Johnson's theory of poetry as expressed in his Lives of the English poets

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Johnson's Theory of Poetry as Expressed in his "Lives of the English Poets"

by

Hazel M. Roth

A Thesis

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## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION - Johnson's Definition of Poetry.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BODY - Johnson's Critical Theory of Poetry</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Johnson's Opinion Regarding Content of Poetry</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. As Respects Truth</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Types of Verse Excluded</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Fiction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Myth</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Pastoral</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Encomiastic Verse</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Occasional Verse</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Epitaph</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Burlesque</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Poems Written in Imitation of Others</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Contemplative Sacred Verse</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Types of Verse Approved</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Epic</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Didactic Poetry</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Criticism</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Satire</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Controversy</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Translation</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Narrative Poetry</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Descriptive Poetry</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Elegy</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Drama</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II As Respects Pleasure</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Pleasures of the Mind</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Novelty</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Variety</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Pleasures of the Heart ............................................. 58
   a. In the Drama ...................................................... 59
   b. In the Lyric .................................................. 61

B. Johnson's Opinion Regarding Form of Poetry ............... 64
   I. As Respects Style .............................................. 64
      1. Classification of Style ...................................... 65
         a. Concise ................................................ 66
         b. Diffuse ................................................. 67
         c. Lofty .................................................... 71
         d. Humble .................................................. 72
      2. Sources of Stylistic Effect .................................. 73
         a. Diction - Poetic ........................................ 73
            (1) Not too Familiar .................................. 75
            (2) Not too Remote ..................................... 75
         b. Figures of Speech ......................................... 76
            (1) Simile ............................................. 77
            (2) Metaphor ......................................... 78
            (3) Alliteration ......................................... 79
            (4) Onomatopoeia ...................................... 80

II. As Respects Prosody .............................................. 81
   1. Meter .......................................................... 81
      a. Regular .................................................. 81
   2. Rhyme .......................................................... 84
      a. Orderly .................................................. 88
      b. Consonant ................................................ 88

CONCLUSION - SUMMARY ................................................. 90

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................... 92
JOHNSON'S THEORY OF POETRY AS EXPRESSED
IN HIS "LIVES OF THE ENGLISH POETS"

INTRODUCTION

JOHNSON'S DEFINITION OF POETRY

"Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason."

In the above-quoted lines, Dr. Samuel Johnson briefly states his theory of poetry. Good poetry must serve a twofold purpose: it must convey truth to the reader; and it must give him pleasure. Therefore its content must be twofold: an intellectual element, and an emotional appeal. It is Johnson's opinion that the regular verse form is best adapted to comply with these demands; for "the great pleasure of verse arises from the known measure of the lines and uniform structure of the stanzas." Therefore, according to Johnson's theory, the keynote of poetic content is truth; of poetic structure, is regularity.

* The edition referred to in these and following pages is that by George Birkbeck Hill, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1905
JOHNSON'S CRITICAL THEORY OF POETRY

A. JOHNSON'S OPINION REGARDING

CONTENT OF POETRY

I

AS RESPECTS TRUTH

The keynote of the content is truth. "The heart naturally loves truth." The subject-matter must be truth; - not necessarily fact, but universal truth. "On great occasions and on small the mind is repelled by useless and apparent falsehood." "Where truth is sufficient to fill the mind, fiction is worse than useless; the counterfeit debases the genuine." "Subtily and harmony united are still feeble, when opposed to truth."

Therefore, before writing upon any subject, it is the poet's first duty to make a serious search for truth in each of the following three ways: first, by a study of the moral law; secondly, by a study of humanity; and finally, by a study of the particular subject under consideration. "But the truth is that the knowledge of external nature, and the sciences which that knowledge requires or includes, are not the great or the frequent business of the human mind."
Whether we provide for action or conversation, whether we wish to be useful or pleasing, the first requisite is the religious and moral knowledge of right and wrong; the next is an acquaintance with the history of mankind, and with those examples which may be said to embody truth and prove by events the reasonableness of opinions. Prudence and Justice are virtues and excellences of all times and of all places; we are perpetually moralists, but we are geometricians only by chance. ... Let me not be censured for this digression as pedantick or paradoxical, for if I have Milton against me I have Socrates on my side. It was his labour to turn philosophy from the study of nature to speculations upon life, but the innovators whom I oppose are turning off attention from life to nature. They seem to think that we are placed here to watch the growth of plants, or the motions of the stars. Socrates was rather of opinion that what we had to learn was, how to do good and avoid evil."

Thus Johnson declares that, in his quest for universal truth, the poet's first duty is to obtain a religious and moral knowledge of right and wrong. He praises highly Addison's writings, both prose and poetry; for "all the enchantment of fancy and all the cogency of
argument are employed to recommend to the reader his real interest, the care of pleasing the Author of his being. Truth is shewn sometimes as the phantom of a vision, sometimes appears half-veiled in an allegory, sometimes attracts regard in the robes of fancy, and sometimes steps forth in the confidence of reason. She wears a thousand dresses, and in all is pleasing."

Therefore the highest praise is due to Addison, because "he has dissipated the prejudice that had long connected gaiety with vice, and easiness of manners with laxity of principles. He has restored virtue to its dignity and taught innocence not to be ashamed. This is an elevation of literary character 'above all Greek, above all Roman fame.'"

Among those who have striven after truth by attempting to give a moral knowledge of right and wrong, Johnson recognizes especially Blackmore, Savage, and James Thomson. "Blackmore ... was made a poet not by necessity but inclination, and wrote not for a livelihood but ... for a nobler purpose, to engage 'poetry in the cause of virtue.'" Savage's poem, "The Wanderer," has one characteristic which "ought to be thought equivalent to many other excellences, that this poem can promote no other purposes than those of
virtue, and that it is written with a very strong sense of the efficacy of religion." The highest praise which James Thomson has received, "ought not to be supprest; it is said by Lord Lyttelton in the Prologue to his posthumous play that his works contained

'No line which dying, he could wish to blot.'"

