and natural in Shakspeare, and one to which there is hardly an approach in any other author" (Hazlitt, Works, I, 303-4).
showed little perception of the fundamental complexity of his attitude but accepted him pretty much on the same uncomplicated level that the majority rejected him on. It would be difficult to prove, of course, any direct and widespread influence wielded by Hazlitt on these results, but it is at least worth pointing out that it was after the publication of his *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* that opinion solidified.

It is scarcely possible to consider this aspect of the study complete, however, without an investigation of the distinctions implied by Johnson among the sublime, the pathetic, and the beautiful as subjects for poetry, for as Scott Elledge points out, Johnson's notions about the general and the particular were clearly related to the doctrine of the sublime. It is also necessary to observe whether the Romantic periodicals recognized those distinctions.

J. H. Hagstrum has recently analyzed Johnson's concept of the beautiful, the pathetic, and the sublime, pointing out that Pope, Shakespeare, and Milton were to him the respective exemplars of the three aesthetic areas. In this connection, it will be remembered, of course, that Longinus originated the cult of the sublime with its emphasis on those forms of external nature possessing vastness and awe-inspiring grandeur

58"Generality and Particularity," *PMLA*, LXII, 158.

and its resulting lack of emphasis on faithfulness in detail. During the eighteenth century in England, interest in the sublime became increasingly evident; and one indication of it, at least, was Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, in which was set up in contrast to the first category a second one of the smooth, the gentle, the minute, and the pleasant. So far as the third category is concerned, Hagstrum believes, Johnson used the pathetic in two ways:

... as a part of the philosophical distinction between external nature (whose grander aspects can evoke sublimity) and human life (which includes the passions) and as an aesthetic contrast of mood and feeling between that which arouses terror and awe (the sublime) and that which arouses sympathy and tenderness (the pathetic).

The pathetic for him connoted simplicity and naturalness of human emotions, whereas the sublime was not a term he associated with human passions.

That fact would, perhaps, explain the statement he once made at which the literal-minded Stockdale expressed great amazement in his *Lectures on English Poets*:

"When Goldsmith's Deserted Village came out, I wrote, and published some observations on that elegant poem. In those observations, when my judgement was not so mature as, I should hope, it is, now; I mentioned the sublimity of Shakespeare. Dr. Johnson, in conversing with me, after he had read those remarks, told me, that sublimity was so far from being a

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characteristick of Shakespeare, that he could not recollect one sublime passage in that great poet. Here, certainly, either his memory, or his judgment failed him."

In other words, Stockdale reproved Johnson for taking the very position — in an exaggerated form, it is true — which he himself accepted almost immediately afterward:

"Shakespeare, however, is not, in a distinguishing manner, inspired with the sublime; nor was it so requisite for him as for the stupendous, the boundless range of Milton."

The Monthly recognized this inconsistency:

Thus unsatisfactory and superficial are all the critical remarks which have yet occurred to us. We cannot deny that Mr. S. possesses a flow of well sounding words, but this is only the dress of thought, and the body and soul of criticism are wanting.

An understanding of Johnson's separation of the three elements would also lend clarity and consistency to a comment of his about Two Gentlemen of Verona quoted approvingly in the Gentleman's Magazine:

Dr. Johnson also supports...the opinion that no one of his plays more abounds with aphoristic sentences; and "few have more lines and passages which, singly considered, are eminently beautiful."

In other words, although it would be difficult to isolate the sublime in single passages, the very minuteness of detail upon which the beautiful depended permitted such isolated consideration.

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62 As quoted in MR, LIX (June, 1809), 141-2.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., p. 142.
65 LXXXVIII (October, 1818), 338.
It is not surprising that, since Johnson was concerned with the pathetic in Shakespeare, there were more references to his understanding or lack of understanding of the dramatist's passionate qualities than to the problems of the sublime or the beautiful in him. For instance, in the Gentleman's of April, 1804, an "illustrator" of Macbeth gave his interpretation of the "She should have died hereafter" speech as a broken one with hereafter substituted on the spur of the moment for the guilt-revealing before which would have been natural; and he acknowledged his indebtedness to Johnson for that interpretation. In January, 1807, the Monthly Review quoted from Gifford's Edition of Massinger's Plays this critique of the editor on Steeven's criticism:

"... Nor can I well conceive why, after the rational and unforced explanation of Johnson, the worthless reveries of Theobald, Tollet, &c. were admitted." Shortly afterwards the theatrical critic for the Examiner recommended Johnson as one source of an actor's understanding of his role:

"... [It is] more advisable to read a note of Dr. Johnson than one of George Steevens, and the Essay on the character of Hamlet of Professor Richardson than the verbal criticism on the Plays of Edward Malone. The business of an actor is with the passions rather than with the syllables of his character."

On the other hand, however, there was the British Critic's approbation of Pye's Comments on the Commentators:

66 LXXIV, 317.
67 LII, 9.
68 June 26, 1818, p. 415.
That both Johnson and Steevens should so strangely have wanted feeling of nature, as not to comprehend this speech and answer [the "Hang on my neck forever" scene between Imogene and Posthumous], is indeed wonderful. Mr. Pye has very happily expressed his interpretation, and proved his feeling of what may be called, the playfulness of secure affection.69

Although there was no general association of Johnson's name with distinctions between tragic and comic characters, the Examiner referred five times to his statement concerning Aguecheek that mere fatuity could not be comical; in general, it approved.70

Then there was a note on Douce's Illustrations of Shakspeare in the Monthly Review:

Will Mr. Douce forgive us for hinting to him, that the few specimens of his taste given in this work furnish no exception to the common observation on the want of poetic feeling ascribed to verbal critics? We hope that he is the last of the "zealous admirers of Shakspeare," who will question the beauty of an epithet that even Dr. Johnson has condescended to admire, -- "deserts idle."71

The reviewer ostensibly included Johnson in this instance among those who possessed "poetic feeling," though he granted that the critic was ordinarily difficult to please. The reviewer also tartly upheld Johnson against Douce apropos of a phrase in Henry IV, saying:

Mr. Douce observes, "Dr. Johnson thought the image of war capering poetical; yet it is not easy to conceive how grim-visag'd war could caper in a lady's chamber."

69XXXI (March, 1808), 245-6.


71LVII (October, 1808), 123.
Where is the difficulty?\textsuperscript{72}

Also there was the matter of the interpretation of the character of Hamlet — a point which one might have expected to see widely discussed in the periodicals for two reasons at least. For one thing, the interest in Hamlet's character — his madness, particularly — was not confined to literary circles. Medical men became concerned, and one, for instance, a Dr. Good, used as his reason for tracing the development of Hamlet's melancholy Johnson's statement that at the end of the play Hamlet is an instrument rather than the agent of the action.\textsuperscript{73} For another reason, Coleridge differed vociferously from Johnson particularly on the reading of the scene in which Hamlet spares the king because he finds him at prayer and, therefore, safe from damnation. He repudiated Johnson's belief that Hamlet's action — or failure to act, rather — indicated a desire for complete revenge, not merely death, but eternal damnation; he preferred to paint him as the procrastinator who saw his duty to his father but could not force himself to carry it out.\textsuperscript{74} And he publicized those views in

\textsuperscript{72}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{73}\textit{Ly, IX (April, 1824), 379.}

\textsuperscript{74}The first recording of that difference of opinion was a brief note on the speech in his Shakespeare commentary: "Dr. Johnson's mistaking the marks of reluctance and procrastination for impetuous, horror-striking fiendishness! Of such importance is it to understand the germ of a character" (CSC, I, 32-3). Later he took that idea and expanded it for delivery as part of his twelfth lecture in the 1811-1812 series: "This conduct, and this sentiment, Dr. Johnson has pronounced to be so atrocious and horrible, as to be unfit to be put into the mouth.
his 1811-1812 lectures. Despite the prevalence of speculation about Hamlet and despite Coleridge's vigorous insistence that Johnson was wrong, the issue did not appear in the periodicals. Johnson continued to be looked to for illuminating comments on Shakespeare's characters.

Although Coleridge thoroughly distrusted Johnson's understanding of Hamlet's motives -- "the germ" of his character -- he absorbed into Lecture I of the 1813-1814 series the eighteenth-century commentator's note on Polonius, whom he of a human being. The fact, however, is that Dr. Johnson did not understand the character of Hamlet, and censured accordingly; the determination to allow the guilty King to escape at such a moment is only part of the indecision and irresoluteness of the hero. Hamlet seizes hold of a pretext for not acting, when he might have acted so instantly and effectually; therefore, he again deflects the revenge he was bound to seek, and declares his determination to accomplish it at some time:

- When he is drunk, asleep, or in his rage,
- Or in the incestuous pleasures of his bed.

This allow me to impress upon you most emphatically, was merely the excuse Hamlet made to himself for not taking advantage of this particular and favorable moment for doing justice upon his guilty uncle, at the urgent instance of the spirit of his father" (Ibid., II, 195-6).

On this point, as Raysor explains, Johnson was really closer to historical reality than Coleridge; Shakespeare's contemporaries would not have been necessarily horrified at such a motive as Johnson attributed to Hamlet, but they would have taken it literally and seriously (Ibid., I, 33).

Coleridge entered the lists against Dr. Johnson also on the score of the character of Richard II: "In prosperity he is insolent and presumptuous, and in adversity, if we are to believe Dr. Johnson, he is humane and pious. I cannot admit the latter epithet, because I perceive the utmost consistency of character in Richard: what he was at first, he is at the last, excepting as far as he yields to circumstances: what he shewed himself at the commencement of the play, he shews himself at the end of it. Dr. Johnson assigns to him rather the virtue of a confessor than that of a king." Again, Raysor points out, Coleridge borrowed from Johnson the words that Richard's "passive fortitude" was "the virtue of a confessor rather than a king" but twisted them in adverse criticism (Ibid., II, 186-7). Furthermore, it should be noted that Johnson used the figure of the confessor to convey passivity rather than piousness and that Coleridge himself added that last quality.
considered in need of rescue from the misrepresentations of actors particularly:

Shakespeare never intended to represent him as a buffoon. It was natural that Hamlet, a young man of genius and fire, detesting formality, and disliking Polonius for political reasons, as imagining that he had assisted his uncle in his usurpation, should express himself satirically; but Hamlet's words should not be taken as Shakespeare's conception of him. In Polonius a certain induration of character arose from long habits of business; but take his advice to Laertes, the reverency of his memory by Ophelia, and we shall find that he was a statesman of business, though somewhat past his faculties. One particular feature which belonged to his character was, that his recollections of past life were of wisdom, and shewed a knowledge of human nature, whilst what immediately passed before, and escaped from him, was emblematical of weakness. 75

And let it be remembered that the writer for Blackwood's cited above on the character of Hamlet credited Johnson, not Coleridge, with the reclamation of Polonius from the "drivelling caricature of methodical, prying, garrulous, blar-eyed, avaricious dotage," a reclamation resulting from his "acute observation of life and manners." 76

There was another matter on which Coleridge differed from Johnson -- the "melancholy catastrophe" of Lear. Johnson had defended the eighteenth-century practice of providing a happy ending for the tragedy, and Coleridge objected. Unfortunately, a complete record of Coleridge's lecture does not exist, the only information about it appearing in Henry

75 CSC, II, 266-7. Coleridge's not giving Johnson credit for the characterization may quite logically be explained by the fact that this was a lecture and not a manuscript prepared for publication.

76 XXIV (November, 1828), 589.
Crabb Robinson's Diary. That similar positions were held by Hazlitt and Lamb is well known, and the expressions of those views have survived, the general tenor of them being that Johnson was usually indisposed to "sympathise...with works of high-wrought passion." Again the issue was not

77 CSC, II, 219-20.

78 In the Characters of Shakespeare's Plays Hazlitt wrote: "Yet a happy ending has been contrived for this play, which is approved of by Dr. Johnson and condemned by Schlegel. A better authority [Lamb] than either, on any subject in which poetry and feeling are concerned [italics mine], has given it in favour of Shakspear, in some remarks on the acting of Lear, with which we shall conclude this account: "...But the play is beyond all art, as the tamperings with it shew: it is too hard and stony: it must have love-scenes, and a happy ending....A happy ending--as if the living martyrdom that Lear had gone through,--the flaying of his feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him" (Works, I, 270-1). In a later dwelling on the same theme Hazlitt accounted in much the same fashion for Johnson's opinion that Shakespeare's comedies were better than his tragedies: "The labour which the Doctor thought it cost Shakespear to write his tragedies, only shewed the labour which it cost the critic in reading them, that is, his general indisposition to sympathise heartily and spontaneously with works of high-wrought passion or imagination. There is not in any part of this author's writings the slightest trace of his having ever been "smit with the love of sacred song," except some passages in Pope" (Ibid., VIII, 30-31). Yet oddly enough, after maintaining that Johnson was no authority on matters of feeling, he immediately proceeded to say: "His habitually morbid temperament and saturnine turn of thought required that the string should rather be relaxed than tightened, that the weight upon the mind should rather be taken off than have any thing added to it. There was a sluggish moroseness about his moral constitution that refused to be roused to any keen agony of thought" (Ibid.). Either he did not perceive or he refused to admit that he perceived the relationship between the two comments -- that it was precisely because Johnson was so susceptible to emotion that he restrained his reaction to it. On another occasion Hazlitt granted that Johnson had been moved by Lear, for he wrote that he was disappointed in Kean's performance of the role, having hoped to witness "something of the same effect produced upon an audience that Garrick is reported
made much of by the periodical reviewers, only the London expressing an opinion on it. In July, 1824, one of its commentators remarked of Johnson's reaction to Lear:

"There is, perhaps, no play," says Dr. Johnson, "which keeps the attention so strongly fixed—which so much agitates our passions, and interests our curiosity. The artful involutions of distinct interests, the striking oppositions of contrary characters, the sudden changes of fortune, the quick succession of events, fill the mind with a continual tumult of indignation, pity, and hope. There is no scene which does not contribute to the aggravation of the distress, or conduct of the action, and scarce a line which does not conduce to the progress of the scene." Such was the opinion of the great critic, yet in the same paper he speaks as it were in censure of the Spectator, for declaring that Tate had deprived the tragedy of half its beauty, by his alteration in giving Cordelia success and happiness. The literary leviathan then observes: "In the present case the public has decided. Cordelia from the time of Tate has always retired with victory and felicity..."79

Thus was recognized Johnson's sensitive appreciation of the passionate elements in Lear, but his defense of the happy ending was interpreted as a contradiction of that response rather than the result of it. The commentator, like Hazlitt, did not perceive that it was precisely because Johnson was so susceptible to emotion that he desired surcease from it.

In the same passage there was revealed another interesting facet of the literary criticism of the day. When Johnson said, "In this case the public has decided," he evidenced the same faith in the judgment of the people -- a judgment enduring
to have done in the part, which made Dr. Johnson resolve never to see him repeat it--the impression was so terrific and overwhelming" (Ibid., VIII, 443).

79x (July, 1824), 79.
for a long period of time -- as was inherent in "Nothing can please many and please long..." To that attitude the London responded:

Mr. Steevens has observed with every appearance of truth, that "Dr. Johnson should rather have said that the managers of the theatres-royal have decided, and the public has been obliged to acquiesce in their decision. The altered play has the upper gallery on its side; the original drama was patronized by Addison..." 80

For the liberal London this distrust of "the upper gallery" and acceptance of Addison were rather aristocratic notes. Or, perhaps it was simply that the London was glad to accept an authority when he chanced to reinforce its point of view.

Still another phase of the literary battle between Johnson on the one hand and Coleridge and Hazlitt on the other on the question of the pathos of Shakespeare was that of the language of Shakespeare. And again it was a battle in which most often the reviewers remained on the sidelines. In the light of Johnson's conception of the pathetic as dealing in simple and natural emotions, it is not surprising that on the grounds of propriety he objected to puns and conceits and freedom in speech generally in a serious context. 81 Coleridge in his views actually used the same argument of appropriateness or inappropriateness which was the basis of Johnson's

80Ibid.

81Cf. his treatment of the Metaphysical poets, which will be discussed later.
beliefs; but their conclusions were different in that Johnson felt any pun represented artificiality in a pathetic situation.

On one occasion, Coleridge seized on one of Johnson's objections and hastily interpreted it as a denial that Shakespeare possessed pathos at all; the reporter of his lecture recorded: "Of the assertion of Dr. Johnson, that the writings of Shakespeare were deficient in pathos, and that he only put our senses into complete peacefulness, Mr. Coleridge held this much preferable to that degree of excitement which was the object of the German drama" (CSC, II, 284). However, although Coleridge overlooked few opportunities to disparage Johnson, he was not himself whole-heartedly in favor of conceits. In Lecture VI of the series on Shakespeare and Milton, he said: "I have been induced to offer these remarks, in order to obviate an objection often made against Shakespeare on the ground of the multitude of his conceits. I do not pretend to justify every conceit, and a vast number have been most unfairly imputed to him; for I am satisfied that many portions of scenes attributed to Shakespeare were never written by him. I admit, however, that even in those which bear the strongest characteristics of his mind, there are some conceits not strictly to be vindicated. The notion against which I declare war is, that whenever a conceit is met with it is unnatural. People who entertain this opinion forget, that had they lived in the age of Shakespeare, they would have deemed them natural" (STO, Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and Other English Poets, London, 1908, p. 72).

He pleaded primarily the historical argument there. Later, in Colier's report of the twelfth lecture in the 1811-1812 series, he enlarged on his attitude thus: "In order to decide this point, it is obviously necessary to consider the state of mind, and the degree of passion, of the person using this play upon words. Resort to this grace may, in some cases, deserve censure, not because it is a play upon words, but because it is a play upon words in a wrong place, and at a wrong time. What is right in one state of mind is wrong in another, and much more depends upon that, than upon the conceit (so to call it) itself. I feel the importance of these remarks strongly, because the greater part of the abuse, I might say filth, thrown out and heaped upon Shakespeare, has originated in want of consideration. Dr. Johnson asserts that Shakespeare loses the world for a toy, and can no more withstand a pun, or a play upon words, than his Antony could resist Cleopatra. Certain it is, that Shakespeare gained more admiration in his day, and long afterwards, by the use of speech in this way, than modern writers have acquired by the abandonment of the practice: the latter in adhering to, what they have been pleased to call, the rules of art, have sacrificed nature" (CSC, II, 186).
and Coleridge acknowledged the occasional naturalness of such a figure. This attitude of Coleridge was sounded again by Hazlitt in his *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, when he ascribed Johnson's failure to conceive a character to which "antithetical comparisons" were natural to an insipidity of spirit.83

After the seriousness of Coleridge and Hazlitt, the approach of *Blackwood's* to the question was refreshingly flip-pant — indeed, the reviewer referred to it only incidentally in conjunction with the quarrel between Wordsworth and Jeffrey. In this fashion was Wordsworth consoled:

Johnson has said that we cannot read many pages of Shakespeare, "without contempt and indignation;" and Hume says, that the same divine Poet cannot, for two

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83 He quoted Schlegel to this effect: "And yet Johnson has objected to Shakespeare, that his pathos is not always natural and free from affectation. There are, it is true, passages, though, comparatively speaking, very few, where his poetry exceeds the bounds of true dialogue, where a too soaring imagination, a too luxuriant wit, rendered the complete dramatic forgetfulness of himself impossible. With this exception, the censure originates only in a fanciless way of thinking, to which everything appears unnatural that does not suit its own tame insipidity. Hence, an idea has been formed of simple and natural pathos, which consists in exclamations destitute of imagery, and nowise elevated above every-day life. But energetical passions electrify the whole of the mental powers, and will, consequently, in highly favoured natures, express themselves in an ingenious and figurative manner. It has often been remarked, that indignation gives wit; and, as despair occasionally breaks out into laughter, it may sometimes also give vent to itself in antithetical comparisons" (*Works*, I, 173).

Contrary to what Raysor says -- that Coleridge did not use Schlegel's attack on Johnson in this connection -- this passage seems fairly definitely the source of the quotation from Coleridge just above; Schlegel's lectures on Shakespeare appeared in 1811, and Coleridge's indebtedness to them for his ninth lecture in this series is granted.
pages together, "preserve a reasonable propriety."
Now, neither Samuel Johnson nor David Hume were dunces. Let us therefore believe that neither is Mr. Francis Jeffrey a dunce,—and let Mr. Wordsworth be contented with sharing the fate of...Shakespeare.84

It was not necessarily that the critics were right; the essential point was that Shakespeare had survived critical derogations and Wordsworth might expect likewise to do so.

Now to recapitulate the position of the literary journals of the period on the debated issue of the proper materials of literature. Earlier it was pointed out that in the traditional dichotomy of the universal and the particular, which received renewed attention in this first third of the nineteenth century, generally the reviewers deplored what they considered Johnson's upholding of the abstract and vague aspects of nature -- both external and human -- and his overlooking the minute details of it. But when they came to his criticism of that specific portion of the subject matter of poetry designated for convenience as the pathetic, i.e., that dealing with human passions and motives, by far the majority of them recognized his competence. Even the planned attacks of Coleridge and Hazlitt on his views of Hamlet and Lear and the language of pathos failed to elicit support. Consciously or unconsciously, the periodical reviewers preferred his interpretations of Shakespearean character to those of the avant-garde rebels.

84II (October, 1817), 73.
iii. The Handling of the Materials

When the periodical reviewers came to the consideration of the dramatic techniques used by Shakespeare -- or any other playwright, for that matter -- in the handling of his materials, by far their primary concern was the neoclassical doctrine of the unities of action, time, and place. At first glance, this interest might appear rather surprising, for the issue was by no means a new one; it had had as long a history as the question of the general versus the particular, and furthermore, the essential attitude of rejecting the unities of time and place while accepting that of action had been arrived at well before the turn of the century. However, there were several factors which might help to account for the preoccupation: among those who looked upon themselves as the new liberals, the point was a good one to re-emphasize as evidence of their emancipation; among those who cherished an anti-continental bias, particularly an anti-French or anti-Italian one, the point was an apt means of indicating British superiority in matters of taste; and among those possessing a philosophical or psychological turn of mind -- Coleridge, for instance -- there were still ramifications of it to be explored.

It has been said that the essential attitude toward the unities was well established before the nineteenth century. Actually, Samuel Johnson's attack on the pseudo-classical unities of time and place in his Preface to Shakespeare in 1765
was simply the culmination of a long series of treatments of the problem by various critics. As Raysor points out in the very helpful preface to his edition of Coleridge's Shakespearean criticism, from the beginning of the Restoration there were protests from such men as Howard, Temple, and Farquhar, and as the eighteenth century advanced, the number of rebels increased, so that Johnson's preface was important "...not so much because of the newness or soundness of its arguments as because of Johnson's vigor and personal prestige. The great virtue of his preface is the fact that it makes the doctrine of literal delusion seem not merely mistaken, but rather ridiculous." And the personal prestige of the critic in addition to the general propensity of the age to relax rules and regulations regardless of what they pertained to resulted in widespread acceptance of the point of view there expressed.

At the beginning, it might be well to point out the position of Coleridge, for he was the one critic during the Romantic period who refused to accept Johnson's treatment of the unities. He realized, of course, that Johnson had denied the validity of the unities of time and place, but he felt that the supporting argument had not been psychologically correct -- that Johnson had repudiated not only literal delusion in the theatre but the possibility of any illusion as well. Coleridge himself maintained that the purpose of a play was

85I, xviii-xix.
not to bring the audience to a logical belief in the action portrayed but to induce in them an imaginative belief, a "willing illusion" which represented a state of mind halfway between delusion and complete disbelief. 86

There is no doubt that Johnson, in his repudiation of the conception of literal delusion, pounded the point home so hard that it was easy for Coleridge to see him as denying entirely the possibility of any illusion. However, the famous passage in the Preface exhibited a positive as well as a negative aspect. Johnson there maintained:

The truth is, that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and the players are only players. They came 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 a place; but the different actions that complete a story may be 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?...The drama exhibits successive imitations of successive actions; and why may not the second imitation represent an action that happened years after the first, if it be so connected with it that nothing but time can be supposed to intervene? 87

That is to say, the audience was constantly aware that what was taking place on the stage was intended to produce, not a sense of reality, but a sense of probability. And that probability recognized by Johnson was in the tradition of Aristotelian and classical illusion.

It will be interesting then to discover the opinions of

86 Csc, I, 128-130.
87 Works, II, 333.
the periodicals on this point. Even a cursory examination of their comments reveals one obvious fact — that almost invariably a mention of the unities meant a mention of Johnson also. A closer examination, in addition, reveals another fact — that although his name was associated with the question of the unities, he was not always correctly interpreted, nor was he always even correctly quoted.

Early in the period the British Critic reviewed two dramatic poems by an anonymous author, Leonora and Ethe and Aidallo; after commenting briefly and quoting profusely, the journal concluded:

Subjoined to both, are very ingenious remarks; the justice of which we cannot discuss within the limits necessarily assigned to this article. We will only intimate that, in our opinion, the question respecting the unities of time and place, has been long ago settled by Johnson; and the author (whom we rather suspect to be a lady) should recollect that those unities were rendered necessary by the construction of the Greek drama, and its chorus, and might not otherwise have been thought of.

Johnson thus was credited with the dethroning of the unities. Incidentally, it might be noted that the critic here used the historical approach in explaining the origin of them.

The next reference to the problem appeared in the Monthly Review of July, 1806, in conjunction with Wild's Drama Adapted to the English Stage. In the material introductory to the adaptations, Wild had set forth his conception of "the perfect model of construction," which involved the strictest adherence to all three of the unities. The reviewer pointed

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88 Series 1, XXI (February, 1803), 192.
out that the pseudo-classicist's influence on his contemporaries would probably not be very great; Wild himself, he said, apparently recognized that the restriction resulted in dullness, for

...he tells us that "the contrivance of breaking the representation into acts at once widely extends the scope of the Dramatic art, and gives all the freedom to a judicious author that he can possibly wish: "but then each act, he observes, "is absolutely incapable of admitting any change of scene, any break in the action, any imaginary lapse of time:—Our dramatic muses in this respect are perfect Bedlamites."

The reviewer then proceeded to involve Johnson as an authority for Wild:

In this opinion, he has the sanction of Dr. Johnson; who, in his life of Rowe, remarks that "in the construction of his dramas there is not much art: he is not a nice observer of the unities: he extends time and varies place as his convenience requires. To vary the place is not, in my opinion, any violation of Nature, if the change is made between the acts; for it is no less easy for the spectator to suppose himself at Athens in the second act, than at Thebes in the first; but to change the scene, as is done by Rowe, in the middle of the act, is to add more acts to the play, since an act is so much of the business as is transacted without interruption."

Now it is quite true that Johnson made that statement, but he did not make it in isolation from the rest of his criticism nor did he intend it as a necessarily adverse comment on the number of acts found in Rowe's works. Long before he brought out the Lives, he had written in the Rambler:

By what accident the number of acts was limited to five, I know not that any author had informed us; but

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89 L (July, 1806), 328.
90 Ibid.
certainly it is not determined by any necessity arising either from the nature of action or propriety of exhibition. An act is only the representation of such a part of the business of the play as proceeds in an unbroken tenor, or without any intermediate pause. Nothing is more evident than that of every real, and by consequence of every dramatic action, the intervals may be more or fewer than five; and indeed the rule is upon the English stage every day broken in effect, without any other mischief than that which arises from an absurd endeavour to observe it in appearance. Whenever the scene is shifted, the act ceases, since some time is necessarily supposed to elapse while the personages of the drama change their place. 91

In other words, Johnson thought it absurd to hold to the letter of a dictum while violating it in practice.

Apparently oblivious of the true position of Johnson, the *Monthly* reviewer fought the battle all over again:

To the abstract propriety of this reasoning, perhaps it would be difficult to object: but are our dramatic readers or spectators prepared to welcome the immense revolution which it tends to produce? What will they think when they are told that they are never more to be referred to Act I., Scene 2d or 3d and that, having entered a dungeon, they must be contented with their confinement there, even though the prisoner himself may have effected an early escape? Keillerry apart, would not too scrupulous an attention to this rule lead us into those absurdities which Dennis, in his coarse but strong criticism on Addison’s Cato, has pointed out as necessarily arising from its observance in that play: a criticism, to the truth of which Dr. Johnson himself assents, and which, with more justice than good nature, he had delivered down to posterity by inserting it in his works. 92

It is amusing to see that finally he had to give Johnson credit for having anticipated his own argument in the Cato affair 93 but gave it himself with "more justice than good nature."

91 *Works*, I, 270.
93 For Johnson’s comments see *Lives*, I, 453.
The Gentleman's Magazine somewhat later published an account of an author who likewise felt that Johnson's attack on Addison's observance of the unities in Cato was the result not of good sense but of prejudice. First the journal merely quoted "the anonymous Bard":

"Dr. Johnson, who was prejudiced in the most vehement manner against every line in which the word Liberty was inscribed, has condescended to insert in his 'Lives of the Poets' an angry critique of Dennis on this play, which wholly grounds its ridicule on the unity of time and place being observed with too great exactness."

Then it added succinctly and tellingly:

Thus much for the Writer's political creed. 94

It was the Quarterly which was characterized most noticeably by the nationalistic spirit earlier referred to. One occasion for its manifestation was the discussion of Italian tragedy in the October, 1820, number:

The author of the Conte di Carmagnola, Alessandro Manzoni, in his preface, boldly declares war against the unities. To ourselves, "chartered libertines," as we consider ourselves on the authority of Shakespeare's example and Johnson's argument, little confirmation will be gained from this proselyte to our tramontane notions of dramatic liberty; we fear, however, that the Italians will require a more splendid violation of their old established laws, before they are led to abandon them. 95

Again it was Johnson who was credited with the theory supporting the liberal attitude of English dramatists.

Another occasion was the review of Byron's plays in

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94 LXXXI (October, 1811), 341.
95 XXIV, 87.
1822. Byron had set forth his theory of the drama, which included an adherence to the unities of time and place; and by way of justifying that rebellion against what was by then established practice in England, he had cited the acceptance of the unities throughout the "civilized" world, i.e., France and Italy. The Quarterly was not impressed:

A doctrine may be sound though the majority of the world reject it; and the consent of the greatest and most overwhelming majority, though it may be a presumption, is still not a proof of its soundness. Let us examine, then, the principles on which Lord Byron's dramatic canons depend, and the arguments which are usually advanced to prove their necessity. In this task we are sensible that we can supply but little which Johnson has not already said far better;—but even Johnson himself will be found, in some few instances, to have made a larger admission to modern prejudice than either the reason of the case or the truth of literary history would warrant.96

The "modern prejudice" there alluded to was the occasional observance of the unities in English drama, but the reviewer never specified what he considered Johnson's "larger admission" of it to have been. He did, however, proceed to point out that the principles urged very sensibly and liberally by Johnson (an Englishman, of course) were sound Aristotelian classicism — a significant indication that one phase of Romantic criticism was a conscious return to true classicism.

The Monthly Review reached essentially the same conclusions about Byron in its treatment of his dramas:

Against such restrictive laws [the unities], indeed, we have the powerful judgment of our great critic on our great bard: who, in the preface to his edition of Sh., declares that a full examination of them will show

96 XXVII (July, 1822), 482.
that, as they respect time and place, they do not deserve the veneration which has been allotted to them, and that they cramp the exertions of the poet more than they gratify the judgment of the reader or the spectator. They may, he says, occasionally conduce to our satisfaction, but are not requisite to the formation of a just drama, and should always be disregarded in favour of the higher beauties of variety and instruction; beauties which, we need scarcely add, are obtained by copying nature in her diversified forms, and presenting numerous lessons in the exhibition of "many-coloured life," in all countries and ages.

In the face of this judgment of Dr. Johnson, "not dogmatically but deliberately written," Lord Byron avows his predilection for the unities, and composes drama with the observance of them... 97

Johnson there, too, was the name identified with the breakdown of false and illiberal dogma.

The Scots Magazine took an even more derogatory tone with Byron, suggesting that it was sheer ignorance of progress in dramatic theory rather than willfulness that accounted for his method of composition:

It is conceivable, that as the poet never read Milton since he was twenty years of age, the tragedian may never have read Dr. Johnson's preface to Shakespeare at all. Let him obtain it from his publisher, and learn that "there is no reason why an hour should not be a century, in that calenture of the brains that can make the stage a field." If the unities be essential to drama, why should not the sacrifice of a goat be essential to tragedy? 98

And Jeffrey in the Edinburgh Review did his share in demonstrating to the playwright his failure to arouse a sympathetic reaction in the journals:

For ourselves, we will confess that we have had a considerable contempt for these same Unities, ever since we read Dennis's Criticism on Cato in our boyhood--

97XCVII (January, 1822), 84.

98X (January, 1822), 102.
except indeed the unity of action, which Lord Byron
does not appear to set much store by. Dr. Johnson, we
conceive, has pretty well settled this question; and
if Lord Byron chooses to grapple with him, he will find
that it requires a stronger arm than that with which
he puts down our Laureates. We shall only add, that
when the moderns tie themselves down to write trage­
dies of the same length, and on the same simple plan,
in other respects, with those of Sophocles and
Aeschylus, we shall not object to their adhering to
the Unities; for there can, in that case, be no suf­
ficient inducement for violating them.99

After that the critic recapitulated the arguments advanced by
Johnson, concluding:

That any writer should ever have insisted on such an
unity as this, must appear sufficiently preposterous;
but, that the defence of it should be taken up by an
author whose plays are never to be acted at all, and
which, therefore, have nothing more than a nominal
reference to any stage or locality whatever, must
strike one as absolutely incredible.100

The entire discussion was really beside the point since Byron's
plays were plays in name only.

At any rate, whatever minor variations appeared in the
criticism of Byron, one point remained clear -- the unequivocal
acceptance of Johnson as the authority for the rejection of the
unities of time and place.101

At approximately the same time but in allusion to another
subject, the Gentleman's Magazine also came forward with a
99 XXXVI (February, 1822), 423.
100 Ibid.
101 There was one dissenting vote recorded in the journals,

101 There was one dissenting vote recorded in the journals, the absurdiety of which was quite obvious. Blackwood's in
February, 1824 (XVII, 194), included an excerpt from the writ­
ings of John Neal, an American who claimed to have overthrown
Johnson's arguments. The reviewer very sensibly added that
Neal's works were "adventurous, impudent, strange, and foolish."
comment on Johnson's contributions to the unities controversy.

An article entitled "View of the Editions and Commentators of Shakspeare" included the following:

So greatly has the Bard increased in the general esteem since Rymer's crude and illiberal attempt to disparage him, that a critique so paradoxical and strange was, at that period, offered to the publick in an apparent confidence of universal acceptance....these censures had nearly sunk into oblivion, when they were revived by Voltaire, upon the same principle, but most ably refuted by Mrs. Montagu. We have Dr. Johnson's authority in declaring, that "when Shakspeare's plan is understood, most of the criticisms of Rymer and Voltaire fade away." 102

This was a comment, it is to be noted, not only on Johnson's liberality of mind but on the changing taste of the general public — a recognition, perhaps unconscious, of the fact that a literary critic cannot be considered in isolation from the temper of his time.

Somewhat later the Gentleman's was again the source of a commendatory notice of Johnson. The essayist concluded his observations "On Ancient Tragedy and Comedy" by quoting that part of Dr. Johnson's "admirable Preface to Shakspeare" which treated of "the propriety of rejecting or observing the dramatic unities." 103

By the time the Edinburgh Review in May, 1828, included in its article on "Greek Tragedy" a discussion of the unities, Johnson's arguments were so well known that they had been virtually absorbed into the critical theory of the age. The author of the article did not mention his name at all but

102 XCII (May, 1822), 421-2.
103 XCVIII (August, 1828), 128.
obviously echoed the Preface:

We have not much to say about the Unities. All sensible people, indeed, we think, are now agreed that the importance attached to them in the ancient system was truly fantastical and absurd. As to the unity of Place and of Time, the pretext for the observance was, that it was necessary to maintain the illusion on which the dramatic effect was, very gratuitously, supposed to depend. Now, as to Place, we cannot but think that if any sane spectator really believed that the prosenium of the theatre of Athens, which he took last night for the Greek camp before Troy, was, the night after, the Temple of Diana at Aulis, he must be very unreasonable if he refused to believe that it was, on any other night, the Areopagus in the first act, and the wall of Thebes in the second. The truth—and the obvious and indisputable truth, is, that there is no actual illusion in the matter; and that all the spectators are perfectly aware, during all the representation, that they are in a well-known place of exhibition, and within ten minutes' walk of their own quiet homes; and that the change of scene, if not ludicrously and extravagantly frequent or extreme, shocks or disturbs them no more than the change of persons or of subjects...

As Johnson himself once said very aptly in the Lives:

Of an opinion which is no longer doubted, the evidence ceases to be examined. Of an art universally practised, the first teacher is forgotten. Learning once made popular is no longer learning; it has the appearance of something which we have bestowed upon ourselves, as the dew appears to rise from the field which it refreshed.

Early in the investigation of opinion on the unities, it was pointed out that the principle of unity of action, the only truly classical one of the three, was never questioned. As Coleridge very ably put it in the Othello marginalia, "It is not properly a rule, but in itself the great end, not only

104 XLVII, 421-2.
105 I, 299.
of the drama but of the epic, lyric, even to the candle-flame cone of an epigram — not only of poetry, but of poesy in general, as the proper generic term inclusive of all the fine arts, as its species." The same belief appeared near the end of the period and in words so similar to Coleridge's that probably it was derived from him:

The unity of Action is no doubt in a very different predicament; and in a certain sense ought no doubt to be observed, not only by all dramatic writers, but by all other writers who have actions to describe, and are any way solicitous about being understood by their readers. It has confessedly no reference to theatrical illusion. It is no invention of dramatic critics; and it is not exemplified by the Greek tragedians, more than by the good writers of epic, history, or romance, of all ages and countries.107

It is obvious, consequently, that the periodical reviewers did not follow Coleridge's line of attack on Johnson, for not only was he universally acclaimed by them as the liberal critic assisting in the breakdown of the rules regarding the unities of time and place but also his arguments supporting the invalidation of them were accepted.

Another principle of literary criticism very closely allied to that of the unities and ultimately to the conception of the universal and particular as the subject matter of literature was that of probability. Coleridge based his theory of theatrical illusion on probability rather than possibility, it will be recalled, as Johnson did his repudiation of the pseudo-classical idea of literal delusion. And comments by

106 CSC, I, 50.
107 ER, XLVII (May, 1828), 422-3.
the periodical reviewers show that the principle of probability was generally accepted among them as fundamental not only in stage presentations but in all kinds of imitation. Therefore, those comments took the form of decisions on whether individual works satisfied the requirement.

In June of 1812 the Quarterly reviewer quoted an observation of Johnson in such fashion that his actual position on the issue was put in a rather ambiguous light:

Buffon says somewhere that when a chance becomes so remote as to be ten thousand to one, it ceases to create any interest; and though Doctor Johnson observed that if among ten thousand men, lots were to be drawn for the death of one, none of the ten thousand would be perfectly at ease; yet we are quite sure that (however it might be in a real crisis of life and death) the reader of a novel will be indifferent to events, the probability of which rests on no better foundation than that they have happened once in an age, or to one man out of ten thousand.108

However, what was important, actually, was the support of the probability customarily demanded by Johnson.

Another -- this time direct -- recognition of Johnson as an advocate of the principle appeared later in the Monthly:

We may use the nervous language of Dr. Johnson, in which he animadverts on the meagre and impoverished materials that constitute a modern drama: "to bring a lover, a lady, and a rival into the fable; to entangle them in contradictory obligations...; to distress them as nothing human ever was distressed; to deliver them as nothing human ever was delivered; is the business of a modern novelist. For this, probability is violated, life is misrepresented, and language is depraved."109

108VII, 330.
109XCVII (March, 1822), 303.
Still later, the Edinburgh Review, seizing upon Roscoe's Italian Novels as an excuse for attacking Italian fiction in general, said:

When the system of interesting, by variety of incident, is introduced, it generally follows, first, that the incidents cannot always be probable or agreeable to good taste; and, secondly, that a multitude of plagiarisms and imitations in the works of different authors will take place.... The resources afforded by the painting of a character are almost infinite; the possible combinations of events really adapted for the purposes of fiction, are much less numerous than is generally imagined. "Whether it be," says Dr. Johnson, "that we comprehend but few of the possibilities of life, or that life itself affords but little variety, every man who has tried, knows how much labour it costs to form a combination of circumstances, which shall at once have the grace of novelty and credibility, and delight fancy without violence to reason."110

Johnson was cited as an authority who realized the difficulty of achieving credibility in fiction.

A consideration of probability led naturally at times to a consideration of poetic justice, the attitudes toward which in turn of course led to a definition of the function or purpose of poetry. Johnson's positions in those matters are well known. He was completely neoclassical rather than classical in his demand that the author make a "just distribution of good and evil" and be careful "to shew in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked," and he censured Shakespeare for not having done so.111 That conviction accounts, partially at least, for his approval of the happy ending of Lear, which Hazlitt and Lamb among others deplored.

110XLII (April, 1825), 205.
111Works, II, 330.
And it accounts for the attitude a *Literary Gazette* reviewer attributed to him in a review of a novel by Madame de Souza:

...In the end, after a variety of conflicts, Souvre, who had almost believed that Helen loved him, is at length painfully undeceived; but he heroically resolves to promote her union with the object of her affections, in which he is successful.

The story is of such nature, that the author could not have brought it to any other conclusion, than that which she has given to it. And we will venture to anticipate what most readers, on reflection, will agree with us, that it concludes most happily. Dr. Johnson suffered his kind heart to overcome his judgement, when he blamed Shakspeare for the fate of Ophelia, the young, the beautiful, and the pious.  

However, the reviewer there gave Johnson no credit at all for a theory in favor of poetic justice but merely assigned to him a sentimentality that refused to face reality. This is all the more ironical when it is remembered that Johnson established himself firmly as opposed to the morally confusing combination of good and bad in fictitious persons -- the "villain with the heart of gold" combination characteristic of the growing sentimentality of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

One more comment on poetic justice appeared in the *British Critic*’s article on Caldecott’s edition of *Hamlet*:

The general accusations of Steevens, Johnson, and Malone, against Shakspeare, for his want of poetical justice in this play [*Hamlet*]...are admirably answered in a note at the conclusion of the play.  

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112 February 10, 1821, p. 85.

113 Series 2, XVII (April, 1822), 377.
Unfortunately, the reviewer failed to say how the arguments were refuted. All that is certain is that both the editor and his critic repudiated the practice usually demanded by Johnson.

In his beliefs concerning the function of literature Johnson belonged to a tradition which could be traced from Horace and his phrase prodesse et delectare right down to the nineteenth century. There were a few rebels along the way -- Castelvetro and Hobbes, for instance -- and varying emphases on the two elements, but essentially Horace's view was adhered to. Johnson, of course, stressed strongly the didactic aspect of the rule, seeing the pleasure as a means to the profit. The periodical reviewers of the early nineteenth century in their comments on him showed also a general conviction that poetry should teach as well as delight; their disagreements occurred over what constituted a good lesson or a bad lesson.

In a November, 1800, review of Mary Ann Hanway's Andrew Stuart, the British Critic concurred in Johnson's view of the function of the novel.