Besides having a moral knowledge of right and wrong, a poet must also have a sympathetic understanding of humanity. Johnson attributes much of Addison's success to his keen insight into human nature, for "he read with critical eyes the important volume of human life, and knew the heart of man from the depths of stratagem to the surface of affectation." Savage, too, was an observant student of life, and hence he was able to portray it truly, at least when he chose to do so. "As he never suffered any scene to pass before his eyes without notice, he had treasured in his mind all the different combinations of passions and the innumerable mixtures of vice and virtue, which distinguish one character from another." "The knowledge of life was indeed his chief attainment."

However, a poet must not fail to study himself, as well; otherwise he will not be able to convey truth
without bias. Although Johnson sometimes censures Pope, yet he gives him credit for his earnest self-criticism. "He is said to have sent nothing to the press till it had lain two years under his inspection. ... He suffered the tumult of imagination to subside, and the novelties of invention to grow familiar. He knew that the mind is always enamoured of its own productions, and did not trust his first fondness. He consulted his friends; ... and, what was of more importance, he consulted himself, and let nothing pass against his own judgement."

Although Johnson says that "the knowledge of I, external nature, and the sciences which that knowledge requires or includes, are not the great or the frequent business of the human mind"; nevertheless, if occasionally the poet chooses to write upon such a subject, Johnson insists that he have a thorough knowledge of that subject-matter. "Knowledge of the subject is to the poet what I, durable materials are to the architect." Johnson admits that Prior excelled Butler in versification; yet he calls Prior an "inventore minor," because "he had not Butler's exuberance of matter and variety of illustration. The spangles of wit which he could afford he knew how to polish; but he wanted the bullion
of his master." He credits Somervile with writing in
"The Chase," "with great intelligence of his subject, which is the first requisite of excellence."

He criticises severely, however, any poet who
presumes to write upon a subject of which he is not
master. "Imagination is useless without knowledge;

nature gives in vain the power of combination, unless

study and observation supply materials to be combined."

Although he recognizes Dryden's genius as superior even to
Pope's, yet he finds fault with Dryden for delighting
"to tread upon the brink of meaning, where light and dark-

ness begin to mingle; to approach the precipice of ab-

surdity, and hover over the abyss of unideal vacancy.

This inclination sometimes produced nonsense, ... and

sometimes it issued in absurdities, of which perhaps he

was not conscious." Even Pope, despite his careful pre-

paration, does not entirely escape; for when he studied

metaphysical morality, "he was proud of his acquisitions, and supposing himself master of great secrets, was in

haste to teach what he had not learned." The Essay

on Man was a work of great labour and long consideration, but certainly not the happiest of Pope's performances.

The subject is perhaps not very proper for poetry, and
the poet was not sufficiently master of his subject."

Thus the poet, whose duty it is to convey truth to the mind of the reader, must be prepared to tell this same truth: first, regarding the moral law; secondly, regarding humanity; and finally, regarding any particular subject under consideration.

1. TYPES OF VERSE EXCLUDED

Because of their inherent lack of truth, Johnson certain excludes subjects from the realm of poetry. Fiction, when its possibility is no longer credible, is not to be treated in poetry. Johnson censures Gray for introducing incredible fiction into "The Bard." "The fiction of Horace was to the Romans credible; but its revival disgusts us with apparent and unconquerable falsehood. ... To select a singular event, and swell it to a giant's bulk by fabulous appendages of spectres and predictions, has little difficulty, for he that forsakes the probable may always find the marvellous. And it has little use; we are affected only as we believe; we are improved only as we find something to be imitated or declined. I do not see that The Bard promotes any truth, moral or political."

Johnson admits, however, that fiction may be used
as a means of expressing universal truths: "Poets, in-

deed, profess fiction, but the legitimate end of fiction is the conveyance of truth; and he that has flattery ready for all whom the vicissitudes of the world happen to exalt must be scorned as a prostituted mind that may retain the glitter of wit, but has lost the dignity of virtue."

There is another extensive field of subject-
matter which Johnson bars from the realms of poetry; namely, mythology. He spares no poet who is guilty of the choice of such a subject; it matter not whether it is Gray whom he subjects to rather harsh criticism, or Pope whom he admires greatly. In fact, he prefers Dryden's "Ode on St. Cecilia's Day," to Pope's "Ode," because the content of the former is based upon history, while that of the latter is in its nature mythological. "Dryden's plan is better chosen; history will always take stronger hold of the attention than fable; the passions excited by Dryden are the pleasures and pains of real life, the scene of Pope is laid in imaginary existence. Pope is read with calm acquiescence, Dryden with turbulent de-

light; Pope hangs upon the ear, and Dryden finds the passes of the mind."

In criticising Pope's "Ode," Johnson further
laments the choice of a mythological subject-matter, even though presented in a pleasing form: "The next stanzas place and detain us in the dark and dismal regions of mythology, where neither hope nor fear, neither joy nor sorrow can be found: the poet however faithfully attends us; we have all that can be performed by elegance of diction or sweetness of versification; but what can form avail without better matter?"

On another occasion, Johnson does not fail to censure Dryden's "Threnodia," because the author was not serious enough to keep heathen fables out of his religion." In a similar manner he censures Waller, because "he borrows too many of his sentiments and illustrations from the old mythology, for which it is vain to plead the example of ancient poets: the deities which they introduced so frequently were considered as realities, so far as to be received by the imagination, whatever sober reason might even then determine. But of these images time has tarnished the splendor." He also considers "The Fan" by Gay a minor poem, because "it is one of those mythological fictions which antiquity delivers ready to the hand; but which, like other things that lie open to every one's use, are of little value."

Hence, according to Johnson, mythological poems
cannot claim more than a passing interest, even though
they may be supported by the praise of men of genius.
Cranville's "Heroick Love" is a "mythological tragedy,
upon the love of Agamemnon and Chryseis, and therefore sunk easily into neglect, though praised in verse
by Dryden, and in prose by Pope." James Thomson's
"Agamemnon" also had the fate which "most commonly
attends mythological stories, and was only endured,
but not favoured."

Johnson accuses Tickell of unskilfully com-
pounding his "Kensington Gardens" of Grecian deities
and Gothic fairies. "Neither species of those ex-
ploded beings could have done much; and when they
are brought together they only make each other con-
temptible." Finally he criticises the third stanza
of Gray's poem "The Bard," because of the "puerilities
of obsolete mythology. When we are told that Cadwallo
'hush'd the stormy main,' and that Modred' made huge
Plinlimmon bow his cloud-top'd head,' attention recoils
from the repetition of a tale that, even when it was
first heard, was heard with scorn."