114 Although the following passage from "Addison" in the Lives may have been only the belief of a moment, it is about the apex of Johnson's liberalism: "Whatever pleasure there may be in seeing crimes punished and virtue rewarded, yet, since wickedness often prospers in real life, the poet is certainly at liberty to give it prosperity on the stage. For if poetry is an imitation of reality, how are its laws broken by exhibiting the world in its true form? The stage may sometimes gratify our wishes; but, if it be truly the 'mirror of life,' it ought to show us sometimes what we are to expect" (I, 452).
It is always painful to us, when we cannot give to works, apparently well-intended, the praise of skillful execution. A well written Novel, if directed to honest purposes (which seems to be the case with that now before us) is, in our opinion, far from being the least useful species of composition. "It teaches," as Dr. Johnson has admirably said, "the passions to move at the command of virtue." 115

Later in the Gentleman's the usefulness of comedy was pointed out:

In a well-written Comedy, though the instruction be of a different and inferior kind, the lesson may still be useful. We there see the world as it is; and we are taught how to act in the common occurrences of ordinary life.... We do not all know the moral which Dr. Johnson has so admirably drawn from the character of Falstaff. 116

And Johnson's name was associated with the recognition of moral values. Several of the references were to his most liberal expressions of opinion. In the Examiner Johnson was listed as one of the "delicate and rigid critics" of Measure for Measure who had not found it indecent. 117 And the Monthly reviewer who dealt with Byron's plays, it will be recalled, after citing Johnson on the unities, went on to say:

They may, he says, occasionally conduce to our satisfaction, but are not requisite to the formation of a just drama, and should always be disregarded in favour of the higher beauties of variety and instruction... 118

Johnson's criticism of the didactic function of The Beggars' Opera also came in for its share of attention, the Examiner

115 XVI, 556.
116 LXXVI (July, 1806), 640.
117 November 10, 1811, p. 727.
118 XCVII (January, 1822), 84.
pointing out on one hand that Johnson had "half-assented" in the fear that the audience would be led astray by it, and the Quarterly feeling that he had been too liberal:

With all deference we must take the liberty to believe that both Dr. Johnson and Sir Walter Scott have judged as to these matters more from the vigour of their own masculine minds than from actual observation of the world at large as it was, and is. The Beggars' Opera did, we may admit, no harm in the boxes, but we suspect the galleries, if they could speak, might tell a very different story.

Twice too he was castigated for having defended Prior against the charge of indecency. The first attack was published in the Gentleman's Magazine in an essay called "Dangers of licentious Writings pointed out"; the other came from Croker in his notes on Boswell, derisive attention being called to it by Macaulay in his review in the Edinburgh.

There is an interesting paradox to be noted in this whole discussion of poetic justice and the purpose of poetry. Johnson and the reviewers agreed, it has been seen, that the purpose of poetry was to teach and to please the audience; they differed sometimes in their view of what means it was necessary to use in the pointing out of the lesson. Johnson's desire to make it unmistakable was so strong that he advocated poetic justice; the reviewers saw no need for it,

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119 December 22, 1822, pp. 804-5.
120 XXXIV (September, 1826), 365-6.
121 LXVII (November, 1808), 976.
122 LIV (September, 1831), 8.
particularly in the works of Shakespeare. What is paradoxical is that his few instances of liberality were those seized upon for censure.

Throughout this phase of the investigation of Johnson's reputation in the journals, the concern has been primarily with specific problems in literary theory and practice as reflected in Johnsonian criticism. Now for the sake of completeness and also by way of conclusion, there are some general observations on Johnson as an editor and critic of Shakespeare to be considered.

One series of them centered in a comparison and contrast of Johnson and Bishop Warburton as editors, and the consensus, well expressed by the British Critic in the following comment, was unquestionably in Johnson's favor:

We were pleased with the manner in which, when he [Pye] controverts the observations of Johnson, he expresses his general esteem and veneration for the man; but for Warburton he has no such mercy.123

However, this represented not so much a recommendation of Johnson's editorial qualifications as an approval of him as a man.

The second series of observations appeared in relation to Hazlitt's open assault on Johnson's reputation and ranged from the violence of William Gifford in the Quarterly, to the pointed but lighter treatment in the Noctes Ambrosianae. 

123 XXXI (March, 1808), 248. For similar material see Ibid., 225; BR, XIII (January, 1809), 360; and QR, VII (June, 1812), 390.
Thus gifted, it may be supposed that Mr. Hazlitt is not inclined to speak with much respect of his critical predecessors...He pours the whole weight of his censure on Dr. Johnson. He scarcely thinks his preface worthy of perusal, and has therefore read it so hastily that he does not seem to have understood one word of it: hence he charges the Doctor with supporting opinions which he never entertained, and some of which, indeed, he has expressly opposed. We shall not mislead our own and the reader's time by entering into a formal defence of one of the most perfect pieces of criticism which has appeared since the days of Quintilian...\[125\]

Later, "Christopher North," conversing with Tickler in the *Notae Ambrosianae*, No. 29, evaluated the character of Hazlitt:

...Why, Jemmy Boswell was a gentleman born and bred—a difficulty in the way of impersonation, which Billy Hazlitt can never, in his most sanguine moments, hope to overcome....He of the Table-Talk has never risen higher than the lowest circle of the Press-gang—Reporters fight shy—and the Editors of Sunday newspapers turn up their noses at the smell of his approach. ...Billy hates and envies all that he pretends to love and venerate, for the best of reasons, because his eulogiums on others are libels on himself.\[128\]

\[124\] Since Hazlitt was a contributor to the *Examiner*, this impartiality is not surprising.

\[125\] *QR*, XVIII, 458-9. Of course, Hazlitt's retort in his "Letter to William Gifford" is equally well-known; it said in part: "Dr. Johnson...in his Preface, 'one of the most perfect pieces of criticism since the days of Quintilian' (and which might have been written in the days of Quintilian just as well as in ours), has neglected to expatiate on Shakespear's 'indestructible love of flowers and odours, and woodland solitudes and moonlight bowers.' You know nothing of Shakespear, nor of what is thought about him: you mind only the text of the commentators" (*Works*, I, 393-4).

\[126\] *XX* (November, 1826), 786-7.
The envy once before ascribed to him as the motivating force of his criticism there was conjured up again.

The *Examiner* spoke up twice in the affair, once in its initial notice of the *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* and once much later -- after Hazlitt's death -- in a summary of his life. The first review, as usual in the *Examiner*, took the form of extensive quotations with a few subjective comments interspersed; the following damming with faint praise was quoted from Hazlitt, however, with no qualification at all:

"...We like and respect [Johnson] very sincerely nevertheless, all sorts of differences of opinion not excepted..."127

In "The Late William Hazlitt" the author merely maintained that he felt no urge to defend or assail or discuss the relative merits of Hazlitt's writings.128

All told, then, it would not be fair to say that the entire world of criticism bore out Hazlitt's earlier statement:

It is in fact the established rule at present, in these cases, to speak highly of the Doctor's authority, and to dissent from almost every one of his critical decisions.129

The third and final series of observations concerned the Preface to *Shakespeare* taken generally rather than specifically. Coleridge's virtual persecution of it, noted earlier, was attested to by Henry Crabb Robinson's entries in his diary. Robinson also recorded parenthetically that Coleridge

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127 November 2, 1817, p. 698.
128 November 4, 1832, p. 709.
"excited a hiss once by calling Johnson a *fellow*, for which he happily apologized by observing that it is in the nature of evil to beget evil, and that we are thus apt to fall into the fault we censure."\(^{130}\) In the main, the reviewers who cited the *Preface* did so in complimentary fashion. It was called "admirable,"\(^{131}\) it was called "exquisite,"\(^{132}\) it was "useless to praise, and folly to blame" it,\(^{133}\) and the *Literary Gazette* supported Gifford's defense of it.\(^{134}\) Then there was an evaluation of it in the *London Magazine*’s essay "On the Life and Writings of Samuel Johnson":

At the beginning of the *Preface*, he has marked out the character of our great dramatist with such a power of criticism, as there was perhaps no example of in the English language. Towards the conclusion, he has, I think, successfully defended him from the neglect of what are called the unities. The observation, that a quibble was the Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it, is more pointed than just. Shakspeare cannot be said to have lost the world; for his fame has not only embraced the circle of his own country, but is continually spreading over new portions of the globe; nor is there any reason to conclude that he would have acquiesced in such a loss. Like most other writers, he indulged himself in a favourite propensity, aware, probably, that if it offended some, it would win him the applause of others. Johnson is distinguished in his notes from the other commentators, chiefly by the acute remarks on many of the characters, and on the conduct of some of the fables, which he has subjoined to the different plays. In other respects he is not superior to the rest; in


\(^{131}\)*GM*, XCVIII (April, 1828), 319, and LXXXVI (April, 1816), 291.

\(^{132}\)Ibid., XCIV (June, 1824), 612.

\(^{133}\)Ibid., LXXXVI (April, 1816), 291.

\(^{134}\)March 3, 1827, p. 132.
some, particularly in illustrating his author from antecedent or contemporary writers, he is inferior to them. A German critic of our own days, Schlegel, has surpassed him even in that which he has done best.135

This evaluation might very well stand, with minor qualifications, as representative of the journals' views of Johnson as a Shakespearean critic. The preference of Schlegel, a reflection no doubt of the influence of Coleridge and Hazlitt, was not a widely expressed one in periodical circles, but the other judgments herein set forth were generally supported. Other editors — and later ones, for the most part — were considered to excel Johnson in linguistic matters and in matters requiring historical information, for either the knowledge was not available to him or he was disinclined to make the necessary meticulous investigation. It was felt that in his treatment of Shakespeare's most imaginative passages he fell short of the desired enthusiastic appreciation — that somehow he was beyond his range of understanding and feeling; even here, however, there were those among the reviewers who singled him out for praise. In his attack on the unities of time and place, he was adjudged eminently satisfactory by virtually all the commentators. And finally, despite the fact that most of them saw him as the proponent of generality in opposition to particularity, they granted him preeminence in the interpretation of the particular human motives and passions of Shakespeare's characters.

135VIII (July, 1823), 68-9.
CHAPTER III
THE BIOGRAPHER AND CRITIC OF MILTON

The second figure in the hierarchy of those authors whom the Romantics worshipped just short of idolatry was, of course, Milton; and the fact that he had not always enjoyed unqualified worship was the stimulus for much of the comment in the early nineteenth century journals on him and on Johnson's criticism of him.

The truth of the matter is not that Milton had been neglected, for throughout the neoclassical period in England he had been admired, but that admiration had been rather judiciously accorded him in spite of certain irregularities and innovations, not because of them. Long before 1800, however, the task of restoring him to grace had been begun. The Wartons with their interest in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in general and with their admiration of Spenser and Shakespeare and Milton in particular did much of the spade work. Bishop Hurd, only slightly later, in his Letters on Chivalry and Romance advanced the then novel opinion that perhaps there might be good after all in the "barbarities" of Spenser and Milton -- the Gothic and romance elements, for instance -- and used the historical argument to develop his point; that opinion was one of the signposts along the road
to the breakdown of hard-and-fast neoclassicism, for it prepared the way for a critical theory elastic enough to encompass new literary forms and new individuals. But even these men were not sufficiently enthusiastic to suit the taste of the conscious founders of a new attitude toward literature. Coleridge, Hazlitt, and DeQuincey -- DeQuincey, especially -- all felt that Milton's reputation, like Shakespeare's, was still in need of defense; and they heaped scorn upon anyone who, like Samuel Johnson, dared to list faults as well as beauties in his criticism of Milton. However, Hazlitt is the only one of the three who comes within the scope of this study, for he was the only one who made any appreciable contribution to periodical criticism. In fact, Coleridge's specific comments did not survive at all, for they were part of the lost lectures of 1811-1812, and his generally antagonistic attitude was merely recorded by Henry Crabb Robinson in his Diary. And DeQuincey, though he wrote voluminously on the subject, did so after the end of the particular period under investigation.

Just where the periodical reviewers stood on this matter of Johnson's criticism of Milton remains to be seen, but so numerous were their references to it that a treatment of Milton separate from the rest of the poets in the Lives seems justified.
i. The Bases of Prejudice

A large proportion -- in fact, almost half -- of the comments made by the periodical reviewers in reference to Johnson's handling of Milton pertained to the prejudice evidenced in the biographical material in the Lives. In the minds of most of them, too, there was a very definite causal relationship between the prejudice against Milton the man and the judgment of Milton the poet. Several explanations of the prejudice were offered -- Johnson's dislike of Milton's anti-royalist political principles, his distrust of Milton's anti-episcopal religious views, and his professional jealousy of one who had a remarkably high literary reputation.

Although there were isolated references to this subject earlier, the major anti-Johnson blasts were set off by the appearance in 1806 of Charles Symmons's Life of Milton, which showed the author's fervent intention to establish the poet in his rightful position in literary circles. The Gentleman's Magazine, the first of the journals to comment, noted that the biography included "such a Philippic against Johnson and Tom Warton, as must call forth their ghosts to vengeance."¹ The usual paternal feeling which the Gentleman's exhibited toward Johnson being considered, it is significant that the reviewer did not take upon himself the task of vengeance. It is quite possible that he believed the vengeance would be

¹LXXVI (July, 1806), 595.
difficult of achievement.

The *Monthly* in January of the following year was the next to open fire, commenting near the beginning of its quite long notice:

Hume, Warton, and Johnson in particular, looked with "eyes askance" on the stern republican Milton; and because they did not approve of his political and religious principles, they have been unjust to his memory.2

And near the end of it there was a repetition of the opinion:

...The whole of his labours clearly proves that Dr. Symmons's zeal for Milton has induced him not merely to vindicate the poet from his principal enemies, Dr. Johnson and Mr. Thomas Warton, but to give them in return a Rowland for their Oliver.3

One of the points on which Symmons took issue with Johnson was his endorsement of William Lauder's brash pamphlet accusing Milton of plagiarism from divers modern Latin poets and quoting forged proofs of those borrowings. The *British Critic* in August of 1800 had carried a review called "Dunster on Milton's Early Reading," and the reviewer therein quoted Dunster as saying that Sylvester's Du Bartas led to *Paradise Lost* "not only by awakening his passion for sacred poetry, but by absolutely furnishing what Dr. Johnson, in his Preface to Lauder's pamphlet, terms the *prima stamna* of *Paradise Lost."4 Both Dunster and the reviewer accepted Lauder's claims quite calmly and Johnson's preface as well. But eight

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2 LII (January, 1807), 68.
4 XVI, 136.
years later the picture had changed, and in response to
Symmons's attack, the British Critic wrote:

[Symmons] labours to identify the feelings of Johnson
with those of the infamous Lauder, and accuses him
of that which was most remote from his nature and
habits, a wilful perversion of truth. Johnson cer-
tainly, from political feelings, wished to see Milton
depressed; he was even blinded by them, both as to
the merits of the poet, and the tricks of the slandering.
But Johnson most assuredly detested falsehood,
and would not have abetted anything which he conceived
to deserve that name. With equal injustice is that
great moralist censured as a mere state hireling,
for writing in defense of his own most genuine and
decided sentiments.

Johnson's anti-republican politics were admitted and their influence on his attitude to Milton regretted, but his honor as a literary man was defended.

Shortly afterwards, the Gentleman's published as one of its letters to the editor a curious and rather belated vindication of Johnson against the charges of Symmons. The correspondent began by quoting the anonymous "Philalethes" who said:

"When the learned Doctor (Symmons) was censuring in such severe, though perhaps merited terms, the malignity of Salmasious, of Lauder, and of Johnson," &c.&c.

He continued:

Now whether Dr. Symmons, or Philalethes, or both, regarded Dr. Johnson's account of Milton and of his writings with contempt, I have not the means of learning; but, if we fairly examine all its features, both as a composition of Criticism and of mere Biography, there will not be much difficulty in discovering that it possesses first-rate excellence. Waiving, however, our consideration of the critical decisions in

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5XXXII (August, 1808), 153.
Johnson’s Life of Milton, as being of minor consequence, how comes it to pass, that the perusal of this work can induce any one to bring against the writer of it the heavy charge of "malignity," or even to leave such a charge, as Philalethes has done, qualified a little, and but very little, by that vox ambugua perhaps?

Then at great length he exhibited the impeccable nature of Johnson’s honor and concluded:

Surely, Sir, this man’s virtues, which it is needless to recount, ought rather to be graven "with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond," than borne down, as frequently happens, by "railing accusations;" —the well-attested qualities of his heart, and the excellence of his teaching, were such as ought to exempt him from being joined a co-partner in "malignity" with Lauder and Salmasius, and to embalm his unfading name for ever and for ever.

This was in essentially the same vein as the comment of the British Critic.

Much later when the writer for Blackwood’s referred rather casually to Johnson’s part in the affair, the conception of his motives had apparently changed to the extent that deliberate malice was not any longer attributed to him:

And if Samuel Johnson had got a back stroke or two for his carelessness, thought I, it would have been only what he deserved...

It was carelessness which had caused his endorsement of Lauder.

In the London Magazine for October, 1828, there was an account of Lauder written by one who obviously felt the issue closed. He told of Lauder’s forgeries and then said:

...The preface and postscript were written by Dr.  

6LXXXIII (April, 1813), 326-7. 
7I (September, 1817), 576.
Johnsons, on whose Tory prejudices Lauder had easily imposed...

Carelessness encouraged by prejudice was the accepted answer.

The final comment on the question came in the Quarterly's essay on "The Life and Writings of Dr. Parr." Concerning the scholar's part in the affair of the Ireland forgeries, the reviewer said:

This incident in Parr's life has been compared to Johnson's patronage of Lauder, but there is a marked distinction, we think, between the two cases. Johnson's deception involved no question of taste, but was merely the consequence of his own habitual and sluggish indolence. He was too lazy to inquire for the books from which Lauder pretended to have derived his parallel passages, and therefore, as the least troublesome course, took their accuracy for granted. Parr would not have been deceived by Lauder; for his busy alacrity, on all literary subjects, would have led him to collate, compare, and examine such remarkable correspondencies. Johnson could not have been deceived down half a page by Ireland: his strong good sense and sound judgment would, on the internal evidence of the fabrications, and on an examination of the circumstances of the story, immediately have pierced through the thin veil of fraud, and rejected the imposture with indignation.9

So, again, it was indolence or carelessness which accounted for Johnson's acceptance of Lauder's story; the prejudice was not even mentioned.

Another point on which Symmons attacked Johnson was that of Milton's service to the Puritan government during the days of civil war. Johnson, it will be recalled, had noted sharply and condescendingly Milton's "great promises and small performance" after his return from Italy. In this attack too

8XXII, 339.

9XXXIX (April, 1829), 287.
the Monthly upheld Symmons:

It is well known that Dr. Johnson..., in adverting to the conduct of Milton on this occasion, exults on his apparent inactivity, and hastily pronounces that "this is the period of Milton's life from which all his biographers are inclined to shrink:" but Dr. Symmons brings evidence to repel the sneer of the tory at the republican. He clearly proves, from a passage in the Defensio Secundo, that the part which Milton assigned to himself was taken with much deliberation, and is justified by the reasons which he alleges for his choice. 10

The defense of Milton took actually two directions -- the first, that the private boarding school which Milton opened on his return filled a need at the time, and the second, that his real contribution to the cause was not a sword but his pen. The first line had been picked up by the Monthly early in the period in reference to Edward Phillips's Theatrum Poetarum Anglicanorum:

This publication appears to have escaped Dr. Johnson's notice, since, in speaking of the author in his Life of Milton, he says with sarcastic severity: "From this wonder-working academy, I do not know that there ever proceeded any man very eminent for knowledge; its only genuine product, I believe, is a small History of Poetry, written in Latin by his nephew Phillips, of which perhaps none of my readers has ever heard." 11

Obviously the attitude expressed in the review of Symmons was at once a continuation of this one and an amplification of the defense. Godwin's Lives of Milton's Nephews was another attempt of the same kind -- to prove through the works of the pupils that Milton's academic activity had been worthwhile; and the Edinburgh Review noted Godwin's effort with approval,

10 LII (January, 1807), 70.
11 XXXIII (July, 1800), 332.
for the biographer had found not only the one "genuine production alleged by Johnson, but forty or fifty." 12 Somewhat later, the Gentleman's in an article called "Academic Errors" compared Johnson and Milton thus:

Dr. Johnson, who was qualified for anything rather than a schoolmaster, and whose mighty genius would have been lost under the vapours of an academic employment, failed in his attempt to acquire reputation in that profession. He found it impossible to gain even a livelihood; for most probably he adhered to the prescribed form of tuition which has existed for ages, and endeavoured to do nothing more than other masters at the same place had done before. Milton, on the other hand, was of service to his pupils, and improved their minds, if not his own income, by the novel method which he employed of cultivating the moral, as well as the physical and mechanical powers of the understanding. But the Sage of Litchfield, instead of applauding his industry and good intentions, misunderstood and mis-stated his system, and spoke in contemptuous terms of "the wonder-working Academy," which he said, "had never to his knowledge produced any very eminent man." 13

Not only had Milton's school served a justifiable purpose, but Milton was more successful at the profession than Johnson.

The Monthly did not quit the field after the review of Symmons's Life but gave ample space to any material on the conflict. When Cowper's Translation of Milton's Latin and Italian Poems was reviewed in March, 1809, "Dr. Johnson's virulent attack on the character of Milton" was recalled; 14 and when Anna Seward's letters were published in 1811, copious quotations from them about Johnson were printed. To the fairly

12XXV (October, 1815), 489-90.
13LXXXVIII (April, 1818), 344.
14LVIII, 286.
generally held view that Johnson's religious and political principles biased his critical judgment, Miss Seward added the even more damning charge that personal envy of "rival excellence" also influenced his criticism; and although the Monthly deprecated her judgment somewhat by pointing out that her zeal in demeaning Johnson might be the result of the fact that he had once said "that she had nothing of woman about her but the vices," still it was obvious from the lengthy quotations and separate approving notes on them that in general it concurred in her views. For instance, the reviewer commented:

Writing to Mr. Boswell, she reprobates the biographer for not speaking of Johnson "as he was, the most wonderful composition of great and absurd, of misanthropy and benevolence, of luminous intellect and prejudiced darkness, that was ever produced in the human hears."—In another place, she adds more odious features to the picture. "He was a strange compound of great talents, weak and absurd prejudices, strong but unfruitful devotion, intolerant fierceness, compassionate munificence, and corroding envy." To the last of these traits, she attributes his critical injustice in the Lives of the Poets; an injustice for which, as a poet, she cannot forgive him.

Then later he quoted from a letter of hers to Hayley:

Mr. Boswell urged the unlikelihood that he, who had established his own fame on other grounds than that of poetry, should envy poetic reputation [italics mine], especially where it was posthumous; and seemed to believe that his injustice to Milton, Prior, Gray, Collins, &c. proceeded from real want of taste for the higher orders of verse, his judgment being too rigidly severe to relish the enthisiasms of imagination.15

15LXVI (October, 1811), 118.
Boswell was later shown to have been overcome in the argument and reduced to a mere dissenting shake of the head. Incidentally, it might be pointed out in passing that Anna Seward did not reject Boswell's argument entirely, but maintained that Johnson was handicapped by both "corroding envy" and a "real want of taste for the higher orders of verse." But more of that later. That the Monthly on the whole agreed with Miss Seward was obvious here:

As the respect of mankind for dogmatism and bigotry diminishes, they will be less disposed to venerate those narrow-minded, illiberal, and in some instances, envious decisions which Johnson has fulminated...  

Hazlitt was on the scene, but only briefly, with an incidental reference in the Examiner to the fact that "Dr. Johnson magnified [the faults of Paradise Lost] because the author was a republican."  

At approximately the same time, the Edinburgh Review gave vent to a judgment of Johnson as a biographer of Milton:

But it must not be forgotten, that Milton had subdued the adverse prejudices of Dryden and Atterbury, long before he had extorted from a more acrimonious hostility, that unwilling but noble tribute of justice to the poet, for which Dr. Johnson seems to have made satisfaction to his hatred by a virulent libel on the man.

It is an excellence of Mr. Godwin's narrative, that he thinks and feels about the men and events of the age of Milton, in some measure as Milton himself felt and thought. Exact conformity of sentiment is neither possible nor desirable. But a Life of Milton, written by a zealous opponent of his principles, in the relation of events which so much exasperate the passions, almost inevitably degenerates into a libel. The

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16Ibid., 123.

17September 10, 1815, p. 586.
constant hostility of a biographer to the subject of his narrative, whether it be just or not, is teasing and vexatious.18

In spite of the slight concession of "whether it be just or not," Johnson was seen as a virulent and bigoted biographer of Milton; nevertheless -- and this is significant -- his criticism of the poet was regarded as noble and just.

In April, 1818, the Monthly -- which had so vigorously defended Symmons, it will be recalled -- conceded that Johnson could be right on occasion:

Dr. Johnson says that Milton endeavoured to write English prose with a foreign idiom; which observation, we apprehend, will remain true, notwithstanding the eighty-four pages of animadversion here bestowed on this innocent proposition.19

And the Gentleman's called attention to Johnson's behavior on the occasion of a theatrical benefit for Milton's grand-daughter:

...Johnson, the stickler for monarchy, most generously contributed, thus offering up an oblation to the offended shade of the great republican, and largely, but sincerely acknowledging that genius is confined to no political creed.20

In a footnote the reviewer explained his phrase "the offended shade" by recounting the Lauder episode; then he maintained that Johnson by his generous act "wiped away every suspicion" of malicious intention.

On the debit side again were several very brief entries

18XXV (October, 1815), 495.
19LXXXV, 446-7.
20XCII (August, 1822), 122.
-- a reference to Johnson's seeming approbation of Bishop Sprat's prejudice against Milton, a rebuttal of Johnson's statement that Milton grew old without any visible form of worship, a disapproving record of Johnson's anger at Milton for attacking Salmassius and the king, a comment on Hayley's eagerness "to vindicate Milton from the injurious aspersions of his biographer Johnson, a note on the critic's "clumsy ridicule" of his subject, a statement that Johnson ought to feel compunction for his life of Milton, and the contention that Johnson hated Milton's democratic principles and despised his "impracticable" philosophy. Obviously, these all emphasized the religious and political aspects of prejudice.

In the midst of all this, however, there was a dissenting vote. The Monthly in April, 1828, considered Dr. Channing and his view of Milton's character.

The following comparative view of Milton and Dr. Johnson will, we think, interest all our readers.
"The mists which the prejudices and bigotry of Johnson spread over his bright name, are not yet wholly scattered, though fast passing away....Johnson was

21 Literary Examiner, July 26, 1823, p. 64.
22 Ibid., August 30, 1823, p. 132.
23 Ibid., September 6, 1823, p. 147.
24 MR, CIV (May, 1824), 2.
25 ER, XLII (August, 1825), 306.
26 Examiner, June 18, 1826, p. 394.
27 QR, XXXVI (June, 1827), 42.
great in his own sphere, but that sphere was comparatively 'of the earth,' whilst Milton was only inferior to that of angels....His biographical works are tinged with his notoriously strong prejudices, and of all his 'Lives,' we hold that of Milton to be most apocryphal."

When Johnson's Biography of Milton is disparaged by mean writers, we turn from them and their cant about liberty with disgust; but when such writers as Dr. Channing reprehend it, we read with attention; meditate with deference, and differ with respect....28

Again, there was no attempt to defend the charge of prejudice; the contention which followed was that in spite of the prejudice, Johnson was a capable critic. To be noted also, but only incidentally here, was Channing's opinion that Johnson's soul was terrestrial rather than ethereal.

Haslitt too made a brief reference to Dr. Channing on Johnson in the Edinburgh Review for October, 1829. After stating that Channing acknowledged "the harshness and virulence of Milton's controversial writings" but blamed Johnson for doing likewise, Haslitt pronounced rather petulantly: "All this we have heard or said before."29 He felt that the American was simply echoing what he himself had already discovered.

Although DeQuincey wrote a great deal about Milton in the course of his career, very little of that was published until after 1832, the end of the period under consideration. He did publish one article on Richard Bentley in Blackwood's in 1830 and defended him against any "moral blame...as

28VII, n.s., 475-6.
29L, 142.
connected with his creation of a visionary editor [of *Paradise Lost*], let Dr. Johnson say what he will." That last phrase was typical, incidentally, of the denunciatory attitude permeating all his later criticism of Johnson.

The *Quarterly* sided with Johnson on this point, quoting as factual his account of Bentley.

The final notice of this point was occasioned by the appearance of Mitford's edition of Milton in 1832. In reviewing it, the *British Critic* commented on the various biographers of Milton, said that Johnson excited the most discussion, and agreed with Mitford that he was prejudiced:

The Life of Milton was not the only instance in which the English moralist permitted the bitterness of political animosity to deaden the feeling of the noble and the beautiful.

Furthermore, it later maintained that "Johnson was unfitted to pronounce a judgment upon Milton, by reason of his political prejudices...." And that was the view of the *British Critic*, an avowedly Tory organ.

On one point at least there was unanimity of opinion; all the periodical reviewers granted the existence of political and religious prejudice in Johnson's biographical notes on Milton. Furthermore, most of them assumed that his prejudice against the man would lead automatically to prejudice against

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30 *Collected Writings*, IV, 193.
31 XLVI (November, 1831), 160.
32 Series 4, XII (July, 1832), 44.
his poetry, so that they detected nothing in his criticism beyond the negative comments. Only an isolated few went farther to see the positive elements, and only those few defended the criticism in spite of the prejudice.

11. **The Minor Poems**

In the discussion of Johnson's criticism of the minor poems, there was evidenced from the beginning of the period to the end a virtually unanimous feeling that the eighteenth century critic had been at best much less than adequate and at worst completely mistaken.

The question of the Latin poems was one of the first to arise. The *Literary Examiner* noted that Johnson "wished to prefer [Cowley's Latin poetry] to Milton's" and refused to bow to that judgment. The *Edinburgh Review* assigned not caprice but corrupt taste as the cause of that preference:

Cowley, with all his admirable wit and ingenuity, had little imagination; nor indeed do we think his classical diction comparable to that of Milton. The authority of Johnson is against us on this point. But Johnson had studied the bad writers of the middle ages till he had become utterly insensible to the Augustan elegance, and was as ill qualified to judge between two Latin styles as a habitual drunkard to set up for a wine-taster.

And the *Gentleman's* said flatly:

Johnson showed bad taste, when he preferred the Latin poetry of Cowley to that of Milton.

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34 August 30, 1823, p. 130.
35XLII (August, 1825), 310.
36C (November, 1830), 391.
Then there was Johnson's statement that "Milton never learned the art of doing little things with grace" — a statement with which some of the Romantics felt urged to take issue. At this point it would be well to recall Johnson's customary distinctions among the sublime, the pathetic, and the beautiful — the sublime dealing in the grand, the awe-inspiring, the noble; the pathetic dealing in human emotions and passions; and the beautiful dealing in smallness, neatness, and elegance. And also, it should be remembered that Johnson later in the treatment of *Paradise Lost* qualified his statement about "doing little things":

The characteristic quality of his poem is sublimity. He sometimes descends to the elegant, but his element is the great. He can occasionally invest himself with grace; but his natural port is gigantick loftiness. He can please when pleasure is required; but it is his peculiar power to astonish.

He seems to have been well acquainted with his own genius, and to know what it was that Nature had bestowed upon him more bountifully than upon others; the power of displaying the vast, illuminating the splendid, enforcing the awful, darkening the gloomy, and aggravating the dreadful... 37

Milton could be elegant and graceful, but his forte was the grand; and since Johnson saw him in this light, his judgment of the minor pieces followed.

At any rate, the *Literary Examiner* took the earlier dictum without qualification and objected to it.

Milton's [epigrams] are, for the most part, poor enough; particularly the pleasant ones. He could

not descend from the gravity of his genius with impunity. He could "do little things with grace," whatever Dr. Johnson has said to the contrary: but still they must be serious things,—courtesies and condescensions.38

It was Johnson's harsh treatment of the pastorals, however, which received the greatest attention. Once more, it was Symmons's *Life of Milton* that began the series. The *Monthly* accepted Symmons's pettishly expressed view without any reservations or comments:

To Dr. Johnson's remark on the *Epitaphium Damonum*, that it is written with "the childish affectation of pastoral life," it is here replied: "Affectation is everywhere a just object of reprobation; but how a writer can, with propriety, be said to be guilty of it, for employing any allowed and established species of composition as the vehicle of his thoughts, is more than I can possibly comprehend."39

Two years later the same journal referred to the same topic, this time apropos of Cowper's translation of the poem:

The epistle to Manso is strikingly elegant; and perhaps the *Epitaphium Damonum* is not too highly complimented by the present translator when he thus speaks of it: "a pastoral, in my judgment, equal to any of Virgil's Bucolics, but of which Dr. Johnson (so it pleased him) speaks as I remember contemptuously. But he, who never saw any beauty in a rural scene, was not likely to have much taste for a pastoral..."40

It has been pointed out that Johnson was not insensitive to natural beauty, but that fact is really beside the point; he was typed fairly generally in the nineteenth century as a

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38 September 6, 1823, p. 145.
39 LII (January, 1807), 72.
40 LVIII (March, 1809), 290.
lover of the town rather than the country. Also it might be noted that Johnson's attitude toward the pastoral was part and parcel of his views of the universal; as Scott Elledge says:

The early poets had already said everything important, said it well, and had skilfully described all which in nature was of abiding value and interest. The modern poets were poor merely because they were too late.\footnote{Generality and Particularity," p. 154.}

For the imitation of what was no longer in existence -- that is, of the artificial -- Johnson had little use.

In 1811 Anna Seward's Letters again stimulated the Monthly to go on with the battle. It was Lycidas this time which needed succor.

All who have perused Johnson's Life of Milton are acquainted with the violence of his prejudices against this eminent writer, but especially with his absurd criticisms on the Lycidas, the beauties of which he could not or would not perceive. On the other hand, Miss Seward coincides with us in regarding this monody as supremely beautiful, and first-rate of its kind. She, indeed, considered it as a test-poem, by which a person's taste for poetry might be ascertained...\footnote{LXVI (October, 1811), 122.}

The reviewer then quoted Miss Seward's anecdote of a conversation she once had with Johnson:

"Johnson told me once, 'he would hang a dog that read the Lycidas twice.' 'What then,' replied I, 'must become of me, who can say it by heart; and who often repeat it to myself, with a delight "which grows by what it feeds upon?"' 'Die,' returned the growler, 'in a surfeit of bad taste.'"

The reviewer admitted to smiling at the reply, but Miss Seward
merely commented righteously:

"Thus it was, that the wit and lawless impoliteness of the stupendous creature bore down, by storm, every barrier which reason attempted to rear against his injustice. The injury that injustice has done to the claims of genius, and the taste for its effusions, is irreparable."43

A later reference in the Monthly quoted her as writing in a similar fashion to another acquaintance:

"I am charmed to find you amongst the adorers of Milton's Lycidas. That is a test-composition; and to read it without pleasure—to have read it without frequent recurrence, argues a morbid deficiency in the judgment and in the affections. I know that it is reprobated by Johnson; but false criticism, on the pale horse of that despot, is the pest of the present times, trampling beneath its 'armed hoofs' the richest and rarest flowers of genius."44

If the reviewer's earlier implication was true -- that personal spite motivated Anna Seward in part at least -- it was certainly likewise true that part of her venom derived from a recognition and real fear of Johnson's influence on the reputation of Milton.

Hazlitt in the Round Table Series of the Examiner was the next to protest vigorously against Johnson's criticism of the pastoral elegy. He began by saying:

We cannot agree to the charge which Dr. Johnson has brought against it, of pedantry and want of feeling...45

Then he proceeded to argue very plausibly that what might have been pedantry and artificiality in another poet was second

43Ibid.
44LXVI (November, 1811), 227-8.
45August 6, 1815, p. 508.
nature in Milton.

It is not affectation in him to recur to ideas and modes of expression, with which he has the strongest associations, and in which he takes the greatest delight.46

Also he replied to the charge of lack of propriety in the mingling of Christian religion and mythology:

We conceive there is very little foundation for this objection, either in reason or good taste....There is no inconsistency or natural repugnance between this poetical and religious faith in the same mind. To the understanding, the belief of the one is incompatible with that of the other; but in the imagination, they not only may, but do constantly co-exist.47

Actually, Johnson had not alluded to the faulty confusion of pagan and Christian elements; his objection was to the Shepherd's being first an actual "feeder of sheep, and afterwards an ecclesiastical pastor, a superintendent of a Christian flock."48 That is, he objected to the confusion of the real and the figurative, an objection which Hazlitt might well have refuted.

And finally Hazlitt came to the same point that he treated elsewhere49 -- Milton's ability to do little things gracefully:

Dr. Johnson's general remark, that Milton's genius had not room to shew itself in his smaller pieces, is not well-founded. Not to mention Lycidas, the Allegro and Penelope, it proceeds on a false estimate of the

46 Ibid., p. 509.
47 Ibid.
49 Works, VI, 180, and VIII, 55.
merits of his great work, which is not more distin­
guished by strength and sublimity than by tenderness
and beauty. 50

Here Hazlitt reached a compromise position that Milton re­
presented both the sublime and the beautiful. Johnson too
had supported essentially the same combination, but his
emphasis on the sublime was so great that the beautiful was
of necessity virtually ignored.

Considerably later, in its review of Adonais, the
Examiner returned to Lycidas and Johnson's attack on it as
artificial. Casually including "most critics" in a category
with Johnson, the reviewer repeated the earlier arguments of
Hazlitt:

Dr. Johnson, like most critics, had no imagination,
and because he found nothing natural to his own im­
pulses in the associations of poetry, and saw them
often abused by the practice of versifiers inferior
to himself, he was willing to conclude, that on
natural occasions they were always improper. But a
poet's world is as real to him as the more palpable
one to people in general. . . . What is mere frigidity
and affectation in common magazine rhymers, or men
of wit and fashion about town, becomes another thing
in minds accustomed to live in the sphere I spoke
of. 51

The only faintly approving note on this subject in the
whole period came from an essay in Blackwood's on the theory
and work of Wordsworth, and that was an incidental comment
on Johnson's having seen -- and rightly so -- the "dawn of
Paradise Lost" in Comus. 52

50 Examiner, August 6, 1815, p. 509.
51 July 7, 1822, pp. 419-20.
52 XXVI (November, 1829), 785.
Thus the periodical reviewers repudiated Samuel Johnson entirely as a critic of Milton's minor poems; at least, they repudiated his unfavorable comments on the Latin poems in general and on the *Epitaphium Damonis* in particular and on *Lycidas*. The sonnets were ignored, and *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, and *Comus* virtually so. It is worth noting that, although the sonnets might well have been defended, Johnson was kind to the other three; but his unqualified praise of the companion pieces went unnoticed, and his evaluation of *Comus*, which was on the whole commendatory, missed by a very little sharing the same fate.

111. *Paradise Lost*

Johnson the critic of *Paradise Lost* fared somewhat better. He did have defenders, even though, just as there had been many who believed that the limitations of his imagination prevented a complete appreciation of Shakespeare, there were many who believed that those same limitations -- in addition to the religious and political bias, naturally -- affected his judgment of Milton's great imaginative creation. They felt that he was too much of the earth to follow Milton's free soaring in the ethereal realms of fancy and imagination. That was why he could say of *Paradise Lost* that it was dull and tedious and that no man could wish it longer. And it must be granted that those are curious judgments, particularly in view of the fact that only shortly before, he had assigned it a place second only to the *Iliad* "among the productions
However, much of what seems inconsistent appears less so when one considers again Johnson's principles of aesthetics and examines his classification of *Paradise Lost* in the light of his interpretation of the sublime, the pathetic, and the beautiful. To begin with, Johnson saw such greatness in the poem that before it "all other greatness shrinks away."53 Furthermore, he contrasted the sublime elements of it with the beautiful:

He had considered creation in its whole extent, and his descriptions are therefore learned. He had accustomed his imagination to unrestrained indulgence, and his conceptions therefore were extensive. The characteristic quality of his poem is sublimity. He sometimes descends to the elegant, but his element is the great. He can occasionally invest himself with grace; but his natural port is gigantic loftiness. He can please when pleasure is required; but it is his peculiar power to astonish....When he cannot raise wonder by the sublimity of his mind, he gives delight by its fertility.74

Then he distinguished between the sublime and the pathetic:

As human passions did not enter the world before the Fall, there is in the *Paradise Lost* little opportunity for the pathetic; but what little there is has not been lost. That passion which is peculiar to rational nature, the anguish arising from the consciousness of transgression, and the horrors attending the sense of the Divine Displeasure, are very justly described and forcibly impressed. But the passions are moved only on one occasion; sublimity is the general and prevailing quality in this poem; sublimity variously modified, sometimes descriptive, sometimes argumentative.55

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54 *Ibid.*, 127.
He had earlier pointed out a certain universality of appeal in the characters of *Paradise Lost*, arising from the fact that all humanity "will, through all ages, bear the same relation to Adam and to Eve, and must partake of that good and evil which extend to themselves", but that universal relationship was not enough to excite suspense or sympathy or interest:

The plan of *Paradise Lost* has this inconvenience, that it comprises neither human actions nor human manners. The man and woman who act and suffer, are in a state which no other man or woman can ever know. The reader finds no transaction in which he can be engaged; beholds no condition in which he can by any effort of imagination place himself; he has, therefore, little natural curiosity or sympathy.

Johnson admired sublimity and he admired Milton, but he sympathized with the humanity portrayed by Shakespeare.

That he was capable of recognizing that sublimity was acknowledged on occasion. In October, 1800, the *British Critic* by way of attacking the biographer of Allan Ramsay contrasted his style and method to those of Johnson, writing of the latter:

How simply does he begin his life of Milton, though he was to rise, in his analysis of the *Paradise Lost*, to a grandeur of diction, and sublimity of sentiment, surpassed only in the poem which was the subject of his criticism.

Unfortunately, again, there were no specific instances cited of that sublimity of sentiment, so that the significance lay merely in the generally approving tone.

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58 XVI, 266.
Stockdale's *Lectures on Eminent English Poets*, brought out in 1808, did its share in stirring up a furor in Miltonic criticism as well as in Shakespearean. The *Edinburgh*, the first to note the publication, granted that Stockdale was successful in pointing out "the glaring inconsistencies of Johnson," but had a poor opinion of his method of attack, which involved accepting the favorable comments and rejecting the unfavorable. The inconsistency, said the reviewer, "invalidated the faith of [Johnson's] praise as well as of his censure." A part of that censure, however, the reviewer himself subscribed to — that *Paradise Lost* was deficient in interest; but he did not want to be classed with Johnson:

> These expressions are not Johnsonian cavils; they contain all that can be fairly said in objection to Milton, and nothing more.

The *Monthly* reviewer agreed with the one in the *Edinburgh* that Johnson's pronouncements on Milton left a great deal to be desired, and agreed likewise that Stockdale was inadequate to the task of pointing out deficiencies. He cited as an example of the pettiness of Stockdale's mind his mathematical proof that Milton — in Johnson's own language — was the greatest of poets. Then he continued:

> Some of Johnson's inconsistencies, in speaking of the style of Milton, are properly, though too laboriously, exposed: but it is rather unfair to extend his censure of the sixth book, as "the favourite of children," to the whole poem, by the present author's own

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59XII (April, 1808), 67-8.
60Ibid., 69.
assertion that "Dr. Johnson might, with as little hesi-
tation, have extended the same contemptuous language
to the whole poem."61

The unrestrained violence of the Lectures compelled the Monthly
to adopt a moderate tone:

After having applied the epithets "feeble and confused" to a criticism of the great biographer, we should have thought that Mr. S. might have spared the still more furious accusations of absurdity and illiberality; and it is not quite seemly in this gentleman to call the Doctor an ass. When Mr. Stockdale, who lays claim to the merit of strict impartiality, and who abjures all rancor and prejudice, has reckoned up these invectives, which form but a small part of his "invectatio," he may perhaps admit a doubt of the justice of the claim so modestly advanced by him in these words: "This honest, this fair freedom (without any partiality to myself I speak it) certainly deserves the esteem and encouragement of the public."62

And for the rest of the period, moderation was the rule rather than the exception. In an account of Rogers' Poems in October, 1813, the Edinburgh reviewer discoursed at length on the topic that different ages require different kinds of poetry and brought forth different kinds of criticism. Thus although he maintained that Johnson was the critic eminently fitted to appreciate the poets of the neoclassical spirit, he acknowledged:

"Johnson did indeed perform a vigorous act of reluctant justice towards Milton; but it was a proof, to use his own words, that
'At length our mighty Bard's victorious lays
Fill the loud voice of universal praise;"

61LIX (June, 1809), 142.
62Ibid., 143.
And baffled Spite, with hapless anguish dumb,  
Yields to renown the centuries to come!"63

Johnson had to concede Milton's genius in spite of his prejudice.