Because the reader receives a wrong impression
of the past through mythical narratives, Johnson does
not consider mythology as a proper subject for poetry. Similarly, because in pastorals the reader is misinformed about rural life, Johnson condemns this form of poetry. "There is something in the poetical Arcadia so remote from known reality and speculative possibility, that we can never support its representation through a long work. A Pastoral of an hundred lines may be endured; but who will hear of sheep and goats and myrtle bowers and purling rivulets, through five acts? Such scenes please barbarians in the dawn of literature, and children in the dawn of life; but will be for the most part thrown away as men grow wise, and nations grow learned."

Since pastorals "please barbarians in the dawn of literature, and children in the dawn of life," Johnson considers the writing of pastorals as an initiatory step for young authors. "It seems natural for a young poet to initiate himself by Pastorals, which, not professing to imitate real life, require no experience, and exhibiting only the simple operation of unmingled passions, admit no subtle reasoning or deep enquiry." "At the revival of learning in Italy it was soon discovered that a dialogue of imaginary swains might be composed with little difficulty, be-
cause the conversation of shepherds excludes profound or refined sentiment; and, for images and descriptions, Satyrs and Fauns, and Naiads and Dryads, were always within call, and woods and meadows, and hills and rivers, supplied variety of matter, which, having a natural power to soothe the mind, did not quickly cloy it."

Johnson severely criticises Milton's "Lycidas" because of lack of truth. "In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting; whatever images it can supply are long ago exhausted; and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind."

"Nothing can less display knowledge or less exercise invention than to tell how a shepherd has lost his companion and must now feed his flocks alone, without any judge of his skill in piping. ... He who thus grieves will excite no sympathy; and he who thus praises will confer no honour."

Still "Lycidas" has stood the test of time; and Johnson himself declares that "about things on which the public thinks so long it commonly attains to think right." Yet, strange to say, Johnson does not attribute the con-
tinued popularity of "Lycidas" to its own intrinsic worth, but rather to the reputation of its author. "Such is the power of reputation justly acquired that its blaze drives away the eye from nice examination. Surely no man could have fancied that he read Lycidas with pleasure had he not known its author."

Johnson also impartially criticises several minor poets for their folly in writing pastorals. Queen Mary had encouraged Congreve's dramatic efforts by attending two of his plays. "When she died soon after Congreve testified his gratitude by a despicable effusion of elegiack pastoral; a composition in which all is unnatural, and yet nothing is new." In speaking of Fenton's "Florelio," Johnson curtly says that "it is sufficient to say that it is an occasional pastoral, which implies something neither natural nor artificial, neither comick nor serious." In commenting upon Shenstone's "Pastoral Ballad," he candidly admits: "I cannot but regret that it is pastoral; an intelligent reader acquainted with the scenes of real life sickens at the mention of the crock, the pipe, the sheep, and the kids." His criticism of Lyttelton's pastoral is decidedly to the point: "Of his Progress of Love it is sufficient blame to say that it is pastoral."

There is one set of pastorals, however, which
Johnson considers true to life; and that is "The Shepherd's Week," written by Gay presumably at the instigation of Pope. The latter was anxious to excel Ambrose Philips, whom Steele had praised as the pastoral writer that yielded only to Theocritus, Virgil, and Spencer. Therefore, Pope, besides drawing up a comparison of his own pastorals with those of Philips, is supposed to have incited Gay to write the "Shepherd's Week" to show, that if it be necessary to copy nature with minuteness, "rural life must be exhibited such as grossness and ignorance have made it."

... But the effect of reality and truth became conspicuous, even when the intention was to shew them groveling and degraded. These Pastorals became popular, and were read with delight, as just representations of rural manners and occupations, by those who had no interest in the rivalry of the poets, nor knowledge of the critical dispute."

d. **Encomiastic Verse**

There is another group of verse which Johnson excludes from good poetry, because it does not stand the searching test of truth; and that is encomiastic verse. "Praise must not be too rigorously examined," for "poets are sometimes in too much haste to praise."

Richard Savage is an example of a poet, hasty
and impetuous in lavishing praise upon his friends and benefactors, and soon just as eager in attempting to retract his foolish flattery. "The Preface of Sir Thomas Overbury contains a very liberal encomium on the blooming excellences of Mr. Theophilus Cibber, which Mr. Savage could not, in the latter part of his life, see his friends about to read without snatching the play out of their hands." "The Wanderer" was dedicated to Lord Tyrconnel in terms of highest praise with warmest professions of gratitude. "These praises in a short time he found himself inclined to retract, being discarded by the man on whom he had bestowed them, and whom he then immediately discovered not to have deserved them." In his "Miscellany," "the dedication is addressed to the Lady Mary Wortley Montague, whom he flatters without reserve, and, to confess the truth, with very little art. The same observation may be extended to all his Dedications; his compliments are constrained and violent, heaped together without the grace of order, or the decency of introduction."

Johnson criticises Dryden severely for his extravagance in praise and flattery, which in time became cheap, because it was lavished indiscriminately. "The State of Innocence and Fall of Man" is addressed to the princess of
"Modena" in a strain of flattery which disgraces genius, and which it was wonderful that any man that knew the meaning of his own words could use without self-detestation. "Almost every piece had a dedication, written with such elegance and luxuriance of praise as neither haughtiness nor avarice could be imagined able to resist. But he seems to have made flattery too cheap: That praise is worth nothing of which the price is known."

Johnson condemns even Prior for writing in the encomiastic strain; for though he no doubt meant to be truthful, yet his admiration necessarily led him astray. "This year (1700) produced one of his longest and most splendid compositions, the Carmen Seculare, in which he exhausts all his powers of celebration. I mean not to accuse him of flattery; he probably thought all that he writ, and retained as much veracity as can be properly exacted from a poet professedly encomiastick. King William supplied copious materials for either verse or prose. ... To Prior gratitude would dictate praise; which reason would not refuse."

The author of fiction or mythology always realizes that he is misrepresenting the conditions and facts of former days. The writer of pastorals purposely pictures rural life in flattering colors, thus creating an Arcadia
which does not exist. But the great danger in writing encomiastic verse lies in the fact that even the most earnest author is betrayed into expressing in glowing terms, sentiments which cannot endure. "To charge all unmerited praise with the guilt of flattery, and to suppose that the encomiast always knows and feels the falsehood of his assertions is surely to discover great ignorance of human nature and human life. In determinations depending not on rules, but on experience and comparison, judgement is always in some degree subject to affection. Very near to admiration is the wish to admire. ... We admire in a friend that understanding that selected us for confidence; we admire more in a patron that judgement which, instead of scattering bounty indiscriminately, directed it to us; and, if the patron be an author, those performances which gratitude forbids us to blame, affection will easily dispose us to exalt. To these prejudices, hardly culpable, interest adds a power always operating, though not always, because not willingly, perceived. The modesty of praise wears gradually away; and perhaps the pride of patronage may be in time so increased that modest praise will no longer please."

Very closely allied to encomiastic verse is occasional Verse.
poetry, written in celebration of a birth or marriage, in commemoration of a death, in congratulation upon a victory, or in rejoicing upon a coronation. These and similar events supply facts for the poet; but the author of occasional verse treats them, not as universal truths, but merely as incidents of local and temporary interest. He is handicapped in several ways. He has no choice of subject-matter; the occasion presents to him a subject, which he must treat in a favorable way, irrespective of whether he rejoices and approves, or not. It is not a question of presenting the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; but rather a question of presenting an oft-occurring incident in a new and striking way.

"The occasional poet is circumscribed by the narrowness of his subject; whatever can happen to man has happened so often that little remains for fancy or invention. We have all been born; we have most of us been married; and so many have died before us that our deaths can supply but few materials for a poet. ... Even war and conquest, however splendid, suggest no new images; the triumphal chariot of a victorious monarch can be decked only with those ornaments that have graced his predecessors."

"Not only matter but time is wanting. The poem must not be delayed till the occasion is forgotten."
The composition must be dispatched while conversation is yet busy and admiration fresh; and haste is to be made lest some other event should lay hold upon mankind."

Because occasional verse interests only certain people at certain times, it can never hope to be added to the world's treasury of poetry. It therefore sinks into oblivion when the event which has occasioned it, has been forgotten. Prior's occasional poems "necessarily lost part of their value, as their occasions, being less remembered, raised less emotion."

Johnson cites Savage's yearly panegyric to the queen as an example of occasional poetry whose worthlessness was recognized later on even by the author himself. "Of some of them he had himself so low an opinion that he intended to omit them in the collection of poems, for which he printed proposals and solicited subscriptions."

Political events also serve as occasions for literary contest. It is difficult to find the entire truth in poems occasioned by such events, for two factors serve to bias the author's mind: party prejudice, and personal interest. Johnson severely blames Milton for his attitude during the Puritan revolution; for a man as keen as Milton should have seen the injustice of Cromwell's claims; but "Milton, having now tasted the honey of publick
employment, would not return to hunger and philosophy." I-116
It is not strange, therefore, if many men of less moral
courage than Milton, try to attract public attention and
to win political favor.

With a change of government, comes a change of
subject-matter for occasional verse. "When the king was I,
restored Dryden, like the other panegyrists of usurpation, 334
changed his opinion, or his profession, and published
Aenaeas Redux, a poem on the happy restoration and return
of his most sacred Majesty King Charles the Second."

Johnson scorns authors who are servile enough to
try thus to ingratiate themselves with potentates, instead
of being guided by the maxims of truth. "It is not
possible to read, without some contempt and indignation, I,
poems of the same author, ascribing the highest degree 270-
of 'power and piety' to Charles the First, then transfer-
ring the same 'power and piety' to Oliver Cromwell; now
inviting Oliver to take the Crown, and then congratulating
Charles the Second on his recovered right. Neither
Cromwell nor Charles could value his testimony as the
effect of conviction, or receive his praises as effusions
of reverence; they could consider them but as the labour
of invention and the tribute of dependence."

Johnson pays high tribute to Pope, for refusing to
stoop to the writing of occasional verse. "His effusions were always voluntary, and his subjects chosen by himself. His independence secured him from drudging at a task, and labouring upon a barren topick: he never exchanged praise for money, nor opened a shop of condolence or congratulation. His poems, therefore, were scarce every temporary. He suffered coronations and royal marriages to pass without a song, and derived no opportunities from recent events, nor any popularity from the accidental disposition of his readers."

Almost akin to the composing of encomiastic and occasional verses, is the writing of epitaphs. Johnson says it is useless to define an epitaph; for "every one knows that it is an inscription of a tomb. ... It is indeed commonly panegyrical, because we are seldom distinguished with a stone but by our friends." The first requisite that Johnson insists upon, is that an epitaph should contain the name of the deceased. He criticises Pope's epitaphs on Sir William Trumbal and on Mrs. Corbet, because in each case the name is omitted. "The end of an epitaph is to convey some account of the dead; and to what purpose is anything told of him whose name is concealed?" He praises the following line from Pope's epitaph on the Hon. Simon Harcourt, because of the "art-
ful introduction of the name, which is inserted with a III, peculiar felicity."

"If Pope must tell what Harcourt cannot speak."

Besides insisting that the name of the deceased must be contained in the epitaph, Johnson strenuously objects to any superfluous matter, introduced for the sake of supplying a rhyme or of filling in a line. He criticises Pope's epitaph on Charles Earl of Dorset, because "the first distich contains a kind of information which III, few would want, that the man for whom the tomb was erected 'died'." In the epitaph on Sir William Trumbal, he objects to the line:

"An honest courtier, yet a patriot too";
because "there is no opposition between an honest courtier and a patriot: for an honest courtier cannot but be III, patriot."

Similarly he finds fault with the epitaph on III, James Coraggs, Esq., because "there is a redundancy of 260 words in the first couplet: it is superfluous to tell of him who was sincere, true, and faithful, that he was in honour clear."

He also criticises the above epitaph for joining in the same inscription Latin and English. "If either language be preferable to the other, let that only be used,
for no reason can be given why part of the information should be given in one tongue and part in another. ... Such an epitaph resembles the conversation of a foreigner, who tells part of his meaning by words, and conveys part by signs."

Finally, Johnson bars mythological allusions from epitaphs. Pope's inscription for the tomb of Mr. Rowe contains the words: "Peace to thy shade"; which Johnson considers "too mythological to be admitted into a Christian temple. ... Let fiction, at least, cease with life, and let us be serious over the grave."