In 1825 the Gentleman's cited Johnson as an authority who held that "sublimity is the indispensable characteristic of religious poetry."64 When the Quarterly reviewed Todd's edition of Milton in June, 1827, and evaluated the various biographers of the poet, Johnson of course was among them. After pointing out the harmful effects of Johnson's bias on his criticism, the reviewer analyzed the quality of Johnson's mind in this fashion:

Johnson was in nothing more remarkable than in his reverence for common sense; to this he appeals on all occasions--in his maxims of government, in his regulations of society, in his canons of criticism: his wisdom was the wisdom of Socrates, practical rather than speculative, homely rather than sublime; he thought that its true province was on the earth, not in the clouds; its proper minister, experience, not conjecture; all this was against Milton, and in favour of Pope; the latter of whom he, perhaps, extravagantly commends,--from the former he no less extravagantly detracts.65

There again was the assumption that because Johnson preferred in the final analysis the pathetic to the sublime, he was incapable of comprehending the noble imagination of Milton. There was the assumption that Johnson was purely neoclassical in his definition of the imagination as an associative rather

63 XXII, 34.
64 XCV, 612.
65 XXXVI, 42.
than a creative power. But of Milton in *Paradise Lost* he wrote:

The appearances of nature, and the occurrences of life, did not satiate his appetite of greatness. To paint things as they are, requires a minute attention, and employs the memory rather than the fancy. Milton's delight was to sport in the wide regions of possibility; reality was a scene too narrow for his mind. He sent his faculties out upon discovery, into worlds where only imagination can travel, and delighted to form new modes of existence [italics mine], and furnish sentiment and action to superior beings, to trace the counsels of hell, or accompany the choirs of heaven.

In spite of not recognizing Johnson's acceptance of a new function of the imagination, the *Quarterly* came to his defense, however, later in the same article. Symmons, the reviewer pointed out, had also written a life of Milton, and although he had had the advantage of idolizing his subject, his style was so fulsome as to be "pitiable."

...Then (we trust) we shall have no more talk of Dr. Symmons' "honouring with his notice" a work of Dr. Johnson, nor hear a pigmy like this begging pardon of the admirers of a giant, whilst he assures them, that "Johnson actually wanted the power to comprehend the greatness and elevation of Milton's mind."

Thus, after all, the reviewer arrived at the belief that Johnson was not wanting in comprehensiveness of soul.

The *British Critic* later used almost the same simile in comparing Johnson and Symmons:

Dr. Symmons bears about the same proportion (mentally) to Samuel Johnson as the traveler who sits on the nose

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67.*XXVI*, 43.
of Jain Boromeo does to that gigantic statue. 68
And in the same article, in making a comparison between Hayley and Johnson as biographers and critics of Milton, the reviewer implied that it was Johnson's prejudice rather than a lack of sublimity of soul that prevented his being a fit judge of Milton:

But if Johnson was unfitted to pronounce a judgement upon Milton, by reason of his political prejudices, Hayley was equally unable to do him justice, from the want of any corresponding grandeur or majesty of thought. 69

In this connection too will be recalled the Monthly's reaction to Dr. Channing's evaluation of Johnson. Channing had said not only that Johnson was prejudiced and bigoted but also that his mind was too pedestrian to comprehend Milton's. Granting the first charge, the Monthly respectfully refused to subscribe to the second:

Now we confidently ask those who have quarrelled with Dr. Johnson's criticism of Milton—not whether they themselves have written in Milton's praise any thing which does him so much honour as the periods of Dr. Johnson's pen—but whether they have found, in the whole range of ancient or modern literature, a finer piece of criticism: whether the English language contains passages more noble conceived, or more accurately, more energetically, or more happily expressed, than those we have cited? 70

The reviewer had done what apparently few of Johnson's vilifiers had — read the positive as well as the negative judgments in his criticism.

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68 Series 4, XII (July, 1832), 48.
69 Ibid., 46.
70 VII, n.s. (April, 1828), 476.
One of those negative pronouncements, it has already been indicated, was that the absence of the pathetic made reading *Paradise Lost* tedious. Furthermore, it has been seen that the *Edinburgh* reviewer concurred. But there was a dissenter. The *London Magazine* denounced Mrs. Siddons's abridged version of *Paradise Lost* and the preface to it as well:

The Preface is truly written in a very feeble and maudlin style, and in the course of about a dozen sentences, it contrives to utter two or three foolish opinions, and two or three erring ones..."The perfection of his immortal Poem is seldom appreciated by the young; and its perusal is, perhaps, very generally regarded rather as a duty than a pleasure. This has been attributed by Dr. Johnson to the want of human interest."\(^71\)

Though the *London* objected, Johnson's views apparently were shared by later readers.

Another of the debated issues was propriety in sacred poetry, i.e., the proper reconciliation of the probable and the marvelous elements and the ornamentation that might properly be used. In both "Milton" and "Waller" in the *Lives* Johnson had set forth his views of the difficulty of writing sacred verse, a difficulty which arose for him as a natural result of his deeply pious nature. He acknowledged the possibility of successful didactic and descriptive poetry of this order, but "contemplative piety" or devotional verse was in his opinion rarely managed adequately,\(^72\) for God was both too awful and too perfect to be approached directly. Although the

\(^{71}\) *VII* (February, 1823), 216.

\(^{72}\) *Lives*, I, 211.
latter judgment was upheld by the Monthly, both Blackwood's and the Quarterly devoted a long essay to refuting Johnson's argument. Blackwood's took the position that Johnson was among those "persons of cold hearts and limited understandings" who held "that Religion is not a fit theme for poetical genius, and that Sacred Poetry is beyond the powers of uninspired men." Johnson's motives as well as his expressed limitation on his opinion were misunderstood. The Quarterly, on the other hand, was aware of what prompted the "great writer" to state his views but refuted him on the basis of the devotional lyrics in the Bible.

So far as Paradise Lost itself was specifically concerned, Johnson gave his complete approval to the manner in which Milton handled the theology:

In this part of his work, Milton must be confessed to have equalled every other poet. He has involved in his account of the Fall of Man the events which preceded, and those that were to follow it: he has interwoven the whole system of theology with such propriety, that every part appears to be necessary; and scarcely any recital is wished shorter for the sake of quickening the progress of the main action.

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73LIV (October, 1807), 205.
74XXIV (December, 1828), 917. Cf. the expression of this sentiment earlier in the same journal: "It is happy for the world, that, in spite of the prognostics of literary prophets, there is something in the mind of man too buoyant to be borne down by any of those impossibilities which have been conjured up by a host of cool unimaginative critics" (I, 630).
75XXXII (June, 1825), 223.
76Lives, I, 122.
Furthermore, he put his seal on the poet's handling of the marvelous elements in relation to poetical probability:

Of the probable and the marvellous, two parts of a vulgar epic poem, which immerse the critic in deep consideration, the Paradise Lost requires little to be said. It contains the history of a miracle, of Creation and the Redemption; it displays the power and the mercy of the Supreme Being; the probable therefore is marvellous, and the marvellous is probable. The substance of the narrative is truth; and as truth allows no choice, it is, like necessity, superior to rule. To the accidental or adventitious parts, as to every thing human, some slight exceptions may be made. But the main fabric is immovably supported.

Later, he did specify the "slight exceptions" -- the mixture of materiality and immateriality in the presentation of the spirits, and the participation of allegorical figures in the action, both objections arising, it is quite true, from a literal and common sense point of view. He pointed them out for the sake of completeness, believing that it was "the business of impartial criticism to discover" the defects as well as the beauties of a work; in relation to the whole poem, he considered them highly insignificant:

Such are the faults of that wonderful performance Paradise Lost; which he who can put in balance with its beauties must be considered not as nice but as dull, as less to be censured for want of candour, than pitied for want of sensibility.

77Ibid., 124-5.
78Ibid., 132-3.
79Ibid., 129-30.
80Ibid., 135.
However, it was those very objections which called down upon Johnson's head the invective of Stockdale recorded in the Monthly; it was for those that his criticism was called contemptuous, absurd, ridiculous, assine. The Edinburgh, too, though more calmly, asserted that Johnson was mistaken in the first of the alleged faults.

Dr. Johnson acknowledges that it was absolutely necessary for him to clothe his spirits with material forms. "But," says he, "he should have secured the consistency of his system by keeping immateriality out of sight, and seducing the reader to drop it from his thoughts." This is easily said; but what if he could not seduce the reader to drop it from his thoughts? What if the contrary opinion had taken so full a possession of the minds of men as to leave no room even for the quasi-belief which poetry requires? Such we suspect to have been the case. It was impossible for the poet to adopt altogether the material or the immaterial system. He therefore took his stand on the debatable ground. He left the whole in ambiguity.

Surprisingly, the justification of Milton's procedure involved a denial of the possibility in this instance of any "willing suspension of disbelief" and an adherence instead to the neo-classical doctrine of literal delusion, which had long before been generally abandoned.

Toward the close of the period Fraser's Magazine engaged in a minor quarrel with the Literary Gazette on the subject of religious poetry, in the course of which it published an open letter to the editor of the Gazette. The author of the letter cited Johnson on the difficulty of

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81 LIX (June, 1809), 142.

82 XLII (August, 1825), 320.
writing religious poetry, agreed with him for the most part, but maintained that good poets could overcome the obstacles. The difficulty was merely an additional challenge, and Milton among others had met it nobly, contrary to Johnson's implication:

It is, however, the fashion of the Literary Gazettes of the present day, to speak with contempt of "a Miltonic taste"... But he never felt the religion of Milton, or the nature of Shakspeare, who dared impiety so abominable! He must have been one of those whom Dr. Johnson described as "forsaking their master, and seeking their companions"... One who sneered at a Miltonic taste might well have been encouraged by Johnson.

Johnson's stand on the question of the versification of Paradise Lost also was noted by the periodicals. It will be recalled that after a lengthy disquisition in "Milton" on the inferior claims of blank verse as compared to rhyme -- and this was a topic he discoursed on on other occasions too -- he came rather oddly to this conclusion:

But, whatever be the advantage of rhyme, I cannot prevail on myself to wish that Milton had been a rhymer; for I cannot wish his work to be other than it is; yet, like other heroes, he is to be admired rather than imitated. He that thinks himself capable

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83II (August, 1830), 79.
84Ibid., 84.
85It was this point of propriety in religious poetry that occupied DeQuinsey time and again in his later biographical and critical sketches of Milton. He wrote voluminously to refute Johnson's charges that Milton had mingled improperly pagan gods and Christian figures in Paradise Lost -- charges which Johnson had never made. See Works, X, 402-411, and XI, 24.
of astonishing, may write blank verse; but those that hope only to please, must condescend to rhyme.\textsuperscript{86}

In spite of his reasoned defense of rhyme, Johnson had to grant that there was an excellence in Milton's blank verse which he could not account for -- a quality beyond his power of definition; and because the quality was indefinable, he was unwilling to allow other poets to attempt to emulate the master. Another point to be noted was the association of astonishment, a characteristic of the sublime, with the appropriate use of blank verse. Johnson's rare approval of the form was granted when it was found in conjunction with grand, sweeping, dignified, or awe-inspiring subject matter.

The fact that Johnson's position was a rather equivocal one made naturally for various interpretations. The \textit{Monthly} denounced his view, which it saw as completely negative, and then used as justification Johnson's own words on Milton:

\begin{quote}
It [Ogilvie's \textit{Britannia}] is written in blank verse; the employment of which the author vindicates, in his preliminary dissertation, against the objections of \textit{If an author can write such heroic verse as that of Milton or Shakspeare, he may safely leave his performance to the protection of its own merits [italics mine]}. Dr. Johnson, we believe, has made very few converts on this subject.\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}

Hazlitt too interpreted his position as a completely damning one, first in one of the \textit{Round Table} essays in the

\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Lives}, I, 138.

\textsuperscript{87} XXXVII (April, 1802), 360.
Examiner and then, in practically the same words, in Lectures on the English Poets:

Milton's blank verse is the only blank verse in the language (except Shakspeare's) that deserves the name of verse. Dr. Johnson, who had modeled his ideas of versification on the regular sing-song of Pope, condemns the Paradise Lost as harsh and unequal. I shall not pretend to say that this is not sometimes the case; for where a degree of excellence beyond the mechanical rules of art is attempted, the poet must sometimes fail. But I imagine that there are more perfect examples in Milton of musical expression, or of an adaptation of the sound and movement of the verse to the meaning of the passage, than in all our other writers, whether of rhyme or blank verse, put together, (with the exception already mentioned).... Dr. Johnson and Pope would have converted his vaulting Pegasus into a rocking-horse.

He again reaffirmed his interpretation in answer to Gifford's attack:

The only mistake you are able to point out, is a slip of the pen, which you will find to have been corrected long ago in the second edition. -- Your pretending to say that Dr. Johnson was an admirer of Milton's blank verse, is not a slip of the pen -- you know he was not.

Though Gifford was not right, he was as close to having a true picture as Hazlitt.

Others besides Gifford could quote Johnson with approval. Blackwood's in an essay called "Diversity of Genius" used a

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88 August 20, 1815, pp. 39-40.
89 Works, v, 61, 63.
90 Ibid., i, 401.
91 DeQuincey later agreed with Schlosser's Literary History of the Eighteenth Century in saying: "Dr. Johnson, though he pretended to be satisfied with the "Paradise Lost," even in what he regarded as the undress of blank verse, still secretly wished it rhyme." See Collected Writings, XI, 25.
statement of Johnson as proof that each poet's work bore the stamp of his individual personality:

"The blank verse of Thomson," says Johnson, "is no more the blank verse of Milton, or of any other poet than the rhymes of Prior are the rhymes of Cowley." 92

The London Magazine author of "On the Life and Writings of Richard Jago" cited with approval Johnson's observation that "if blank verse be not tumid and gorgeous, it is crippled prose." 93 But that was all. Haslitt and Gifford, apparently, were the only ones who felt strongly on the question.

There remain several references disputing the course of Milton's reputation both in his own day and in succeeding periods. Johnson had written of it in this fashion in his biographical sketch:

The slow sale and tardy reputation of this poem have been always mentioned as evidences of neglected merit, and of the uncertainty of literary fame; and enquiries have been made, and conjectures offered, about the causes of its long obscurity and late reception. But has the case been truly stated? Have not lamentation and wonder been lavished on an evil that was never felt? 94

He amplified the argument by pointing out that the reading and buying public was comparatively small and that, in spite of their inability to advertise, the publishers had still sold thirteen hundred copies of Paradise Lost in two years. Furthermore, he asserted that only two thousand copies of Shakespeare had been sold between 1623 and 1664.

92 VI (March, 1820), 677.
93 VI (November, 1822), 419.
In this connection again Johnson received contradictory treatment. Wordsworth once explained at great length that

...Dr. Johnson has fallen into a gross mistake when he attempts to prove, by the sale of the work, that Milton's countrymen were "just to it" upon its first appearance.

He maintained that the first sale was due to friends and those interested in it as a religious work, not to those interested in its poetical merit. Then he added:

There were readers in multitudes; but their money went for other purposes, as their admiration was fixed elsewhere.97

On the other hand, an Edinburgh reviewer put exactly the reverse interpretation on Johnson's statement:

The strange misrepresentations, long prevalent among ourselves, respecting the slow progress of Milton's reputation, sanctioned as they were by both Johnson and Thomas Warton, have produced ridiculous effects abroad.96

Hazlitt, for once, had a kind word to direct at Johnson:

Milton has as fine an idea as any one of true fame; and Dr. Johnson has very beautifully described his patient and confident anticipations of the success of his great poem in the account of Paradise Lost.97

Another writer for the Edinburgh Review in commenting on Summer's edition agreed essentially with Wordsworth:

We venture to say, on the contrary, paradoxical as the remark may appear, that no poet has ever had to struggle with more unfavourable circumstances than Milton. He doubted, as he himself owned, whether he


96 XXV (October, 1815), 495.

97 Works, I, 94.
had not been born "an age too late." For this notion
Johnson has thought fit to make him the butt of his
clumsy ridicule. The poet, we believe, understood
the nature of his art better than the critic."

And finally the Westminster Review said with admirable intel-
lectual snobbery:

Neither Aeschylus, nor Dante, nor Milton, has the
slightest pretension to the name of a popular poet.
Even if Johnson's attempt to confute the well-
authenticated traditions respecting the early recep-
tion of Paradise Lost had been more successful,
there is sufficient evidence to convince all who are
willing to be convinced, that the veneration expressed
for it in the present day by all classes, is almost
solely the result of that deference which inferior
minds pay to those who think..."

Not only was Johnson's estimate of Milton's early reputation
seen as erroneous, but what reputation the poet had finally
achieved was considered a matter more of lip service than of
sincere appreciation. Since the reviewer offered no authen-
tication whatsoever of his double allegation, it cannot be
taken as more than one critic's view of Milton's position in
the period, but at any rate, not one of the commentators sup-
ported Johnson's judgment.

In a summary of the material in the journals on Johnson
as a critic of Milton, it is necessary for the sake of com-
pleteness to note what did not appear there as well as what
did. Earlier it was pointed out that although Milton was
second only to Shakespeare as a poet admired by the Roman-
tics, little of what the major critics had to say of him fell

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98XLII (August, 1825), 306-7.
99VIII (October, 1827), 304.
within the scope of this study; Hazlitt alone publicized his views in the years between 1800 and 1832. Then in the writings of the reviewers proper there were omissions to be noted. Of the minor poems only the early Latin ones and Lycidas received any appreciable attention, and of the major ones only Paradise Lost. Though Johnson attacked in particular the structure of Samson Agonistes, no interest in it was evinced, and Paradise Regained likewise was neglected.

From the examination of what actually did appear in the journals and reviews, several truths have emerged which need perhaps to be re-emphasized. In the first place, it was seen that the reviewers looked upon Johnson as completely unsatisfactory in the role of biographer by reason of his active antipathy to Milton's political and religious principles. In that violent reaction to him as a biographer lay a very obvious barrier to their according him justice as a critic. In other words, many of them were so aroused by his prejudice that they could see nothing else in the "Milton" and ignored the criticism; others went slightly further and saw the criticism, but only the derogatory comments, and they were honor-bound to object to those. Operating in conjunction with that defensive reaction was of course another influence -- the growing trend toward a definition of criticism as appreciation rather than evaluation. Furthermore, in spite of their theoretical devotion to the historical approach in literary criticism, the critics of the Romantic period -- the reviewers for the journals as well as the major figures --
showed a decided disinclination to evaluate Johnson and his standards against the background of his own time; they scarcely recognized the fact that his view of the critical process included an exposition of faults as well as an appreciation of beauties. Hence, the majority of them on a second ground resented his handling of the minor poems and objected to his pointing out what he considered errors in *Paradise Lost*. Since anything short of complete worship was sacrilege, a critic really had no business to look for flaws, and besides, only a critic blinded by prejudice could find them in Milton if he did look for them.

After the negative conclusions have been pointed out, there still remains the minority vote to be accounted for. Not all of the reviewers were so antagonized by Johnson's prejudice against Milton the man that they looked no further; some few recognized the bias and deplored it, but went on to explore the criticism in its entirety, to read the praise as well as the qualifications, to see the relative insignificance of the qualifications in the light of the whole commendatory judgment. Consequently, there was throughout the period a small group of men who vigorously defended Johnson as a critic, if not as a biographer, of Milton.
CHAPTER IV

THE AUTHOR OF THE LIVES OF THE POETS

When early in 1777 Boswell, who happened to be in Scotland at the time, learned that Samuel Johnson had contracted to provide biographical and critical prefaces for a forthcoming edition of English poets, he immediately wrote to his friend for the details of the transaction. The answer was very simple. It appeared that an Edinburgh publishing house had just brought out a cheap edition of the poets—a pirated one, in the eyes, at least, of the London booksellers who held copyrights to the older writers. Since the edition was to be sold in London as well as in Edinburgh and since the copyrights could not be legally defended, it behooved the London booksellers to take other action. About forty of them banded together, decided on a superior edition of their own, and called upon Johnson, the value of whose name they knew, to write the prefatory material. That he agreed to do, for a sum of two hundred pounds. In this manner was the task begun which Johnson did not complete until

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1781. And it was this task which proved to be the crown of Johnson's career as a literary critic; the faith of the booksellers was justified by an immediate and continuing profit from the sales both of the edition as a whole and of the separate publication of the Lives issued very shortly.

Naturally, since this work in addition to the Shakespeare edition formed the great body of Johnson's critical writing, not only his contemporary fame but his reputation in succeeding years as well depended much upon the reactions to it. By the beginning of the period under investigation the initial furor had subsided, of course, but there was still in the periodicals a great deal of comment concerning the Lives whenever a new edition of English poetry was projected and whenever one of the writers treated by Johnson was under discussion. The general comment on the work, furthermore, followed three lines of thought -- the choice of authors included in the edition, the merit of the Lives as biography, and the merit of the Lives as criticism.

1. The General Reputation

The first question of why the authors chosen had been chosen and why those excluded had been excluded was not a new one; as soon as the edition appeared, there had been comment, naturally, both approving and disapproving. Actually, Johnson himself had had very little to do with that portion of the enterprise, for he was by no means the editor in the modern sense. The booksellers had merely consulted their accounts,
evaluated on the basis of expected sales the authors appearing there, and decided on a plan beginning with Waller and excluding any authors still living. It is true that Johnson's influence was felt to this extent: on his recommendation Blackmore, Yalden, Watts, Pomfret, and (perhaps) Thomson were included, and Churchill — so said Mrs. Thrale — was excluded. Otherwise he accepted what names were given him, reserving only the right to call them dunces if he considered them dunces. Among the major figures of the Romantic period, only Wordsworth and Hazlitt were heard on this point, both deploring the omission of Shakespeare, Spenser, Chaucer, and Sidney from the collection. But many of the journals had views to air.

The earliest comment came from the British Critic in the form of a review of Aiken's new edition of the English poets:

This republication of Johnson's poets is very elegant in point of form, and has the decoration of plates by Heath; besides the accessions it derives from the pen of Dr. Aiken, some changes in the selection, and some additions.

One significance of that was the very fact that a new edition, with "some changes" and "some additions," was considered necessary; the need for additions had arisen naturally from

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4Series 1, XXII (December, 1803), 674.
the passage of time, but the changes -- not here specified, incidentally -- reflected an alteration in the popularity of certain authors with the reading public. Another significant point was that the original edition was identified as "Johnson's poets," so that it was only natural that his taste be impugned when the choice of authors was not approved. In a later note on Aiken, the review mentioned Blackmore as one author whom Johnson had included in the collection, and it stated definitely that the choice was a poor one.

In this connection, too, Stockdale's Lectures on the Eminent English Poets figured. The Monthly, in objecting to his title, revived the old issue of what Johnson's purpose had been in his Lives:

Johnson professes to give an account of the more eminent English poets; and Mr. Stockdale, offended at the mean pretensions of many who are admitted into this assemblage, announces the resolution to confine himself to those who are truly eminent: but, with whatever scrupulousness the list may be reduced, why has he excluded Otway, Rowe, Akenside, Collins, and Goldsmith?

The reviewer there again gave Johnson credit for having chosen the "eminent" poets to whom Stockdale objected, and he agreed that some might well have been dropped from the list; but Stockdale went too far and omitted authors whom Johnson had rightfully included. The insistence on Goldsmith, who had not appeared in the earlier edition and whom Stockdale too neglected, was to recur later.

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5Ibid., XXIII (June, 1804), 633-4.
6LIX (June, 1809), 148.
Another poet of whom Johnson was considered oddly neglectful was Christopher Smart. In an article on him the *Gentleman's Magazine* remarked:

It is somewhat remarkable also, that our great National Biographer, though he and our author were personally known to each other, has not deigned to take the smallest notice of him in his celebrated Lives of the English Poets, notwithstanding many names appear in that work, which, in the estimation of any candid and impartial judge, seem much less worthy of praise than that of our Author.

There the responsibility for the material in the *Lives* was seen as Johnson's, and it was felt that the critic might well have substituted Smart for some of the less happy choices.

Another edition of English poets, like Aiken's, really a revision of that to which Johnson had contributed, was elaborately entitled *The Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper; including the Series edited, with Prefaces Biographical and Critical, by Dr. Samuel Johnson; and the most approved Translations. The Additional Lives by Alexander Chalmers, F.S.A.* Chalmers himself and the booksellers for whom he compiled the edition were still aware of the value of Johnson's name and kept it on the title page. The *Gentleman's*, first on the reviewing scene, also recognized his authority and the importance of his contributions to literary history:

That Mr. C. will have to encounter some objections in admitting the writings of certain Poets, who have long been denounced as below mediocrity, is highly probable; but to have passed them over, after having become members of the body of British Poets, and generally received as such, would undoubtedly have

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*JXII (December, 1822), 499-500.*
rendered his Series incomplete. The Lives prefixed to their works by the powerful hand of Johnson, are alone sufficient to give them a certain rank amongst their brethren...

Even though some of the authors who had been included in Johnson's edition were deserving of no further notice, they were retained by Chalmers purely by virtue of the prestige which Johnson's biographies had lent them. The addition of the Middle English and Renaissance authors was, of course, in direct line with the trend begun by the Wartons and Hurd and Percy back in the mid-eighteenth century, and was a constructive answer to those who felt that the earlier forms of English poetry were unjustly neglected.

The Quarterly in its notice of Chalmers's production commented on earlier editions, among them that of Dr. Anderson, who had insisted upon including writers preceding those in Johnson's collection. In commending him for that stand, the reviewer placed the responsibility for the contents of Johnson's edition where it belonged:

The booksellers, as their predecessors had done with Dr. Johnson's edition, would have begun the collection with Cowley.9

In the same article, the reviewer indicated Chalmers's indebtedness to Johnson:

Where Johnson ends, the present editor resumes his biographical and critical labours, collects his information with laudable care, and deals out his praise or censure with oracular solemnity, and qualifying

8LXXXII (December, 1812), 546.

9XI (July, 1814), 504.
Not only the plan but the style and spirit as well, it was implied tolerantly, were the result of Johnson's influence.

Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* for March, 1819, again recalled Johnson's services to English literature. Thomas Campbell's *British Poetry* had just been published, and Jeffrey used it as a springboard into a discussion of literary taste:

Considered as a nation, we are yet but very imperfectly recovered from that strange and ungrateful forgetfulness of our older poets which began with the Restoration, and continued almost unbroken till after the middle of the last century. Nor can the works which have chiefly tended to dispel it among the instructed orders, be ranked in a higher class than this which is before us. --Percy's Relics of Antient Poetry produced, we believe, the first revulsion--and this was followed up by Warton's History of Poetry. --Johnson's Lives of the Poets did something; --and the great effect has been produced by the modern commentators on Shakespeare.  

Although Johnson's *Lives* had included relatively few authors who wrote before the Restoration, still the work was classed among that which exhibited an expanding point of view. Obviously, Johnson was not considered as wilfully neglectful of the "older poets."

In the first year of its existence the *London Magazine* commented on the need for supplementing the work of Johnson:

The "Lives" of Johnson are too limited in their compass, however excellent in many respects; and the

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10 *XI*, 488.

11 *XXI* (March, 1819), 467.
reprint of Phillips's Theatrum Poetarum, even if it
had been finished, would, apparently, have done little
towards supplying the hiatus.12

Apparently that feeling presaged an undertaking begun in the
following year:

We have the pleasure to introduce, to the readers
of the LONDON MAGAZINE, the first of a series of valu­
able papers in continuation of Dr. Johnson's Lives
of the English Poets. It is now exactly a century
since the birth of Akenside, the latest of those who
have a place in that collection, and the space which
the whole occupies is not much more than a century:
an attempt, therefore, to continue the work to our
own times, is not only a desirable undertaking, but
almost a necessary duty of the age in which we live.
That the intervening period abounds with the most
interesting materials for biography and criticism, is
evident from the names of Goldsmith, Johnson, Churchill,
Chatterton, Thomas and Joseph Warton, Mason, Falconer,
Glover, Mickle, Hammond, Langhorne, Sir William Jones,
Hurdls, Beattie, Burns, Cowper, and many of later
date, not inferior to these in excellence.13

It was the intervening years which made the amplification of
the Lives necessary. And it is interesting to note that
Johnson himself was one of the prospective subjects.

The London's pretensions did not go unnoticed. Chris­
topher North in the "Noctes Ambrosianae" in Blackwood's in­
quired of Tickler:

"By the way, Tickler, what do you think of the
Continuation of Dr. Johnson's Lives of the Poets in
that periodical?"

Tickler did not hesitate:

"Mere quackery. Why, the compiler manufactures a
life of this and that poet from materials in every
body's hands, and then boldly calls it 'a continuation

12I (April, 1820), 370.
13IV (August, 1821), 121.
of Dr. Johnson's Lives, &c. There seems no attempt to imitate his style at all. According to this notion, every thing that comes after another is a continuation of it.\textsuperscript{14}

The objection lay in the lack of originality; the independent spirit of Samuel Johnson was missing.

Later in the decade, in reviewing Dr. Sayers's Works, the Quarterly returned to the point of how material for collections of poetry was chosen and edited:

...The adventurous bookseller, who had the merit (and it is no light one) of making the first [collection], inserted in his list the names which were familiar to him in his trade, and (with few exceptions) they have continued to take their place by prescription in subsequent publications of the same kind. By virtue of this prescription, they passed muster with John Bell, with Dr. Johnson and his booksellers, who formed the list according to their copyrights, with Dr. Anderson, the most good-natured of all critical editors, and with Mr. Alexander Chalmers, whose good nature certainly was not such as to atone for his want of judgement.\textsuperscript{15}

Actually, the reviewer, in placing the responsibility for selection on the publishers, ignored what slight personal weight Johnson had brought to bear. Pomfret was one of his choices, it will be remembered. The Quarterly reviewer noted that there was little Johnson had to say about the poet and concluded:

This is, indeed, a rare, perhaps, a singular case, of long-lived reputation, founded neither upon desert, nor mis-desert, but preserved by prescription among low printers and provincial booksellers, who kept the book continually on the market.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} XI (April, 1822), 487.

\textsuperscript{15} XXXV (January, 1827), 192.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 190.
The point of responsibility occurred again in 1829 when the *Monthly Review* criticized a selection of poetry called *Flowers of Fancy*:

We will not repeat, for the ten thousandth time, the complaint about his [Johnson's] political or personal antipathies, and his consequent resolute blindness to the poetical merits of those who were so unfortunate as to excite either; and we will spontaneously acquit him of any enormous culpability in the omission of our earliest heroes of song.

The absolution of guilt rested on three points — in Johnson's day there were no facilities for understanding the "earliest heroes of song"; even if the proper information had become available in the latter part of the century, Johnson would have been too old to begin the study of it; and finally there was no demand for those poets among the public.17

The last notation came from *Blackwood's* in "An Hour's Talk about Poetry":

In Johnson's *Lives of the Poetasters*, may be spied with a microcosm, a variety of small fry, wriggling about in the waters of Helicon, which the creatures at last contrive so to muddy, that they elude observation, even through that microscopic instrument; and in Chalmers's edition of the British Poets, the productions of people are inserted, who must, when alive, have been almost too stupid for the ordinary run of social life.18

Although Johnson was not blamed for including the small fry, still his name was linked with theirs by circumstance.

Throughout the period, then, the question continued to recur — whether *The Lives of the Poets* was satisfactory from

17*CXIX* (May, 1829), 31-2.
18*XXX* (September, 1831), 487.
the point of view of mere inclusiveness. For the most part, the periodical reviewers realized that Johnson’s responsibility in the selection of the poets was relatively slight; they objected to some of the ones included and felt that others of the time might better have been substituted; and they saw that the passage of time would make additions inevitable. Nevertheless, whether they considered the poets trivial or important, they recognized the prestige which Johnson’s criticism gave to every one of them.

The complex attitude of the periodicals toward the essay on Milton has already been discussed, and later in this chapter the opinions of other individual sections of the Lives will be taken up. But at this stage in the study it seems feasible to establish the reputation of the Lives in general as biography and then as criticism. Although the prefaces were frequently judged on both grounds simultaneously, such a division is possible here because of Johnson’s organization of the originals.

Right from the beginning the tone was approving. The British Critic in January, 1805, reviewed The Life and Posthumous Writings of William Cowper and in the course of the article said:

Though this is marked as the third volume of Cowper’s Life, it contains no biography at all; but simply an additional collection of Letters. It contains indeed what is much better than biography, except such as flows from the pen of a Johnson, a very interesting and characteristic succession of Letters...19

19 Series 1, XXV (January, 1805), 8.
Several years later the same journal, in the process of criticising Barrow's *Life of Lord Macartney*, attributed to Johnson's influence the increasing number of biographers in England:

The remark of Dr. Johnson, that "there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful," (a maxim, which some even of his own performances show to have been carried rather too far), has...greatly multiplied the race of biographers...20

Although the influence was seen as a mixed blessing, still Johnson's own contributions on the whole were welcomed. The same quotation from Johnson was given unqualified approbation by the *Quarterly* a little later.21

The *Life of Alexander Nowell* occasioned another evaluation — this time by the *Quarterly* — of Johnson as biographer.

The dignity and usefulness of biography have been celebrated by a great writer, who has himself nearly carried that species of writing to perfection; but the biographical style and manner of Johnson, however seducing, are dangerous models for ordinary writers. To select a few illustrious names, to assume concerning them a few facts already known, to neglect the labour of research, to amplify and expand existing materials by profound reflexion, elaborate criticism or varied digression, are privileges belonging only to the gifted few, who, by the alchemy of genius, are enabled to turn whatever they touch to gold.22

This was high praise, indeed, of the results Johnson had produced, but simultaneously, it was a denial of his method as one to be imitated. Anecdotes were rife in Johnson's own day about his disinclination to seek biographical material even

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20XXXIII (March, 1808), 209.
21IV (August, 1810), 104.
22III (February, 1810), 111.
when he knew the source of it and when it was easily obtainable; although they rather exaggerated the picture, the essential spirit emerged. Johnson did depend a great deal on what he could recall and what information was given to him unsought. It was that unscholarly approach which the reviewer deplored, and it was the criticism in his opinion which distinguished the Lives.

In December of the following year the Quarterly again paid tribute to Johnson. The reviewer suggested that the author of the Memoirs of the Rt.-Hon. C.J. Fox might have gained considerable insight into the problems of his particular literary form if he had heeded Johnson's exposition of them in the essay on Addison:

This just and beautiful delineation of the duties and difficulties of biography, by the man who has excelled all others in that province of literature, might have suggested to Mr. Trotter some doubt of the soundness of those principles, and of the safety of those rules, by which he has professed to be guided; and some distrust of that temper and those feelings with which he avows his work to have been undertaken. 23

The theory of biography to which Johnson adhered could serve as a model, at any rate.

The article in the Gentleman's on Chalmers's The Works of the English Poets -- the same article earlier cited on the question of the inclusiveness of the Lives -- expressed an opinion too on the subject of their value as biography:

The body of English poetry edited by Dr. Johnson in 1781 extends from Cowley to Lyttelton: comprizing

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23 VI (December, 1811), 538-9.
the works of 52 writers. To dwell upon the imitable parts of this undertaking, or upon those passages which must ever be liable to censure, as sanctioning many errors, and betraying many perverse decisions, would be a most unnecessary task; the work having been criticised with as much minuteness as the literary and moral character of Johnson himself, of which, to use the words of a valuable writer, "it exhibits a more faithful, expressive, and curious picture, than all the portraits attempted by his Biographers."

The unscholarly "sanctioning of many errors" was the same charge which the Quarterly had brought against the biographer. However, this reviewer agreed with Chalmers that "Johnson's Lives, after all the objections that have been offered, must ever be the foundation of English Poetical Biography." 24

Several years later Chalmers produced another effort in the field of biography -- his Biographical Dictionary -- and the Gentleman's passed judgment upon it also. By way of introduction the reviewer commented upon the accepted dignity and usefulness of biography and then said:

...With the deepest reverence for the talents of Johnson, it must be confessed that his model is a dangerous one. To copy it, would not only be hazardous; but, were it generally adopted, the utility of Biography would be lessened. In his "Lives of the Poets" Johnson appeared rather as Critick than a Biographer. Satisfied with gleaning a few of the most striking incidents in the Life, he exerted the whole force of his genius in an elaborate criticism on the Writings of an Author; and, neglecting himself the due labour of research, he too often rested content with a few facts already recorded, or which friendly aid or accident threw his way. The digressions into which he wandered, interesting and delightful as they are, in a series of critical essays, would

24 LXXXII (December, 1812), 545-6.
nevertheless be misplaced in a body of biography, where facts alone are sought for.25

Thus far, the passage was virtually an amplified paraphrase of the earlier one in the Quarterly. But this reviewer continued. Granting that the life of Savage was an exception to Johnson's usual biographical style, he maintained that it was rather fortunate that Johnson had not been the author of such a work as Chalmers's.

Such an occupation must necessarily have most materially diminished the number of his original compositions; and as the minuteness of Biography furnishes its greatest charm, and the extent and accuracy of the research employed contributes so mainly to its utility, it is evident that men less highly gifted, but of greater industry, were better qualified for so vast an undertaking.26

And Chalmers was of that lesser group and so received high praise for his accomplishment.

In January, 1818, the Gentleman's published "Remarks on the Genius and Character of Johnson," in which the author proposed to assess impartially Johnson's overall reputation as a man of letters and his specific contributions to the literary world. These were his comments on the labors in biography:

His Lives of Eminent Persons, the production of his earlier years, and which, combined with other circumstances, were the instruments which raised him to notoriety, and founded the basis of his future fame, may, for literary excellence, and propriety of style, be termed models for the imitation of Biographers. Although perhaps less nervous and antithetical than

25 LXXVII (April, 1817), 291.
26 Ibid., 292.
that of the Lives of the English Poets, they yet exhibit greater simplicity and ease...Concise, yet on the other hand sufficiently luminous, the Author in narration strikes at principal events, neglecting the review of subordinate matter; his chief aim, after having imparted requisite information on those points, seems rather to delineate character, than to heap together occurrences in the detail. These performances, in conjunction with the Lives of the English Poets, must long remain among the most finished biographical sketches in the language. 27

So far as method was concerned, this essayist approved his neglecting detail for broad delineation of character.

Later in a comment on the disputed point of the birth date of Nicholas Rowe, the writer for the Gentleman's cited as evidence the church register in the town where the playwright was born. Since the information given there did not agree with Johnson's statements, the comment was simply:

Dr. Johnson, I should think, must have gotten his information from another source, than the Register here... 28

There was no indication of which source the reviewer preferred.

When in 1825 Ballantyne brought out the Novelist's Library for which Sir Walter Scott composed the prefatory lives, the Monthly's comment was:

The contributions which Sir Walter Scott has given to the present collection consist of memoirs of the author's lives, and criticisms on their writings, which, after the manner of Johnson's Lives of the Poets, are prefixed to the works of each writer. The memoirs, we are bound to say, are by no means comparable to those of the admirable biographer of Savage. 29

27 LXXXVIII, 33.
28 LXXXIX (September, 1819), 230.
29 CVIII (November, 1825), 261.
Scott himself, though he realized the inadequacy of Johnson's *Lives* after the interval of years, recognized the essential excellence of the work, saying that it had been executed with a "degree of critical force and talent which has seldom been concentrated."  

Quite late in the period Johnson still appeared as an authority on these matters:

Mr. Wilson commences his elaborate performance with the grave establishment of two distinct propositions; the first of which affirms the utility of Biography, on the authority of Zeno, Plutarch, Dr. Johnson, and Lord Bolingbrooke; while the second assumes, that the life of Daniel DeFoe is entitled to be written.

The tone was rather amused and superior, but the amusement was directed not at the authorities, but at Mr. Wilson's serious-minded approach.

On the whole, then, Johnson enjoyed a high reputation as a biographer from the beginning of the period to the end, in spite of occasional qualifying comments on his disregard of detailed research and in spite of the repudiation of his treatment of Milton.

The analysis of the reputation of *The Lives of the Poets* as criticism, which was of course what Johnson intended the prefaces primarily to be, results in a more complex picture.

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32 *WR, XIII* (July, 1830), 69.
In the discussion of the reviewers' reactions to the Milton essay, the question of political and religious prejudice arose time and again, and it does here also occasionally; the question of prejudice against certain literary forms arose there, and here it does also.

In the British Critic account of John Aiken's General Biography the reviewer quoted from the section on Richard Blackmore. Aiken pointed out that Johnson and Addison both had claimed "superior rank" for Blackmore's Creation, but he disagreed:

> This is high praise from a high source; but perhaps both Johnson and Addison suffered their regard for piety, in this instance, to take place of their critical discrimination.33

The British Critic made no comment, thus supposedly concurring in the criticism. This was one instance in which a favorable prejudice was considered to have obscured Johnson's judgment.

Stockdale's violent reactions to Johnson in his Lectures have already been noted so often in this study that it is not at all surprising to find them appearing here again. Their importance was not intrinsic, of course, but lay in what attitude the reviews took toward them. The lecturer's comments were so unrestrained that although the periodicals for the most part deprecated his judgment, they felt that they had to devote considerable space to an analysis of him.

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33 Series I, XXIII (June, 1804), 634.
From the Edinburgh came this evaluation:

More than half of his pages is devoted to the refutation of Dr. Johnson's heretical dogmas on the merits of our best writers. There was a time when no true admirer of Milton or Gray could speak without a rapture of indignation of Johnson's blasphemies against those poets. We know not if any duels were fought in that fashionable controversy, as they were in the course of another, which did not long precede it, in this part of the island, viz. the guilt or innocence of Mary Queen of Scots; but if blood was not spilt, a great deal of gall was generated...Mr. Stockdale appears to us rather impetuous as an advocate; yet generally, and with good feelings, in the right. We are only afraid that ingenuous veteran will find the public interest not so warm as his own. Johnson's true glory will live for ever; his violent prejudices have already lost their authority. The refutation of his errors, therefore, is not now called for.\textsuperscript{34}

The reviewer agreed that the charge of prejudice was just, but at the same time he saw it as a settled issue. The general public had already weighed the prejudices, rejected them, and gone on to accept the rest of the criticism.

Essentially the same attitude was reflected in the British Critic's notice of Stockdale:

A great part of these Lectures is polemical, employed in anxious dispute against the opinions and criticisms of Johnson and others. But much of this arises from having lived remote from the world, and literary intercourse. Most of the opinions against which Mr. S. contends, have long ceased to have any influence upon the minds of the readers of English poetry. The name of Johnson retains the just and high veneration which belongs to it, and which Mr. Stockdale himself supports, while his literary and other prejudices are known, acknowledged, and given up.\textsuperscript{35}

The presence of the bias in Johnson had not invalidated his entire contribution.

\textsuperscript{34}XII (April, 1808), 62.

\textsuperscript{35}XXXIII (May, 1809), 518-9.
The *Monthly* felt too that Stockdale was rash and impetuous in his approach to the *Lives*:

Dr. Johnson's critical *Lives* of our Poets have formed a standard of public opinion, which, though contested on some points, acquires additional authority from its duration. Boldly yet modestly to expose the hypercriticisms and errors, which may be detected in this code of national taste, would be an useful though a daring plan; but to direct against it a series of coarse attacks, distinguished both by violence and levity, must be equally inconsistent with the interest of literature, and with the reverence which we owe to the names of the illustrious dead. The judgment of Dr. Johnson was, indeed, rather sagacious than delicate; his criticisms demonstrate more good sense than feeling; and his preference of Blackmore is scarcely consistent with true poetic taste. Yet his volumes contain so many valuable and excellent remarks, on man as well as on books, and they convey such a mass of information under an agreeable form, that they are justly entitled to the pre-eminence which they have acquired in our literature; and their dictates, if not always to be implicitly followed, ought surely to be questioned with calm and respectful consideration.36

One reservation the reviewer made was in the matter of delicacy of feeling; Johnson's sphere, again, was the world of common sense. However, although Johnson was not given unquestioning obedience, he was respected and his authority was strong and enduring.