Johnson says that an epitaph "ought not to be longer than common holders may be expected to have leisure and patience to peruse." In the above few short epitaphs written by Pope, he finds so many faults, chiefly because the author was laboring upon barren topics. Johnson candidly admits that epitaphs are, however, "not the proper subjects of poetry, and whenever friendship or any other motive obliges a poet to write on such subjects, he must be forgiven if he sometimes wanders in generalities and utters the same praises over different tombs."

In the writing of encomiastic and occasional verses, as well as in the composing of epitaphs, the author either
consciously or unconsciously wanders from the truth in an endeavor to please. The situation is quite the opposite in the writing of burlesque, in which the author purposely violates truth, by exaggerating certain characteristics, in order to bring them into prominent notice. "Burlesque consists in a disproportion between the style and the sentiments, or between the adventitious sentiments and the fundamental subject. It therefore, like all bodies compounded of heterogeneous parts, contains in it a principle of corruption. All disproportion is unnatural; and from what is unnatural we can derive only the pleasure which novelty produces. We admire it awhile as a strange thing; but when it is no longer strange, we perceive its deformity."

Because of its very nature, burlesque generally deals with subjects of local and temporary interest. Therefore, it cannot hope to be perpetuated to posterity the same as are poems dealing with universal truths. Because of this fact, Johnson recognizes the perishableness of Butler's "Hudibras," in which "the manners, being founded on opinions, are temporary and local, and therefore become every day less intelligible and less striking. ... Such manners as depend upon standing relations and general passions are co-extended with the race of man; but
those modifications of life and peculiarities of practice
which are the progeny of error and perverseness, or at
best of some accidental influence or transient persuasion,
must perish with their parents."

Similarly parodies, or verses written in imitation
of other poems, cannot endure. Johnson says that composi-
tions like West's *Imitations of Spenser* are not to be reckoned among the great achievements of intellect, be-
cause their effect is local and temporary; they appeal
not to reason or passion, but to memory, and presuppose
an accidental or artificial state of mind."

Johnson excludes from the realms of true poetry
the above-mentioned types of verse, because their content
is a deviation from the truth. There is another class
of literature, however, which he thinks unsuited to poetry,
not because its subject-matter is falsehood, but because
the truth contained therein is so grand and majestic, that
it surpasses all attempts at poetic expression and inter-
pretation. This class includes all contemplative sacred
verse. "Sacred History has been always read with sub-
missive reverence, and an imagination over-awed and con-
trolled. ... We go with the historian as he goes, and
stop with him when he stops. All amplification is frivolous and vain: all addition to that which is already sufficient for the purposes of religion seems not only useless, but in some degree profane. ... The miracle of Creation, however it may teem with images, is best described with little diffusion of language: 'He spake the word, and they were made.'

"Let no pious ear be offended if I advance, in opposition to many authorities, that poetical devotion cannot often please. ... Contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul, cannot be poetical. Man admitted to implore the mercy of his Creator and plead the merits of his Redeemer is already in a higher state than poetry can confer."

The truths conveyed by poetry must please the reader by the novel way in which they are presented, as well as by the poetic selection of details. "The topics of devotion are few, and being few are universally known; but few as they are, they can be made no more; they can receive no grace from novelty of sentiment, and very little from novelty of expression.

"Poetry pleases by exhibiting an idea more grateful to the mind than things themselves afford. This effect proceeds from the display of those parts of
nature which attract, and the concealment of those which repel, the imagination: but religion must be shown as it is; suppression and addition equally corrupt it, and such as it is, it is known already. ... Omnipotence cannot be exalted; Infinity cannot be amplified; Perfection cannot be improved. ... The ideas of Christian Theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestick for ornament; to recommend them by tropes and figures is to magnify by a concave mirror the sidereal hemisphere."

Johnson recognizes the earnest efforts of authors who have attempted to write contemplative works of piety in verse; and he regrets that their zeal has been so mis-directed. Denham, "a man of piety, ... consecrated his poetical powers to religion, and made a metrical version of the psalms of David. In this attempt he has failed; but in sacred poetry who has succeeded?"

Blackmore wished to gratify the desire of the lovers of musical devotion, and so he produced "A new Version of the Psalms of David, fitted to the Tunes used in Churches." Johnson remarks that "Blackmore's name must be added to those of many others who, by the same attempt, have obtained only the praise of meaning well." Regarding Fenton's "Paraphrase on Isaiah," he says that "nothing very
favourable can be said. Sublime and solemn prose gains little by a change to blank verse."

As much as Johnson admires Dr. Isaac Watts, yet he includes the latter's devotional verse in the group of unsatisfactory poetry; for the "paucity of its topics enforces perpetual repetition, and the sanctity of the matter rejects the ornaments of figurative diction. It is sufficient for Watts to have done better than others what no man has done well."

Johnson criticises John Philips for planning a poem on "The Last Day," -"a subject on which no mind can hope to equal expectation." In discussing Young's first great performance on the same theme, "The Last Day," Johnson admits that many paragraphs are noble and that few are mean; yet, he says, the reader is disappointed because "the thought of the Last Day makes every man more than poetical by spreading over his mind a general obscurity of sacred horror, that oppresses distinction and disdains expression."

Johnson has no patience, whatever, with authors who touch upon sacred subjects in a familiar and trifling manner. He censures both Donne and Cowley for "that familiarity with religious images, and that light allusion to sacred things, by which readers far short
of sanctity are frequently offended; and which would not be born in the present age, when devotion, perhaps not more fervent is more delicate." He stoutly refuses to tolerate any mingling of mythology and religion. He blames Milton severely for being guilty of this gross fault in his "Lycidas." "With these trifling fictions are mingled the most awful and sacred truths, such as ought never to be polluted with such irreverent combinations. The shepherd likewise is now a feeder of sheep, and afterwards an ecclesiastical pastor, a superintendent of a Christian flock. Such equivocations are always unskilful; but they are indecent, and at least approach to impiety, of which, however, I believe the writer not to have been conscious." Dryden, too, is censured because he "sometimes connects religion and fable too closely without distinction." Similarly, some of Yalden's hymns are criticised because they "are partly mythological and partly religious, and therefore not suitable to each other." Even Pope does not escape the severity of Johnson's censure. In his works are found "many idle and indecent applications of sentences taken from the Scriptures; a mode of merriment which a good man dreads for its profaneness, and a witty man disdains for its easiness and vulgarity."