An interesting reversal of the usual attitude toward Johnson was evidenced by Dugald Stewart's "Observations on the different Species of Taste" published in the *Scots Magazine* in October, 1810:

Among our English poets, who is more vigorous, correct, and polished, than Dr. Johnson, in the few

36 *LIX* (June, 1809), 138-9.
poetical compositions which he has left? Whatever may
be thought of his claims to originality of genius,
no person who reads his verses can deny, that he
possessed a sound taste in this species of composi-
tion: and yet, how wayward and perverse in many in-
stances, are his decisions when he sits in judgment
on a political adversary, or when he treads on the
ashes of a departed rival! To myself (much as I
admire his great and various merits, both as a critic
and as a writer), human nature never appears in a
more humiliating form, than when I read his Lives of
the Poets; a performance which exhibits a more faith-
ful, expressive, and curious picture of the author,
than all the portraits attempted by his biographers;
and which, in this point of view, compensates fully
by the moral lessons it may suggest, for the critical
errors which it sanctions. The errors, alas! are not
such as any one who has perused his imitations of
Juvenal, can place to the account of a bad taste; but
such as had their root in weaknesses, which a noble
mind would be still more unwilling to acknowledge. 37

Prejudice other critics of Johnson had found in his work, but
seldom had anyone vouchsafed the opinion that his poetry was
better than his criticism. Furthermore, although Stewart
professed to admire Johnson's abilities as critic and writer,
obviously he felt that the only redeeming feature of the criti-
cism in the Lives was the moral lessons to be gleaned therefrom.

Chalmers's English Poets provoked comment on the criti-
cal merits, naturally, as well as the biographical merits of
its predecessor. The British Critic quoted from Chalmers'
preface:

To the opinion given of Johnson's Lives by Mr. Chalmers
we most heartily subscribe, namely, that "After all
the objections that have been offered, they must ever
be the foundation of English poetical biography. To
substitute anything in their room would be an attempt,

37 LXXII, 756.
by the ablest, hazardous, and by inferior pens, ridiculous.\textsuperscript{38}

The Gentleman's article quoted earlier on Chalmers was practically a composite of Stewart's views and those of the British Critic. It will be recalled that the author of it deplored the "many errors" and "many perverse decisions" exhibited in the Lives and then said that it would be useless to dwell on either those or the "inimitable parts of the undertaking," since "...as Mr. C. truly says, 'Johnson's Lives, after all the objections that have been offered, must ever be the foundation of English Poetical Biography.'\textsuperscript{39}

At about this time the Monthly came on the scene with two contributions, the first one a citation of Johnson's Lives as one of the "great events in literary history" adorning the year 1779,\textsuperscript{40} and the second a review of Wordsworth's Poems:

Mr. W. takes a brief and rapid notice of some of the leading English poets, the temporary neglect of whose writings evidently consoles him in the comparative unpopularity of his own, and then thus proceeds, alluding to Johnson's Lives of the Poets:

"As I do not mean to bring down this retrospect to our own times, it may with propriety be closed at the era of this distinguished event. From the literature of other ages and countries, proofs equally cogent might have been adduced that the opinions announced in the former part of this essay are founded upon truth....The love, the admiration, the indifference, the slight, the aversion, and even the contempt,

\textsuperscript{38}XXXIX (January, 1812), 15.

\textsuperscript{39}See footnote 24 above.

\textsuperscript{40}LXXV (October, 1814), 180.
with which these poems have been received... they are all proofs that for the present time I have not laboured in vain; and afford assurances, more or less authentic, that the products of my industry will endure.\textsuperscript{41}

Though Wordsworth called the Lives "this distinguished event," he saw himself as an innovator working against the kind of taste generally exhibited before his own poems were published. The Monthly did not appear to be particularly sympathetic to him.

Shortly after that the Gentleman's in reviewing The Life of Bishop Newton quoted at length but without any comment at all the biographer's remarks on Johnson:

"Dr. Johnson's Lives of the Poets afforded more amusement, but candour was much hurt and offended at the malevolence that predominates in every part. Some passages, it must be allowed, are judicious and well written, but make not sufficient compensation for so much spleen and ill humour. Never was any biographer more sparing of his praises, or more abundant in his censures. He seemingly delights more in exposing blemishes than in recommending beauties, slightly passes over excellences, enlarges upon imperfections, and not content with his own severe reflections, revives old scandal, and produces large quotations from the long-forgotten works of former critics. His reputation was so high in the republic of letters, that it wanted not be raised upon the ruins of others. But these essays, instead of raising a higher idea than was before entertained of his understanding, have certainly given the world a worse opinion of his temper. The Bishop was therefore the more surprised and concerned for his townsman, for he respected him not only for his genius and learning, but valued him much more for the amiable part of his character, his humanity and charity, his morality and religion."\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{41} LXXVIII (November, 1815), 229-30.

\textsuperscript{42} LXXXVII (January, 1817), 58.
The best indication that this quotation did not reflect the editorial policy of the journal was the previously noted "Remarks on the Character and Genius of Johnson," which appeared in it in January of the following year. In that essay Johnson's criticism was analyzed virtually not at all, for the simple reason that his prestige in that field of letters was taken for granted. Once the essayist said:

Viewed apart from the celebrity which he has acquired and must ever retain in elegant and philosophical criticism, Johnson rises still higher as a Moralist.

And somewhat later he repeated his conviction:

The reputation of Johnson in the science of Criticism is so universally acknowledged and established, that to enlarge on the subject would be both superfluous and injudicious....The great innovator, Time, whose unsparing hand is in most other cases productive only of decay, and which often, in literature detects the fallacy of slight pretensions, may peculiarly in the case of Johnson be said to brighten and confirm his reputation, and sufficiently to prove the justice of Voltaire’s remark, that the best eulogium of a great Writer is a good edition of his Works.43

Knowing the unadorned truth about Johnson from reading his entire body of work could result only in admiration.

Then there were several merely incidental references to Johnson. Blackwood’s, in an article comparing Jeffrey and Hazlitt, assessed Jeffrey's contributions to literary history and criticism.

Mr. Jeffrey's great merit lies in those general speculations which he has appended to his appreciations of particular books. In originality and

43 LXXXVIII (January, 1818), 33, 36.
ingenuity, they were so far above the level of all former publications, that they could not fail to be read with admiration. The public was then scarcely acquainted with any higher philosophy than what could be found in Johnson's Lives of the English Poets.

That was not an evaluation of the criticism proper in the Lives but of the philosophy in the digressions. Then the Gentleman's Magazine in discussing prefaces in general listed the Lives as one of the great losses the literary world would have sustained had the "modern plan" of omitting prefaces then prevailed. And the London Magazine in the course of a critique on Thomas Warton's Lives of the Poets pointed out as one evidence of its value the approval which Johnson had given it.

The survey of Johnson which the London published in August, 1823, as "On the Life and Writings of Samuel Johnson" and which was part of its continuation of Johnson's Lives, has appeared in other sections of this study, but it is revealing here too in an evaluation of the Lives. In one place the essayist wrote:

...At the solicitation of the booksellers, he now (1777) undertook to write the Lives of the English Poets. The judicious selection of the facts which he relates, the vivacity of the narrative, the profoundness of the observations, and the terseness of style, render this the most entertaining, as it is, perhaps, the most instructive of his works. His criticisms, indeed, often betray either the want of a

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44 III (June, 1818), 303.
45 XCI (February, 1821), 135.
46 IV (August, 1821), 122.
natural perception for the higher beauties of poetry, or a taste unimproved by the diligent study of the most perfect models; yet they are always acute, lucid, and original. That his judgment is often warped by a political bias can scarcely be doubted; but there is no good reason to suspect that it is ever perverted by malevolence or envy.

The presence of prejudice in politics and of prejudice in literature was acknowledged, but it was not seen as coloring and invalidating the whole work. That introduction was amplified in a later section of the article:

The principal charm of the Lives of the Poets is in the store of information which they contain. He had been, as he says somewhere of his own father, "no careless observer of the passages of the times." In the course of a long life, he had heard, and read, and seen much; and this he communicates with such force and vivacity, and illustrates by observations so pertinent and striking, that we recur again and again to his pages as we would to so many portraits traced by the hand of a great master, in spite of our belief that the originals were often misrepresented, that some were flattered, and the defects of others still more overcharged. In his very errors as a critic there is often shown more ability than in the right judgments of most others. When he is most wrong, he gives us some good reason for his being so. He is often mistaken, but never trivial and insipid. It is more safe to trust to him when he commends than when he dispraises; when he enlarges the boundaries of criticism which his predecessors had contracted, than when he sets up new fences of his own. The higher station we can take, the more those petty limits will disappear, which confine excellence to particular forms and systems. The critic who condemns that which the generality of mankind, or even the few of those more refined in their taste, have long agreed in admiring, may naturally conclude the fault to be in himself; that there is in his mind or his organs some want of capacity for the reception of a certain species of pleasure. When Johnson rejected pastoral comedy, as being representative of scenes adapted chiefly "to please barbarians and children," he might have suspected that his own eye-sight, rather than pastoral

47VIII, 173.
comedy, was to blame. When he characterized blank verse, "as verse only to the eye," he might reasonably have questioned the powers of his own hearing. But this, and more than this, we may forgive him, for his successful vindication of Shakspeare from the faults objected to him by the French critics.

It is in his biographical works that Johnson is most pleasing and most instructive.48

The limitations of Johnson's criticism in certain areas of literature were there explained, it is to be noted, on the basis primarily of organic insensibility rather than intellectual processes. Although it was quite true that Johnson did not particularly enjoy the scenes of rural England, it was also quite true that his objection to the pastoral form rested largely on its conventional artificiality; the pipes and crooks of the Sicilian shepherds were not a part of those rural scenes. At any rate, whatever the causes of those limitations, they did exist, and the London critic recognized them; but he saw them in the light of their relative insignificance to the whole body of criticism and paid homage to Johnson in spite of them.

It was Croker's edition of Boswell which provoked the last references in the period to the Lives. The Quarterly for one, in the course of its review, pronounced Johnson's critical prefaces "the best and most characteristic...of all his prose works."49

But the outstanding review was Macaulay's notorious one in the Edinburgh Review. The general tenor of his essay

48 Ibid., 184-5.
49 XLVI (November, 1831), 10.
scarcely needs to be recalled, for the picture of the narrow­
minded, bigoted literary dictator is a familiar one. But
for the sake of completeness, the following comments might
be noted. Once Macaulay defended Johnson against a charge
of carelessness in the essay on Tickell:

Now Johnson, though a bigoted Tory, was not quite
such a fool as Mr. Croker here represents him to be. 50

The disparagement of Johnson was exceeded only by the con­
tempt for Croker. Then in analyzing the Lives as a whole he
said:

The judgments which Johnson passed on books were,
in his own time, regarded with superstitious venera­
tion; and, in our time, are generally treated with
indiscriminate contempt. They are the judgments of a
strong but enslaved understanding. The mind of the
critic was hedged round by an uninterrupted fence of
prejudices and superstitions. Within his narrow
limits, he displayed a vigour and an activity which
ought to have enabled him to clear the barrier that
confined him.

How it chanced that a man who reasoned on his pre­
mises so ably, should assume his premises so foolishly,
is one of the great mysteries of human nature....

Johnson decided literary questions like a lawyer,
not like a legislator. He never examined foundations
where a point was already ruled. His whole code of
criticism rested on pure assumption, for which he
sometimes gave a precedent or an authority, but rarely
troubled himself to give a reason drawn from the
nature of things. He took it for granted, that the
kind of poetry which flourished in his own time, which
he had been accustomed to hear praised from his child­
hood, and which he had himself written with success,
was the best kind of poetry. In his biographical
work, he has repeatedly laid it down as an undeniable
proposition, that during the latter part of the seven­
teenth century, and the earlier part of the eighteenth,
English poetry had been in a constant progress of im­
provement. Waller, Denham, Dryden, and Pope, had

50 LIV (September, 1831), 10.
been, according to him, the great reformers. He judged of all works of the imagination by the standard established among his own contemporaries.... He was undoubtedly an excellent judge of compositions fashioned on his own principles. But when a deeper philosophy was required,—when he undertook to pronounce judgment on the works of those great minds which "yield homage only to eternal laws,"—his failure was ignominious. He criticised Pope's Epitaphs excellently. But his observations on Shakspere's plays, and Milton's poems, seem to us as wretched as if they had been written by Rymer himself, whom we take to have been the worst critic that ever lived.

Some of Johnson's whims on literary subjects can be compared only to that strange nervous feeling which made him uneasy if he had not touched every post between the Mitre tavern and his own lodgings.

That the first sentence was not at all true of Johnson's reputation in the periodicals, at least, has been made clear; the attitude there was anything but "indiscriminate contempt," for throughout the years from 1800 to 1832, the Lives in general were accorded high praise. Macaulay found in them the same bias and the same limitations, actually, as had the earlier reviewer for the London Magazine, but their views of the final significance of those factors in relations to the whole work were entirely different. And it must be admitted that it was Macaulay who walked alone.

11. The Metaphysical Poets

It has been indicated that one of the usual assumptions about the early nineteenth century periodicals is that they rather servilely followed the neoclassical standards of the preceding period and, since Johnson was customarily identified

51 Ibid., 31-33.
with that literary theory, the judgments of Johnson as well. An examination of the reputation of Johnson's Lives in general has alone proved the superficiality of that assumption, for the overall respect the eighteenth century critic enjoyed was frequently qualified insofar as his treatment of individual authors was concerned. And now it is time to investigate those authors -- in addition to Milton -- whom the reviewers found occasion to comment on specifically.

First among them chronologically were Cowley and the metaphysical poets with whom Johnson classified him, and the first mention of them pertained to just that appellation. In reviewing Wordsworth's Poems in 1815, the Monthly commented:

He is pleased, among other curious judgments, to disapprove the title of "Metaphysical Poets," which Johnson has bestowed on Cowley and some others.52

The reviewer's calling Wordsworth's judgment "curious" indicated an approval of Johnson's terminology. For the sake of keeping the record clear, it should be pointed out that it was Johnson's manner of designating the school, not his judgment of them, that Wordsworth objected to. He called them "that class of curious thinkers" and the contemporary admiration they were accorded "extravagant."53 The Monthly, however, here chose to uphold Johnson.54

52LXXVIII (November, 1815), 229.
53Prose Works, II, 111.
54Bo also did Scott (The Works of John Dryden, I, 9) and Hazlitt (Works, VIII, 49).
And in its first reference to the matter, so did the London; at least, in its article "On Parties in Poetry," the author used Johnson's designating term without any comment or qualification:

Those whom Dr. Johnson calls metaphysical poets, substituting conceits and witticisms for the profound thoughts of the first commencers of this corruption, prepared the way for the epigrammatic versifiers of the French school, by teaching their readers to expect perpetual surprises. Thus, the first serious inroad on our poetical constitution was effected by the head obtaining more than its share in the representation. A contrary abuse has prevailed in later times. 55

He concurred likewise in Johnson's essential judgment of them as "men of learning" whose first desire was to show that learning.

But in the London's second reference to it, the attitude was rather ambiguous:

He particularly valued himself on the Life of Cowley, for the sake of those observations which he had introduced into it on the metaphysical poets. Here he has mistaken the character of Marino, whom he supposed to be at the head of them. Marino abounds in puerile conceits, but they are not far-fetched, like those of Donne and Cowley; they generally lie on the surface, and often consist of nothing more than a mere play upon words; so that, if to be a punster is to be a metaphysician, Marino is a poetical Heraclitus. But Johnson had caught the cant of the age in which it was usual to designate almost anything absurd or extravagant by the name of metaphysical. 56

Two points were clear: the author objected to Johnson's calling Marino metaphysical, since he was an "absurd and

55 IV (November, 1821), 476.
56 VIII (August, 1823), 184.
extravagant" punster, and he objected to his linking Marino with Donne and Cowley. The ambiguity lay in whether the "far-fetched" conceits of Donne and Cowley were also "absurd and extravagant" enough to obviate applying the term metaphysical to them. The implication was that they were superior at least to Marino's, whatever they might be called.

The Quarterly took a definitely negative stand on the terminology, as this comment witnessed:

The strained and conceited style which Johnson has, not very happily, called metaphysical, fell into disuse, in despite even of Cowley's example.\(^57\) But the essential criticism was once more upheld.

Fraser's, on the other hand, apparently took Johnson's whole position as authority, the name as well as the evaluation:

What Dr. Johnson, in his life of Cowley, said of metaphysical poets, may, with equal truth and justice, be applied to that class of image-mongers, of whom Mr. Moore must be pronounced the chief par excellence.\(^58\)

The far-fetched image was again under fire.

DeQuincey, writing on "Elements of Rhetoric" for Blackwood's in December, 1828, presented a somewhat more complicated point of view. He accepted Johnson's classification of Cowley as metaphysical but objected to the inclusion of Donne in the same group.

...The first very eminent rhetorician in the English literature is Donne. Dr. Johnson inconsiderately classes him in company with Cowley, &c., under the title of Metaphysical Poets; but Rhetorical would have

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\(^57\)XXXV (January, 1827), 188.

\(^58\)IV (August, 1831), 46.
been a more accurate designation. In saying that, however, we must remind our readers, that we revert to the original use of the word rhetoric, as laying the principal stress upon the management of the thoughts, and only a secondary one upon the ornaments of style. 59

In differentiating between the two poets on the basis of their relative concern with ideas, he by implication defined metaphysical as pertaining to an excessive interest in ornaments of style. Then he went on to do what no other critic in the period was interested in doing -- to refute Johnson's argument concerning the kind of taste which the metaphysical poets represented:

No criticism was ever more unhappy than that of Dr. Johnson's, which denounces all this artificial display as so much perversion of taste. There cannot be a falser thought than this; for, upon that principle, a whole class of compositions might be vicious, by conforming to its own ideal. The artifice and machinery of rhetoric furnishes in its degree as legitimate a basis for intellectual pleasure as any other; that the pleasure is of an inferior order, can no more attain the idea or model of the composition, than it can impeach the excellence of an epigram that it is not a tragedy. Every species of composition is to be tried by its own laws.... Weak criticism, indeed, is that which condemns a copy of verses under the ideal of poetry, when the mere substitution of another name and classification suffices to evade the sentence, and to reinstate the composition in its rights as rhetoric. It may be true that the age of Donne gave too much encouragement to his particular vein of composition; that, however, argues no depravity of taste, but a taste erring only in being too limited and exclusive. 60

To the charge of artificiality he agreed; but his line of reasoning was that if the verses could not be defended as poetry,

59XXIV, 892.
60Ibid., 893.
they could be applauded as rhetoric -- a rather inadequate
defense of Donne and his followers.

A fundamental element in Johnson's judgment of Cowley
was his estimate of the kind of wit the poet possessed, and
it has been evident that the critics accepted the definition
as a matter of course in accepting the general trend of the
criticism. Those who commented on it specifically approved
it. The Edinburgh, one recalls, disagreed with Johnson on
the relative merit of Milton's and Cowley's Latin poetry but
agreed to this:

Cowley, with all his admirable wit and ingenuity, had
little imagination.\textsuperscript{61}

And the London named Johnson an authority on the definition
of wit as a "combination of dissimilar images, or discovery
of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike."\textsuperscript{62}

So far as the Latin poetry was concerned, the opinion
was uniform -- that Johnson was mistaken in preferring Cowley's
to Milton's, both the Literary Examiner and the Gentleman's
going on record with the Edinburgh to that effect.\textsuperscript{63} The
London disagreed with Johnson on still another point -- the
merit of Love's Riddle, about which it said:

It is difficult to suppose that he had read some
of the works upon which he passes a summary sentence.
The comedy of Love's Riddle, which he says, "adds

\textsuperscript{61}XLII (August, 1825), 310.
\textsuperscript{62}XIX (November, 1827), 428.
\textsuperscript{63}Literary Examiner, August 30, 1823, p. 130; GM, C
(November, 1830), 391.
little to the wonders of Cowley's minority," deserved to be commended at least for the style, which is a specimen of pure and unaffected English.

Needlessness there was assigned as the cause of Johnson's lapse in taste. On yet another point, however, it concurred so far as the metaphysicals were concerned — the charge of roughness of meter:

Neither is it true that the art of modulation was ever forgotten by our poets. After the time of Queen Elizabeth it was preserved by many, besides William Browne, above mentioned; namely by the brothers Beaumont, by Giles and Phineas Fletcher, by Sandys, to whom others might be added; and when Dr. Johnson speaks of "ragged metre," he must have had in his recollection only Donne and Ben Jonson, and the disciples of their school.

At the same time this represented incidentally a denial of Johnson's conviction that the art of English poetry was revived by Waller and Denham and Dryden.

So much, then, for Cowley in particular. The essay on him, however, recurred during the period in discussions of two broader topics — the problem of what constituted genius and the problem of an author's inspiration.

Edgeworth's Essays on Professional Education caught the attention of both the Monthly and the Quarterly reviews, and since Edgeworth based a great deal of his philosophy of education on Johnson's conception of genius, the reviews evaluated it in addition to the whole system. The Monthly spoke first:

64VIII (August, 1823), 184.
65VIII (July, 1824), 33.
Mr. Edgeworth is of opinion that the best and most effective manner of preparing young men, who are intended for active life, to fill their destined stations with usefulness and honour, will be to initiate them at an early age in the peculiar branch of studies to which they will afterward be required to devote themselves.... The authority of Dr. Johnson is made the basis of this system.

The reviewer then recounted in detail Johnson's comments on Pope and Cowley, including the pronouncement that "the true genius is a mind of large general powers, accidentally determined to some particular direction." He continued:

Now, in the whole of this system, our deference for the respectable authorities which appear in support of it must not prevent our declaring that, in our own judgment, a great deal too much is taken for granted. Johnson is recorded by his biographer to have maintained in conversation, that, had Newton applied his mind to literature instead of mathematical science, he would have composed the best tragedy the world ever saw; a conclusion which necessarily follows indeed from the premises above laid down, but which, it is presumed, men of common sense can scarcely hear without astonishment. Is it an incontestible proposition, that because a man is endowed with a penetrating genius and uncommon perseverance, he should therefore possess peculiar sensibility, and the power of exciting the strong or the tender emotions in the hearts of others? It happens in the case before us that the example of this great Longinus subverts his laws more completely than any argument we could offer; since, while all regard his noble critical powers with admiration, who ever reads his Irene except as curious proof how deficient the greatest men may be in some particular faculties, and how strangely, how lamentably, unconscious of that deficiency?

In the following year the Quarterly seconded those views:

In fact, he [Edgeworth] seems nearly to adopt the doctrine of Dr. Johnson, in his Life of Cowley: "The true genius is a mind of large general powers accidentally determined to some particular direction." If this doctrine be true, human minds, great and small alike,
are at first indifferent to any art, science, or profession. Accident may decide the taste of others, by well selected and well managed motives, or in one word, education may decide it also.67

The reviewer decided that he could not agree:

It is not pleasant to make a blunt attack upon any man's opinion when it has some truth mingled with it. Though it may lie full in the way of our own, we prefer explaining and accommodating a little, to an encounter with it by a direct denial at the first shock. We admit then, that when a person makes a business of one pursuit, he is in the right way to eminence in it; and that divided attention will rarely give excellence in many. But our assent will go no farther.68

Both reviewers rejected Johnson's definition as too broad, too all-inclusive; the almost Renaissance versatility he had ascribed to genius was narrowed down to excellence in one particular field.

D'Israeli's The Literary Character produced further comments on this subject, similarly negating Johnson. The Monthly was present again:

Dr. Johnson says that genius describes "a mind of general powers, accidentally determined to some particular direction;" and Taylor, in his Synonyms, states that genius describes "power of representation, excellence of fancy." We should rather incline to the latter definition, as distinguishing genius from intellect in general.69

The equating of genius to fancy or the imagination was typical; one may recall that the genius of Shakespeare and Milton was believed to lie in their imagination.

67VI (October, 1811), 168.
68Ibid., 178.
69LXXXIX (May, 1819), 85.
Then Blackwood's came forward too:

Johnson has defined genius as "a mind of general powers accidentally determined by some particular direction," a theory which rejects any native aptitude, and according to which the reasoning Locke, without an ear or eye, might have become the musical and fairy Spenser. 70.

What Johnson had rejected was "any native aptitude" in a particular direction; his genius was more comprehensive.

In 1820 Hazlitt reviewed for the Edinburgh Farington's Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and it was inevitable that he consider Johnson's view of genius, since Reynolds had concurred in it and Farington as well. After quoting at length from Farington's analysis of Reynolds's capacities -- an analysis in which in turn Johnson was copiously quoted -- Hazlitt set forth the reasons for his dissenting opinion.

From the time that Mr. Locke exploded innate ideas in the commencement of the last century, there began to be a confused apprehension in some speculative heads, that there could be no innate faculties either; and our half metaphysicians have been floundering about in this notion ever since: as if, because there are no innate ideas, that is, no actual impressions existing in the mind without objects, there could be no peculiar capacity to receive them from objects; or as if there might not be as great a difference in the capacity itself as in the outward objects to be impressed upon it. We might as well deny at once, that there are organs or faculties to receive impressions of any particular kind. If the capacity exists (which it must do), there may, nay we should say there must, be a difference in it, in different persons, and with respect to different things. 71.

Then he applied this reasoning to Johnson's definition:

70 IV (October, 1818), 14.
71 XXXIV (August, 1820), 83.
Now surely we have no right to give any man credit for genius in more things than he has shown a particular genius in. In looking around us in the world, it is most certain that we find men of large general capacity and no particular talent, and others with the most exquisite turn for some particular thing, and no general talent. Would Dr. Johnson have made Reynolds or Goldsmith, Burke, by beginning early and continuing late? We should make strange havoc by this arbitrary transposition of genius and industry.72

Blackwood's again in 1822 objected to the use of genius as a general term.

To favour this vain eagerness of comparison in criticism, all powers and faculties are resolved at once into genius,—that vague quality, the supposition of which is at every one's command; and characters sublime in one respect, as they are contemptible in another, are viewed under this one aspect. The man, the poet, and the philosopher, are blended, and the attributes of each applied to all without distinction. One person acquires the name of a poet, because he is a reasoner, another because he is mad, another because he is conceited. Johnson's assertion is taken for granted—that genius is but great natural power directed toward a particular object; thus all are reduced to the same scale—Wellington, Byron, and Kean, measured by the same standard.73

Each man as well as each work of art was to be judged according to the qualities expected of him in his own category and in that alone. This attitude was a ramification of the historical approach, just as DeQuincey's defense of the metaphysical poets was.

And finally, Fraser's contribution to the definition represented really a compromise between Hazlitt's and Johnson's versions.

72Ibid., 85-6.
73XI (January, 1822), 63.
Genius is an abstract term, and formed, as all abstract terms have been, from individual apppellations. ...Dr. Johnson forgot the process by which we arrive at general terms, when he constructed his definition. Had he recollected this process, he would not have confounded the terms "mind" and "genius," and would have reversed the definition thus—"a determination in some particular direction, accidentally developed by a mind of large general powers." 74

The reviewer accepted the association of genius with "a mind of large general powers," but he refused the equating of the two; he reversed Johnson's definition, considering genius, as Hazlitt had considered it, a specialized rather than a comprehensive capacity. The narrowing of the definition of genius from the general to the particular was quite consonant with the whole trend of literary criticism after the end of the neoclassical period.

At the same time that the critics were concerned with what genius was, they were also concerned with the problem of how much control an author had over his talents; particularly were the editors interested in the issue, faced as they were by repeated deadlines. The British Critic of January, 1806, for instance, carried a preface devoted to the plight of the periodical writer:

Writers of great eminence have confessed that they had their hours of apparent inspiration, and of comparative dereliction of talents; and every man must be sensible of a difference, from causes beyond number, in his inclination and ability to employ thought, and exert his powers of composition. Johnson indeed said, that a man can always write "if he will set himself doggedly to it;" and true it is, as we at present

74I (February, 1830), 57.
experience. But very doggedly indeed does he go to it, whose mind is oppressed by any recent affliction, or disturbed by an painful apprehension. The periodical writer, as Johnson also knew, is bound to this necessity more strongly than any other. Willing or unwilling, disposed or indisposed, he must count the steps of time, and write under his inexorable orders. The evil of this is not ideal; while we describe we feel it; and wish, at the moment of writing, for a respite from our labour, which it is not possible to obtain.75

And Leigh Hunt in the Examiner later also asked his audience for tolerance in judging his shortcomings:

Our readers will do us the justice to acknowledge, that we very rarely indeed fail in giving them the usual article at the head of our paper; and perhaps when it is considered that it is one and the same individual that has been in the habit of furnishing the original matter in this paper for nearly ten years, through all the various feelings of health and sickness, and the love of other studies besides politics, it may be granted by those who understand human nature kindly and wisely, that he has not failed in his regularity as often as might be excused him....

Dr. Johnson, it is true, says that an author may always write, provided he sits down to it doggedly. And write he certainly may; but how write is another question. Not that industry in general is not sufficient; but even setting aside the inclination, industry itself will not always do, as in cases for instance where the subject does not readily present itself, or rather where out of many subjects it is difficult to choose.76

Johnson, of course, had had ample experience in forcing himself to write, for scarcely any of his work was done without pressure of either financial need or definite commitment to a publisher. Also his common sense view of genius precluded any belief in the theory of divine inspiration — the sort of

75 Series 1, XXVII, 2.
76 September 27, 1818, p. 609.
reed-in-the-wind method to which Shelley professed allegiance, for example. That rational attitude was praised by the British Critic on the occasion of its review of Smedley's Prescience; the essayist repeated Johnson's comment to Boswell "that if music made him such a fool, he would take care never to listen to more" and then added:

We should wish to soften Johnson's manner of expressing himself, but substantially we should say the same thing of the pretences which the poets of the last twenty or thirty years have made (for the affectation is like most affectations of modern date) to superior sensibility, and so forth. If they cannot write poetry and remain at the same time in their sober senses, why write poetry at all?"

The Scots Magazine in speaking of the precariousness of the trade of author used Johnson as an example of one who had "narrowly escaped shipwreck" and approved his self-discipline:

Johnson, who was tolerably disciplined to the trade of author, persisted to the last in maintaining that no man would write but for money, and that the pecuniary recompense of his literary labours was more acceptable to him than the collateral fame he had derived from them. He spoke with the feelings of a professional author. The "fine frenzies" of dilettanti litterateurs were utterly incomprehensible to that great man's mind.78

On the other hand, reviewers were found who considered Johnson's contempt for those "fine frenzies" an indication of poetic insensibility. A Scots reviewer thought him unjust to Gray on this point:

Dr. Johnson, in his life of Gray, accuses the lyrical bard of "fantastic foppery," for supposing that he

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77 Series 2, VIII (August, 1817), 197.
78 XVII (November, 1825), 574.
could only write at certain times, or at certain happy moments. But the old critic, whatever may be said of his strictures on poetry, was any thing but a man of poetical sensibility. Though himself the author of some very correct and meritorious poems, he must, in this part of his high literary character, be accounted rather a rhetorical writer than a poet. He was eminently deficient in that glow of enthusiastic feeling which uniformly characterized the poetical mind. 79

A writer who reviewed for the British Critic Mitford's edition and biography of Milton called Johnson insensitive for disparaging Milton's belief that seasonal changes affected his writing. 80 And Mitford himself wrote a letter to the editor of the Literary Gazette, pointing out Johnson's inconsistency in this matter:

In his Life of Milton he had ridiculed the notion, asserted on sufficient authority, that Milton's poetical powers varied according to different seasons of the year—"his vein ran strongest from the autumnal to vernal equinox." But at p. 148 of Dr. Strahan's work [Johnson's Prayers], Johnson says—"Between Easter and Whitsuntide, having always considered this time as propitious to study, I began to learn the low Dutch language," &c. 81

Opinion on this minor point was obviously divided; and professional writers with set time limits to consider tended to take Johnson's practical position, while those whom necessity did not dog maintained that the impulse to create could not be completely controlled.

In reviewing the attitudes displayed by the periodicals toward Johnson's criticism of Cowley and the metaphysical

79 XV (September, 1824), 546.
80 Series 4, XII (July, 1832), 44-5.
81 January 27, 1832, p. 58.
poets, one discovers an essential concurrence in his views. Such disagreement as appeared — that on the definition of genius, or that on the term *metaphysical* itself, or even DeQuincey's defense of them — did not alter the fundamental characterization of them as intellectual, artificial, and unimpassioned. In other words, their spirit was sufficiently unlike either of the major streams of thought in the Romantic period that no one was impelled to the kind of fervent service that Coleridge performed for Shakespeare. Their day was still far in the future.

### iii. The Authors of the Neoclassical Spirit

A second group of writers from the *Lives* in connection with whom Johnson's name frequently occurred were men who flourished in the neoclassical period and whose work, furthermore, was characterized by the qualities ordinarily associated with the English classical spirit. There has been seen, of course, occasional mention of Pomfret and Waller and Denham and Blackmore and Rowe and a few of the lesser lights of the eighteenth century, but for the most part, the attitude of the journals toward this portion of Johnson's criticism revolved around Dryden and Congreve of the Restoration and Pope, Addison, Swift, and Savage of the later time. And within this limited circle there was more attention concentrated on Dryden and Pope and Addison than on the rest. That this was the situation is quite understandable. In any discussion of the art of poetry
as it was practiced in England, the names of Dryden and Pope would inevitably arise for two reasons, at least: their tremendous contemporary popularity with the reading public and their great influence on poets of both their own times and of the succeeding periods. And in any discussion of English prose style, the names of Dryden, again, and Addison would appear for the same reasons.

When Wordsworth and Coleridge, at the turn of the century, set about establishing a new kind of poetic theory, they were reacting consciously against that to which Dryden and Pope had adhered and which, largely because of their writings, had gained ascendancy in literary criticism. Since Johnson, rightly or wrongly, bore the stamp of neoclassicist, it was inevitable that his name too be involved in the controversy. That Wordsworth, at any rate, felt that the battle was a hard one and not yet ended in 1815, when he wrote the preface to the second edition of his poems, was apparent in his account of their fate. Furthermore, it seems quite possible that the unpopularity of magazines in general in the Wordsworth household was a reflection of where the poet thought they stood. An investigation, then, of the attitude of the periodicals toward Johnson's views on the central figures of neoclassicism should reveal not only another facet of his reputation but also, though to a very limited degree, the popularity of the old school of literature.

The material on Dryden, like that on the Lives in
general, divided itself almost automatically into evaluations of the life as biography and evaluations of it as criticism, and many of the comments were called forth by the publication of new editions of Dryden's works. The first of these in the period was Malone's, in 1800.

In September of that year, the Gentleman's Magazine wrote of it:

I scarcely know any work that I have read with more pleasure than Mr. Malone's Life, &c. of my favourite, John Dryden, the "great high-priest of all the Nine," as Churchill very justly calls him. Johnson seems to have reserved all his biographic favours for this poet; yet it is to be lamented that his materials were so few, that he was often obliged to resort to tradition, or to writers of doubtful authority, on some of the most interesting points in the chequered life of our immortal Bard. Mr. M. had in a great measure supplied these deficiencies with uncommon industry, and, I may add, success, even beyond expectation, when we reflect on the few lights that he had to guide him in the pursuit of papers, and any of them very curious, and all in some measure more or less in connection with a subject in which the pride of every Englishman is interested.82

This was the same criticism of Johnson for negligence in research as emerged from the comments on the Lives in their entirety. Yet the reviewer thought well of his efforts, as one can infer from the lament that he was not better supplied with data about the poet, toward whom he was favorably disposed.

In December the same journal noted a difference of opinion on a minor point between Johnson and Malone and, in line with the policy earlier established, gave credence to Malone's view.83

82 LXX, 812.
83 LXX, 1153.
Also in September the British Critic carried a review of the edition; the author of it used as his introduction Malone's statement of his purpose:

"So few are the notices which have been transmitted to us concerning the great poet whose Prose Works are here collected, that Dr. Johnson, who at an early period had meditated writing his life, soon abandoned the project, in despair of finding materials sufficient for his purpose. Many years afterwards, however, having undertaken a general review of the lives of the most eminent English poets, he enriched his volumes of biography with an account of this author, in which are displayed such comprehension of mind, and accuracy of criticism, such vigour of expression, and luxuriance of imagery, that, of the various masterly lives in his admirable work, that of Dryden is perhaps the most animated and splendid; so splendid indeed, that a competition with such excellence can be sought only by him who is actuated by a degree of confidence in himself, which I beg leave most strenuously to disclaim..."84

Malone then pointed out Johnson's aversion to detailed scholarly research and said that his own work was an attempt to supply what Johnson had omitted. The reviewer commended Malone's sound judgment.

The second edition of Dryden's work to gain the attention of the periodicals was Sir Walter Scott's in 1808, and the Edinburgh Review was the first of the journals to give an account of it. In doing so, it remarked:

The life of Dryden, as is well known, was written by Johnson, with more copiousness of biography than was usual with him, and with more peculiar vigour and justness of criticism. None, perhaps, of the Lives of the Poets, is entitled to so high a rank. No prejudice interfered with his judgment; he approved his politics; he could feel no envy of such established fame; he had a mind precisely formed to relish the

84 XVI, 286-7.
excellences of Dryden—more vigorous than refined; more reasoning than impassioned. 85

Though the reviewer manifested a reluctance to praise Johnson unequivocally for his work in the Lives— the prejudice still rankled — he did accord the essay on Dryden high commendation. The implication of the familiar meagreness of biographical detail was there, but this particular one of the Lives was approved as an exception to Johnson's usual method.

Later in the extended article, the reviewer cited Johnson as he chastised Scott:

The attacks upon Dryden, by Settle, Shadwell, Ravenscroft, Fordage, and fifty more, were unworthy of preservation; especially after Johnson and Malone had quoted enough to shew their unspeakable stupidity. From the remarks of one of these vermin, by name Clifford, Johnson, "that no man might ever want them more, extracted enough to satisfy all reasonable desire."...An unlucky prophecy! He knew not the voracity of those antiquaries, whose desires, we will not say how reasonable, know no stint or satiety. Mr. Scott has republished and enlarged the very passage quoted by Johnson, though nothing is to be gleaned by it, but that this unknown Clifford was as vulgar a Libeller as ten thousand others of his day. 86

There was no need to do again what Johnson had done.

The Monthly Review published its estimate of Scott's undertaking in February of the following year; in the course of it the reviewer announced that only Johnson and Malone, among the previous biographers of Dryden, were worthy of any notice. Then, analyzing their contributions to Dryden scholarship, he said of Johnson:

85 XIII (October, 1808), 117.
86 Ibid., 134.
The characters of these two writers, in the instance before us, stand in the most direct opposition to each other, and may be regarded, like the zenith and the nadir, as separated by the diameter of the world. Each of them, however, has his merits as well as his defects; and both of them must be allowed to possess a distinct literary value.

The narrative by Dr. Johnson is inaccurate, and meagre; and it is rendered also unpleasant by that levelling and debasing spirit which prevails through all his biographical tracts, and from which even Dryden, exalted as he was into favour by his Tory principles, could not altogether escape. This piece of biography, however, is enlivened with some brilliant and happy, though not always unexceptionable, criticism; and, as a literary history of its subject, it must be admitted to display very considerable merit.

Malone, in contrast to Johnson, he pictured as the dull, indefatigable scholar who provided for Scott the details missing in Johnson's treatment. The conception of Johnson's attitude toward Dryden as evidence of a "levelling and debasing spirit" was contrary to what the other reviewers believed, but the rest was in accord with prevailing opinion.

The British Critic did not get around to an evaluation of Scott's Dryden until May, 1810, and then it was a brief one. The primary concern was Dryden's religion -- the shift to Catholicism -- and in justifying it, the reviewer referred to Johnson as an authority:

The act itself occasioned much discussion, both in his lifetime and afterward. Dr. Johnson, a man never disposed to apologize for any thing that appeared like making a traffic of religion, attaches no blame to the conduct of Dryden...

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87LVIII, 138-9.
88XXXV, 473.
If even Johnson did not castigate him, no one should.

Quite late in the period, the Edinburgh felt the need to soften the judgment of Johnson on Dryden's panegyrics:

[Dryden] praised to the skies the schoolboy lines of Addison. Always looking on the fair side of every object, he admired extravagance, on account of the invention which he supposed it to indicate; he excused affectation in favour of wit; he tolerated even tameness, for the sake of the correctness which was its concomitant.

It was probably to this turn of mind, rather than to the more disgraceful causes which Johnson has assigned, that we are to attribute the exaggeration which disfigures the panegyrics of Dryden. No writer, it must be owned, has carried the flattery of dedication to a greater length. But this was not, we suspect, merely interested servility; it was the overflowing of a mind singularly disposed to admiration—of a mind which diminished vices, and magnified virtues and obligations. The most adulatory of his addresses is that in which he dedicates the State of Innocence to Mary of Modena. Johnson thinks it strange that any man should use such language, without self-detestation. But he has not remarked, that to the very same work is prefixed an eulogy on Milton, which certainly could not have been acceptable at the court of Charles the Second.

Johnson's own well known independence did make him unsympathetic to anything smacking of flattery for the sake of self-interest, but the Edinburgh went rather far in defending Dryden, whose satirical works alone prove he by no means always "diminished vices and magnified virtues and obligations."

As biography, then, the essay on Dryden was seen as sharing, though to a lesser degree than most of the prefaces, in the usual neglect of biographical material in the Lives. Although the Monthly reviewer believed that Johnson was

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89XLVII (January, 1828), 32-3.
unnecessarily severe in his treatment of the poet, the general
tenor of the opinion so far evidenced was that Johnson had
been just. Furthermore, it was indicated that the critical
portion of the essay well compensated for any lack of detail
in the account of the poet's life. There were additional
proofs to reenforce this attitude.

The Gentleman's, it has been said, was the first to
review Malone's Dryden. After lamenting the scarcity of facts
available to Johnson and commending Malone for his industry
in discovering more of them, the reviewer added:

Those who admire him as a poet will be pleased to see
the first efforts of his Muse, which Mr. M. has been
fortunate enough to discover; and those who are charmed
with his flowing prose will be pleased to find some
scarce pieces added to that treasure. The union of
both will justify the character which Dr. Johnson has
given of them—"Such a facility of composition, such
readiness of language, and such a copiousness of
sentiment," as cannot fail to charm as long as the
English language exists;—a language that Dryden him-
self "cultivated, improved, and refined."90

He gave his support to Johnson's conception of Dryden as the
founder of English style.

The same magazine, in considering slightly earlier the
point of rhyme in Dryden's "Ode for St. Cecilia's Day," had
said:

Dryden's Ode for St. Cecilia's Day stands confes-
sedly at the head of modern Lyric composition;—yet
Johnson observes of it, "that some of the lines are
destitute of correspondent rhymes."—Horace makes him-
sell a new species of versification in his eighth Ode,
==...And Virgil, the most perfect of Epic poets, has
his hemistichs, and his breaks.

90LXX (September, 1800), 812.
I mean not, Mr. Urban, from these observations, to infer, that, by such examples, occasional anomalies are to be recommended; but that by such authorities they are to be defended.—In any kind of literary composition, a departure from rules, which criticism and taste have established,—is admitted, rather than justified.—And, it is only when we gain in the sentiment more than we lose in the mechanism, that we are satisfied with the alteration.91

The authority of the critic had to yield to the authority of the master artists, but still the reviewer was conservative; the breaking of the rules was "admitted," not "justified." This was the kind of attitude which, when exhibited toward Shakespeare and Milton, Coleridge fulminated against.

The British Critic, in surveying Dryden's reputation apropos of Malone's edition, made this pronouncement:

The praise of Dryden's Poetry has not been pronounced by higher authorities, or in stronger terms, than that of his prose; and by a peculiar felicity, he has contributed more than any single man to improve the style of his native language in measured and unmeasured composition.92

Then it cited Johnson as an authority supporting that view. It was the British Critic, too, which quoted at length Malone's tribute to Johnson as a literary critic.93

The Monthly welcomed Malone's undertaking in this cordial fashion:

Dr. Johnson observes that "Dryden may be properly considered as the father of English criticism, as the writer who first taught us to determine upon principles

91 LXX (March, 1800), 206.
92 XVI (September, 1800), 285.
93 See footnote 84 above.
the merit of composition."...Of the productions of an
author, of whom Dr. Johnson farther declares that
"nothing is cold or languid; that the whole is airy,
animated, and vigorous; that what is little is gay,
and what is great, splendid;" we naturally wish to
possess the whole."