Therefore, because they do not convey the simple
and entire truth to the mind of the reader, Johnson ex-
cludes from true poetry, as we have seen, the following
types of verse: fiction, myth, pastorals, encomiastic and
occasional verses, epitaphs, burlesques, poems written in
imitation of other authors, and contemplative sacred verse.

2. TYPES OF VERSE APPROVED

Not all of Johnson's criticism of poetical types,
however, is disparaging and condemnatory. On the other
hand, Johnson highly approves of poetry which teaches
universal truths derived from a deep understanding of
morality, a sympathetic interpretation of humanity, and
a thorough knowledge of external nature. It is Johnson's
opinion that the type of literature that most nearly
approaches this ideal of poetic perfection, is the epic.
"By the general consent of criticks the first praise of I,
genius is due to the writer of an epick poem, as it
requires an assemblage of all the powers which are singly
sufficient for other compositions. ... Epick poetry
undertakes to teach the most important truths by the
most pleasing precepts, and therefore relates some great
event in the most affecting manner. History must
supply the writer with the rudiments of narration, which
he must improve and exalt by a nobler art, must
animate by dramatick energy, and diversify by
retrospection and anticipation; morality must teach him
the exact bounds and different shades of vice and virtue;
from policy and the practice of life he has to learn the
discriminations of character and the tendency of the
passions, either single or combined. ... To put these
materials to poetical use is required an imagination
capable of painting nature and realizing fiction."

The greatest epic in the English language is Milton's
"Paradise Lost"; and, according to Johnson's estimate, it
is second to Homer's, only because it does not precede
the Greek epic. "Paradise Lost." ... considered with re-
spect to design, may claim the first place, and with
respect to performance the second, among the productions
of the human mind." "Milton cannot be said to have con-
trived the structure of an epic poem. ... But of all
borrowers from Homer Milton is perhaps the least indebted;
... and his work is not the greatest of heroick poems,
only because it is not the first."

Milton's epic conveys truth based upon morality,
humanity, and sacred history. As an author, he was well
qualified to discuss each; for by careful study he had
become master of his subject. "Of his moral sentiments
it is hardly praise to affirm that they excel those of
all other poets; for this superiority he was indebted to
his acquaintance with the sacred writings. The ancient
epick poets, wanting the light of Revelation, were very unskilful teachers of virtue; their principal characters may be great, but they are not amiable. ... In Milton every line breathes sanctity of thought and purity of manners, except when the train of narration requires the introduction of the rebellious spirits; and even they are compelled to acknowledge their subjection to God."

His character-study is truthful. "Great events I, can be hastened or retarded only by persons of elevated dignity. Before the greatness displayed in Milton's poem all other greatness shrinks away. The weakest of his agents are the highest and noblest of human beings, the original parents of mankind."

The subject-matter of "Paradise Lost" is "the history of a miracle, of Creation and Redemption; it dis- I, plays 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."

b. Didactic Poetry

Another type of poetry which Johnson commends, is
didactic poetry, "of which the great purpose is instruction." Of course, he considers it far inferior to the epic for the field of each individual poem is very limited; however, within that limited field, the poet must be master of his subject. On the other hand, there is scarcely any subject concerning which the human mind wishes information, which Johnson does not think adapted to didactic poetry. He praises didactic poems discussing the art of criticism, science, and even religious or theological precepts; but in each case, he insists that the author must give truthful information on the subject. The poem which he considers a model example of didactic poetry, is Pope's "Essay on Criticism"; for "if he had written nothing else it would have placed him among the first criticks and the first poets, as it exhibits every mode of excellence that can embellish or dignify didactick composition, selection of matter, novelty of arrangement, justness of precept, splendour of illustration, and propriety of digression."

Johnson does not spare Pope's didactic poetry, however, when the latter attempts to teach something which he himself does not thoroughly understand. He criticizes Pope's "Essay on Man," which "affords an egregious instance of the predominance of genius, the dazzling splendour of imagery, and the seductive powers of eloquence."
Never was penury of knowledge and vulgarity of sentiment so happily disguised." "Thus he tells us, in the first III, Epistle, that from the nature of the Supreme Being may be deduced an order of beings such as mankind. ... He finds out that these beings must be 'somewhere,' and that 'all the question is whether man be in a wrong place.' ... But what is meant by 'somewhere' and 'place' and 'wrong place' it had been vain to ask Pope, who probably had never asked himself."

Modern critics may be tempted to exclude from poetic recognition such a work as J. Philips's "Cider," because of the choice of such a matter-of-fact subject. However, because its purpose is to give truthful instruction, Johnson gives it "this peculiar praise, that it is grounded in truth; that the precepts which it contains are exact and just, and that it is therefore at once a book of entertainment and of science." He also quotes Miller, "the great gardener and botanist whose expression was, that there were many books written on the same subject in prose, which do not contain so much truth as that poem." Similarly he approves of Somerville's didactic poem, "The Chase," for sportsmen declare that the author wrote "with great intelligence on his subject, which is the first requisite to excellence."
Although Johnson strenuously opposes the writing of contemplative sacred verse, because the majesty and awful greatness of sacred truths are beyond poetic interpretation; nevertheless, he approves of didactic poems dealing with religious truths. "The doctrines of religion may indeed be defended in a didactic poem. ... The subject of the disputation is not piety, but the motives to piety."

Closely allied to the didactic poem is criticism. The purpose of each is to instruct. The subject-matter of the former may be art, science, or theology; that of the latter is the study and appreciation of literary composition. Criticism, as a study of composition, prescribes rules and theorems; as an appreciation of literature, it recognizes beauties as well as detects faults. Johnson considers Dryden as the father of English criticism, for he is the writer "who first taught us to determine upon principles the merit of composition." "The criticism of Dryden is the criticism of a poet; not a dull collection of theorems, nor a rude detection of faults, which perhaps the censor was not able to have committed; but a gay and vigorous dissertation, where delight is mingled with instruction, and where the author proves his right of judgement by his power of performance."
Indeed, his criticisms were so effective, that in a conversation with Swift, Dryden said "that he regretted the success of his own instructions, and found his readers made suddenly too skilful to be easily satisfied."