As a matter of course, the high opinion which Dr. Johnson
held of the poet added lustre to his reputation. And the
Scots Magazine two months later greeted the work in identical
words.95 Either the reviewer contributed the same article to
two periodicals, or the Scots considered it part of its func-
tion to cull from other publications what might be of interest
to its audience; no indication of the source was cited, at
any rate.

Among its other comments on Stockdale's Lectures in
April, 1808, the Edinburgh included a special notice of the
section on Dryden:

...We cannot help wondering, that a passage like that
in the 269th page of his first volume, should come
from any writer who has taste, spirit, and polite in-
formation enough to collect remarks on English litera-
ture. In this extraordinary page, Mr. Stockdale supposes
himself, even in the presence of his belles-lettres audi-
ence, speaking face to face with the departed spirit
of Dryden. In this supposed phantasmagoria, he begins,
"Few men have contributed so large as you (Dryden) to
the poetical improvement of your country;" and, after
a prefatory compliment, he proceeds to inform Dryden,
that a celebrated writer rose among us (who at the end
of two pages is discovered to be Dr. Johnson); that
this writer wrote lives of the poets, which gave to
him (Mr. Stockdale) offence in many exceptionable pas-
sages; but that the public swallowed his dogmas with
avidity, and that numerous biographers published his

94 XXXIV (February, 1801), 130-1.
95 LXIII (April, 1801), 273.
(Dr. Johnson's) life. This horrible address to the spirit of Dryden lasts for several pages. We beseech Mr. Stockdale to extirpate it from his book, whenever it comes to a second edition; and if his friends do not give him the same advice, we shall think that his zeal and good intentions have fewer friends than they deserve. Without meaning disrespect to Mr. Stockdale, by far the best part of the notice of Dryden is what he quotes from Johnson, because he quotes the best of Johnson; and the general survey of Dryden's merit is more impartially executed by that great critic, than his general character of any other poet.96

The shadow of Johnson's prejudice dimmed the praise accorded him, but still he was "that great critic." And later in the article the essayist concurred in Johnson's observations that Dryden's "intellectual operations" were characterized more by "strong reason than quick sensibility."97

The Monthly reviewer in this connection merely wrote:

We are truly happy to bear honourable testimony to the three lectures on Dryden, from which we could wish to expunge the attacks on Johnson, but which contain many just observations, and many entertaining extracts.98

Stockdale's disparaging of Johnson's criticism was a flaw.

Scott's edition of Dryden's works appeared almost simultaneously with Stockdale's Lectures, so that 1808 produced much Dryden commentary in the periodicals. The Edinburgh's discussion of a portion of Scott's work has already been cited in relation to the biographical aspects of Johnson's essay, and it will be remembered that the reviewer considered Johnson

96 XII (April, 1808), 73-4.
97 Ibid., 74.
98 LIX (June, 1809), 145.
eminently fitted to the task of criticizing this particular poet. To repeat:

The life of Dryden, as is well known, was written by Johnson, with more copiousness of biography than was usual with him; and with more peculiar vigour and justness of criticism. None, perhaps, of the Lives of the Poets, is entitled to so high a rank. No prejudice interfered with his judgment; he approved his politics; he could feel no envy of such established fame; he had a mind precisely formed to relish the excellences of Dryden—more vigorous than refined; more reasoning than impassioned."

That was an echo of the belief, expressed by the same review earlier, that Dryden's mind was characterized rather by "strong reason than quick sensibility." And the lack of sensibility was the same lack widely attributed to Johnson as a result of the controversy over Milton.

When the *Monthly* evaluated the biographical aspects of Johnson's Dryden essay, it found evidence of an "unpleasant" tendency in Johnson to demean the character of his subject. However, Malone was considered to have avoided this fault and added necessary facts, so that when Scott undertook his edition, he had

...little labour to undergo:--from the one he can receive his facts as they are accumulated to his hand:--from the other, he may light his torch of criticism; and with the materials supplied by both, if he possess the ability of a master-builder, he may construct an edifice that shall be complete in its symmetry and beautiful in its ornaments, to the memory of the man whom he professed to celebrate. Mr. Scott's ambition, however, aims at a higher mark...100

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99XIII (October, 1808), 117.

100LVIII (February, 1809), 138.
The goal which Scott professed to seek, even while he acknowledged his debt to Johnson, was the linking of Dryden's life with his writings and with the historical events of his time. The *Monthly* reviewer, however, believed that Johnson had already accomplished that integration:

> He who undertakes to write the life of a man, highly eminent in any walk of genius or of science, cannot, as we should think, well avoid the connection of the history of the individual in some degree with that of the literature and the taste of the times in which he lived. ... If, occupied in groping for facts and in wrestling with dates, Mr. Malone has in this respect insulated his author, Dr. Johnson, with more just and comprehensive views, has connected the poet with the age; and he has remarked not only the gradual improvements effected in the productions of the former, but the beneficial influence also of these compositions on the composition and the judgment of the latter.\(^{101}\)

There was little for Scott to do in the way of criticism that the eighteenth century critic had not done.

The debt, incidentally, which Scott acknowledged to Johnson, was a very real one. Scott wrote in the preface to his edition that "it would have been hard to exact, that the Editor should rival the criticism of Johnson" and that "the general critical view of Dryden's works [had been] sketched by Johnson with unequalled felicity."\(^{102}\) That this was not merely lip service is borne out by the repeated citation of Johnson's opinions throughout the critical comments prefixed to all the works.

The point of view just found in the *Monthly* -- that there

\(^{101}\) Ibid., 139.

was little left for Scott to do — was shared by the British Critic, which in its comment on Scott's edition said:

The nervous, manly and discriminative criticism of Johnson completed the restoration of the Bard, to the preeminence from which he had been for a time deposed ... Mr. Scott has filled one of his volumes with a life of Dryden. In this department, Mr. Malone had left little for industry to discover, Johnson nothing for criticism to elucidate. 103

And when Warton's Dryden came to its attention two years later, the opinion had not altered:

... And with Dr. Johnson's admirable Life of Dryden prefixed, the present publication has been produced, exhibiting the strongest claims to respect and commendation. 104

When Rogers's Poems was published in 1813, the Edinburgh showed that it still adhered to the estimate of Johnson which had appeared in the reviews of Scott and Stockdale. The essayist developed in detail the thesis that the poetry of an age is the outgrowth of all the background features of the age combined — religion, politics, war, tranquillity, "every conceivable modification of the state of a community" — and then according to that thesis characterized the poetry of the neo-classical period:

The tranquillity of that fortunate period was not disturbed by any of those calamitous, or even extraordinary events, which excite the imagination and inflame the passions. No age was more exempt from the prevalence of any species of popular enthusiasm. Poetry, in this state of things, partook of that calm, argumentative, moral, and directly useful character into which it naturally subsides, when there are no events which call

103XXXV (February, 1810), 98.
104XXXIX (April, 1812), 361.
up the higher passions;—when every talent is allured into the immediate service of a prosperous and improving society;—and when wit, taste, diffused literature, and fastidious criticism, combine to deter the young writer from the more arduous enterprises of poetical genius. In such an age, every art becomes rational. Reason is the power which presides in a calm: But reason guides rather than impels; and, though it must regulate every exertion of genius, it never can rouse it to vigorous action.105

Dryden and Pope were the great exponents of the conservative school, and Johnson had embodied their practice into a theory of literature:

Johnson was the critic of our second poetical school. As far as his prejudices of a political or religious kind did not disqualify him for all criticism, he was admirably fitted by nature to be the critic of this species of poetry. Without more imagination, sensibility, or delicacy than it required,—not always with perhaps quite enough for its higher parts,—he possessed sagacity, shrewdness, experience, knowledge of mankind, a taste for rational and orderly composition, and a disposition to accept, instead of poetry, that lofty and vigorous declamation in harmonious verse, of which he himself was capable, and to which his great masters sometimes descended. His spontaneous admiration scarcely soared above Dryden. "Merit of a loftier class he rather saw than felt."106

That characterization, not only of Johnson's critical ability but also of the poetry of the first part of the eighteenth century, represented one substantial segment of opinion existing then and enduring to the present time. Furthermore, it was consistent with the fact that Shakespeare and Milton were the idols of the majority of the Romantics and that many believed Johnson lacking in the imaginative perception necessary to the appreciation of them.

105XXII (October, 1813), 33.
106Ibid.
Haslitt's Lectures on the English Comic Writers elicited from the Monthly in 1820 only a brief comment concerning the section on Dryden:

Mr. Haslitt has allotted his fourth lecture to Dryden and Pope. Dr. Johnson had nearly exhausted this topic with impressive felicity and unusual justice. This was still another tribute to Johnson's eminence.

Ring's Virgil, appearing in 1821, was the occasion of another citation of Johnson's authority. In December of that year the Gentleman's published an article called "Arguments in Favour of Ring's Virgil," in the course of which Dryden's translation was compared to the new one. To justify his preference, the essayist quoted first a commentator named Jephson:

"The version of Pitt is less licentious [than Dryden's], and in particular passages more brilliant, but, upon the whole, languid; while Trapp (as Dr. Johnson observes) is now only a clandestine refuge for the laziness of school-boys."

And then he drew on the authority of Johnson:

Dr. Johnson's strictures are not less severe than the preceding writer's. He tells us that "Dryden's learning was not extensive, that his vanity now and then betrays his ignorance, and that he is sometimes unexpectedly mean; that his faults of negligence are beyond recital; and that there are seldom ten lines together in his translation, without something of which the reader is ashamed." That quotation presents an interesting problem. In the first place, it was a composite of statements which Johnson made about the faults of Dryden's works in general after he had in 

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107 XCII (May, 1820), 64.
108 XCI (December, 1821), 592.
his usual fashion enumerated the merits; not all of them were intended to apply to the Virgil. In the second place, in his zeal to make his point, the essayist quoted Johnson incorrectly. The critic had not said that "Dryden's learning was not extensive"; he said that he sometimes descended to "display his knowledge with pedantick ostentation." He did not say that "there are seldom ten lines together in his translation [italics mine] without something of which the reader is ashamed." He said of all Dryden's writings: "Such is the unevenness of his compositions, that ten lines are seldom found together without something of which the reader is ashamed." Of the Virgil in particular he said:

When admiration had subsided, the translation was more coolly examined, and found like all others, to be sometimes erroneous, and sometimes licentious....

It is not by comparing line with line that the merit of great works is to be estimated, but by their general effects and ultimate result. It is easy to note a weak line, and write one more vigorous in its place; to find a happiness of expression in the original, and transplant it by force into the version; but what is given to the parts may be subducted from the whole, and the reader may be weary, though the critic may commend. Works of imagination excel by their allurement and delight; by their power of attracting and detaining the attention.

Certainly the essayist who would falsify Johnson's criticism for the sake of winning a point recognized the weight his name carried in literary criticism.

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The London's essay "On the Life and Writings of Samuel Johnson," in addition to its general summary of the Lives, had a specific comment to make on the Dryden criticism:

Throughout his Lives of the Poets, he constantly betrays a want of relish for the more abstracted graces of the art. When strong sense and reasoning were to be judged of, these he was able to appreciate justly. When the passions or characters were described, he could to a certain extent decide whether they were described truly or no. But as far as poetry has relation to the kindred arts of music and painting, to both of which he was confessedly insensible, it could not be expected that he should have much perception of its excellences.... What shall be thought of his assertion, that before the time of Dryden there was no poetical diction, no system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestic use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to the particular arts, and "that words too familiar, or too remote, defeat the purpose of a poet?" It might with more show of reason be affirmed, that in proportion as our writers have adopted such a system as he speaks of, and have rejected words for no other cause than that they were too familiar or too remote, we have been receding from the proper language of poetry. One of the chief ornaments, or, more properly speaking, the constituents of poetical language, is the use of metaphors; and metaphors never find their way to the mind more readily, or affect it more powerfully, than when they are clothed in familiar words. Even a naked sentiment will lose none of its force from being conveyed in the most homely terms which our mother tongue can afford. As for the terms which Johnson calls remote, if I understand him rightly, they too may be employed occasionally, either when the attention is to be roused by something unusual, or for the sake of harmony; or it may be for no other reason than because the poet chooses thus to diversify his diction, so as to give a stronger relief to that which is familiar and common by the juxtaposition of its contrary. Of this there can be no doubt that, whoever lays down such arbitrary rules as Johnson has here prescribed, will find himself mocked at every turn by the power of genius, which meets with nothing in art or nature that it cannot convert to its own use, and which delights to produce the greatest effects by means apparently the most inadequate.  

112 VIII (August, 1823), 183-4.
This was a far cry from the Gentleman's approval in 1800 of Dryden as the cultivator, improver, and refiner of the English language. So far as this reviewer was concerned, at any rate, Wordsworth had won the battle of poetic diction.

In its essay "On English Versification" published in the following year, the London returned to the question of Dryden's influence on the course of English poetry. The point arose only incidentally, for the essayist used as an example of an allowable "rhyme continued for three lines together" a quotation from Pope:

Waller was smooth, but Dryden taught to join The varying verse, the full resounding line, The long majestic march, and energy diving.

Then in a footnote he took issue with the idea expressed therein:

The criticism contained in these celebrated lines seems to have been received by subsequent critics as a sentence of decisive authority. Dr. Johnson's account of Waller and Dryden is a sort of commentary upon them....It is unpleasant to contradict such grave authors, when they are treating of a subject with which they must have been well acquainted: but unless we will suffer some of our poets to lie under the reproach of great ignorance and incapacity; unless we are ready to acknowledge that the art of modulation which existed in Queen Elizabeth's age was neglected or forgotten; that for half a century afterward nothing was produced but ragged metre; that our writers did not perceive, till Waller and Denham showed them, that the arrangement of syllables, as well as the number, was necessary to make a verse, that till they were taught by Dryden, they knew not how to compose; that neither energy nor majesty, nor sonorous lines, nor variation of numbers, is to be found in their works; unless we will acquiesce in the justice of these injurious censures, we cannot permit them to pass without contradiction. In fact, they are altogether unfounded. Waller indeed was smooth; yet not (as Pope would insinuate) the first by many who wrote smoothly in
English verse; and some of them equally so with Waller himself, for example, William Browne: but Dryden taught nothing of what is attributed to him. If the poets who wrote before him should be examined, there will be found, in some one or other of them, each particular quality for which he is here praised; and all of them in Milton. 113

Dryden was not to be allowed the name of father of English versification, Johnson's authority notwithstanding.

In another footnote in the same article, Johnson's authority -- as well as the authority of Dryden -- was again disputed, and again it was a matter of verse form:

The form in which English Elegy has most commonly appeared is the stanza of four lines in which the rhymes alternate. Dr. Johnson seems to ensure this form; for he says, "Why Hammond or other writers have thought the quatrains of ten syllables elegiac, it is difficult to tell. The character of the elegy is gentleness and tenuity: but this stanza has been pronounced by Dryden, whose knowledge of English metre was not inconsiderable, to be the most magnificent of all the measures which our language affords." Life of Hammond.

In alleging the authority of Dryden, Dr. Johnson has not dealt fairly with his readers; for, granting that Dryden had a perfect knowledge of English metre, he did not always speak according to that knowledge; and this the Doctor knew... It is needless, we think, to vindicate the practice of our elegy-writers against so disputable an authority. When Dryden gave that high character to the quatrains, he was composing Annus Mirabilis, which is written in that measure. 114

The London essayist, though he praised Johnson's criticism in general in the Lives, would not accede to his opinion on these matters of versification.

The consensus, then, on Johnson's views of Dryden was
that while the account of his life needed supplementing by such a scholar as Malone, the critical acumen well compensated for the negligence of research. Even Sir Walter Scott, widely admired in both England and Scotland, could illuminate no better the text of Dryden. From time to time there were objections raised to certain of Johnson's judgments — particularly in the field of metrics and diction — but the whole picture pointed to general acceptance of his authority.

The other Restoration dramatist who appeared in the periodical criticism of Johnson was Congreve, and at that he barely escaped being overlooked, for he was mentioned only twice — once in the Scots Magazine and once in the Examiner, both times early in the period. It was Johnson's criticism of The Old Bachelor which stimulated the Scots reviewer to comment. He believed that Johnson had been mistaken on two scores — his estimate of the characters and his view of the probability of the action. First he said:

Of the characters of Congreve it has been observed in general, that he did not draw much from common life. Dr. Johnson, speaking of the Old Bachelor, observes, that "the characters both of the men and women are either fictitious and artificial, as those of Heartwell and the ladies; or easy and common, as Wittol, a tame idiot; Bluff, a swaggering coward; and Fondlewife, a jealous puritan." It may be granted, without detracting from his merits, that his characters are not generally drawn from common life...  

And a little later he came back to the point:

It seemed proper to enter thus fully into the character of Heartwell, because it does not appear to have

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115 LXVI (January, 1804), 12.
been fairly appreciated by Dr. Johnson: it certainly is remarkably well drawn, and sufficient of itself to stamp the impression of superior merit on the play.\textsuperscript{116}

However, although Johnson did consider the characters artificial -- "with very little of nature, and not much of life." -- he also found merit in the play.

Yet this gay comedy, when all these deductions are made, will still remain the work of very powerful and fertile faculties: the dialogue is quick and sparkling, the incidents such as seize the attention, and the wit so exuberant that it o'er-informs its tenement.\textsuperscript{117}

The probability of the outcome of the play was the second point with which the reviewer was concerned, and again he attempted to refute Johnson:

His plots are original; they are deeply laid, but not intricate; unexpected, but not improbable. Dr. Johnson objects to the Old Bachelor, that the catastrophe arises from a mistake, not very probably produced, by marrying a woman in a mask. But when Congreve wrote, the improbability was much less, as masks were then very commonly and generally worn...\textsuperscript{118}

It is to be noted that not the principle, but the application of the principle was the disputed point. Incidentally, the reviewer would have done better to focus on the essential of "marrying a woman in a mask" than just on the fact that masks were worn -- a fact which Johnson no doubt knew as well as he.

On the other hand, the notice of Congreve in the "Theatrical Examiner" commended Johnson for his perception of the playwright's characters and then applied his description

\textsuperscript{116}\textit{Ibid.}, 13.

\textsuperscript{117}\textit{Lives}, II, 26.

\textsuperscript{118}\textit{LXVI} (January, 1804), 14.
What was said of Congreve's personages by Johnson, in some of the noblest language the pen ever produced, may be applied in all its brilliance to Bendick and Beatrice; they are "a kind of intellectual gladiators: every sentence is to ward or strike; the contest of smartness is never intermitted; their wit is a meteor playing to and from with alternate coruscations."

The score was fairly even.

The second great exponent of neoclassicism and the one around whom much controversy revolved in the Romantic period was the "wicked wasp of Twickenham," Alexander Pope. Part of the controversy was based, naturally, on the character which had provoked Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's appellation, but the major concern was his poetic endowments and accomplishments. After all, it was his kind of poetry -- his and Dryden's -- which Wordsworth and Coleridge saw as an obstacle to the establishment of theirs. Inevitably, Johnson's Lives became involved in the contest, and as Pope's merits as man and poet were weighed, so were Johnson's as biographer and critic.

First the biographical aspect. Early in the period an essayist for the Gentleman's, in an article called "Pope's Misanthropy," quoted at length Johnson's estimate of Pope's nature:

Dr. Johnson's character of Mr. Pope is that of a man who would fain be a misanthrope, and could not. "He very frequently professes contempt of the world, and represents himself as looking on mankind sometimes with gay indifference, as on emmets on a hillock, and sometimes with gloomy indignation, as on monsters more..."
worthy of hatred than of pity. These were dispositions apparently counterfeited. How could he despise those whom he lived by pleasing, and on whose approbation his esteem of himself was superstructured? Why should he hate those to whose favour he owed his honour and his ease? Of things that terminate in human life the world is the most proper judge; to despise its sentence, if it were possible, is not just, and if it were just, is not possible. Pope was far enough from this unreasonable temper; he was sufficiently a fool to fame, and yet he pretended to neglect it. His levity and sullenness were only in his letters; he passed through common life, sometimes vexed and sometimes pleased, with the natural emotions of common men. His scorn of the Great is repeated too often to be real; no man thinks that much of that which he despises; and, as falsehood is always in danger of inconsistency, he makes it his boast at another time that he lives among them.  

The author gave that view his tacit approval.

Then in 1806 appeared the edition of Pope's works compiled by William Lisle Bowles. The reactions to his unfavorable comments, particularly to the ones on the poet's personal qualities, reverberated throughout the first quarter of the century both among the general public and members of the literary world. In January, 1808, the Edinburgh Review gave its judgment:

The life of Pope is one of the finest, as well as most elaborate, which Johnson has written. He seems to have been more on his guard than was usual with him, against a secret ill-will, and perhaps jealousy, which he had imbibed; and, in the present state of public opinion respecting Pope, that suffrage may be deemed favourable, which would have been spurned half a century since as the fruit of bad taste or malignity. If he has left on the mind an impression of dislike towards Pope's moral character, the cause, we fear, must be found rather in the plain truth of his story, than in his own commentary. Mr. Bowles is more studious in bringing forward and dwelling upon the blemishes

120LXXV (January, 1805), 12.
of his author's disposition; but, in fact, they speak pretty plainly for themselves; and we stand in need of no guide-post to direct our contempt towards duplicity and cowardice." 121

This passage was revealing on several scores. For one, the Edinburgh aligned itself pretty much with Bowles on the estimate of Pope's character. For another, Johnson's moderate treatment of Pope was considered the best the poet could expect, though once it might have been considered unfair. Then, in the phrase "more on his guard than was usual" there was an implication that ordinarily Johnson was prejudiced in his views of rival abilities. Nevertheless, grudgingly though it might be given, there was admiration in the statement that "the life of Pope is one of the finest, as well as the most elaborate, which Johnson has written."

The same hesitancy to accede to the judgment of Johnson was revealed in the Edinburgh's account of the chapter on Pope in Stockdale's Lectures:

In the midst of this chapter, however unwilling we may be to submit to the universal authority of Dr. Johnson, yet it is quite refreshing to meet with passages of his better sense and more dispassionate decisions, which our author quotes. The sentences of Johnson stand indeed with peculiar advantage in this insulated situation; and Mr. Stockdale is entitled to the same sort of gratitude which we feel to a dull landlord who has invited us to dine with an interesting visitor. In fact, after the one has bewildered us, the other puts us right. It is not easy to add to what Johnson has said; still less should we presume to take away from the truly admirable summary of Pope's character which he has drawn. 122

121 XI, 400-1.
122 XII (April, 1808), 76-7.
As in the chapter on Dryden, Stockdale's inadequacy virtually forced the reviewer to praise Johnson's good sense and perception. Furthermore, the reviewer's awareness of Johnson's "universal authority," even if it was rather resentful, was significant.

D'Israeli's *Quarrels of Authors* also drew the attention of the periodicals to Pope and incidentally to Johnson. In its review of the book, the *Gentleman's* quoted D'Israeli as saying:

"But I am inclined to think, that what induced me to select this topic, were, the literary quarrels which Johnson has given between Dryden and Settle, Dennis and Addison, &c. and Mr. Walter Scott, who amidst the fresh creations of Fancy can delve for the buried truths of research, in his narrative of the Quarrel of Dryden and Luke Milbourne."123

He proceeded to discuss the difficulty of investigating such quarrels and credited Bayle with teaching literary historians...

to think, and to be curious and vast in our researches....This father of a numerous race has an English, as well as a French progeny. Johnson wrote under many disadvantages; but, with scanty means, he has taught us a great end.124

Particularly D'Israeli admired Johnson's observation on the ill feeling between Addison and Pope.

The *Monthly*, however, saw Johnson's contributions to biographical evidence as rather slim. In its review of the *Quarrels*, it said:

The second, third, fourth, and fifth chapters

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123 *LXXXIV* (April, 1814), 358.
related successive squabbles of Pope and the dunces, with the printers, with Cibber, and with Addison. Much bibliographic knowledge of obscure volumes is here displayed by Mr. D'Israeli; whose account of the extraordinary transactions which accompanied the publication of Pope's Letters adds much to the evidence that Dr. Johnson could record on the subject. 125

Again, that view was consonant with the generally held one of Johnson as a research worker.

The Reverend Joseph Spence's Anecdotes, Observations, and Characters of Books and Men enjoyed considerable publicity in the early months of 1820. The Literary Gazette, remarking that very little actually was known of the author, cited Johnson as one of the few sources:

Dr. Johnson described him as "a man whose learning was not very great, and whose mind was not very powerful," but he acknowledges that his criticism was commonly just, that what he thought, he thought rightly, and that his remarks were recommended by coolness and candour. He lived in intimacy, however, with distinguished persons, and his common-place book was enriched with many entries of uncommon interest. 126

The Examiner saw in the Anecdotes the same virtues which the Literary Gazette had commented on:

This is a very amusing book, especially to the lovers of poetry and biography. It is a sort of minor Boswell upon Pope and other eminent men of that age, by Joseph Spence,—a name with which literary men are familiar, from his mythological work called Polymetis, and the extracts made by Johnson and others from the anecdotes before us while in manuscript.

But the reviewer went on to remark the fact that Johnson had not made maximum use of the Pope material available in Spence's work:

125 LXXVIII (September, 1815), 15.
126 January 15, 1820, pp. 40-1.
One is surprised that Dr. Johnson, who made use of Mr. Spence’s MS., thought fit to turn it to no greater account; for though the anecdotes and sayings here recorded of Pope do not amount, on the whole, to what his name might lead us to expect, or what a cleverer man than Mr. Spence perhaps might have carried away, yet every thing relating to the character and opinions of so eminent a person is of interest to the public. We have not time or room to compare Johnson's Life with the present work; but we believe we are pretty correct in saying, that the following accounts are all new to the Doctor's readers in general.127

This was more than just a recognition of Johnson's dilatoriness in research; consciously or not, the reviewer considered Johnson's account the foundation of Pope biography and certainly the one generally read.

For the British Critic, Spence's production recalled the "great critic's masterly skill" in the work on Pope;128 and the Monthly, like the Gazette, resorted to Johnson for his evaluation of Spence.129

When in April, 1821, the Gentleman's set forth its views on the "Controversy respecting Pope and his Writings," it showed an interesting reversal of one of its usual policies — the support of Johnson's authority. Desiring to defend Bowles against the attacks of Byron and the Quarterly Review, it explored all possibilities and arrived at the position that Bowles deserved censure less than Samuel Johnson had, and since the Quarterly had not attacked Johnson, it had no reason to attack Bowles. This was the argument:

127 January 23, 1820, p. 57.
128 Series 2, XIII (February, 1820), 158.
129 XCI (March, 1820), 245.
It is not a little remarkable that these indignant defenders of Pope, from the imputed slanders of his modern editor, never thought it worth their while to impugn the credit of Dr. Johnson upon the same account, who has often gone much farther, and shown more decided asperity in his censure of this poet, than Mr. Bowles....

The true state of the case...is, that Mr. Bowles has actually rather softened than exaggerated the disagreeable traits of Pope's character, as we have already shown by a comparison of what he has said with the report of Dr. Johnson. What the lexicographer has termed "parsimony" and "meanness," the modern editor has softened into "prudence," and what the Doctor calls "sneaking and shuffling," Mr. Bowles refines into "evasion," and so on, indeed, with all the principal features of the poet's character on which he takes occasion to comment.

We therefore see but little wit, and still less candour, in reiterating charges so fallacious and uncalled for as those adduced against Mr. Bowles, by Lord Byron and the Quarterly Review.

Whether in direct response to the Gentleman's or not, the Quarterly several years later published a general critique of "Pope's Works and Character." What it actually consisted of was a résumé of various contributions to the controversy—Bowles's edition of Pope, Byron's letters, Bowles's replies, and the Quarterly's own previous notes. When Johnson was mentioned as a critic who had praised Pope's Iliad, the reviewer wrote:

Having mentioned Johnson's liberal praise we must not pass unnoticed, his frequent censure of Pope, by which Mr. Bowles has not failed to profit. The truth, however, is, that there is no authority, either in morals or criticism, of such uncertain estimation: none was higher when he wrote under the unbiassed influence of his understanding and his principles; and none lower when under the not unfrequent ascendency of morbid feelings: then, even truth, for which his reverence was so profound and habitual, was sacrificed to

130XCI (April, 1821), 292, 294.
the petty vanity of a momentary triumph; and even
the benevolence with which his mind was so deeply em­
bued, yielded to the dictates of spleen and caprice.
Frequent as are the proofs of this unhappy influence
in the Lives of the Poets, it is no where more con­
spicuous than in his estimate of evidence on the moral
character of Pope, and of the merit of some of his
productions. 131

To say, as the Gentleman's had said, that Bowles was no worse
than Johnson -- in fact, that he was kinder to Pope than
Johnson -- would then be no valid argument. Johnson's status
as a biographer was impaired by the inconsistencies of prejudice.

The last reference to Pope's character occurred in the
Edinburgh in "Mr. Robert Montgomery's Poems, and the Modern
Practice of Puffing." In discussing the whole problem of
patronage in literature, the essayist wrote:

Pope was the first Englishman who, by the mere sale of
his writings, realized a sum which enabled him to live
in comfort and in perfect independence. Johnson ex­
tols him for the magnanimity which he showed in in­
scribing his Iliad, not to a minister or a peer, but
to Congreve. In our time, this would scarcely be a
subject for praise. 132

Although he was not tremendously impressed by Pope's indepen­
dence, still he realized that Johnson's attitude grew out of
the circumstances of the time. Also, he saw Johnson as favor­
ably disposed toward the poet.

Against that background, then, appeared the discussion
of Pope as a poet and of Johnson's criticism of him. At the
beginning of the period the opinions were advanced in a calm

131 XXXII (October, 1825), 295.
132 LI (April, 1830), 195.
and matter-of-fact fashion. For example, the Gentleman's
tacitly submitted to one of Johnson's pronouncements in re-
marking:

The oldest Epistles seem to be what Dr. Johnson
considers those of Pope, "compositions premeditated
and artificial." 133

And the Monthly, in commenting on The Correspondence of Samuel
Richardson, also depended on Johnson's support:

The minor geniuses, who were contemporaneous with
Pope, endeavoured to persuade each other than he was
no poet; but, as Dr. Johnson asks, in allusion to this
assertion, "If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to
be found?" 134

The battle was not really a serious one yet.

An old point of contention was revived by the Scots
Magazine when it reviewed The Falls of Clyde in June, 1806,
and repeated part of the author's preface:

The following passage, introduced by the mention
of Johnson's aversion to pastoral poetry, deserves
also to be quoted.

"To a person whose vision was imperfect, who was
enamoured of town life, and who considered a chair in
a tavern as the throne of happiness; to a person whose
mind was agitated by a series of violent emotions,
accustomed to intellectual entertainment, to the agi-
tation of contest, and the triumph of victory; to such
a person, the scenes of the country might have been
languid and uninteresting. The principal charm of rural
life is the tranquillity it represents; but to a mind
like Johnson's tranquillity was a curse. Indeed, I
do not know, if a person of much mental energy, unless
a proprietor, or landscape painter, can long feel de-
light from a tranquil peaceful scenery." 135

133 LXXIV, 1214.
134 XLVI (January, 1805), 37.
135 LXVI, 443-4.
The poet began with what was apparently a disparaging attitude toward Johnson, but by the end of the passage he had worked himself into taking a rather sympathetic position. He did ignore completely one basis of Johnson's dislike of the pastoral in English -- its artificial imitativeness -- but at any rate his defense of the form took a moderate tone.

It will be recalled that the Edinburgh submitted to Johnson's authority in its review of Stockdale's Lecture, but reserved the privilege of qualifying the submission:

But when we assent to the opinions of a superior mind, we generally find its utterance so conveyed, that we can assent in a qualified manner, where as it is, on the whole, due, and yet find room for some partial distinction of our own. "If Pope is not a poet, (says Johnson), where is poetry to be found?" This is certainly true; for though the forte of Pope be neither pathos, sublimity, nor daring originality, yet that he moves the affections, approaches to majesty of thought, and possesses much of his own creation, who shall deny? The indiscriminate praise of our author [Stockdale] is, that Pope united apparently inconsistent excellences. Dr. Johnson touches off his picture more rationally, by saying, that he had, in proportions very nicely suited to each other, all the qualities which constitute genius. The excellences of Pope were adjusted by proportion to each other, and not incompatible qualities.136

The balance in Johnson's criticism struck a kindred note in the Edinburgh reviewer. He then proceeded to quote Johnson on The Rape of the Lock and to comment on the criticism:

"He had invention, (Dr. Johnson continues), by which new trains of ideas are formed, and new scenes of imagery displayed, as in the Rape of the Lock; or extrinsic embellishments and illustrations are connected with a known subject, as in the Essay on Criticism".... It [The Rape of the Lock] is an epic poem in that

136XII (April, 1808), 76.
delightful miniature which diverts us by its mimicry of greatness, and yet astonishes by the beauty of its parts, and the fairy brightness of its ornaments. In its kind, it is matchless; but still it is but mock-heroic, and depends, in some measure, for effect on a ludicrous reference in our own minds to the veritable heroics whose solemnity it so wittily affects.137

Pope's capacity to invent was not completely acknowledged, for the effect of his poem depended partially on the true heroic poem. Similarly, he said of Johnson's analysis of imagination in Pope:

"He had imagination, Johnson observes, which enables him to convey to the reader the various forms of nature, incidents of life, and energies of passion, as in his Eloisa, his Windsor Forest, and his Ethic Epistles." It is true that Pope's imagination could convey the forms of nature, yet many poets have looked upon nature much less through a medium than Pope, and have seen her and painted her in less artificial circumstances.138

Johnson and the reviewer both apparently were referring to external nature. In the qualification of the latter -- the insistence on "less artificial circumstances" -- there was, it would seem, a reflection of the Wordsworthian theory.

The Monthly took a similarly derogatory tone toward Stockdale's chapter on Pope:

On the publication of Warton's Essay, Mr. Stockdale, (it seems) honoured it with an answer; and he informs us twice that Dr. Johnson promised to compliment this answer in his intended Lives of the Poets, but broke his word. The wounded pride of authorship appears, however, to have been amply propitiated by the Doctor's vigorous eulogies on the illustrious subject of Mr. S's two lectures. Large passages from the Life of Pope are here transcribed: but still the author's

137Ibid., 77.
138Ibid., 78.
thirst of praise for his favourite bard is left unsat­i­ated. Johnson, we find, was not sufficiently alive to
the beauties of Pope's early stanzas on solitude, or
the metaphysical value of the Essay on Man; he should
not have called the Rape of the Lock the first of
Pope's works, because then the Eloisa can only be the
second; his objections to the doctrine of a ruling
passion are very weak and futile; and he is styled "a
Herod of Jury" for his comments on the unfortunate
lady. His praise of the "Ovidian Graces" displayed in
Pope's Iliad and Odyssey is injurious to the translator,
because it intimates a deficiency in "the more magni­ficent
graces;" his mind was "darkened in its early
habits of thinking," when he considered some part of
the sublimity of Homer as lost in the translation;
and "he treats the epitaphs in a very hypercritical
manner." The present critic offers a commentary on
some of the epitaphs, seemingly in opposition to that
of his predecessor.139

For one thing, Stockdale's enthusiasm, his complete lack of
any restraint in his approach to authors he admired, was made
to appear ridiculous, and for another he was shown to be in­
adequate to the task of refuting Johnson on rational grounds.

Another author who found a point of disagreement with
Johnson was Ensor, the author of The Independent Man. One
portion of his book was devoted to a comparison of Dryden and
Pope, and of this the Monthly wrote:

Any writer less daring than Mr. Ensor would have
shrunk from again instituting a comparison between our
two great modern poets; yet, though he may not set up
his parallel against the finest portion of the Lives of
the British Poets, all readers of judgment and taste
will grant that he has acquitted himself well, and will
feel glad that he has hazardred the effort. Indeed,
splendid and dazzling as Johnson is, it not infrequently
happens that he transgresses against impartiality and
common sense.140

139LVIX (June, 1809), 145-6.
140LVII (December, 1808), 413.
Ensor could not reach the heights of Johnson, but he could perhaps clear the view of those heights. As a part of the comparison, he analyzed Pope's works, and just as Stockdale had felt that Johnson was unnecessarily severe on the epitaphs, Ensor came to the defense of the Essay on Man, and the Monthly quoted him. First the author was concerned with whose philosophy was there represented -- Pope's or Bolingbroke's:

"...It seems that the philosophical poetry of Pope preceded the philosophical writings of Bolingbroke. Yet without resting on these remarks, though I think them conclusive, even Johnson asserts, that 'the order, illustration, and embellishments of the Essay on Man must be all Pope's..." 141

In case the "it seems" would not be accepted as adequate, the essayist made Johnson an unwilling witness. But as frequently happened in such cases, Ensor's argumentative zeal seduced him into falsifying Johnson's position by incomplete quotation. What Johnson had said was:

The Essay plainly appears the fabric of a poet: what Bolingbroke supplied could be only the first principles; the order, illustration, and embellishments must all be Pope's. 142

Later in the essay came the objection to Johnson's criticism and the Monthly's comment on it:

"Johnson, of course, is very supercilious in his observations on this philosophical poem: he says that some of its sentiments, which affect by the power of numbers and the harmony of the versification, we have heard from our nurse....Johnson's mode of criticizing this poem would degrade the sublimest passages."

We frankly own that the charge which is here so

141 Ibid., 415.
142 Lives, II, 287.
ably combated, and which, being incapable of proof, is also incapable of absolute refutation, always appeared to us extremely singular and improbable; we had almost said, preposterous. 143

Definitely the review sympathised with Ensor's position, mistaken though it was.

The question of Johnson's stand on pastoral poetry arose again in the British Critic in November, 1809. The reviewer of Bowles's edition of Pope commended the editor for the good sense he evinced in pointing out an error in Warton's essay on Pope. Warton had maintained that Johnson condemned all pastoral poetry; Bowles maintained that Warton's belief was not firmly founded, that Johnson had merely objected to the presence of crook and pipe in English pastorals. 144

There is no doubt that Johnson was not fond of pastoral poetry, for rarely did he find in it the adherence to actual human life and manners that he demanded of all literature; but when he did find that quality — as in Gay's Shepherd's Week, for instance — he granted that pastorals could be "read with delight." Bowles, then, and the British Critic on this point were very near the truth.

At about the mid-point of the period there were two references to Pope and Johnson indicative of little more than a sustained interest in them: The Quarterly in taking a shot at Leigh Hunt said:

143 LVII, 415.
144 XXXIV (November, 1809), 439.
Mr. Hunt tells us that Dryden, Spenser and Ariosto, Shakespeare and Chaucer, (so he arranges them), are the greatest masters of modern versification; but he, in the next few sentences, leads us to suspect that he really does not think much more reverently of these great names than of Pope and Johnson; and that, if the whole truth were told, he is decidedly of opinion that the only good master of versification, in modern times, is--Mr. Leigh Hunt.145

And the Literary Gazette in its section on "The Drama" said:

Doctor Johnson observed that, by placing the merits of Pope's Man of Ross on the basis of truth, he had made his fame more permanent. We do not conceive that any of our remarks can have a similar effect on the well-earned fame of Mr. Kean...146

The controversy about Pope's merit as a poet -- the controversy for which Bowles's attacks had furnished impetus and which was characterized by an indulgence in bitter personal invective -- was still alive late in the second decade of the century, and the Gentleman's Magazine participated in it vigorously. In August of 1819 it published an essay on "Pope's Merit," in which the author observed:

I am aware that some soft-headed persons, of little learning, and corrupt taste, affect to display superior judgment, by expressing their doubts as to the justice of Pope's claim to the title of Poet; but the question has been long since decided by Doctor Johnson's luminous essay on this subject, wherein it is maintained that Pope possessed more rare and great qualifications than belong to most of our esteemed Poets: from the decision of Johnson no succeeding critic of acknowledged taste has dared to dissent. If the title of Poet was to be confined to those exclusively who excel Pope, we should be forced to degrade many illustrious names of ancient and modern times. The world has not yet produced more than twelve poets of the highest order,

145XIV (January, 1816), 474.
146February 22, 1817, p. 76.
There was no doubt of the position which Johnson held or of the excellence of Pope. Only a soft-headed, ignorant, tasteless upstart would presume to dispute either.

In December of that year, the same magazine in an article called "Defence of the Literary Age of Queen Anne" broadened the scope of battle at the same time that it moderated its style. A rival reviewer had depicted Addison and Pope and Swift and their associates as deficient in "the greater energies of the human mind, fire and imagination of genius, and force of invention." To that charge of sterility the essayist would not agree:

Were the eyes and understandings of our Johnsons, our Wartons, our Melmoths, our Youngs, our Warburtons, and our Beatties, so unaccountably dim to the true standard of merit which characterized the productions of these writers, as to eulogize them in terms very far above that degree of comparative rank in which Nature, diversified through all her productions, intellectual as well as material, destined them to move? Yet these Criticks have, upon record, declared their high estimate of the genius of these their predecessors, and of that faculty which is able at will to call forth the secret sympathies, passions, and all the intellectual emotions of our nature.

Johnson was among those whose judgment was relied on to justify the essayist's high opinion of the neoclassical poets under attack.

It should not be forgotten that the Gentleman's only

147 LXXXIX, 121-2.
148 LXXXIX, 584.
eighteen months later took the odd position already noted\textsuperscript{149} that Bowles's attack on the character of Pope had not been so severe as Dr. Johnson's. The contrast in attitude represented in these two views, however, merely indicated again that Johnson the biographer could be repudiated while Johnson the critic was praised.

At about the same time the Monthly paid tribute to Johnson's liberal critical spirit. In evaluating \textit{Echoism; a Poem}, the reviewer first noted the debt owed to Johnson by many later editors of Pope and then contrasted the spirit of the original and the spirit of the borrower under discussion at the moment:

The remarks on the alterations in some passages in Pope's poems, made in different editions, are copied from Johnson's life of Pope, without acknowledgement: but how different is the spirit in which the great biographer of the poets mentions these variations, from that in which the present author censures them! The latter would have us believe that they arose entirely from regard to sound or melody, without any attention to the sense; while Johnson's more liberal reflection is the following: "To such oversights will the most vigorous mind be liable, when it is employed at once upon argument and poetry."\textsuperscript{150}

This was good evidence that Johnson was not invariably cast in the role of the hypercritical dogmatist.

That Johnson could be careless in critical as well as in biographical matters was attested by a letter published in the \textit{Literary Gazette} on September 4, 1824:

\textsuperscript{149}See footnote 130 above.

\textsuperscript{150}\textit{xcviii} (May, 1822), 91.
Dr. Johnson has stated, rather incorrectly, that the books of the *Odyssey* translated by Fenton, "have very few alterations by the hand of Pope;" for it is a fact that I could nowhere, in the first book find twenty lines together as Fenton originally wrote them: the fourth has many additions and improvements; the nineteenth is lost; and the twentieth has scarcely a hundred marks of Pope's correction. Thus, one only of four books agrees with the Doctor's account, and it is not improbable that he looked at that alone; for our Aristotle (as a friend of mine calls him) was not accustomed to take unnecessary trouble, and always supplied the defects of his researches by the ingenuity of his own observations,—no contemptible exchange; something resembling Mercury's present to the Woodman who asked for an iron axe, and received a golden one.¹⁵¹

The alleged inaccuracy was not considered serious, however, in the light of Johnson's total services to criticism.

The Quarterly's attitude to Johnson at this stage in the period has been partially noted already in the discussion of Pope biography. The author of "Pope's Works and Character," it will be remembered, first quoted Johnson's pronouncement that Pope's translation of the *Iliad* was "the noblest version of poetry which the world has ever seen," and then said that there was no authority more subject to the influence of prejudice. As an example he cited Johnson's remarks on the epitaphs:

> It is not intended minutely to examine these hypercritical observations; to which, however, their author seems to have been uncommonly partial, as he published them in "The Universal Visitor," "The Idler," and "The Lives of the Poets." But we shall, on the general subject, notice the difficulty of doing that originally and well, which has been done so often; and of giving appropriateness to what must, in fact, have been common to many.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹P. 571.

¹⁵²**XXXI** (October, 1825), 296-7.
There was no doubt that the Quarterly wanted to throw all of
Johnson's negative testimony out of court as being based on
"caprice and spleen." Of course, it was a possibility that
the review was forced into taking such an uncompromisingly
derogatory view by its zeal to defend Pope against Bowles and
his adherents; only complete praise could be accepted. On
the other hand, Macaulay, limited though he thought Johnson's
criticism was, approved his commentary on the epitaphs.\footnote{153}

Pope's translation of the Iliad figured once more in
periodical criticism when Blackwood's reviewed Sotheby's ver-
sion of it in April, 1831. By way of establishing the value
of the current product, the reviewer compared its beginning
lines with those in previous translations:

Dryden and Cowper, we think, (please always, if you
have time and opportunity, to verify or falsify our
criticisms by reference to translation and original,) succeed best; Pope and Sotheby are about on an
equality, though Pope is the more musical; and Tickell
is poor, though Johnson, throughout that passage, way-
wardly prefers him to Pope.\footnote{154}

Again it must be noted that Johnson had not been nearly so
definite as this reviewer made him appear:

To compare the two translations would be tedious;
the palm is now given universally to Pope; but I think
the first lines of Tickell's were rather to be pre-
furred, and Pope seems to have since borrowed some-
thing from them in the correction of his own.\footnote{155}

However, it remains that Johnson was considered mistaken in

\footnote{153}{See footnote 51 above.}
\footnote{154}{XXIX, 670.}
\footnote{155}{Lives, II, 89.}
this one preference; furthermore, in the word waywardly there was a slight suggestion of the charge of perversity and capriciousness which the Quarterly had earlier brought against him.

And that was the last commentary on Pope in the period. The results of the survey of Johnson's reputation as a critic in this quarter of the literary world are much the same as those emerging from the Dryden investigation. The heated debates arising from the Bowles flurry encouraged rather extreme views on occasion, but those were the exceptions. For the most part, Johnson was accepted as a just and adequate biographer of Pope in spite of his cavalier disregard of research, and as an illuminating and valuable critic. A significant tribute to the weight his word carried was the fact that adherents of both sides in the arguments concerning Pope's merits relied upon Johnson's authority.

Addison was another author about whom much was written in the journals of the Romantic period, and with his name was linked that of Johnson. However, virtually all the treatments lie outside the scope of this study, for they were concerned not with Johnson's critical judgments of Addison, but with the relative merits of the two men as prose stylists. Occasionally, though, there were remarks pertinent to the problem here. The Scots Magazine, for instance, in February, 1800, wrote:

Dr. Johnson has, I think, taken too confined a view of the range of Addison's humour in thus describing it. "His humour is so happily diffused as to give the grace of novelty to domestic scenes and daily
occurrences..." In this account there is truth, but not all the truth.156

The commentator did not specify what the whole truth was, incidentally. Then when Alexander Chalmers brought out The British Essayist, the British Critic commended him for very sensibly having drawn on Johnson's Addisonian criticism:

The Preface to the TATLER very properly begins with an account of the origin of such Essays. A great part of this is taken from Johnson's Life of Addison, and as no better statement could have been given, it would have been absurd not to have taken advantage of it. But the account is continued by Mr. Chalmers, and in a manner very creditable to his powers of thinking, and of writing.157

On another occasion the author of an essay in the Gentleman's on "Serious Papers of Addison" used a judgment of Johnson's to reenforce his own taste:

Where so many Essays are excellent, it may be difficult to select one for preference. But his hundredth and fifty ninth paper is exquisitely beautiful; and was greatly admired by Dr. Johnson.158

When Gifford edited The Plays of Philip Massinger, the British Critic in its review of the work quoted the editor with approval:

"'Whoever,' says Johnson, 'wishes to attain an English style familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison.' Whoever would add to these the qualities of simplicity, purity, sweetness, and strength, must devote his hours to the study of Massinger."159

156 LXII, 89.
157 Series 1, XXIII (May, 1804), 544.
158 LXXV (February, 1805), 115.
159 Series 1, XXVII (April, 1806), 356.
The Monthly, in criticizing Drake's Essays, On the Tatler, &c. in its June, 1806, number, approved his observations and noted that they were substantiated by Johnson's:

His strictures on the period generally termed the Augustan age of British literature coincide with the remark of Dr. Johnson; who has observed that "the general knowledge which now circulated in common talk, was then rarely to be found. Men not professing learning were not ashamed of ignorance; and in the female world, any acquaintance with books was distinguished only to be censured."160

The British Critic later commended Johnson's attitude toward Addison's similes.161 Then, Addison, too, it may be presumed, shared in the Gentleman's "Defence of the Literary Age of Queen Anne," in which Johnson's high opinion of the Augustan authors played an integral part.162 And the same magazine slightly later again incidentally but approvingly referred to an observation of Johnson on Addison:

Johnson has observed of Addison, that a perpetual smile plays upon his countenance, and brightens his periods.163

Such notations, occasional and casual though they were, indicated both that Addison's position -- particularly as an essayist -- was secure and that Johnson's as a critic of him was equally so.

The other two writers of the neoclassical spirit about whom the periodicals showed concern in relation to Johnson were

160L, 178.
161XL (November, 1812), 448.
162See footnote 147 above.
163XCI (November, 1821), 397.
Jonathan Swift and Richard Savage, and in both cases the central issue was prejudice. Only three times was Johnson's "Life of Swift" referred to specifically — i.e., apart from the rest of the Lives — and each time Johnson was seen as being unreasonably ill-disposed to his subject. The first notation was called forth by Nichols's edition of Swift's works, in which Johnson's estimate was included. The Monthly reviewer thought Swift needed defending:

The prejudice which Dr. Johnson entertained against Swift is well known; and, in the character here preserved, it betrayed him into an obvious inconsistency.

Then he quoted Johnson's passage on Swift's parsimony and refuted it thus:

How could that economy, practised too by a person who was never rich, become detestable, which was never suffered to encroach on virtue; and which suggested the idea that the party preferred one mode of expence to another, and saved merely that he might have something to give?

Shortly after Scott's edition of Swift was published in 1825, Blackwood's printed a letter from "Senex" on Swift and Scott. In it the correspondent noted Johnson's reputation:

Sir Walter Scott concurs, with every other reader of Johnson's Critical Biography, in expressing his astonishment at the latter's dislike of Swift, and unaccountable injustice to his fame and character.... "Great wits," says Pope, though with a different application, "sometimes may gloriously offend." I believe they often do, but there is a great difference between opinions sported in conversation, or the ephemeral essays of a party writer, and the sober meditations of impartial criticism, written for the instructive information of present and future generations. In the latter, we have a right to expect the utmost candour,

164 XXXVII (February, 1802), 199.
with the fairest judgment; a careful abstinence from anything that may mislead the reader, and a cautious avoidance of conclusions, not fully justified by the premises. Offences against these requisites are not of the glorious kind, and ultimately prove more injurious to the commentator than the person commented on. ...Your celebrated countryman, Sir Walter Scott, has done such ample justice to the Dean's character as a writer, a patriot, and a man, that it would be wrong to say another word on the subject.  

Scott did, it is quite true, say that Johnson was "no friend to [Swift's] fame;" but he did not therefore repudiate, as the correspondent implied, Johnson's entire contribution. In the preface to his edition he stated definitely that his purpose was to condense the information provided by earlier biographers -- Johnson among them; and in the critical comments he drew on Johnson occasionally.

Macaulay in his review of Boswell, it will be recalled, defined Johnson's limitations as a critic thus:

He judged of all works of the imagination by the standard established among his own contemporaries.

And then he cited as an example of those limitations the critic's failure to appreciate the originality of Gulliver's Travels. Though Scott did not concur in that -- as was proved by his statement that "even Johnson has allowed that perhaps no author can be found who has borrowed so little, or has so well maintained his claim to be considered as an original" -- still so far as opinions in the periodicals

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165 XVIII (December, 1825), 726-7.
166 i, vii-viii.
167 ER, LIV (September, 1831), 32.
168 Swift, I, 481-2.
were concerned, Johnson could not be trusted as a critic of Swift.

The "Life of Savage" was unique in another way. Johnson was seen as being so sympathetic to the companion of his early years in London that for once the biographical treatment was considered more valuable than the critical. Near the beginning of the period the Gentleman's, reviewing Sharpe's "The Church," commented that "Johnson wrote his best piece of biography, 'the Life of Savage,' almost at a sitting."¹⁶⁹ That this opinion was still held when Chalmers brought out his Biographical Dictionary fifteen years later was obvious, for after stating that Johnson's ordinary method of biography should not be used as a model by other authors, the reviewer qualified his judgment to this extent:

Still, in offering these remarks, they must be qualified with one important exception—Johnson's personal intimacy with Savage enabled him to fulfil duties more important than those belonging to the Critick. As the Moralist, he sought "to instruct, admonish, and reform," and never has the portrait of a glowing, but neglected genius, of a strong, but ill-directed understanding, been more powerfully, or more impressively drawn, than in the narrative of that unfortunate man.¹⁷⁰

In another number of the Gentleman's Johnson was called "the panegyrist of Savage,"¹⁷¹ and in still another he was the biographer by whom Savage had "been so ably familiarized with

¹⁶⁹ LXXI (July, 1801), 597.
¹⁷⁰ LXXXVII (April, 1817), 291.
¹⁷¹ LXXXVII (January, 1817), 58.
Leigh Hunt in the Indicator spoke kindly of the work too:

Of Johnson's friendship with Savage (we cannot help beginning the sentence with his favourite leading preposition), the well-known Life is an interesting and honourable record. It is said that in the commencement of their friendship, they have sometimes wandered together about London for want of a lodging;—more like, for Savage's want of it, and Johnson's fear of offending him by offering a share of his own. But we do not remember how this circumstance is related by Boswell. 173

In 1824 the Scots Magazine reviewed what was called the "Original Edition of Johnson's Life of Savage" and recorded its established reputation:

The Life of the unfortunate Richard Savage, written by Doctor Johnson, is universally esteemed to be our great lexicographer's finest piece of biography; and some of the Doctor's more ardent admirers even venture to assert it the most perfect model we possess of biographical excellence. 174

Not willing to go quite all the way, still the reviewer gave it high praise. The Monthly's comparison of Johnson's work and Scott's prefaces to Ballantyne's Novelist's Library was pertinent here also:

The memoirs, we are bound to say, are by no means comparable to those of the admirable biographer of Savage. 175

Blackwood's made a contribution to the subject apropos of a review of The Man of Tin:

172 XCI (September, 1821), 222.
173 I (November 17, 1819), 42.
174 XV (October, 1824), 419.
175 CVIII (November, 1825), 261.
Savage was a man of a superior class—but he was a villain. He was made so either by nature or his stars. Yet he must have had a strong semblance of some virtue since Samuel Johnson loved him—for Samuel would not have loved a man merely on account of his talents. There was, however, a sympathy of situation and condition; for they were both poor, and necessity, as often and as much as choice, made them stroll together—moralizing and philosophizing—yet, we fear, not always so—up and down the midnight streets, and lanes, and alleys of London. It was just as well that the Lexicographer was not with Savage in that house of ill-fame, when, in a doubtful brawl, he became a stabber; afterwards condemned to die on the scaffold....Savage, besides, was probably something of a scholar, though Johnson's fine philosophical biography of him must be read with many salvos; for nothing is more common than for men of great acquirements to transfer, in a fit of enthusiasm for some unworthy associate, the glory that is in themselves alone, to one whose endowments may be considerable, but who, on the whole, is but a very inferior character.

The commentator felt that Johnson's critical estimate of Savage needed to be modified in a downward direction, but even so, he called the life a "fine, philosophical biography." Similar admiration was attested to by the British Critic in its account of Thomas Moore's Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: with Notices of his Life:

When Mr. Moore was contemplating the life of Sheridan, he was told by Lord Byron that he could find no model for his work equal to Johnson's Life of Savage. One would imagine the biographer had actually placed that pattern before him throughout the present performance; not, however, for the purpose of imbibing the spirit of that incomparable specimen, but with a perverse ambition to avoid all its peculiar excellencies.

And finally the Literary Gazette quoted Croker's note on the life in his Boswell edition:

176 XXIII (June, 1828), 838.
177 IX (April, 1831), 315.
Of the Life of Savage, Mr. C. says:—"Johnson has spread over Savage's character the varnish, or rather the veil, or stately diction and extenuatory phrases, but cannot prevent the observant reader from seeing that the subject of this biographical essay was, as Mr. Boswell calls him 'an ungrateful and insolent profane,' and so little do his works shew of that poetical talent for which he has been celebrated, that if it had not been for Johnson's embalming partiality, his works would probably be now as unheard of as they are unread."  

The biographer's sympathy for his subject had in Croker's opinion obscured his critical judgment; that was the same view that the Blackwood's reviewer had expressed in a milder fashion. So far, then, as Savage was concerned, though the periodicals did not always share Johnson's sympathy for him and though they felt at times that the attention given the author's writings was unwarranted, still they accorded the life a high place among Johnson's works and among biographies in general.

When the attention which the periodicals gave to Johnson's criticism of Restoration and Augustan authors is examined, one is forced to conclude that they were interested in his views of relatively few of them -- Dryden and Congreve, Pope, Addison, Swift, and Savage. In fact, only in his criticism of Dryden and Pope did they manifest interest to any appreciable degree at all. However, once they took cognizance of his analyses and judgments of those men, for the most part they approved. They saw the biographical material about Dryden and Pope given fuller treatment than Johnson usually vouchsafed that aspect of his task, and considered the details

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178 June 25, 1831, p. 404.
about Savage as comprehensive as could be desired. So far as the problem of critical prejudice was concerned, they felt that he had been more than just to Savage, just to Dryden and Addison, and for the most part so to Pope; no one approved his treatment of Swift, but the disagreement did not result in such wholesale righteous denunciations as were directed at him because of his "Milton." In other words, what actually appeared in the journals about Johnson and the major neoclassicists showed that both the critic and his subjects enjoyed a steady if not overwhelming reputation throughout the period.

iv. The Eighteenth-Century Poets of the Romantic Spirit

Still a third group whom the booksellers included in their anthology and on whom Johnson perforce wrote critiques were the eighteenth-century poets commonly designated as the precursors of Romanticism -- Thomson, Young, Collins, Gray, and their spiritual associates. If the quantity of material presented about them can be considered any indication, the critic's interest was relatively mild. Only the "Life of Young" approached at all the detailed treatment given the leading figures of the neoclassical school, and at that, Sir Herbert Croft contributed the forty-odd pages of biography to it while Johnson appended four pages of criticism. Even Thomson, included, it is supposed, at the biographer's suggestion, was not discussed at any length.

However, Johnson's attitude toward his subjects is not really so important here as is the reaction of the periodicals
of the Romantic period to this segment of his criticism. Considering their attitudes toward Shakespeare and Milton, one might logically expect them to be vitally interested in it, and consequently it is rather surprising to discover that actually they referred less frequently on the whole to this group of men than to the preceding group. There was an isolated comment or two on the injustice which Akenside and Dyer suffered at Johnson's hands; there were occasional remarks on his criticism of Collins, Thomson, and Young; but only in his judgment of Gray was there evinced a widespread interest. One cannot help speculating on reasons for such a paucity of references, but first it might be well to examine specifically what did appear.

The only mention of Johnson's criticism of Dyer appeared in a letter to Mr. Urban in the Gentleman's Magazine for January, 1801. Drake had said that only a short time had elapsed between the publication of The Fleece and Dr. Johnson's "stern critique," which "had intervened to blast its fame." The correspondent did not dispute the description of the criticism but merely pointed out that the interval between the publication of the poem and the publication of the Lives was actually more than twenty years and that therefore Johnson's influence on Dyer's reputation had not been so great as Drake supposed. 179

Akenside was mentioned twice, once in connection with

179 LXXI, 19.
Nichols's *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* and once in the *London*’s essay "On Parties on Poetry." It was the Gentleman's which quoted Nichols on Johnson's attitude to the poet:

"The first I can recollect of my own personal acquaintance with Dr. Akenside's name and Muse was my father's recital to me, when I was a boy at Eton School, of the Invocation to Antient Greece, in that celebrated Poem which has been so depreciated by Dr. Johnson, that I fear no error of judgment and of taste, manifest in that criticism, can redeem the censure from heavier imputations." 180

Once again Johnson was accused of having allowed personal prejudice -- jealousy perhaps -- to enter into his critical pronouncements. The journal made no commitment on the truth or falsity of the accusation but merely presented it so that the reading audience could judge.

The *London* essayist, after having denominated the neo-classical group as the Legitimates, went on to speak of their successors:

Gray, Mason, and the Wartons, whatever were their individual merits, at least assisted to break the Legitimate spell, by reconciling the public to bolder metaphors, stronger images, and more varied cadence; while Akenside restored somewhat of the old energy of thought and gravity of diction. His best work is his Hymn to the Naiads. His blank-verse is constructed with considerable skill; it reminds you of Milton, without servilely following him.

But neither these, nor any poet of their age, were possessed of that universality, that deep and germinative knowledge, which distinguished the earlier Constitutionalists. They were retired persons, who obtained a negative sort of freedom by withdrawing from society; not citizens of the world, enjoying and promoting general liberty. They earned, however, for the
most part, the censure of Johnson, the great champion of the Legitimates, who upheld their theories when their practice began to decline.  

Akenside thus was associated with those whom Johnson censured. Granted the critic's tone was generally unsympathetic, it is still interesting, incidentally, to see that the very points which the London essayist chose as distinguishing the work of Akenside -- his "energy of thought and gravity of diction" and his blank verse -- were the ones which Johnson had chosen as extenuating qualities. He had called The Pleasures of the Imagination Akenside's "great work" and continued:

> It has undoubtedly a just claim to very particular notice, as an example of great felicity of genius, and uncommon amplitude of acquisitions, of a young mind stored with images, and much exercised in combining and comparing them.

He had said later:

> To his versification justice requires that praise should not be denied. In the general fabrication of his lines he is perhaps superior to any other writer of blank verse...

The London essayist reached a generalization about Johnson's criticism on the basis of the negative comments.

Collins received slightly more attention than the two poets just considered. In the Monthly Review's account of Wooll's Biographical Memoirs of Dr. Warton, he was cited as having contributed with Warton some early verses to the Gentleman's:

> It is particularly mentioned that, in this early stage

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181 IV (November, 1821), 479.
of his literary career, he joined with Collins and another boy in contributing to the Gentleman's Magazine certain verses, which obtained the flattering approbation of the author of the Rambler. 183

Johnson's approval, let it be noted, was seen as desirable.

The London, much later, chose Warton as a subject for one of its "Lives of the Poets," and again Collins's experience with the Gentleman's was cited:

Here, together with two of his school-fellows, of whom Collins was one, he became a contributor to the Gentleman's Magazine. Johnson, who then assisted in editing that miscellany, had sagacity enough to distinguish, from the rest, a few lines that were sent by Collins, which, though not remarkable for excellence, ought now to take their place among his other poems. 184

This represented in one way a significant reversal of the Monthly's earlier attitude; though in both reviews Collins's poetry was praised and though in both Johnson's criticism was accepted, in the first instance, it was Johnson's approval of Collins's verses which lent value to the poetry, and in the second, it was Johnson's approval of Collins's verses which lent value to his criticism. In other words, in the second instance, it was really the critic and not the poet who was being judged. At any rate, he was accepted.

The Monthly had a later comment to offer on Johnson's criticism of Collins. In December, 1819, it reviewed Campbell's Specimens of British Poets and among other things said:

Many other points of excellence their former critics have shared equally with Mr. Campbell: but in touching

183 LII (March, 1807), 226.
184 V (March, 1822), 264.
on the tenderer chords of the lyre,—in developing, contrasting, and pointing out to view the finer beauties of the art,—none perhaps can fairly be put in competition with him. Though Johnson had an enlarged and powerful intellect, he was evidently warped in his opinions, and deficient in that lofty feeling which is requisite to appreciate the higher orders of poetry.

And one proof of that deficiency was his censure of "some of [Collins's] finest allegorical pieces." It is becoming obvious that when the nineteenth century periodicals found Johnson wanting on other grounds than personal and political prejudice, their evaluation almost invariably went in this direction of denying him sublimity of soul. It was the same limitation which some of them had found in his Shakespearean studies and in the Miltonic criticism as well.

In contrast to the above comment, however, was Leigh Hunt's reference in The Indicator to Johnson's description of Collins's taste:

We do not wonder that Collins was fond of this author and his translator [Tasso and Fairfax], since Johnson has told us, in that piece of prose music of his, that "he loved fairies, genii, and monsters,"—that "he delighted to rove through the meanders of enchantment, to gaze on the magnificence of golden palaces, and to repose by the waterfalls of Elysium." Evidently Hunt did not see Johnson as wanting in either perception of, or sympathy toward, the poet.

At about the same time, the Literary Gazette evaluated Johnson's "Life of Collins" as a source of biographical information:

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185 XC, 394-5.
186 I (March 29, 1820), 200.
There is no deficiency in the poetical biography of this country more seriously to be deplored, than the dearth of information as to the life and habits of our admirable and enthusiastic Collins. The unsatisfactory sketch given by Dr. Johnson is calculated rather to excite curiosity than to assuage it...187

Though the commentator found it deficient in details, he went on to show his approval of what Johnson had said, the critical as well as the biographical material.

The London again appeared on the scene in July, 1821, with an essay entitled "On Gray's Opinion of Collins," in the course of which the author said:

As to what Gray has said of "the bad ear" of Collins, and "the no choice at all of words and images;" the latter, as far as the imagery is concerned, is plainly inconsistent with the praise he has bestowed on him. For his want of ear, the same charge has been brought against him by Johnson, who tells us that "his lines commonly are of slow motion, clogged and impeded with clusters of consonants!" so I suppose there is an end of the matter; though I would fain put in a word on his behalf even on this point. Thomas Warton pronounced the same judgment on Milton, but has surely merited the punishment of Midas for his pains.188

There were expressed several attitudes worth remarking. In the first place, Johnson was seen as an authority supporting Gray's charge that Collins was unmusical; it was the same charge, ironically enough, which Johnson had brought against Gray as well. Then, too, the conclusion "So I suppose there is an end of the matter" revealed the author's fear that Johnson's opinion would be generally upheld — a good indication of the state of Johnson's reputation as a critic. But, finally,

188 IV, 16.
the essayist did dare to differ; for even such a man as John-
son could be wrong on occasion.

The last reference to Collins was a part of the Quarterly's review of Hayley's Life and Writings:

It was not till nearly thirty years after his [Collins's] death, that Cowper had ever heard his name. He saw it first in Johnson's Lives of the Poets, and was so little impressed by what he saw there, that he called him a poet of no great fame, and appears not to have formed the slightest conception of his powers. 189

Johnson's critique of Collins was there considered inadequate, for from it no true estimate of Collins's worth could be reached.

Since there were both favorably and unfavorable reactions during the period to Johnson's treatment of Collins, it is not possible to make a definite statement about his reputation. But this much is certain -- the trend as the period progressed was toward a disparagement of this part of his criticism.

Thomson was another poet whose name appeared occasion-
ally in the journals in conjunction with Johnson's, and as in the case of Collins, the references early in the period revealed a general respect for Johnson's opinions. The Scots Magazine in August, 1806, supported him on Thomson's right to be called original:

...They who accuse Thomson of imitating Milton are justly contradicted by Dr. Johnson, who insists that Thomson's poetry is original, and quite peculiar to himself... 190

The Edinburgh, in discussing Bowles's edition of Pope,

189XXI (March, 1825), 287.

190LXVIII, 586.
digressed thus on the subject of what could rightfully be expected of a poet:

A poet feels, and expresses what he feels, more forcibly than an ordinary person: the most common phenomena of the visible world, therefore, strike more in his descriptions, than in reality; they are better selected, better combined, and more richly associated. But if the nice skill of landscape painting, the power of showing "what the reader wonders he never saw before," for which Dr. Johnson has praised Thomson, be essential to poetry, valuable as, in its judicious exercise, it may be deemed, few indeed are the poets. 191

It was recognized that Johnson had praised Thomson for a talent so rare that few poets could claim it.

Then just a few months later the Edinburgh not only recognized Johnson's praise of Thomson but defended a negative portion of the critique against the attacks of Stockdale:

Amidst the profuse and noble praise which Johnson has lavished upon this poet, Mr. Stockdale seems highly offended that he should have ventured to hint at a blemish. Yet, surely, for the sake of taste, and, above all, for the sake of preserving poetical style free from the most dangerous, because the most fascinating fault, florid and excessive ornament, it may be said, with all reverence to Thomson, that he is frequently exuberant, and fills the ear rather than the mind. 192

The last clause there echoes Johnson's own words in the "Life."

It should be noted, furthermore, that the reviewer was aware of the relative importance of the lavish praise and the "hint of a blemish."

Stockdale's attacks were also evaluated by the Monthly Review in its June, 1809, issue:

191 XI (January, 1808), 411.
192 XII (April, 1808), 81.
The merits of Thomson are next discussed, and very liberally praised. Johnson's complaint of than poet's want of method is dismissed with less reply that Mr. S. usually bestows on his objections, viz. with the character of "absolute nonsense." The censure passed by the same critic on the poet's exuberance, and his habit of dwelling too long on one subject, is thus repelled; on his immediate subject "he never dwell too long for me"; and afterward..."I should be sorry to lose a single expression of that most amiable, immortal poet. There is not a feeble, not a superfluous word, in the Seasons; not a word, which does not contribute to inform the mind, to enrich the fancy, or to improve the heart." If this be true, the style of Thomson is superior to that of all authors, antient and modern.193

The lecturer's fine Romantic fervor was lost on the Monthly, which here adopted a rather amused and superior tone and which later on delivered itself of the opinion that, all told, Stockdale's Lectures were more vehement than correct.

Considerably later, in October of 1818, the Literary Gazette cited praise from Johnson as evidence of the value of one of Thomson's early efforts, a paraphrase of Psalm 104.194 And at approximately the same time, Hazlitt in his Lectures on the English Poets was quoting approvingly Johnson's commendation that Thomson wrote "no line which dying he would wish to blot."195

After that, there was quite a period of silence, which was broken by the Literary Gazette in 1830. The third volume of The Aldine Poets, which consisted of The Poetical Works of

193LIX, 147.
194October 3, 1818, p. 629.
195Works, v, 85.
James Thomson, was very briefly noted in the list of books newly published:

This volume, containing the Seasons and an excellent memoir of their bard, whom it rescues from the misrepresentations of Dr. Johnson, is exactly such a production as we could wish to see in so handsome a publication as the Aldine Poets. 196

That was all. What those misrepresentations consisted of -- whether they were the same judgments to which Stockdale, for instance, had earlier objected -- the reviewer did not see fit to say. But, for whatever it was worth, the notice indicated a negation of Johnson's criticism.

Then there was Macaulay again with his review of Croker in the Edinburgh. Since he had nothing good to say of Johnson's criticism except in so far as it dealt with authors of the neoclassical persuasion, it is not at all surprising to find that he repudiated the critic's views on Thomson. He put it thus:

Of the great original works which appeared during his time, Richardson's novels alone excited his admiration. He could see little or no merit in Tom Jones, in Gulliver's Travels, or in Tristram Shandy. To Thomson's Castle of Indolence, he vouchsafed only a line of cold commendation -- of commendation much colder than what he bestowed on the Creation of that Portentous bore, Sir Richard Blackmore. 197

The fact was completely ignored that Johnson had specifically singled out for commendation Thomson's originality, both of

196July 3, 1830, p. 433.
197LIV (September, 1831), 32.
"his mode of thinking" and his manner of "expressing his thoughts." 198

There was one more reference to Johnson's attitude toward Thomson, this time in Blackwood's, but it would be difficult to attach much significance to it. The author of a review of Allan Cunningham's Maid of Elvar rather whimsically allowed himself to weigh the question of whether Thomson's Seasons could be considered a national poem:

But what mean we by saying that the Seasons are a national subject?—do we assert that they are solely Scottish? That would be too bold, even for us; but we scruple not to assert, that Thomson has made them so, as far as might be without insult, injury, or injustice, to the rest of the globe. His suns rise and set in Scottish heavens; his "deep-fermenting tempests, are brewed in grim evening" Scottish skies; Scottish is his thunder of cloud and cataract; his "vapours," and snows, and storms, are Scottish; and, strange as the assertion would have sounded in the ears of Samuel Johnson, Scottish are his woods, their sigh, and their roar... 199

In the jibe at Johnson's well-known anti-Scottish prejudice, there was an implication that the critic would not have enjoyed seeing the stamp of Scotland put upon a poem he had commended. Though it would not do to push the point very far, at least it would seem taken for granted that Johnson favored Thomson in his criticism.

And that was the attitude taken, on the whole, by the reviewers throughout the period with, of course, the notable exception of Macaulay.

198Lives, II, 376.

199XXXI (June, 1832), 981.
The "Life of Young," notwithstanding its relative bulk, got little attention, only four specific notices of it occurring in the period. Furthermore, of these, two were concerned purely with the biographical section of the essay. By coincidence, both appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine. The first was a casual reference to Sir Herbert Croft as "the author of the Life of Doctor Edward Young, which is associated with Johnson's Lives of the Poets," and the second was an echo of that with the addition to Johnson's name of the epithet "the truly-great biographer."

The first notation of the criticism in the "Life" was prompted once again by Stockdale's Lectures, and it was in the Edinburgh that it appeared.

In one respect, our author puts us in mind of a rower in a boat; he looks one way and proceeds another. In Young we find him treating of Pope, and in Thomson looking back upon Young. A Johnson, or a Croft, are ever and anon present to receive some castigation; and are seemingly thrown in his way, that he may have the pleasure of kicking them out of it. His remarks on Young are, nevertheless, in general judicious, except where he praises the minor poems of that author.

Again Stockdale's disorganized, unrestrained method was ridiculed, and it was suggested that he was rather forcing the continuation of a battle really over. The offenses for which he castigated Johnson and Croft were apparently not significant.

200 LXXVI (February, 1806), 115.
201 LXXVI (May, 1816), 471.
202 XII (April, 1808), 80.
enough to be specified, but "his remarks...are, nevertheless, in general judicious..."

The second comment on Johnson's contribution to the "Life" came from the London in -- again -- "On Parties in Poetry." Commenting on Young's place in literary history, the essayist said:

Young departed so far from the established fashion as to write blank-verse, but he wrote it with the cadence of the epigrammatic couplet. We cannot think, with Dr. Johnson, that his Night Thoughts is one of the few poems in which blank-verse could not be exchanged for rhyme with advantage; for bad blank-verse might always be advantageously exchanged for good rhyme. This was noteworthy in that one of Johnson's commendatory judgments was being objected to, and not only that, but a commendatory judgment of a poet belonging, in the opinion of the essayist, to a group not of Johnson's literary kind.

One reviewer, then, considered Johnson as the critic of Young, if anything, too severe, and the other considered him too kind. In the views of Johnson's criticism of Gray, however, there was no such division. From the beginning of the period to the end, the critic was denounced as having failed to perceive the undeniable merit of Gray's poetry.

The Monthly began the attack in May, 1802, in its notice of Berdmore's Specimens of Literary Resemblance. The reviewer quoted Dr. Berdmore as saying:

"Even Dr. Johnson himself, willing, as he evidently was, from whatever cause, to degrade the high character which Mr. Gray deservedly held, of an original writer, with uncommon powers of fancy and invention, and,

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203 IV (November, 1821), 479.
therefore, ever on the watch to detect any latent imitation, has been able to discover no instance of similar composition."204

The Monthly gave tacit approval, apparently, to this comment, for it raised no objection. The phrase "for whatever cause" would indicate the possibility of either personal or literary prejudice.

The Scots Magazine joined the attack in the next month with the comment of an essayist engaged in a study of Gray's poetry:

It is rather singular, that Dr. Johnson, who seems to have been so much better disposed to discover the blemishes than the beauties of Gray, should never have hit upon this objection of his want of originality in language; although he has observed upon another occasion, that "what is borrowed is not enjoyed as our own," and that "it is the business of critical justice, to give every bird of the muses his proper feather."

The mention of Johnson, naturally leads me to speak of another inducement to this work, which arose from my not being completely satisfied with any of the answers I had yet seen, to his severe strictures on the poetry of Gray. By these structures (Scotchman as I am) I had felt myself much more mortified and offended, than by all the sarcastic and illiberal reflections scattered over his journey to the Hebrides.205

Though he himself was astute enough to discover Gray's indebtedness to earlier authors, Johnson in his general severity had missed it.

Again in October of that year the Monthly quoted a derogatory comment on Johnson with no indication of either approval or disapproval. This time the citation came from Dyer's introduction to his poems:

204XXXVIII, 25.
205LXIV, 485.
"I add, in passing, that Dr. Johnson, in his attempts at lyric poetry, has, in my opinion, been very unsuccessful. The sentiments are but common; his measures are neither dignified nor sprightly; his language is neither stately nor animated. His imitations of Juvenal's Satires are, allowedly, excellent: but his five rural odes are indifferent manufactures: they contain no originality of thought or gracefulness of diction; and will of themselves show the grounds of Johnson's insensibility to the sublimity of Gray. 206

The critic was there judged on the basis not of his criticism but of his poetry, and once more he was found lacking in a sympathetic sublimity of soul.

The British Critic's review of John Aiken's General Biography in June, 1804, followed the journal's usual procedure of supplying generous excerpts. One of them, chosen no doubt because the reviewer considered it of interest to his audience, was part of Aiken's account of Gray:

"It has already been remarked, that his two principal odes are expressly addressed to prepared readers; and to enter into his beauties, both of diction and versification, a course of poetical study is necessary. Even with such a preparation the delight they afford will not be the same to all, as is manifest from Dr. Johnson's derogatory strictures; in which, however, candid readers have discovered more ill nature than taste." 207

Aiken granted the exclusive appeal of Gray's odes, but imputed Johnson's dislike of them more to prejudice than to a deficiency in the training necessary to understanding them. Again the review made no commitment of its own attitude.

When the Monthly reviewer came to that portion of Stockdale's Lectures devoted to Gray, for once it did not

206 XXXIX, 145.
207 XXIII, 639.
assume its customary superior attitude toward the commentator.

The two closing lectures are devoted to Gray, whom Mr. Stockdale defends from Johnson's hypercritical sarcasms and cold compliments, much in the same manner as every reader of poetical feeling has, to his own mind at least, defended him as often as he has perused "the Lives of the Poets."208

This, it should be remembered, was the journal which said that Stockdale usually exhibited more declamatory talent than sober sense.

The Edinburgh Review, too, in this connection modified its customary tone in discussing Stockdale:

Our author's account of the poetry of Gray has no pretensions to originality. In a long and laborious defence, we think he forgets one very obvious excuse for the obscurity of the Bard, which is, that the language of prophecy, according to all usage, having been obscure in real prophecy, as an imitative artist, the poet is justified in couching the language of his poetical prophet in the same obscurity. He succeeds better in defending its originality, and the probability of its fiction, against the attacks of Dr. Johnson.209

It did not go so far as the Monthly in accepting Stockdale's views, but it shared the feeling that Johnson had been mistaken.

Several years later the same review returned to the question of Johnson's treatment of Gray, this time in its essay on Rogers's Poems. It was in this, one recalls, that the essayist developed his belief that different periods in history required different sorts of literature and that Johnson, though eminently fitted to evaluate the merits of the

208 LIX (June, 1809), 147-8.
209 XII (April, 1808), 82.
neoclassical school, was equally unfit to evaluate the succeeding one. As an example of his deficiency, the reviewer cited his judgment of Gray:

The deformities of the life of Gray ought not to be ascribed to jealousy—for Johnson's mind, though coarse, was not mean—but to the prejudices of his University, his faction, and his poetical sect: and this last bigotry is the more remarkable, because it is exerted against the most skilful and tasteful of innovators, who, in reviving more poetical subjects and a more splendid diction, has employed more care and finish, than those who aimed only at correctness.210

Here it was not personal prejudice, but literary prejudice to which was assigned Johnson's failure to recognize Gray's merit.

At about the same time the Quarterly noted Mason's Life and Writings of Gray and, incidentally, one of Johnson's comments on Gray:

That the mind of Gray had a large grasp, was allowed even by Johnson—but he had only seen the effects of it when powerfully exerted: it has been reserved for us to see and to deplore that, in the midst of occupation, it was subject to long intervals of remission and repose.211

That Johnson was an unwilling advocate was an obvious implication of the even.

The London's "On Parties in Poetry," it will be remembered, listed Gray as one of those who "by reconciling the public to bolder metaphors, stronger images, and more varied cadence" earned for themselves the displeasure of Johnson, "the last great champion of the Legitimates, who upheld their

210XXII (October, 1813), 34.
211XI (July, 1814), 309.
theories when their practice began to decline."212 This view of him was similar to that held by the earlier Edinburgh reviewer who saw Johnson as sympathetic only to the neoclassical spirit.

It was a London author too who, in "On the Life and Writings of Samuel Johnson," considered the critic unfair in his discussion of Gray. He put it thus:

Of the first of these, the "London," Gray, in a letter to Horace Walpole, says that "to him it is one of those few imitations, that has all the ease and all the spirit of an original." The other is not at all inferior to it. Johnson was not insensible to such praise; and, could he have known how favourably Gray had spoken of him, would, I doubt not, have been more just to that poet, whom, besides the petulant criticism on him in his Life, he presumed in conversation to call "a heavy fellow."213

Johnson was seen to have been unfavorably disposed toward Gray both as a poet and as a man.

The Scots Magazine in September, 1824, hit on a strain recurring steadily in the examination of Johnson's criticism of this poet:

Doctor Johnson, in his life of Gray, accuses the lyrical bard of "fantastic foppery," for supposing that he could only write at certain times, or at certain happy moments. But the old critic, whatever may be said of his strictures on poetry, was any thing but a man of poetical sensibility. Though himself the author of some very correct and meritorious poems, he must, in this part of his high literary character, be accounted rather a rhetorical writer than a poet. He was eminently deficient in that glow of enthusiastic

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212 IV (November, 1821), 479.
213 VIII (August, 1823), 185.
feeling which uniformly characterized the poetical mind.\textsuperscript{214}

The conclusion then was that Johnson, placid soul that he was, could not be expected to appreciate the difficulties attendant upon the compositions of poets endowed with finer sensitivity.

A Blackwood's correspondent, in chastising Johnson for his unfair and thoughtless treatment of Swift, remarked in passing that that attitude was not so surprising as it might have been if the critic had not displayed

...an equal portion of unjust severity...in his Life of Gray, whose sublime and beautiful Odes, in spite of Johnson's perverse, and I had almost said puerile criticism, will maintain their fame with the duration of our language. Where, indeed, shall we find them equalled, save only by John Dryden?\textsuperscript{215}

The root of the perversity was not accounted for, but the use of puerile in the parenthetical statement seemed to indicate a critical deficiency rather more than prejudice.

Then the Scots came back into the picture with a commentary on Gray's Ode on Spring in its July, 1825, number. A usage in Milton was cited as proving Johnson in the wrong:

Dr. Johnson, in his criticism on this Ode, remarks: --"There has of late arisen a practice of giving to adjectives derived from substantives the termination of participles; such as the cultured plain, the daisied bank; but I was sorry to see, in the lines of a scholar like Gray, the honied spring." The Doctor forgot that Milton has the expression in his Lycidas, "honied showers," and in his II Penseroso, "honey'd thigh."\textsuperscript{216}

It was the lateness of the practise that was actually under

\textsuperscript{214} XV, 346.
\textsuperscript{215} XVIII (December, 1825), 726-7.
\textsuperscript{216} XVII, 38.
dispute, but at the same time the practise itself was justified.

Slightly later, a reviewer for the Gentleman's Magazine in his "Speculations on Literary Pleasures" bore down strongly on Johnson:

Thus the splenetic dictums of Johnson, in connection with his [Gray's] fame, have proved powerless, while they have certainly succeeded in attaching a stigma upon the taste of the great literary Oracle by whom they were pronounced.217

Johnson's unreasonable spleen was here seen as the motivation of his pronouncements on Gray.

A similar point of view was expressed by the Monthly reviewer of Neele's Literary Remains:

We do not quite coincide in our Lecturer's estimate of the merits of Gray. He was evidently prejudiced against that poet by the harsh, invidious, and unjustifiable criticism of Dr. Johnson.218

The "invidious" influence would imply at any rate that Johnson's attitude had carried weight.

And, of course, there was Macaulay again, who maintained that Johnson was so little able to appreciate the great original works of his own time that "Gray was, in his dialect, a barren rascal."219 On this point, at least, Macaulay was typical of the periodical attitude.

Even when the Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard came up for discussion, the reviewers were not completely mollified. The Scots Magazine did note Johnson's acceptance of

217 XCVII (August, 1827), 117.
218 CXVIII (January, 1829), 152.
219 ER, LIV (September, 1831), 31.
it and in turn accepted the criticism calmly enough:

Dr. Johnson acknowledges, in his criticism on Gray's Elegy, that, after all, what is generally capable of affording pleasure, and becomes a universal favourite, must be allowed to have answered the purposes, and to possess the requisites of poetry. 220

But the Edinburgh's tone was different. In speaking of Stockdale, the reviewer said:

More than half of his pages is devoted to the refutation of Dr. Johnson's heretical dogmas on the merits of our best writers. There was a time when no true admirer of Milton or Gray could speak without a rapture of indignation of Johnson's blasphemies against those poets... On both questions, whether as an adversary of Johnson or of Miller and Bryant, Mr. Stockdale appears to us rather impetuous as an advocate; yet generally, and with good feelings, in the right. We are only afraid the ingenuous veteran will find the public interest not so warm as his own. Johnson's true glory will live for ever; his violent prejudices have already lost their authority. The refutation of his errors, therefore, is not now called for. Of all that was ever written against him, there is but one worthy of being preserved as a literary curiosity; we mean the continuation of his criticism on Gray's Elegy, being an admirable imitation of his style, and a temperate caricature of the unfairness of his strictures. 221

He granted that Johnson's views on the "Elegy" were in need of correction, but he felt that the job had been adequately taken care of before Stockdale appeared. Johnson, it is true, had praised the poem, but after all, he had devoted only a paragraph to the whole account of it, and that was considered somewhat insufficient.

And finally there was the approach of the British Critic, which in January, 1820, said in its review of Italian

220LXVI (August, 1806), 577.
221XII (April, 1808), 62.
translations of Gray:

The fame of the original [Elegy Written in the Country Churchyard] is now placed beyond the reach of criticism, and he would be bold indeed who would venture at this time of day to question the surpassing merit of that, to which even the costive Johnson was liberal of praise, when it was enjoying only a recent popularity, and had not been sanctioned by the growing and consolidated applause of whole generations of readers.222

The value of the commendation was increased by the fact that it had come from one so difficult to please as Johnson.

The whole tone, then, of the journals in this period from 1800 to 1832 so far as Johnson's criticism of Gray was concerned was antagonistic. Time after time his judgment was weighed and found wanting -- on the score of personal dislike, on the score of deficiency in the scholarly training necessary to an understanding of unusual poetic forms, on the score of prejudice against literary innovations, and on the score of a deficiency in poetic sensibility and depth of soul. So antagonistic was the attitude that even when the reviewers chanced on one of the critic's sympathetic pronouncements they could not see it unshadowed by the condemnatory ones.

Just why the rest of the poets of this group were not similarly championed and why there was not more written about all of them, it is impossible, of course, to be certain; nevertheless, these facts might be worth noting. Wordsworth thought highly of Thomson's imagery and said so in the preface to his poems, but Wordsworth was a poet first and was more

222XIII, 35.
concerned with his own creative processes than with controversial criticism. Coleridge was engaged in rescuing Shakespeare and Milton from what he considered the patronizing criticism of the previous age, and so were Hazlitt and DeQuincey, though to a lesser degree. Scott, purveyor of the Romantic spirit though he was in his own works, still had a taste for the authors of the neoclassical spirit; at least, his editorial efforts would so indicate. And the reviews, though sometimes initiating literary quarrels, were more often — and naturally so — stimulated by current publications. Consequently, the paucity of references to the eighteenth-century writers of the Romantic spirit is a reflection, partially at least, of the public taste in general.

v. Summary

With Gray and his associates the examination of the periodical comments pertaining both generally and specifically to Johnson's Lives of the Poets comes to an end. From it several conclusions have emerged. The first and the most important of these is that throughout the period, with few exceptions, the general critical excellence of the work was recognized. It is easy perhaps for one to forget that fact while taking cognizance -- as one must -- of the various exceptions to and qualifications of the judgment, but it is the background against which all of those appear in proper proportion. Actually what the periodical reviewers were attempting to arrive at was a sense of proportion in their attitude
toward Johnson. They were so close to the time during which he ruled as a literary dictator that perforce they were conscious of his authority. It has been seen that on the whole they were willing to acknowledge that authority, for over the years it had proved itself worthy of respect. But there were points on which they could not agree with him, and those points they wanted to define; they did not want to be considered servile followers of the master.