A poet, in order to make a truthful criticism, must have a thorough knowledge of the particular work under discussion, as well as a sympathetic understanding of the author and of his times. Johnson criticises Addison's "Musae Anglicanae," because "in this poem there is a very confident and discriminative character of Spenser, whose work he had then never read. So little sometimes is criticism the effect of judgement."

Furthermore, Johnson declares that "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."

The critic expresses without malevolence, his just opinions of literary compositions. The satirist, on the other hand, holds up abuses and error to reprobation and ridicule. Johnson does not approve of all kinds of satire, for he recognizes the selfish and revengeful use some authors make of this weapon. However, he does
admit that under certain conditions even satire may be useful and effective. "All truth is valuable, and satirical criticism may be considered as useful when it rectifies error and improves judgement: he that refines the publick taste is a publick benefactor."

Unusual as it may seem, Johnson finds that Pope made an effective use of satire in the "Rape of the Lock"; for "the purpose of the Poet is, as he tells us, to laugh at 'the little unguarded follies of the female sex.'... The freaks, and humors, and spleen, and vanity of women. ... embroil families in discord and fill houses with disquiet. ... It has been well observed that the misery of man proceeds not from any single crush of overwhelming evil, but from small vexations continually repeated."

Johnson, however, cites more instances of the abuse of satire than of its effective use. Even though Pope assures both his readers and himself that the design of "The Dunciad" was moral, yet Johnson remains unconvinced. "The first motive was the desire of revenging the contempt with which Theobald had treated his Shakespeare, and regaining the honour which he had lost, by crushing his opponent. Theobald was not of bulk enough to fill a poem, and therefore it was necessary to find other
enemies with other names, at whose expense he might divert the publick."

Johnson does not tolerate the ridicule of any misfortune or distress. He severely censures Butler for lampooning Denham because of temporary lunacy. "I know not ... what provocation incited Butler to do that which no provocation can excuse." When Miller ridiculed Savage's misfortunes, and depicted him as the distressed poet who had but one coat, Johnson scorned this taunt as "a mean insult"; even though Savage in his more prosperous days, had himself satirized others less fortunate than himself. Now Savage "very easily discovered that distress was not a proper subject for merriment, or topick of invective. He was then able to discern that, if misery be the effect of virtue, it ought to be reverenced; if of ill-fortune, to be pitied; and if of vice, not to be insulted, because it is perhaps itself a punishment adequate to the crime by which it was produced. And the humanity of that man can deserve no panegyrick who is capable of reproaching a criminal in the hands of the executioner."

Just as Johnson considers satire a proper weapon if employed in the cause of moral truth, so he likewise
approves of controversial verse if it is used to refute error. He has enumerated the usual characteristics of a writer arguing in verse, in the following description of Collier: "He was formed a controvertist with diction vehement and pointed; ... with unconquerable pertinacity; with wit in the highest degree keen and sarcastick; and with all those powers exalted and invigorated by just confidence in his cause."

Learning is the first requisite of a controvertist; for the truth of any case cannot be presented, unless the writer is thoroughly acquainted with both sides of the question. Johnson censures William King, who mingled in the controversy between Boyle and Bentley, because he was "one of those who tried what Wit could perform in opposition to Learning, on a question which Learning alone could decide." Although Shenstone's "Rural Elegance" has irregular lines, and although thoughts are diffused with too much verbosity, yet Johnson says that it cannot be denied "to contain both philosophical argument and poetical spirit."

Johnson sees the danger, however, of giving expression to personal grievances during a controversy; for "controvertists cannot long retain their kindness for each other." Controversy then loses its dignity, and can no
longer be approved; for it does not fulfill its moral purpose of refuting error and of supporting truth. An illustrious example of this, is the controversy between Milton and Salmasius, who wrote respectively the "Defence of the People," and the "Defence of the King." After the publication of the first articles, Milton's supreme pleasure was to "tax his adversary, so renowned for criticism, with vitious Latin." Then followed a controversy on the use of the Latin word "Persona." Finally, "as Salmasius reproached Milton with losing his eyes in the quarrel, Milton delighted himself with the belief that he had shortened Salmasius's life; and both perhaps with more malignity than reason. Salmasius died at the Spa, Sept. 3, 1653; and, as controvertists are commonly said to be killed by their last dispute, Milton was flattered with the credit of destroying him."

At best, controversial poetry receives only transient recognition. Although Johnson approves of it when it is used to refute error, yet he himself admits that "books of this kind seldom live long, when interest and resentment have ceased."

Many critics do not attribute poetic genius to a translator, because the art of translating does not demand
of the writer the same degree of originality as the art of writing poetry. Johnson takes issue with such in considering translation a legitimate field of poetry. In discussing Pope's version of the "Iliad," he says that if Pope had given the world nothing else, "the name of poet must have been allowed him; if the writer of the Iliad were to class his successors he would assign a very high place to his translator, without requiring any other evidence of genius."

A translation must satisfy certain requirements, however, to be poetic: it must be truthful both in regard to content and to style. But first of all, the original poet should be such "as may deserve a translation; then he who intends to translate him should endeavor to understand him; ... and finally the style of the original should be copied in its elevation and depression." In order to give a truthful rendering of the original, the first translators copied word for word, and line for line. "Ben Jonson thought it necessary to copy Horace almost word by word; Feltham, his contemporary and adversary, considers it as indispensably requisite in a translation to give line for line. It is said that Sandys ... has struggled hard to comprise every book of his English Metamorphoses in the same number of verses with the original."
Then the translators, desirous of freeing themselves from this servile drudgery, went to the other extreme, and gave merely the loosest paraphrase of the original. "Holyday had had nothing in view but to shew that he understood his author. ... Cowley ... asserted his liberty, and spread his wings so boldly that he left his authors." Johnson does not approve of either extreme, but agrees with Dryden, who fixed the limits of poetical liberty in the following rule: "Translation ... is not so loose as paraphrase, nor so close as metaphor." 

Not only does Johnson demand that the translator render truthfully the author's thought, but he insists that the former exhibit faithfully the style of the original. "He is to exhibit his author's thoughts in such a dress of diction as the author would have given them, had his language been English: rugged magnificence is not to be softened; hyperbolical ostentation is not to be repressed, nor sententious affectation to have its points blunted. A translator is to be like his author; it is not his business to excel him."