One of the reservations appearing in the evaluation of the Lives concerned their biographical aspect. It was fairly generally felt that Johnson was too indifferent to the scholarly chore of digging up details about his subjects, though his treatments of Dryden and Pope and Savage were considered exceptions. Also there was a feeling that the confirmed Tory and Episcopalian too frequently allowed his political and religious prejudices to be reflected in his accounts, but this became a really major issue only in the "Milton."

In the area of the Lives as criticism, the notable reservation again was the "Milton" with the "Gray" as the secondary one. Although the number of references to the latter portion of Johnson's criticism does not nearly approach the volume of the material on Milton, still the resemblance is unmistakable between the patterns which the rejections followed. There was in both the imputation of personal prejudice against the man, acting in turn as a prejudice against the poet; there was the charge of the critic's insufficient
awareness of certain poetic conventions; and there was the sense that in some rather vague and indefinable way Johnson was beyond his range in dealing with the sublime souls of Milton and Gray. That last was, of course, the same limitation which Coleridge and some of the periodical critics found in Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare.

On the credit side of the specific comments, one finds those on Johnson's treatment of the metaphysical poets and those on his treatment of the authors in the neoclassical tradition. However, there was a difference in attitude among the reviewers. No one appeared to be vitally concerned about the reputation of Cowley and Donne and their companions and followers, and Johnson's essential views of them were accepted almost as a matter of fact. On the other hand, many were interested in the neoclassicists -- Dryden and Pope particularly -- and Johnson's views on them were accepted only after they had been seriously considered. The remainder of the poets who exhibited certain Romantic traits appear in what might be called a neutral area, for opinion on them was rather evenly divided.

With due weight given, then, to the exceptions, one still discovers that Samuel Johnson as the author of *The Lives of the Poets* wielded substantial influence in the critical world of the years from 1800 to 1832.
CHAPTER V

THE ATTITUDES OF THE INDIVIDUAL JOURNALS

In addition to the specific comments in the journals on Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare and Milton and the other poets of the Lives, there was a body of general references which also are worthy of attention in this study. Some of them were simply basic statements to be amplified and reenforced by particular instances, some of them represented basic attitudes to be qualified and limited by particular instances, some have to be taken for what they are worth without amplification or illustration or qualification, and some few refer specifically enough to portions of Johnson's informal criticism not falling within the scope of the previous chapters. In any case, they all must be considered for the sake of completeness.

These general comments can be made to serve, however, a secondary purpose also. In the preceding chapters the material has been organized according to what it said, not which journal it was found in. Now it is time to discover whether the journals of the period developed consistent attitudes toward Johnson's literary criticism and, if so, what those attitudes were. Consequently, the arrangement here is according to the individual journals with the new material
presented in conjunction with a summary of what has already been discussed.

i. The Gentleman's Magazine

The Gentleman's Magazine, dating from 1731, was the oldest of all those journals furnishing material to this investigation and came to the nineteenth century, naturally enough, with an editorial policy already definitely formulated. Since Samuel Johnson had been one of the contributors to it from 1738 on throughout his career, and since his Parliamentary debates had done much to establish it firmly in public esteem, one might well expect the Gentleman's to look kindly upon him even this long after his death. And with certain notable exceptions, that expectation is realized.

In the field of Shakespearean criticism, for instance, it was found that the journal hewed fairly close to the line of unequivocal admiration. On occasion, a reviewer would agree to the charge that Johnson had failed to explain a word adequately or had lacked the knowledge of history or a piece of folklore that would have been helpful in illuminating an allusion, but on all the important issues -- the proper function of a critic, the interpretation of Shakespeare's characters, the view of the unities and the purpose of poetry -- he was considered a dependable guide, "our great critic of our grey Bard."

An examination, however, of the opinions of Johnson's Miltonic criticism resulted in a different story. At a time
when most of the other periodicals were engaging vociferously in the contest over Milton's reputation, the Gentleman's, with only five specific references on this score, virtually did not participate. Symmons's Life of Milton, it will be recalled, provoked only the comment that it included "such a Philippic against Johnson and Tom Warton, as must almost call forth their ghosts to vengeance."1 One correspondent vindicated Johnson against the accusation of having wilfully and knowingly encouraged the forgeries of Lauder;2 another reviewer quoted without comment a notation of Johnson's unfairness to "the wonder-working Academy;"3 another cited Johnson's generosity to Milton's grand-daughter;4 and another rejected his dictum concerning the Latin poems.5 That was all. Even the "Remarks on the Character and Genius of Johnson" in the January, 1818, issue referred only vaguely to "the paradoxical strangeness which sometimes accompanied his literary opinions."6 Obviously, what the Gentleman's could not bring itself to praise and defend in Johnson, it preferred to ignore.

In the matter of the rest of the Lives, the general pattern followed was that of the Shakespearean criticism.

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1LXXXI (July, 1806), 595.
2LXXXIII (April, 1813), 326-7.
3LXXXVIII (April, 1818), 344.
4XCII (August, 1822), 122.
5C (November, 1830), 391.
6LXXXVIII, 34.
There were passages indicating a recognition of the critic's carelessness in handling his biographical data, and there was an objection to his treatment of Hammond and one to his treatment of Gray. And of course, there was the notable inconsistency of attitude respecting his criticism of Pope. Although previous to the appearance of the article in defense of William Lisle Bowles in April, 1821, the Gentleman's had cited Johnson time and again in its support of Pope and the Queen Anne men, on this one occasion it pointed out Johnson's severity in treating the poet; the basic argument was that Bowles was not unkind to Pope for the simple reason that he had softened the censures of Johnson. In view of the fact that the Gentleman's afterward recurred to its original approving attitude, the explanation seems to be that the desire to refute the Quarterly was stronger this once than its loyalty to Johnson. On the whole, however, the fundamental attitude maintained throughout the period was that the Lives represented the highest accomplishment in English critical biography.

Among the miscellaneous and general comments appearing here, the first two are really negligible. In January, 1802, the new editor of a volume entitled Anecdotes of Bowyer commended it to the attention of the public on the grounds that the original edition had "had the approbation of Dr. Johnson."7 Considerably later, another new editor -- this time of The English Works of Roger Ascham -- wrote:

7LXXII, 8.
"To the Life, written by Dr. Johnson, a few notes are attached, where the narrative appears to require elucidation, or where the Biographer has sanctioned imputations on the memory of Ascham, which appear not only to rest on insufficient authority, but to be at variance with the whole of his character, as exhibited in his life and writings."

Apparently Johnson had been careless again.

When in January, 1818, the Gentleman's published the aforementioned essay called "Remarks on the Character and Genius of Johnson," it was an attempt by the author to summarize not only Johnson's character but the course of his reputation. One recalls that it was this author who maintained that Johnson's preeminence in the field of criticism was so great as scarcely to need comment at all. But he amplified his point:

Johnson, however, after all the charges which envy, malignity, or a difference of literary opinion, has and may advance against him, must in this respect alone be allowed on all hands to occupy an elevated rank.--He laboured in his writings for the benefit and improvement of his countrymen; and uniformly endeavoured to maintain and illustrate, by an independence of spirit in his life and conversation, those just and animated lessons of moral excellence which convince and persuade in his works....

Johnson is yet alive in the memory of the world when the age which succeeded him can scarcely be said to have passed away. The eccentricities which marked his personal character, the paradoxical strangeness which sometimes accompanied his literary opinions, and the dogmatism with which he defended any cause which humour or caprice tempted him to espouse, are thought the fair subjects of satire and animadversion; the various foibles of his public, social, or domestic life are yet, it may be said, the occasional theme of conversation and censure. As, on the one hand, amongst certain of his friends, his critical decisions have been contemplated as almost oracular, and his moral apopthegms treasured up with all the pride of fond recollection; so, on the other hand, among the great majority of his countrymen, his name has lived in their

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8LXXXV (May, 1815), 425.
remembrances, as associated with qualities in the high-
est degree unamiable, and scarcely consistent with 
those pretensions of worth which yet have been gener-
ally acknowledged by all; amongst this latter class, 
those whose ages do not permit them to speak from 
actual observation, or cognizance of the things they 
deprecate, imbibe their sentiments from others, or 
form a hasty and erroneous judgment from a perusal of 
biographical anecdotes and sketches, which in some 
shape or another have crept into most works of contem-
porary or succeeding date....To peruse the amusing 
and eventful biography of an individual celebrated in 
active and social life, is a task of more easy accom-
plishment to the generality of mankind, than to glean 
the varied fields of criticism, or climb the heights 
of science. Casual readers, therefore, naturally re-
cur to what, with most pleasure, is attended with least 
trouble; and hence, oftentimes form their estimate, 
and even their literary estimate, rather from these ob-
jectionable traits, which occupy a prominent feature 
in Johnson, than from the sterling weight and real ex-
cellence of his works....Although, therefore, the well-
earned laurels of this distinguished ornament of British 
literature have indeed thus been abundant, many combin-
ing causes have prevented his fame from attaining gen-
erally that pinnacle of greatness, which, nevertheless, 
in the eyes of his admirers, pay in the eyes of impartial 
posterity, is his just award.9

The very fact that the essayist looked to "impartial posterity" 
for justice was revelatory of not only his own approving atti-
tude but also the presence of opposition. It was this essayist 
too who looked to a complete edition of Johnson's works as 
the best possible tribute to him.

A similar attitude was reflected slightly later by the 
author of an article called "Ingratitude to Literature," for 
he included Johnson among such "sons of Genius" as Milton, 
Otway, Butler, and Dryden, who had suffered "the cruel

9LXXXVIII, 33-4.
And still another after comparing *Rasselas* and *The Vicar of Wakefield* concluded:

Johnson and Goldsmith, however, may each rank in a foremost place among the spirits who contributed by their genius to animate and brighten the Eighteenth century,—a period in our literature which, rich as it is in original genius, has too much incurred the neglect of contemporary critics of the present or the last age.

Such literary comparisons were much the order of the day, and Johnson came in for his share of attention as the subject of several more of them. In April, 1820, the *Gentleman's* carried an essay entitled "English and French Authors Compared"; after weighing Rollin against Hooke, and the Abbé Reynal against Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon, the author proceeded to Voltaire and Johnson:

It is likewise obvious that the splendid endowments of Voltaire (although his genius for History, and all the other purposes of literature, has been eulogized by his admirers,) were wholly incapable of affording him this honourable seat of rivalship [with Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon]; as indeed they are, when magnified in the most extravagant degree, to compete, either in extensiveness or accuracy of learning, brilliance of invention, vigour of conception and of thought, or force and sublimity of sentiment, with those of our Johnson, who was a contemporary in fame; and in the regions of criticism and literary taste shone as an established authority in his respective country with equal lustre, and who, in the extensive field of ethical disquisition and a just knowledge of mankind, may be said to have laboured as arduously for the prize of a literary immortality.

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10 *LXXXIX* (December, 1819), 589-590.
11 *XCIX* (May, 1820), 402-3.
Granted that the entire essay was aimed at proving the superiority of English to French talent, still Johnson was chosen as the English champion.

Another of the journal's comments occurred apropos of what it considered a lost opportunity for literary comparison. Dr. Parr, it was recorded, looked to Bishop Hurd's *Life of Warburton* as occasion for entering "upon an enlarged view and dissertation on the genius and character of Warburton;" but he was disappointed and the opportunity lost, for

...Hurd has not mentioned the name of Johnson in his *Life of Warburton*; nor (stranger still) does the name of this his illustrious contemporary, and more than compeere, appear in any other of his works. The reason is, that he was afraid of him, whilst alive; and when he was gone, had too proud a feeling and too correct a taste to trample, before the public eye, on the carcase [sic] of a lion, before whose living presence he had crouched. 13

And the essayist regretted that Parr had not had the chance to display his critical acumen.

Further evidence of the Gentleman's pride in its former association with Johnson appeared in the general index to Volume XCI in June, 1821:

The Gentleman's Magazine is the Classical soil upon which the Farnesian Hercules of English Literature—Samuel Johnson, first exhibited his heroic form. Although his greater exploits were insulated and detached acts of mightiness and glory, yet, here in his repose, we behold the smiles of conscious power; and the scornful stamp of the Giant foot, with which he crushed the insects that would crawl up and sting him....

With whatever modesty it would become us, as far as concerns our own labours, to speak of the Gentleman's Magazine, we have still the common right of all men to

13XCI (March, 1821), 230.
be gratified with approbation, and to consult our interest in thus inviting confidence and satisfaction. Johnson knew that our Work had its appropriate manner — that of Scholars and Gentlemen, who mix with the better orders of Society.14

Then at about this time occurred the first reference in the Gentleman's to a question which had perturbed literary figures from the mid-eighteenth century onward — Johnson's position on the authenticity of the poems of Ossian, translated and published by James Macpherson. Johnson among others had maintained that they were frauds perpetrated on the public by a skilful forger, but Macpherson had stoutly refused to admit to any deception; consequently, the mystery and controversy continued into the nineteenth century, with a flurry of comments appearing in the journals whenever new evidence on either side was introduced.

Actually, all told, the Gentleman's had little to say, but that little was more against Johnson than in his favor. In April, 1824, a reviewer noted that Campbell placed Ossian "on firmer ground than that on which Dr. Johnson left him."15 A later reviewer of a new edition of Ossian's poems aligned himself with those upholding their authenticity against the "bitter attack" of Johnson,16 but he was balanced by still another who wrote that he was "of Dr. Johnson's opinion with regard to the non-authenticity of Ossian's poems."17 The final

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14 XCII, 523-4.
15 XCIV, 355.
16 C (September, 1830), 224.
17 C (November, 1830), 401.
notation in this Journal came in an account of John MacDonald, who first said that he had proved Latin and Greek were derived from Celtic and then again maintained that Ossian was authentic.

The Gentleman's commented:

The luminous and closely reasoned dissertations of Dr. Blair... and the strong testimonies of able scholars and distinguished logicians, are sufficient to oppose to the stubborn prejudices of Johnson...

It was felt that Johnson had allowed his notorious anti-Scotch prejudice to blind him to the worth of Ossian.

But this, again, was an exception to the usual attitude toward Johnson. In September, 1824, when an essayist felt called upon to reprove "our modern reviewers" for their critical style, it was Johnson's example which was set as their proper model:

What, however, would Johnson's honest, though severe mind have said to the temper not infrequently betrayed on certain points of speculation occasionally struck out by these our modern reviewers? Reckless of the opinion of those who happen to view matters of literature and science through another medium--powerful in style, but far from being always convincing in argument--the most ingenuous thinking of our great Critic and Philosopher, though sometimes with themselves equally charged with paradox, would often, it is more than probable, have risen indignantly at the untenable positions which occasionally crown the most brilliant passages of our sagacious Journalists, who are apt, sometimes to forget that their hypotheses are often not so much founded in the reality of things, as in the strength of that genius which upholds them.

Though Johnson's views on occasion appeared paradoxical, for the most part he was logical and reasonable.

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18 (December, 1830), 490.
19 XCIV, 214.
For instance, one reviewer praised his admiration for Richardson, another on the occasion of the Spirit of the Age said that Hazlitt had the "dogmatism of Johnson without his profundity," and another assigned to Melmoth "the accuracy and varied learning of Johnson." Furthermore, stimulated by the appearance of Cradock's Literary Memoirs, a reviewer in March, 1826, wrote:

Whatever the enemies of Dr. Johnson may affect (and hostility to his memory has generally been selfish affectation), the admiration of the great majority of readers is not yet lessened...

Somewhat later, still another maintained:

Johnson, after all the "whips and scorns" and "contumely" which have often been liberally bestowed upon his prejudices, had a great and enlarged mind; his dicta in literature were generally the result of independent feeling, however occasionally pointed from the Cynic school of Antisthenes and Menippus.

And because of the sound foundation of Johnson's work, the essayist went on to say, his reputation would rise rather than sink.

There was the whole tenor of the attitude of the Gentleman's toward Johnson. It could not condone his judgment of Milton and rather disapproved of the criticism of Gray and Ossian, but on the great majority of issues in literary

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20 XCVI (November, 1824), 386.
21 XCV (March, 1825), 243.
22 XCVII (June, 1828), 507.
23 XCVI, 237.
24 XCIX (June, 1829), 500.
criticism it turned to the "Hercules of English Literature."

11. The Scots Magazine

Like the Gentleman's, the Scots Magazine had had ample time before 1800 to formulate its editorial policy. It arrived at the turn of the century as a conservative organ with its pages composed of both original material and that borrowed from other journals. Since by nature the magazine was of general interest, literary questions were considered from time to time but did not form a prominent part of the material.

In its references to Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare, the Scots was found to follow a pattern similar to that of the Gentleman's. It occasionally spoke in a patronizing fashion of Johnson's inadequacy in linguistics, but on the major questions of character interpretation, attitude toward the universal and the particular as subjects for poetry, the adherence to the unities, and appreciation of Shakespeare's beauties, it called on the authority of Johnson. Like the Gentleman's, too, it did not enter into the Milton controversy; not a single notation on that subject appeared during the entire period.

So far as the rest of the Lives were concerned, however, it took a somewhat different turn. It was the Scots, one remembers, which defended Congreve -- really rather needlessly -- against the inadequate appreciation of Johnson, and it was also this journal which dwelt at some length on the critic's severity to Gray. On the other hand, it saw Johnson as the defender of Thomson's blank verse, as the great biographer of Savage, and
as the illuminating critic of Dryden.

A few miscellaneous comments remain to be noted. One was concerned with Strahan, the editor of Johnson's prayers, and his dealings with Blair:

Mr. Strahan by some accident sent one of the sermons (Blair's) to Dr. Johnson for his opinion; and, after his unfavourable letter to Dr. Blair and been sent off, he received a note from Johnson, of which the following is a paragraph:

"I have read over Dr. Blair's first sermon with more than approbation; to say that it is good is to say too little."

Very soon after this time, Mr. Strahan had a conversation with Dr. Johnson concerning them, and then he very candidly wrote to Dr. Blair, enclosing Dr. Johnson's note, and agreeing to purchase the volume.25

This was simply an illustration of the weight of Johnson's authority, and the Scots approved.

Its single contribution to the Ossian controversy was a comment in March, 1801, by one of its reviewers:

So far as I recollect, little has been said on the subject (Ossian) since Dr. Johnson's tour was published, till lately that Malcolm Laing, Esq.; in a dissertation, annexed to the second volume of his history of Scotland, has taken up the subject. Mr. Laing has espoused the same side with Dr. Johnson.26

And the implication later was that Mr. Laing was very sensible in so doing. It is worth noting that there was no suggestion of anti-Scotch prejudice found here, where it would most naturally be expected.

Later, in May, 1805, there was a notation that among critics Dr. Johnson was "entitled to the highest place."27

25LXIII (January, 1801), 6.
26LXIII, 172.
27LXVII, 340.
Then when Hazlitt's *Lectures* were reviewed in February, 1819, the commentator said:

From the Tatler and Spectator, Mr. Hazlitt proceeds to a review of the Rambler and Idler of Johnson. This part of the lecture is most powerfully written, but we cannot trust ourselves to indulge in further extracts. The character of Johnson was never so well understood before, or so faithfully given.

The subject matter here, of course, was Johnson's didactic essays, not his criticism, but the comment is noteworthy because it shows the journal's approval of the most moderate of all Hazlitt's treatments of Johnson.

The final reference was merely a reviewer's quotation from the *Poetical Decameron*, the book under discussion at the moment:

"Dr. Johnson might well say, in reference to this subject [the admiration of modern poets], that 'the great contention of criticism was to find the faults of the moderns and the beauties of the ancients.'"  

Once more, the notation in itself was insignificant, but it indicated that Johnson's name was ready at hand when an authority was needed.

Thus it was that, though the *Scots Magazine* occasionally entered a complaint against one of Johnson's opinions, on the whole it went on record as approving of him and his criticism.

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28*IV*, 149.

29*VI* (May, 1820), 443.
iii. The Monthly Review

The *Monthly Review* was yet another of the eighteenth-century journals continuing into the Romantic period. From its beginning in 1749, it prided itself upon its liberality, not only in political and religious matters but also in literary ones. It would be well to bear that fact in mind as the *Monthly*'s comments already discussed are recapitulated and the general references presented, for simply on general principles, one might expect to find an unfriendly attitude toward the conservative Johnson.

Certainly the body of material on Johnson's Shakespearean criticism reflected a more complex attitude than that found in either the *Gentleman's* or the *Scots*. The *Monthly* shared with those magazines the belief that Johnson lacked sufficient linguistic and historical information to be a completely satisfactory editor of Shakespeare, and shared also with them the approval of his stand on the unities and his insistence on the quality of probability in poetry. However, the *Monthly* reviewers were among those who distinguished between Johnson's interpretations of the passions and motives of Shakespeare's characters and his appreciation of the wit and imagination of the poetry. Of the former they approved, but the latter they found deficient in a way they were virtually unable to describe.

Then also in the matter of Johnson's Miltonic criticism the *Monthly* differed from the *Gentleman's*. Far from maintaining a dignified silence, it allotted liberal space to any
work bearing on the question — to Stockdale, to Anna Seward, to Symmons, to Channing, and to numerous less well known figures. And even though it deprecated the contributions of Stockdale, it was not that he was wrong in principle; he merely did not present his case well. It must be admitted that the comments emphasized more the critic's injustice to Milton as a man than real error in critical judgment. Also, it should not be forgotten that near the end of the period, a *Monthly* reviewer avowed his firm conviction that, whatever Johnson's prejudice had been, still he had written an analysis of Milton which had done the poet more honor than any other single piece of English criticism.

Towards Johnson's criticism in the other *Lives*, however, the *Monthly* took a position quite similar to that of the two early magazines. Once the points were made that Johnson frequently treated his biographical duties in a cavalier fashion, that on occasion he allowed his personal feelings to influence his judgments — as in the case of Gray, for instance — and that he was mistaken in his view of genius as a general quality of the intellect, the rest was high praise for "this code of national taste."

Furthermore, by and large, the miscellaneous comments supported the respectful attitude. In January, 1800, a commentator referred to Johnson as a person of "great judgment or taste."\(^{30}\) Several months later, the reviewer of Browne's *Miscellaneous Sketches* wrote:

\(^{30}\)XXXI, 110.
In this censure, we allude particularly to the essay on the character of Dr. Johnson: in which, although there be much truth in the author's observations, he is too sedulously employed in depreciating solid merit and uncommon talents.\textsuperscript{31}

Two years after that, an essayist approved the inclusion in a new edition of Goldsmith "the many sentiments of Dr. Johnson highly honourable to the talents, and some creditable to the character, of our poet."\textsuperscript{32} Slightly later, the Monthly's account of Churchill's Poetical Works included this comment on the poet and, incidentally, on Johnson:

Unfortunately for himself and for posterity, Churchill exerted the powers of his fertile and extraordinary genius on temporary subjects, in reviling characters of worth and eminence, and in vindicating the conduct of the profligate and licentious. Whether he disgraced himself most in ridiculing Dr. Johnson, in calumniating Dr. Pearce, or in supporting Mr. Wilkes, is, we believe, a difficult question to determine.\textsuperscript{33}

In July, 1806, the critic was referred to as a "front-rank man in literature,... a good man by nature, a great man by genius."\textsuperscript{34} And still again, the reviewer of Crabbe's Poems in the June, 1808, issue called him "that great critic."\textsuperscript{35}

This paean of praise was interrupted, however, by the Monthly's review of "Works on the Ossianic Controversy" in December, 1810. The author of it began:

\textsuperscript{31}XXXII (May, 1800), 40.
\textsuperscript{32}XXXVIII (May, 1802), 52.
\textsuperscript{33}XLIV (August, 1804), 382.
\textsuperscript{34}L (July, 1806), 233.
\textsuperscript{35}LVII, 170-1.
We have watched with anxiety, but with caution, the progress of the Ossianic controversy, from the acrimonious remarks made by Johnson, in his Journey to the Western Islands, to the present Essay of Dr. Graham; and we have occasionally taken notice of the publications which appeared in the early part of the dispute.

Then he continued with the statement that nothing of importance had been brought out after Macpherson's refusal to answer the charges brought against him, until Johnson and Boswell returned from their northern tour:

During that journey, they had made several inquiries concerning the traditionary poems said to exist among the Highlanders: but these inquiries were unsuccessful, and tended to confirm the preconceived notions of Johnson; who, always prejudiced against Scotchmen and Scottish literature, had, almost without examination, condemned Macpherson as a literary felon. In a former volume, already cited, we noticed Dr. Johnson's objections to the authenticity of Ossian's poems, which rest almost entirely on the idea that no written poems in the Gaelic language were then extant, and of course that the published translations must be a forgery; to this charge Macpherson replied only by menaces and abuse; a conduct which tended materially to injure his cause, and still farther to impugn his veracity. 36

It was prejudice that accounted for Johnson's attitude.

After examining all the subsequent evidence produced—primarily by Scotchmen eager to vindicate their countryman—the reviewer reached the rather ambiguous conclusion that

...the English poems published by Mr. Macpherson, though, strictly speaking, neither genuine nor authentic, are, on the whole, evidently translations from the works of Celtic bards, and not original compositions. 37

Six years later when another addition was made to the

36 LXIII, 338-9.
37 Ibid., 360.
works pertaining to Ossian, the *Monthly* still held essentially to its earlier position:

Those truths, which fear of the potent arm and stout stick of Dr. Johnson could never elicit from Macpherson, if there were any concealment in the case, are little likely now to be cleared from the mystery which envelops them: but, although to those who admire Ossian not so much for his age or name as for the more unalienable qualities of his writings, the question of their authenticity can be of only inferior interest, it is nevertheless observable that, when the agitation of this question gradually subsided, the estimation of the work itself, as far as we could judge from public symptoms, declined in a proportionable degree.  

The question of authenticity was a minor one among critics who could appreciate the "unalienable qualities" of Ossian. This attitude, of course, was consonant with that taken toward Johnson's criticism of Gray and of portions of Shakespeare.

The *Monthly* also chose to note two comments by Scott, one appearing in his preface to the *Poetical Works of Miss Seward* and the other in the life of Johnson written for Ballantyne. The first was an attempt to explain the bias Anna Seward exhibited against Johnson:

There was, perhaps, some aristocratic prejudice in their dislike, for the despotic manners of Dr. Johnson were least likely to be tolerated where the lowness of his origin was in fresh recollection.

The *Monthly* appended this cryptic statement:

In her letters, Miss S. accounts for her dislike by other reasons than aristocratic prejudice, and reasons which are not assigned might have strengthened her prejudice.  

Perhaps the reviewer was referring to the anecdote told elsewhere

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38 LXXIX (April, 1816), 419.
39 LXIX (September, 1812), 23.
in which Johnson described Miss Seward as "having nothing of woman about her but the vices."

The second referred to the same dictatorial tendency in Johnson's character:

"...The consciousness of his own mental superiority in most companies which he frequented contributed to his dogmatism; and when he had attained his eminence as a dictator in literature, like other potentates, he was not averse to a display of his authority; resembling in this particular, Swift, and one or two other men of genius, who have had the bad taste to imagine that their talents elevated them above observance of the common rules of society....He was, in a word, despotic, and despotism will occasionally lead the best dispositions into unbecoming abuse of power."40

On this, the Monthly made no comment.

When in December, 1824, Galt's Bachelor's Wife came to the attention of a Monthly reviewer, he noted that Galt had included in his preface "an admirable article on Bishop Warburton and Doctor Johnson," and he quoted the concluding part of the criticism, in which this was the estimate of Johnson:

"In Johnson, the harvest of intellect was not so spontaneous, nor perhaps its fertility so great; but when once raised, it never required the hand of the weeder, but rose unmixed with tares....The fame of Johnson will hereafter principally rest on his productions as a moralist and a critic;...the name of Johnson, rich in the accumulated tributes of time, shall hereafter be accounted the mightiest amongst those who have given ardour to virtue, and confidence to truth."41

The original article, incidentally, was written by John Wilson for Blackwood's.

40 XVIII (November, 1825), 267-8.
41 CV, 424-5.
Again in January, 1829, he was casually listed as a man of genius, but there was a qualification — that he did not necessarily possess taste as well, for he had been "proud of the Dictionary and almost ashamed of the Rambler."\(^{42}\)

And finally, when Croker's edition of Boswell was reviewed in July, 1831, praise was meted out not only to Croker for his services in preventing Boswell's Life from lapsing into obscurity because of allusions which must be understood, but also to Johnson for having possessed such character that it could stand the exposure it had been subjected to:

Hence he [Croker] has, with infinite labour, but labour which to him was one of love, and often, doubtless, of relief from the graver cares of public life, furnished a monument to the memory of Johnson, second perhaps in merit, only to that, which Boswell executed with such pious and admirable care.\(^{43}\)

In defining its attitude toward Johnson over the years from 1800 to 1832, the Monthly found more to take exception to in his criticism than had either the Scots or the Gentleman's, but still the decision was indubitably in his favor. And the Monthly, let it be remembered, was a journal with liberal Whig inclinations, so that its evidence is the more valuable for not being open to the suspicion of favorable prejudice.

\(^{42}\)CXVIII, 142.

\(^{43}\)CXXV, 453.
The British Critic, founded only eight years before the beginning of the period, yet had its character firmly fixed by that time. In fact, it had been established by the conservative Tory and High Church faction with the expressed intention of combatting the liberal opposition, and so from the start had followed a policy of defending the Crown and the Established Church at every opportunity. Naturally, one would not expect Johnson to fare badly in such an organ.

His position as an eminent editor and critic of Shakespeare was granted not wholly without qualification, for there was discovered an occasional remark to the effect that Johnson as a textual critic was open to adverse judgment or that he failed to explain adequately a particular passage in one of the plays. But his view of the purpose of poetry as didactic, his treatment of the unities, and his penetrating and sensitive analyses of Shakespeare's characters were singled out for approval. Furthermore, apropos of the last point, he was specifically defended against Hazlitt's attack in the Characters of Shakespeare's Plays.

In the Milton controversy the British Critic played an unassuming part, admitting when the charge of injustice was brought against Johnson that it was accurate enough but showing itself unwilling to dwell on the unpleasantness. Also, when it saw a rare opportunity to defend him -- against the charge of Symmons, for instance, that he had deliberately encouraged
Lauder in his infamous attacks — it did so, and furthermore, it went on to point out Symmons's insignificance in comparison to Johnson.

On the Lives as a whole, however, it took a quite positive stand. Once in the instance of Blackmore it was felt that Johnson had allowed his respect for piety to influence his critical judgment, and the customary praise was also leavened by distinct repudiation of the criticism of Gray, but from the beginning of the period to the end, Johnson's model of critic-biographer was held up to the authors being reviewed.

The comments on his miscellaneous informal criticism and the general comments, too, bear out this respect for Johnson's authority. In February, 1800, Beattie's Miscellanies were reviewed, and the author was praised for his discriminating defense of Johnson against those of his biographers who insisted upon taking seriously and literally every pronouncement that fell from his lips.44 In May of the same year, in the review of Maurice's Poems, much was made of the fact that Johnson had praised one of his early efforts, "The School-Boy,"45 and again later that praise was cited as evidence of the poem's worth.46 In the article on the poems of Allan Ramsay in the September, 1800, issue, Johnson's "celebrated comparison of Pope

44 XV, 155-6.
45 XV, 482-3.
46 XXVIII (September, 1806), 289.
with Dryden" was recalled,\textsuperscript{47} and the similarity of the editor's manner to Johnson's noted with approval.\textsuperscript{48} In "Jeffreys' The Pleasures of Retirement" a phrase from Johnson was used to support the reviewer's feeling that the work was trivial,\textsuperscript{49} and somewhat later the praise which Johnson had given to Goldsmith's talents was used by the Critic to describe Cumberland's.\textsuperscript{50} Then, too, the encouragement which Johnson had offered Crabbe\textsuperscript{51} and Fanny Burney\textsuperscript{52} was noted as evidence of their worth.

Character analysis of prominent men being a favorite type of literary exercise in the period, Johnson naturally shared in the attention, and the British Critic noted several such essays. It quoted the "well-drawn character of Dr. Johnson" appearing in The Pic-Nic in 1803, one part of which described the critic as "firm in judgment, and in genius bright."\textsuperscript{53} It commended two stanzas of Childe Harold in the Shades, which were devoted to Johnson's "peculiar cast of genius."\textsuperscript{54} And it reproved John Aiden for the "cold and

\textsuperscript{47}XVI, 270.
\textsuperscript{48}XVI, 264.
\textsuperscript{49}XVII (June, 1801), 648.
\textsuperscript{50}XXIV (July, 1804), 80.
\textsuperscript{51}XXXI (June, 1808), 590.
\textsuperscript{52}Series 2, I (April, 1814), 375.
\textsuperscript{53}XXII (August, 1803), 210.
\textsuperscript{54}Series 2, XI (January, 1819), 85-6.
disrespectful manner' in which he represented the "virtues and talents of that eminent man," concluding:

On the whole, therefore, we are of opinion that, without the imputation of partiality, this life might have been animated by a much higher degree of respect for a man of whom it may be truly said, that he was admired most by those who knew him best; and that no degree of intimacy was ever known to diminish the veneration with which he was contemplated at the first interview.55

After all this, one is not surprised at the position taken by the journal in the Ossian affair. In its one comment, which appeared on the occasion of Sir John Sinclair's edition of the poems, the reviewer began by saying that if Sir John were right,

Mr. Laing's objections and our's with those of Johnson, and we believe, nine tenths of the learned antiquaries of the age, must fall to the ground...

But he concluded:

The worthy Baronet's proofs, however, appear not so conclusive to us as they appear to himself.56

The final comment in February, 1820, was quite in tune with the rest of the material. Speaking of Spence, the critic said:

Johnson has spoken coldly, Gray slightingly of his powers; and in truth we do not well know in what manner wholly to rebut the opinions which either of these great judges has expressed.57

Johnson's authority, coupled here, interestingly, with Gray's, was so great that even though the reviewer did not entirely

55XXVI (August, 1805), 138-9.
56XXXIII (February, 1809), 167.
57Series 2, XIII, 155-6.
agree with his judgment, he did not know how to refute him.

The British Critic, then, so far as its attitude toward Johnson was concerned, maintained fairly consistently its conservative policy. Only the sharp tone of the references to Johnson's criticism of Gray and the deprecatory tone of those on his treatment of Milton broke the harmony of praise for solid authority.

v. The Edinburgh Review

The Edinburgh Review, the first of the products of the nineteenth century and the first among those classed by Walter Graham as journals of strong political bias, came into being primarily because its founders saw that there was room for a lighter touch in what they considered the stodgy world of periodicals. Soon, however, through the dominating influence of Francis Jeffrey, its editor until 1829, it developed a definitely Whig attitude in political and religious matters. Furthermore, its literary opinions were so uncompromisingly expressed that the essential liberality of many of them was eclipsed by the illiberal language. It was those two characteristics of the Edinburgh that antagonized many of its early readers and contributors -- a too great liberality in politics and religion and a too rigid approach to literary criticism.

The criticism has been examined here, of course, purely from the point of view of the attitude assumed toward Johnson and his principles. In the realm of Shakespeare commentary, it is worth noting that Jeffrey gave a cold reception to
Douce's *Illustrations of Shakspeare* with its rather disparaging treatment of Johnson, and rebuked Warburton severely for his prejudice against the critic. Also it is significant that, on the positive side, what Jeffrey espoused particularly in Johnson's Shakespearean comment was his repudiation of the unities, a repudiation which meant in turn a denying of one of the tenets of neoclassicism.

The position of the *Edinburgh* on the question of Johnson's Miltonic criticism was not much different from that of the *Monthly*. It felt no hesitancy about entering the controversy and agreed without a doubt that Johnson had been unfair in the biographical treatment. However, it had little respect for Stockdale, one of Johnson's principal assailants, and even granted on occasion that the critic had been capable of doing justice to the poet in spite of his dislike of the man.

It was the *Edinburgh* which in its evaluation of the *Lives of the Poets* developed the thesis that Johnson was eminently fitted to be the critic of the neoclassical period, a period, furthermore, for which it displayed a definite fondness. Consequently, his criticism of Dryden and Pope was favorably received and that of Gray denounced as resulting from a bigoted distrust of originality. As for the work in general, it was recognized as having contributed to the elevating and broadening of English poetical taste; at the same time, the review jealously guarded its independence and took good care to qualify the deference it paid Johnson's opinions.

This tendency was apparent too in the miscellaneous
comments. The review accepted a belief of his concerning Richardson’s fondness for the society of women, but of Johnson and Macpherson it said:

Under all these circumstances of evidence, it appears in the highest degree unjust to disallow a certain extent of foundation to the fabric erected by Macpherson. Johnson, to use his own simile, was entitled to deny that the ancient Celt swaggered in a pair of embroidered velvet breeches; but only the scepticism of prejudice could doubt his being accommodated with a tartan philabeg.

The prejudice there imputed to Johnson was the familiar anti-Scotch one. When Macaulay many years later voiced his opinion on Johnson and Ossian, the prejudice was still there, but it was prejudice with a different basis:

The contempt which he felt for the trash of Macpherson was indeed just; but it was, we suspect, just by chance. He despised the Fingal, for the very reason which led many men of genius to admire it. He despised it, not because it was essentially commonplace, but because it had a superficial air of originality.

By this date, Macpherson was fairly generally acknowledged a forger, but Johnson had been right only by chance. Macaulay’s conception of Johnson and originality was in line, incidentally, with the attitude toward his criticism of Gray noted above.

Bowles’s edition of Pope, reviewed in the Edinburgh in January, 1808, stimulated the essayist to a digression on the "chief substance" of literary men — reputation. After philosophizing on the irregularity with which fortune metes out

58 V (October, 1804), 32.
59 VI (July, 1805), 431.
60 LIV (September, 1831), 32.
But the three writers, of our own country at least, who seem to bask in the fullest sunshine of reputation, are Pope, Swift, and Johnson. They have fallen into the hands of portrait-painters, who think shadow unnecessary, and disdain that discreet management of the pencil, which keeps down certain parts of the picture, were it only to give relief to the others.\(^{61}\)

He granted, however, that public taste was against him, that the public craved every detail about the lives of eminent men. And Johnson was among them.

In May, 1820, Spence's *Anecdotes* occasioned another summary of Johnson's character and conduct, incidental to a comparison of Boswell and Spence as biographers. The reviewer began:

One principal attraction of Boswell's Life of Johnson, is the contrast which, in some respects, it presents to the Doctor's own works. The recollection of the author is a foil to the picture of the man: We are suddenly relieved by the abruptness of his manners and the pithiness of his replies, from the circumlocution and didactic formality of his style. ...It was this vigorous and voluntary exercise of his faculties, when freed from all restraint in the intercourse of private society, that has left such a rich harvest for his biographer; and it cannot be denied that it has been well and carefully got in.

On the other hand, the reviewer maintained, Spence, with an equally fascinating subject in Pope and an equally brilliant background and literary coterie to record, had not the talent necessary to making the most of his material:

Boswell was probably an inferior man to Spence; but he was a far better collector of anecdotes, and the

\(^{61}\)XI, 399.

\(^{62}\)XXXIII, 304-5.
very prince, indeed, of retail wits and philosophers; so that, with all possible sense of the value of what he has done, we sometimes can hardly help wishing that he had lived in the time of Pope, instead of our own. For, to confess the truth, there is scarcely any period of our literature on which we delight so much to dwell, or to which we so often seek to return, as the one to which these pages are devoted.

In one respect, at least Macaulay in his review of Croker in September, 1831, exhibited an attitude similar to this reviewer's. He admired almost without reservation Boswell's handiwork. At the same time, he described Boswell himself as "one of the smallest men that ever lived,...a man of the meanest and feeblest intellect,...a great fool,...a dunce, a parasite, a coxcomb." His opinions of Johnson's criticism have been treated in the appropriate sections of this study, but his general feeling was this:

The judgments which Johnson passed on books were, in his own time, regarded with superstitious veneration; and, in our time, are generally treated with indiscriminate contempt. They are the judgments of a strong but enslaved understanding.

After amplifying and illustrating that conviction, he concluded:

What a singular destiny has been that of this remarkable man! To be regarded in his own age as a classic, and in ours as a companion,—to receive from his contemporaries that full homage which men of genius have in general received only from posterity,—to be more intimately known to posterity than other men are known to their contemporaries! That kind of fame which is commonly the most transient, is, in his case, the most durable. The reputation of those writings, which he probably expected to be immortal, is every day fading; while those peculiarities of manner,

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63 Ibid., 306.
64 LIV, 19.
65 Ibid., 31.
and that careless table-talk, the memory of which, he probably thought, would die with him, are likely to be remembered as long as the English language is spoken in any quarter of the globe.66

Macaulay was typical of the journalists of his time in recognizing the widespread interest in Johnson's character, but his view of Johnson's writings as objects of contempt was certainly not borne out by the rest of the periodical reviewers.

There was only one more reference to Johnson in the *Edinburgh*, that appearing in an account of Southey's edition of *Pilgrim's Progress*:

> Doctor Johnson, all whose studies were desultory, and who hated, as he said, to read books through, made an exception in favour of the Pilgrim's Progress. That work, he said, was one of the two or three works which he wished longer. It was by no means common merit that the illiterate sectary extracted praise like this from the most pedantic of critics, and the most bigoted of Tories.67

In view of this prevailing opinion that Johnson was a pedantic critic and a bigoted Tory, it is all the more remarkable that his critical reputation in the *Edinburgh Review* was sound. He was certainly not ignored, nor was his criticism viewed with the general contempt envisioned by Macaulay's jaundiced eye. On Milton and Gray he was considered unsatisfactory, but only Macaulay objected seriously to his Shakespearean criticism. And even Macaulay joined in the general approval of his analyses of authors of the neoclassical spirit.


67 *LIV* (December, 1831), 452.
Since the Quarterly Review was founded by men seceding from the Edinburgh, it was only natural that the two journals fundamentally had much in common both in political and literary interests. But the rivalry resulting from those very circumstances of the birth of the publication led almost inevitably to the Quarterly's exhibiting more and more a Tory inclination in politics and a friendliness to innovation in literature. That is not to say that the two journals necessarily differed in their views of all literary matters, for both were defenders of Pope, for instance. It was just that as new authors appeared on the scene, one championed by the Quarterly was not likely to be also taken up by the Edinburgh.

In that portion of its criticism examined in this study, one discovers that the Quarterly, like the Edinburgh, frequently called upon the authority of Johnson but also on occasion, and again like the Edinburgh, disputed his authority in a most independent fashion. The Shakespearean section illustrates the point very well. The journal upheld Johnson's opinion of Warburton as an editor of Shakespeare, and Gifford delivered his scathing attack on Hazlitt in defense of Johnson's Preface to Shakspeare. Hazlitt, incidentally, at this point was a contributor to the Edinburgh. Then in the matter of the unities, "Johnson's argument" was linked with "Shakspeare's example" as the authority which had freed the English from the slavish adherence to them, and Byron was
attacked for his neoclassicism. On the other hand, the Quarterly disagreed with Johnson's evaluation of Shakespeare's characters as species rather than individuals, and believed the critic could not see the particular aspects of their nature.

In its references to Johnson as a critic of Milton, the Quarterly recognized his prejudice and felt that that disqualified his criticism; at the same time it derided Symmons's aspirations as a biographer and refuted his charge that Johnson "wanted the power to comprehend the greatness and elevation of Milton's mind." Toward the other Lives the Quarterly's customary attitude was commendatory; they represented the highest species of biography and were the best of Johnson's work. But one reviewer objected to his definition of genius in the Cowley essay; and the one who surveyed the works appearing in the Pope controversy, though he accepted Johnson's praise of the Iliad, repudiated his judgments of Pope's character and the merit of the epitaphs on the ground that they were dictated by spleen and caprice. The latter attitude, of course, might very well have been prompted by the Quarterly's zeal in defending Pope against Bowles and his other attackers.

Once those exceptions were noted, however, the remaining evidence was primarily favorable. For instance, the praise which Johnson had given to Crabbe's Borough was reason enough for its critical acclaim, and later Johnson was cited as a

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68 IV (November, 1810), 281.
"contemporary genius" of Warburton who lacked only the "theological and...classical erudition" necessary to an appraisal of the bishop. In June, 1812, the reviewer of Galt's *Voyages and Travels* wrote:

We have always opposed, and always shall oppose, a popular, but, in our opinion, a very pernicious error, with regard to the original organization of the human mind; from which it is inferred, that the perfection of any one power necessarily involves the imperfection of the rest: that the soundness of the judgment is an obstacle to the vigour of the imagination; and that a good poet must be a bad logician. We had frequently supported our cause by the great names of Milton, Dryden, Pope, and Johnson; and we were in hopes of adding to the list the name of Galt.

This is particularly significant when one recalls that a deficiency of imagination was sometimes seen as an obstacle to Johnson's complete appreciation of Shakespeare and Milton.

Much later, near the end of the period, the author of an essay on "The Life and Writings of Dr. Parr" quoted a "tribute to the memory of Warburton and of Johnson":

...In two immortal works, Johnson has stood forth in the foremost rank of his admirers. By the testimony of such a man impertinence must be abashed, and malignity itself must be softened. Of literary merit, Johnson, as we all know, was a sagacious but a most severe judge. Such was his discernment, that he pierced into the most secret springs of human actions; and such was his integrity, that he always weighed the moral character of his fellow-creatures in the balance of the sanctuary. He was too courageous to propitiate a rival, and too proud to truckle to a superior.

And the reviewer approved.

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69 VII (June, 1812), 389.
71 XXXIX (April, 1829), 277-8.
Another general evaluation of Johnson occurred when Croker's edition of Boswell was reviewed in November, 1831. Since Croker was one of the Quarterly's founding fathers, it was to be expected that he be more kindly received here than in the Edinburgh. Both he and Boswell were quoted at length, and then the summary of Johnson given:

Surely the lamentable circumstance is, not that the Boswellian style should have been applied to the history of one great man, but that there should be so few even of the greatest men whose lives could be so dealt with without serious injury to their fame...In spite of innumerable oddities, and of many laughable and some few condemnable weaknesses, when we desire to call up the notion of a human being thoroughly, as far as our fallen clay admits the predication of such qualities, good and wise; in the whole of his mind lofty, of his temper generous, in the midst of misery incapable of shabbiness, "every inch a man," the name of Samuel Johnson springs to every lip.72

The reviewer was not unaware of Johnson's defects, but he minimized them in relationship to the admirable qualities.

Six months later the reviewer of Diderot's Memoires et Correspondance was reminded of Johnson again:

The public attention has lately been re-awakened by Mr. Croker's new edition of Boswell, to the Life of Johnson. It is remarkable how nearly the doctor and Diderot occupy the same period in the literary history of their respective countries....But the moral contrast!—On one side, the deep, the conscientious, the morbid religion; the stern and uncompromising moral sense, which would not tamper for an instant with any right or decent feeling; the almost Stoic pride of virtue; the principles, petrified at times into prejudices; the reverence for all that was fixed, established, or venerable, bordering close on bigotry...73

72 XLVI, 23-4.
73 XLVII (July, 1832), 329.
There was more emphasis on the defects here than in the previous treatment, but still the general tone was commendatory.

And in October of 1832 still another literary comparison occurred in the analysis of the Reverend Robert Hall:

With no one prejudice like Johnson, he still reminds us of him—he is what Johnson would have been (if it be possible to conceive him such) had he been a whig and a dissenter. He has something of his dogmatism—something of his superstition—something of his melancholy—something of the same proneness to erect himself before man and prostrate himself to the earth before God; a mixture of pride and of humility—of domination and self-abasement: he has much too of Johnson's love for common-sense and home-spun philosophy, combined, however, with an imagination far more vivid and excursive...\(^74\)

The reviewer did not specify what Johnson's "one prejudice" was, but again the general tenor of the comment was approving, with common sense seen as dominating the imaginative element in his character.

Judging then from the remarks of the Quarterly on Johnson as a literary critic, one concludes that, though many of the essayists were as dogmatic and uncompromising as any traditional neoclassicist, yet they did not accord Johnson a mere servile and all-inclusive admiration. They weighed his opinions, sometimes rejected them, sometimes qualified them, but most frequently accepted them as valid.

vii. The Westminster Review

The Benthamite Westminster Review, in spite of the fact

\(^{74}\)XLVIII, 131-2.
that it was on the scene for a third of the period under investigation, made very little contribution to the body of material on Johnson. Of course, its literary criticism was considerably limited by its primary interest in serving the doctrine of utilitarianism. Furthermore, it came late in the period, after much of the fanfare in Shakespearean and Miltonic criticism was past.

Besides one notation to the effect that Johnson was unsuccessful in his attempt to show that Paradise Lost had been well received from the beginning, and a rather patronizing recognition of his authority on the usefulness of biography, the review furnished only two references to him. The first appeared in an account of Wiffen's Tasso in October, 1826.

The wretched attempt of Hoole very probably met with success, as is observed by Mr. Wiffen, from coming before the public, coupled with the name of Tasso, and the far more effectual patronage of Dr. Johnson. Still its chief attractions must have been owing to the language, so easy and agreeable to modern readers, and to the English heroic metre, but recently transmitted as a sort of heirloom by Dryden and Pope; a verse with which none who aspired to the poet's wreath dared then venture to dispense; while Johnson's oracular authority had accustomed his whole train of listeners to the doctrine, that the English possessed no heroic metre, but that of the couplet.75

The journal recognized Johnson's authority among his contemporaries but thought it not well founded.

The second reference was occasioned by Croker's edition of Boswell, and once more, the phenomenon of the Life was marvelled at:

75VI, 405.
The work is in fact unique in literature; there is no other similar book in any language. Two men, the one distinguished for his abilities above all others of his day, the other holding a respectable place in the ranks of life and literature, went about, the one saying good things, the other putting them down. ... Wisdom went rolling about, scattering his sage speeches here and there, with pompous indifference; and Curiosity followed, picking them up, to see what they were, and putting them into her pockets, with sedulous care—the result is, Boswell's Johnson.

Later in the essay, the reviewer attested to the popularity of the book but maintained that as a philosopher Johnson was "notoriously, and confessedly labouring under error." Even so, he concluded:

We can scarcely judge of what fell from Johnson by what has been picked up: we see enough, however, to be able to pronounce him the first extemporizer of wisdom that perhaps ever existed, and that, not among foolish persons and women incapable of judging, but in the centre of all the wits, the brightest age of British social literature could produce."

Although Johnson was "distinguished for his abilities among all others of his day," the Westminster did not emulate the admiration of his contemporaries. On the few occasions when it did not ignore him entirely, it cited him only to differ with him.

viii. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine

When Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine on its establishment in 1817 set out to supplement the Quarterly's Tory opposition to the Whig Edinburgh, it decided on shock tactics. It

76 XV (October, 1831), 374.

77 Ibid., 391.
denounced Hazlitt and Coleridge unmercifully, and even referred to Shakespeare and Milton with a cavalier frivolity hitherto unheard of. Naturally, Johnson was handled no more carefully. However, this initial desire for a more flexible organ of Tory opinion did not mean that the *Maga* reviewers were incapable of serious criticism; on the contrary, original criticism was in it a more important element than it had been in earlier periodicals, and the serious tone alternated with the satirical.

In the comments on Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare, the light tone predominated. For example, though one of the reviewers could not agree with Johnson that "we cannot read many pages of Shakspeare, 'without contempt and indignation'" (apropos of conceits), he refused to become indignant over the issue, and on other occasions, reviewers pointed out the critic's deficiency in scholarship, but with tolerance. Johnson's services in the matter of the unities was recognized and his contributions to the understanding of Shakespeare's characters as well. In the Milton criticism, Johnson's prejudice was recognized, but without the customary fervor of Milton champions, and his views of the unsuitability of "contemplative piety" to poetry were respectfully but firmly denied. The originality and general soundness of the other *Lives* were recognized, but there were reservations here too against Johnson's unfriendly attitude to Pope, his definition of genius, and -- this was DeQuincey -- his inclusion of Donne among the metaphysical poets.
Blackwood's published numerous literary comparisons in the Romantic period, and Johnson's role in these provided the remaining material to be considered. In August, 1818, there appeared one on "Samuel Johnson and David Hume," a subject with good publicity value because of the opportunity for a contrast of English and Scottish temperament and talent.

After commenting on Johnson's "inclination to push against the movements of other minds" and pointing out his conviction "that all foreigners were comparatively fools" the essayist continued:

Johnson had better opportunities of observation, of which we see the products in his writings; and he might have observed still better, had his attention not been so often engrossed by the fermentation of absurd prejudices in his own mind. He was generally more anxious to know whether a man was a Whig in politics, or a High-churchman, or a Dissenter, than to understand the mechanism which had been implanted in the individual by nature.

Johnson, during his lifetime, enjoyed more fame than Hume, and more personal authority in the world of letters. His growling was heard all over Parnassus. The influence he had on English literature consisted, not in disseminating any new system of opinions, but in teaching his countrymen how to reason luminously and concisely, and in making the taste for reflection more popular than it was before.

Johnson had certainly more of what is commonly called genius than Hume. Possessing a strong imagination and warmer feelings, it would have been less difficult for him than for the sceptic to have mounted into the regions of poetry; as may be seen in his tale of Anningait and Ajut, and some other pieces... Although Johnson had imagination, there was no native grace or elegance in his mind, to guide him in forming poetical combinations; and perhaps there is not in any English book a more clumsy and ungainly conception than that of the Happy Valley of Rasselas.78

78III, 512.
According to that definition, one notes, genius was a quality dependent on the imagination and on sensibility. That fact was reemphasized at the end:

During the time when these men flourished, it may be safely averred, that the influence of intellect was completely predominant over that of genius in this country. No great poet arose, who produced moral impressions fit to be weighed against the speculative calculations to which the times were giving birth.9

Thus, though Johnson was seen as possessing more poetic qualities than Hume, still intellect was dominant in him.

In November, 1820, the author of "On Critics and Criticism" came to a discussion of contemporary methods in the profession and commented:

This subject forcibly brings to our recollection some remarks made by Dr. Johnson in one of his conversations. "There is sometimes," says he, "as much charity in helping a man downhill, as in helping him up hill; that is, if his tendency be downward; for till he is at the bottom he flounders; get him once there, and he is quiet. Swift tells us, that Stella had a trick which she learned from Addison, of encouraging a man in absurdity, instead of endeavouring to extricate him; it saved argument, she said, and prevented noise."80

Modern criticism, he felt, was bringing authors much aid of that sort.

In the next month appeared "On the Literary Characters of Bishop Warburton and Dr. Johnson," the article which Christopher North himself later admitted writing and which was considered so penetrating that John Galt quoted it and then was in turn quoted by the Monthly. Wilson began thus:

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9 Abid., 513.
80 VIII, 140.
The two greatest men of the last century in our national literature, the greatest in comprehensiveness of mind and variety of talent, were undoubtedly Bishop Warburton and Dr. Johnson. For a long period of time, they exercised a kind of joint domination over the republic of letters... In the one, it was a tribute which fear of an immediate consequent castigation compelled all to pay; in the other, it was an homage more voluntary, because less enforced, to powers of the highest magnitude, and virtue of the most unblemished purity.

Eventually then, the essayist said, Warburton lost his power through inanity and dotage and left Johnson in possession of the field. However, Warburton's reputation was experiencing a revival:

The fame of Warburton must, therefore, at length experience a renewal of its brightness; and though perhaps shorn of some of its beams, will receive its merited due at the hands of posterity. A very different effect has time had over the fame of his great competitor: its only influence has been in showering down additional lustre on the name of Samuel Johnson, and giving to it that fixed and permanent basis and foundation which is only for posterity to bestow. The best proof which can be given of the extensive circulation of his writings, is the visible effect which they have had over literature and criticism; and the incontestable assistance they have afforded to the great march of the human mind...

After attesting in that fashion to Johnson's continued power, Wilson went on to analyze the nature of his critical abilities:

In real and true taste, Johnson was unquestionably the superior. Discarding all those systems of criticism which had so long fettered and confined the efforts of talent, he first established criticism on the basis and foundation of common sense; and thus liberated our future Shakspeares from those degrading chains and unworthy shackles, which custom had so long allowed the weak to impose upon the strong. His critical decisions— wherever personal hostility did not interfere, and wherever his want of the finer and more delicate perception of inanimate and intellectual beauty did not incapacitate him from judging correctly—are, and ever will be, incontestible for their truth, and unequalled for their talent, and carry with them that undeniable
authority and weight, which nothing can question or withstand. Had he been, perhaps, a little less prejudiced, and a little more largely gifted with that fine feeling, which is as necessary to form a great critic as a great poet, he would certainly have been entitled to take a higher place in the province of criticism than any man who went before, or shall hereafter succeed him....The fame of Johnson will hereafter principally rest on his productions, as a moralist and a critic; while that of Warburton, when again revived, will as certainly be raised on the foundation of his theological writings.

This evaluation of Johnson showed an awareness of the limitations imposed on him by his firm political and religious convictions and by his incapacity to sense completely delicate "inanimate or intellectual beauty," but it did not see them as more than limitations; that is, they did not invalidate the essential excellence of his work.

Incidentally, an example of Johnson's dislike of an individual was cited shortly thereafter in the essay "On the Neglect of Foote as a Dramatic Writer":

Various causes have united to produce the low estimation in which the writings of Foote are held. Amongst these, the enmity of Dr. Johnson, as displayed in the entertaining volumes before referred to [Boswell], was not one of the least. Foote complained, and justly, of the crabbed moralist's harsh and contemptuous way of speaking of him, and had he, in return, exhibited the uncouth censor on the stage, it certainly would not have been the most unprovoked of his outrages on private feelings.

This was evidence of the weight of Johnson's opinion, but at the same time it presented one of the less attractive facets of the critic's nature.

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81 VIII, 243 ff.
82 IX (April, 1821), 40.
Then in the April, 1822, number of the "Noctes Ambrosianae," Christopher North and Buller, his English companion, discussed Johnson's position among his contemporaries and granted him first place:

North.

He could not, or would not, make so good books as other people, but God knows there was a pith about old Samuel Johnson which nothing could stand up against. His influence was not so much that of an author as of a thinker. He was the most powerful intellect in the world of books....

Buller.

Your Magazine once had a good essay on Johnson and Warburton.

North.

Yes; I wrote it myself. But after all, Warburton was not Johnson's match. He had more flame but less heat. Johnson's mind was a furnace—it reduced every thing to its elements. We have had no truly great critical intellect since his time.

Buller.

What would he have thought of our modern reviewers?

North.

Why, not one of the tribe would have dared to cry mew had he been alive. The terror of him would have kept them as mum as mice when there's a cat in the room. If he had detected such a thing as Jeffrey astir, he would have cracked every bone in his body with one worry.

Buller.

I can believe it all. Even Gifford would have been annihilated.

North.

Like an ill-natured pug-dog flung into a lion's cage.83

Later they referred also to Johnson's anti-Scotch prejudice but decided he must have admired the "stately elevation of sentiment" in Home's Douglas. There was no mention of Macpherson, although an earlier Blackwood's reviewer had maintained that Johnson was not a fair judge of Allan Ramsay or Ossian.

83XI, 476.
The author of "Lord Byron and His Contemporaries" in the March, 1828, issue launched himself into an account of one kind of literary personality:

There have been writers of distinguished powers, whose personal and literary character, it may be said, were at all times so indistinguishably blended, that it was hardly possible to speak, even to think of them as men, without also speaking and thinking of them as authors. They carried with them into society the air and atmosphere of the Study. Their talk was ever of books, and the makers of books. Intellectual power, and the product of intellectual power, were the prime objects of all their passions; and their own was the source of their chief enjoyment of life, its pains and pleasures, hopes, fears, anxieties, despondencies, exaltations, humiliations, and triumphs. Reverencing virtue and religion, and in their highest and most solemn moods willingly, and even devoutly, giving them the first place among all human endowments, they nevertheless seemed throughout all the ordinary hours of social intercourse with their brethren of mankind, imperiously to demand talent or knowledge, as an essential condition of their esteem. All their public friendships were with highly-gifted men,—such society alone did they much affect—and converse, to please and satisfy them, always needed, besides the spontaneous kindness of the heart, the premeditated reasonings of the head, feeling by itself being as nothing without the judgments of the understanding. To such a class belonged Dr. Johnson.84

Because Johnson was that kind of man, Boswell's biography, with its minute details of every aspect of his private and public life displayed, was a "justifiable book."85 Again this portrait recognized a balance in the critic of "feeling...and the judgments of the understanding."

And in March, 1831, "Ignoramus on the Fine Arts" provided the final reference. In speaking of "men who lived in

84xxiii, 363.
85ibid., 364.
the busiest epochs of court scandals," the essayist remarked casually:

Like the poetry of Pope, and the criticism of Johnson, they are subjected to an Abernethian regimen to cure their supposed plethora of reputation. Having once been praised at the expense of their betters, they are now depreciated at the expense of justice. So

Since the reference to Johnson was intended to be merely illustrative, there was no indication of precisely in what fashion his criticism had been depreciated; however, the essayist himself, at any rate, believed that the depreciation was unjust.

Thus, the survey of Blackwood's in this study of Johnson reveals that in spite of the very self-conscious irreverence for authority in general and in spite of the unhesitating challenge offered certain of his particular opinions, the reviewers for Maga entertained a sound respect for him and furthermore believed that the rest of the literary world shared the respect.

ix. The London Magazine

John Scott's London Magazine, the southern rival of Blackwood's in familiar criticism, was by nature necessarily general in appeal, but there was a substantial amount of space devoted to literary matters, and furthermore, the articles were contributed by such distinguished men as Charles Lamb and Hazlitt and DeQuincey. The subjects on which they and

86XXIX, 525.
their associates wrote were both general and particular, ranging from a survey of parties in poetry and commentaries on individual authors to analyses of individual characters in literature.

In these résumés and analyses Johnson's name frequently figures; in fact, one recalls that the series of essays called the "Lives of the Poets" was in imitation of his critical biographies, and he himself was the subject of one of them. As a critic and editor of Shakespeare, he was considered by the essayists to excel particularly in "the acute remarks on many of the characters and on the conduct of some of the fables," and they were proud of him for having refuted Voltaire's criticism. On the other hand, they did not approve of his comments on Shakespeare's puns and conceits, nor did they understand his point of view in the matter of the happy ending of Lear. In their few references to his Miltonic criticism, they displayed a moderation and balance unusual in the period; though they recognized his bias and deplored its effect on the criticism, they absolved him of malicious intent. His Lives as a whole they sought to emulate, but they qualified their praise in notations on Gray and Dryden and Pope -- particularly insofar as metrics were concerned.

The few remaining comments on Johnson's informal criticism occurred primarily in the "Lives." The first came from Hazlitt in his essay on Crabbe, later incorporated into The Spirit of the Age:

Mr. Crabbe's first poems were published so long
ago as the year 1782, and received the approbation of Dr. Johnson only a little before he died. This was a testimony from an enemy, for Dr. Johnson was not an admirer of the simple in style, or minute in description. Still he was an acute, strong-minded man, and could see truth, when it was presented to him, even through the mist of his prejudices and his theories. There was something in Mr. Crabbe's intricate points that did not, after all, so ill accord with the Doctor's purblind vision; and he knew quite enough of the petty ills of life to judge of the merit of our poet's description, though he himself chose to slur them over in high-sounding dogmas or general invectives.

Hazlitt was there pounding home again his conviction that Johnson's eighteenth-century "general" had no relationship to the Romantic "particular." But he testified still to his acumen.

The essay on Oliver Goldsmith in February, 1822, inevitably required comment on Johnson, who was cited on both the poet's character and his literary abilities. The author of the article thus accounted for the intimacy between them:

The complaints he [Goldsmith] made of the hard fate of authors, and his censure of odes and blank verse, were well calculated to conciliate the good will, and to excite the sympathy of Johnson, with whom he soon became intimate.

Poverty and indiscretion were other claims, by which the benevolent commiseration of Johnson could scarcely fail to be awakened...

Then he pointed out that Johnson had served in the claque for She Stoops to Conquer and had afterwards pronounced judgment upon the play:

That the piece is enlivened by such droll incidents, as to be nearly allied to farce, Johnson with justice observed, declaring, however, that "he knew of no comedy for many years that had so much exhilarated an audience; that had so much answered the great end of

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87III (May, 1821), 485.
88V, 107.
comedy, that of making an audience merry."

In the next month's issue Johnson's judgment of another author was approved -- Joseph Warton!

The information contained in this essay [on Pope], which is better known than his other writings, is such as the recollection of a scholar, conversant in polite literature, might easily have supplied. He does not, like his brother, ransack the stores of antiquity for what has been forgotten but deserves to be recalled; nor, like Hurd, exercise, on common materials, a refinement that gives the air of novelty to that with which we have long been familiar. He relaxes, as Johnson said of him, the brow of criticism into a smile.

In October of that year, an opinion of Johnson was upheld against those of Horace and Addison:

Petrus Cunaeus asserts the trite axiom that the "beginning of a poem should be gentle, modest, and temperate;" but Samuel Johnson, with his usual sturdy sense, has shown that in this supposed rule Horace is misconceived and Addison mistaken; the proemial verses of both the Iliad and the Odyssey being rather splendid than unadorned.

There was the "common sense" theme again.

And the commentator on Chatterton also used Johnson to support his own views:

Such was the end of one who had given greater proofs of poetical genius than perhaps had ever been shown in one of his years. By Johnson he was pronounced "the most extraordinary young man that had ever encountered his knowledge..."

On the other hand, the subject of prejudice was not

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89 Ibid., 109.
90 V, 266.
91 VI, 338.
92 IX (June, 1824), 635-6.
ignored in these essays. The biographer of Thomas Warton in August, 1821, said:

The imputation cast on one, from whom such kindness had been received, of his "being the only man of genius without a heart," must have been rather the effect of spleen in Johnson, than the result of just observation...93

DeQuincey in his "Letters to a Young Man whose Education has been Neglected" ascribed the success of Watts's Improvement of the Mind, "the most imbecile of books" to

...the extravagant praise of Dr. Johnson, amongst whose infirmities it was to praise warmly, when he was flattered by the sense of his own great superiority in powers and knowledge. Dr. Johnson supposes it to have been modelled on Locke's Conduct of the Understanding; but surely this is as ludicrous as to charge, upon Silence, any elaborate imitation of Mr. Justice Shallow...No: Dr. Watts did not steal from Mr. Locke: in matters of dulness a man is easily original...94

And in a later one of the letters he referred doubtfully to Johnson's opinion of French literature -- that he valued it chiefly because it had a book upon every subject:

How far this might be a reasonable opinion fifty years ago, and understood, as Dr. Johnson must have meant it, of the French literature as compared with the English of the same period, I will not pretend to say. It has certainly ceased to be true even under these restrictions...95

The one reference to the Ossian controversy was made by the author of "On the Life and Writings of Samuel Johnson":

But though his private enmities were easily appeased, yet where he considered the cause of truth to be concerned,

93IV, 123.
94VII (February, 1823), 192.
95VII (May, 1823), 557.
his resentment was vehement and unrelenting. That
imposture, particularly, which he with good reason sup­
posed Macpherson to have practised on the world with
respect to the poems of Ossian, provoked him to ven­
geance, such as the occasion seemed hardly to
demand.96

Johnson was right, but almost too vehemently so.

Finally, the same author, the one who had said of The
Lives of the Poets that "in his very errors as a critic there
is often shown more ability than in the right judgments of
most others," thus estimated the impact of Johnson on his age:

It was the chance of Johnson to fall upon an age
that rated his great abilities at their full value.
His laboriousness had the appearance of something
stupendous, when there were many literary but few
very learned men. His vigour of intellect imposed
upon the multitude an opinion of his wisdom, from the
solemn air and oracular tone in which he uniformly
addressed them. He would have been of less consequence
in the days of Elizabeth or Cromwell.97

These, then, were the opinions of the London. When one
remembers the almost boundless enthusiasm with which Hazlitt
during this time and DeQuincey then and later fulminated
against Johnson's criticism, he wonders that the journal was
not more colored by their personal attitudes. But John Scott
began the London with a firm conviction about the dignity and
responsibility of the critical profession; in fact, the duel
in which he met his death in 1821 was really the result of the
firmness of that belief. Whether his influence on the editorial
policy continued after that date would be difficult to de­
termine, but at any rate the tone of the London was for the

96VIII (August, 1823), 181.
97Ibid., 185-6.
most part moderate and dispassionate. And so far as Johnson's reputation went, the resulting attitude was, on the whole, one of approbation of his independent and logical mind and his insight into the workings of human emotions, and simultaneously of regret that such great abilities had been limited by prejudice and an "insensibility to the more abstract graces" of the art of poetry.

x. Fraser's Magazine

Founded in 1830, "rebellious Fraser's," as it was frequently called, had very little to contribute to the material on Johnson as a literary critic. Besides acknowledging his correctness on the difficulty of writing religious poetry, approving his analysis of the metaphysical poets, and denying his definition of genius, the journal made only one significant comment on him -- Carlyle's review of Croker and the Life in May, 1832. This was eight months after Macaulay's scathing attack on both Croker and Boswell, and three years after his debates with Carlyle's Benthamite friends of the Westminster. Whether in direct reply to Macaulay or not, Carlyle chose a different approach. He began by saying that the edition itself was nothing miraculous and that Croker lacked an understanding of his editorial responsibilities as well as an understanding of Johnson and his times. He balanced Macaulay's picture of Boswell as a great fool with the opinion that he was a combination of the best and worst in a man. Furthermore, throughout the essay he manifested a great
admiration and respect for Johnson.

A full-length image of his Existence has been preserved for us; and here perhaps of all living Englishmen, was the one who best deserved that honour. For if it is true and now almost proverbial, that "the Life of the lowest mortal, if faithfully recorded, would be interesting to the highest;" how much more when the mortal in question was already distinguished in fortune and natural quality, so that his thinkings and doings were not significant of himself only, but of large masses of mankind.

In other words, Johnson was a great intellectual leader worthy of hero-worship.

xi. The Hunt Publications

Of the weekly journals to be considered, four -- the Examiner, the Indicator, the Liberal, and the Companion -- were edited by Leigh Hunt, and a fifth, the Literary Examiner, was primarily the work of his brother John. Actually, only the Examiner entered much into this investigation. Because of the Hunts' avowedly liberal views and again because of the contributions of Hazlitt, one might logically expect in these publications an attitude antagonistic to the Tory Johnson.

There is a preliminary point to be observed -- that in the Examiner, contrary to the usual proportion in the periodicals, less material appeared concerning the Lives than the Shakespearean or Miltonic criticism; this reversal can be explained, however, easily enough by Hazlitt's interest in Milton and by the journal's confining its literary criticism for a

98v, 390.
long period to the "Theatrical Examiner."

Since most of the Shakespearean commentary was occasioned by revivals of the plays in the theatres rather than by new editions of them, Johnson was evaluated primarily on the basis of his interpretations of the characters. And, with the exception of a wavering on the point of Aguecheek as proper material for comedy, his opinions were deferred to. Even when the **Characters of Shakespeare's Plays** was noted, the *Examiner* quoted from Hazlitt to the effect that he liked and respected Johnson, "all sorts of differences of opinion not excepted;" and the author of "The Late William Hazlitt" in 1832 said he felt no urge to either defend or assail the relative merits of his writings. The attitude toward Johnson's Miltonic criticism was another matter, for not once was there a commendatory reference; Hazlitt's essay on *Lycidas* set the tone. On the other hand, what little there was concerning the rest of the *Lives* showed approval.

The first of the general comments on Johnson appeared in the *Examiner's* review of Hazlitt's *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*:

His lecture on the Periodical Essayists is chiefly occupied with Montaigne, Steele, Addison, and Johnson... We concur entirely in his estimate of Johnson; and we cannot sufficiently express our admiration of the skill, truth, and felicity, with which he is characterised.99

Then in the *Indicator's* comparison of Hoole's and Fairfax's *Tasso* -- in which Hoole's came off rather badly -- the essayist

99 June 6, 1819, p. 363.
attempted to account for Johnson's having written the dedication for Hoole:

Johnson, who is now pretty generally understood not to have been so good a critic in poetry as he was strong in general understanding, and justly eminent in some respects, might have been very capable of applauding a translation upon Mr. Hoole's principles; but it is more than to be suspected, that he would have desired a higher order of workmanship out of the manufactory. Hoole was a pitch too low for his admiration, though it appeared he had private qualities sufficient to secure his good wishes... 100

It was the old story of Johnson's deficiency in poetical sensibility.

The final references in the Examiner appeared after a passage of some ten years, and the contrast between them and the foregoing is noteworthy. The Examiner had always had a strong political cast and been outspoken in its criticism of the Court and the administration, and it had never entertained any fondness for the views of the Edinburgh and the Quarterly in literary matters; but it had not been wholly antagonistic to Johnson. By 1831 the tone toward him had changed. In an essay on "Critical Justice" the various receptions given Croker's Boswell were thus characterized:

Oh, for a Peter Pindar to immortalize the different judgments on Croker's edition of Boswell's Johnson. Our brethren of the day and week, of course, would find no fault with a book bearing the names of a celebrated man, and a great publisher. The advertising interest steadies the presumptions, and overrules the disposition to flippancies. The Westminster Review came first of the Quarterlies, with a broad flat-bottomed article of praise, sweeping over the matter, nothing penetrating,

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100 I (March 29, 1820), 194-5.
nothing searching, nothing sounding, taking all as it
found it, and finding the thing good—"the best Variorum
Edition." The Edinburgh followed with an article of a
very different build. A rakish, cunning, practical-
looking [sic] craft, too fast to be honest, with a
deep keel and sharp run, taut sticks and spanking sails.
It stirred the matter up ab igno—was desperately in-
quisitive—overhauled every fact it came to, and cut
away mercilessly. Poor Mr. Croker! we pity his
Philarchus, a very happy term to express "the paternal
and kindly authority of the head of a clan." What
misery to a man of his sort, so presuming, so authora-
tive, so minute himself in the detection of small
slips, so merciless in their visitation, to be convicted
of an error of ignorance, for which a third form boy
would be dubbed dunce! The Quarterly Review comes
last, like a Cleopatra's barge, bearing incense and
music to the genius of Croker. The stowage for praise
is prodigious. The vessel as heavy and clumsy as the
gingerbread craft commonly is. The builder is a dogged
Dutchman, who holds the maxim that pain costs nothing;
and he lays it on prodigiously thick.101

Particularly was the Quarterly's lavish praise derided — and
not only the praise of Croker but that of Johnson himself as
well.

Then in the following year Madame D'Arblay's Memoirs of
Dr. Burney was thus summarily dealt with:

Three bulky volumes of great names, large words,
and small anecdotes. If any one wishes to be carried
back to the inanities and pomposities of the Johnson-
ian epoch, almost bodily, he will do well to peruse
the solemn formalities of the once sprightly authoress
of Evelina and Cecilia. The literature and the loyalty
of the faithful subjects of George III. seem to have
been equally worthy of a great people. The absurd de-
votion of the Burneys to the old Court is certainly
more disgusting, and only less rational, than their pro-
found and trembling veneration for Dr. Johnson, Barker,
and the literary Club in general.102

Apparently the Examiner's contempt for the Crown eventually

101 November 20, 1831, pp. 740-1.
102 December 2, 1832, p. 774.
became so strong as to color the views of anyone or any work even remotely connected with it. By 1832 there was little trace of the earlier esteem which some portions at least of Johnson's criticism had been accorded.

xii. The Literary Gazette

The Literary Gazette, the weekly edited throughout the period by William Jerdan, presented to the public in each issue reviews, poetry, letters, and miscellaneous literary gossip. The reviews -- at least those in which Johnson's criticism was commented on -- were noteworthy for the copiousness of the extracts from books being considered and for the rarity with which the Gazette itself took a definite stand on controversial issues. It was not that controversy was barred, but that the journal merely noted the differences of opinion far more often than it evaluated them. For example, one correspondent defended Johnson vigorously against Hazlitt's charge that he could not appreciate Shakespeare because he could not write Shakespeare's sort of poetry, and the Gazette made no comment. Symmons's attack on Johnson was quoted at length, but the reviewer "did not venture" to offer his own opinion; and the reviewer of Garrick's letters quoted without comment one of the correspondents to the effect that Johnson was completely lacking in pathos. However, disregarding for the moment the usual conservative timidity displayed by the journal, one does note that the majority of the references to Johnson quoted here were favorable.
In its miscellaneous and general comments, the Literary Gazette followed the same pattern of approval. One subscriber wrote to express surprise that

...a Comedy [supposedly written by the mother of Richard Brinsley Sheridan] which had been approved by such men as Garrick, Murphy, and Dr. Johnson, should have remained for ever in obscurity...103

And in the next week's issue there was a similar comment.104

In an account of the Royal Society of Literature the Gazette wrote:

The patronage of the King is an honour. It is the natural desire of every man, of a well constituted mind, to enjoy the respect of society. The favour of the sovereign to a man of genius, is only the highest and most authentic expression of that respect. The author of Waverley has not been degraded by his title. Johnson and Cowper were not degraded by their pensions.105

Loyalty to the Crown and approval of Johnson were at once there indicated.

Elsewhere Johnson was called "the first name in literature of his age."106 Then when that volume of Ballantyne's Novelist's Library in which Johnson appeared came to the attention of the Gazette, Scott's approving comments on him were quoted at great length.107 And when Croker's edition of Boswell was published, the reviewer hailed "these five volumes

103February 8, 1817, pp. 33-4.
104February 15, 1817, p. 50.
105January 6, 1821, p. 1.
106August 6, 1831, p. 497.
107April 19, 1823, pp. 241-2.
with "fivefold welcome" and furthermore devoted a long article in five successive issues to generous quotations from them.

This was typical of the material introductory to the excerpts:

The universal fame of the original production renders any observation upon it quite supererogatory; and indeed it is well for us that we are not at present called upon to do more than introduce some of the new matter—for our day is short.108

And this was typical of the attitude toward Johnson himself:

We venerate him for his wonderful abilities; he touches our warmer and more tender sympathies by his weaknesses. The former command the mind's noblest admiration—the latter ally him to nature and the common lot of mankind.109

The significance to this study of the general esteem for the critic recorded in the Literary Gazette is lessened by the uncritical approach of the contributors, but this much is true: if it was William Jerdan's purpose to present to the public a non-partisan view of literary affairs and if the comments on Johnson were indicative of either what the world of letters believed or what it wanted to hear, then he occupied a respected position in it.

108 June 25, 1831, p. 403.
109 July 2, 1831, p. 423.
A considerable body of evidence has been found in the journals to refute any contention that Samuel Johnson was relegated to obscurity in the Romantic period, but at the same time it must be admitted that his name occurred far less frequently in those years than it had in the period immediately following his death. However, that fact is not so significant to this study as at first it might seem.

Part of the decline was simply a natural result of the passage of time; figures appeared who because of their very currency absorbed the attention of the periodicals. And other influences were at work as well. One of them was the prominence gradually being assumed by prose fiction. More and more space was devoted to reviews of the novels of such authors as Scott and Maria Edgeworth; Scott especially achieved a tremendous popularity. Since Johnson had had very little to say about the novel (except that Richardson excelled in the art of making virtue triumph), it would not be expected that his name appear often in such reviews. Furthermore, in the field of the drama, where he had exerted great influence, there were changes too. Comparatively few new plays appeared, and
the theatres concentrated on producing operas and adaptations and revivals of older plays. Then, because the works were familiar to the reading public, the reviewers focused more and more on the performances of the actors and actresses rather than on the essential merits of the vehicles. Even when one of the major writers of the period became interested in the dramatic form, he wrote not for the theatre-going public but for the reading public, so that "closet drama" became a literary type. Byron's plays of this sort did attract a great deal of attention in conjunction with the rest of his work, and the battle of the unities was fought again because of him. But on the whole, dramatic criticism suffered for the lack of challenging subject matter.

Another factor bearing on the issue was the nature of the reviews themselves. The quotations from them throughout this study have exhibited the style and essentially the terminology of their eighteenth-century forbears, and the reviewers frequently indulged in a dogmatic tone worthy of an arch-neoclassicist. However, there was one essential difference: it was the dogmatism of anonymity rather than the dogmatism of authority. In fact, the anonymous character of the magazines and reviews as a whole was a further indication of the rejection of authority and the reliance upon the opinion of an individual. Another relevant characteristic of the reviews was extensive excerpts from the work under discussion; very often, indeed, the review was merely a series of quotations held together by occasional lines of introductory comment.
And the quotations were intended to exemplify the "beauties" of the author.

What is significant about the number of references to Johnson in the reviews is that in the face of new literary forms and of a new attitude toward authority and toward the function of the reviewer, his name occurred more frequently than that of any other English critic of the past or the contemporary period. Pauline Currie discovered in her examination of the criticism of prose fiction in these same sources that Aristotle and Horace ranked first and then Johnson. There were some references to Longinus and a few to Bacon and Sidney and Milton; some to Dryden, Addison, and Reynolds; rare ones to Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Lamb, and DeQuincey; and many to Hazlitt and Scott. Foreign critics were not often mentioned, but Voltaire, Rousseau, Corneille, Madame de Stael, Boileau, Schlegel, Schiller, and Goethe did appear.1 Particularly it is noteworthy that Johnson was not supplanted by any of the contemporary figures in criticism. Also, it is at least worth commenting that the two creative writers who achieved the greatest contemporary reputation in the journals — Scott and Byron — professed admiration of Johnson.

Once it has been established that Johnson's name did figure to an appreciable extent in the critical magazines and

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reviews of the period, it would be useful to indicate in what portions of his criticism they were most interested. Because of the numerous revivals of Shakespeare's plays and because of the new editions of and lectures on his works, Johnson's edition and commentaries were constantly being re-evaluated. The revolutionary and republican spirit of the time found one outlet in restoring and defending Milton's reputation, and naturally Johnson's *Rambler* essays and the "Life" figured largely in that process. The essays on Dryden and Pope ranked next in the catalogue, a fact which not only reflected a taste for their poetry but also indicated the feeling among those attempting to establish a new art of poetry that the old order must be dethroned. The essay on Cowley drew comment not so much because the reviewers felt any great sympathy with the poets of the metaphysical school but because it included Johnson's definition of genius, a subject with which they were frequently preoccupied. The essays on the eighteenth-century poets of the Romantic spirit ranked last. On one score, that was not surprising, for Johnson had had relatively little to say of them; on another, it was surprising, for one would expect the periodicals to evince interest at least in his lack of interest. But only his criticism of Gray called forth much comment.

It is not enough, of course, to know that Johnson was very much present in the journals of the Romantic period; it is also necessary to know what kind of role he played — whether he was there to be contradicted or whether he was
there to be admired. Actually, very few of the reviewers followed the example of Coleridge, whose policy was one of accepting absolutely nothing of Johnson's criticism. They were after all very close to the time when a pronouncement from him virtually put an end to argument. On the other hand, very few of them manifested a passive acceptance of his views simply because they were his. The general tone was that of an effort to determine what part of his criticism was still valid and useful to them and what part must be rejected. Since the tendency in the period was toward an appreciative criticism rather than a criticism involving an evaluation of merits and faults, it was discovered that more attention was directed to the negative than the positive portions of his opinions. The praise he awarded was for the most part accepted as a matter of course, but unfavorable comments were meticulously weighed. This attitude accounts for the fact that the general criticism of the *Preface to Shakspeare* and the edition itself and of *The Lives of the Poets* was favorable at the same time that qualifications and exceptions were defined.

Just what those qualifications and exceptions were is also significant, for they were indicative of changing literary trends and values in post-neoclassical criticism. Some of them, of course, were not really critical at all, for they arose from the conviction that Johnson had allowed personal or political or religious prejudice to enter into his criticism -- notably into his discussions of Milton and Gray. One group of them centered in or were related to the dispute over the
relative merits of the general and the particular as subject matter for poetry. Almost without exception the periodical reviewers saw Johnson as the exponent of the vague and abstract type character in opposition to one possessing individuality, for they did not understand the basis of his general in the particular; and they did not approve of his stand. Similarly, they rejected his views of pastoral poetry, believing that he was physically incapable of discerning minute differences in the natural scene, and failing completely to comprehend his objection to it on the score of lack of originality. They also believed him mistaken in his definition of genius as a general power of the mind, and his practical views on the artist's ability to control his genius. They distrusted him in matters of versification, again considering him physically incapable of distinguishing subtle variations in rhythm and rhyme. On these points opinion was virtually unanimous.

A second major limitation seen in Johnson as a critic was a deficiency in the kind of imagination and sublimity of spirit necessary to the full appreciation of Shakespeare and Milton. However, on this point there was no unanimity of opinion. Although to a great many of the reviewers Johnson's sober and modest language in praise of their literary idols represented a cold, inadequate appreciation, others chose to single him out as the critic who had paid noblest tribute to them.

And on still other points the periodicals unanimously
accepted him. His repudiation of the unities appealed to two schools of thought; to one it represented a denial of pseudo-classicism and a return to the standards of true Aristotelianism, and to the other it was a symbol of the denial of authority and the breakdown of all rules restricting the liberty of creative genius. The reviewers also adhered to his view of probability as a dramatic essential replacing the neoclassical possible improbability. Likewise, they affirmed his definition of the purpose of poetry as instruction combined with pleasure, though not to such an extent that they agreed to his demand for unmistakable poetic justice. Furthermore, although some of them questioned his ability in the realm of the sublime, almost all granted his supremacy in that of the pathetic; his judgment and discernment in the interpretation of character won that position for him.

For quite some time now students of Johnson have recognized that there was much more in his criticism than just the typical neoclassical views of his age. Not only have they discovered his services to the re-defining and re-establishing of real classical standards, but also they have seen in his independent mind many of the characteristics of the Romantic spirit. This study demonstrates that, consciously or unconsciously, the journals of the Romantic period also recognized the diversity and breadth of his criticism and that the nature of his reputation in the period was due to the nature of his

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2T. Pyles, "The Romantic Side of Dr. Johnson," ELH, XI (September, 1944), 192-212.
criticism.

After all the objections had been raised and all the qualifications defined and all the unacceptable portions of his criticism sifted out, there was still much that was universally considered valuable. It was not only the periodicals with avowedly conservative leanings -- the Gentleman's, the Scots, the British Critic, the Quarterly, and the Literary Gazette -- that manifested an attitude predominantly favorable to Johnson; such liberal organs as the Monthly, the Edinburgh, Blackwood's, and the London shared their approval of him. And even those periodicals evincing most antagonism -- the Westminster, Fraser's, and the Examiner in the latter part of the period -- found occasionally something in him to commend. In other words, it cannot be said that the antagonism shown Johnson by the major figures of the Romantic period was imitated by the journals, nor can it be said that his reputation was the result of servile admiration in journals adhering to eighteenth-century neoclassical standards. His reputation transcended political and religious and literary loyalties.
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Histories and Studies of Criticism


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Dorothy Georg© was born on July 8, 1915, in St. Louis, Missouri. She grew up in Welsh, Louisiana, and received her elementary and secondary education there. In 1936 she was granted a B.A. degree by the Louisiana State Normal College, and in 1937 an M.A. in English by the Louisiana State University. She then alternated graduate study and teaching until January, 1943, when she entered the United States Naval Reserve. In February, 1946, she returned to the Louisiana State University as an assistant in English. Since September of that year she has been a member of the English faculty of the University of Hawaii.
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