Johnson approves of those types of poetry which convey truths to the mind of the reader. In as much as narrative poetry sometimes conveys a moral truth, Johnson
permits its use either as a fable or as a tale. He distinguishes a fable from a tale as follows: "A Fable... seems to be in its genuine state a narrative in which beings irrational, and sometimes inanimate, ... are for the purpose of moral instruction feigned to act and speak with human interests and passions." The only requisite of a narrative poem that Johnson mentions, is rapidity of action.

Another type of poetry which Johnson barely suggests is descriptive verse. He approves of such descriptions as convey information; and strange to say, he does not object to the scientist's accompanying the poet on a ramble. He approves of James Thomson's descriptions in "The Seasons," where both the poet and the scientist describe "the whole magnificence of Nature, whether pleasing or dreadful. ... The poet leads us through the appearances of things as they are successively varied by the vicissitudes of the year, and imparts to us so much of his own enthusiasm that our thoughts expand with his imagery and kindle with his sentiments. Nor is the naturalist without his part in the entertainment; for he is assisted to recollect and to combine, and to arrange his discoveries, and to amplify the sphere of his contemplation."
Johnson censures Cowley for giving inferences, instead of images, and for showing "not what may be supposed to have been seen, but what thoughts the sight might have suggested." He also criticises Milton's descriptions because they were not copied from the original form. "He saw Nature, as Dryden expresses it, 'through the spectacles of books'; and on most occasions calls learning to his assistance."

Descriptive poetry, then, according to Johnson's theory, should be scientific, - at least instructive; it should not be imaginative nor contemplative.

One type of contemplative poetry meets with Johnson's approval, however, because it has a universal appeal; and that is the elegy. He praises Shenstone's conception of an elegy as very judicious and discriminating. The elegy is, according to Shenstone's account, "the effusion of a contemplative mind, sometimes plaintive, and always serious, and therefore superior to the glitter of slight ornaments." Johnson insists that universal turth is always a suitable subject for poetry; hence the elegy is an approved poetic form. "The Church-yard abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo."
He praises enthusiastically even Gray's "Elegy," although he is none too kindly disposed toward Gray; and he generously says: "Had Gray written often thus it had been vain to blame, and useless to praise him."

Johnson believes that the "character of the elegy is gentleness and tenuity." Therefore he warmly commends Edmund Smith's elegy on the death of John Philips, "which justice must place among the best elegies which our language can shew, an elegant mixture of fondness and admiration, of dignity and softness."

Despite his acceptance of the form, Johnson does not rank the elegy as the highest kind of poetry, for the field is so narrow and so familiar, that "it is impossible to travel in it without treading in the foot-steps of those who have gone before."

There still remains a large field of poetry, the drama, which Johnson discusses; not, however, at so great a length as most readers might expect. Even when he does criticise the drama, he does so destructively rather than constructively, as in the case of the epic. Johnson's age was not a dramatic age; moreover, the Restoration period preceding Johnson's time produced so many licentious plays, that Johnson has no sympathy what-
ever with the mass of dramatic production.

Just as in other poetry, so here also Johnson demands that truth be the keynote of the drama. In a historical play, he does not insist upon fidelity to minor facts and details, but rather allows the dramatist a certain amount of poetic liberty. He goes on to advise the playwright, however, to choose for his subject-matter, characters and events far removed in point of time; otherwise any deviation from faithful representation of even the slightest details will offend the reader acquainted with the facts. He disapproves of Savage's choice of content in "Sir Thomas Overbury," a story well adapted to the stage, though perhaps not far enough removed from the present age, to admit properly the fictions necessary to complete the plan; for the mind, which naturally loves truth, is always most offended with the violation of those truths of which we are most certain, and we, of course, conceive those facts most certain which approach nearest to our own time."

On the other hand, Johnson allows no exception to his demands for moral truth. For this reason he censures Dryden most severely; although he recognizes Dryden as the greatest poet of his age, and esteems his genius even above that of Pope's. The drama, "All for Love,"
meets with disapproval, because of the fact that in this play Dryden has committed "one fault equal to many, though rather moral than critical, that by admitting the romanti
cick omnipotence of Love, he has recommended as laudable and worthy of imitation that conduct which through all ages the good have censured as vicious, and the bad despised as foolish."

He disapproves of Dryden's comedies, and he does not forgive Dryden when the latter tries to excuse himself; for "when he cannot disown the grossness of one of his plays, he declares that he knows not any law that prescribes morality to a comick poet." Johnson very sternly reproves him in the following lines: "Of the mind that can trade in corruption, and can deliberately pollute itself with ideal wickedness for the sake of spreading the contagion in society, I wish not to conceal or excuse the depravity. Such degradation of the dignity of genius, such abuse of superlative abilities, cannot be contemplated but with grief and indignation. What consolation can be had Dryden has afforded, by living to repent, and to testify his repentance."

In a similar way Johnson condemns Congreve's plays, since it is acknowledged with universal conviction that the perusal of his works will make no man better; and
that their ultimate effect is to represent pleasure in alliance with vice, and to relax those obligations by which life ought to be regulated."

Johnson distinguishes between several types of drama: tragedy, comedy, opera, and masque. In tragedy, Johnson does not insist upon the observance of the unities of time and place, since in real life such crucial events do not generally happen in the same place and on the same day. On the whole, he does not agree with Dennis's criticism of Addison's tragedy "Cato"; but when the former attacks the probability of the action and the reasonableness of the plan, because of the strict adherence to time and place regulations, Johnson considers him least resistible. "Every critical reader must remark that Addison has, with a scrupulosity almost unexampled on the English stage, confined himself in time to a single day, and in place to rigorous unity. The scene never changes; and the whole action of the play passes in the great hall of Cato's house at Utica. Much therefore is done in the hall, for which any other place had been more fit; and this impropriety affords Dennis many hints of merriment and opportunities of triumph."

Johnson does insist nevertheless, upon unity of action. He criticises Congreve's tragedy, "The Mourning
Bride," because "the plot is busy and intricate and the events take hold on the attention, but, except a very few passages, we are rather amused with noise and perplexed with stratagem than entertained with any true delineation of natural characters."

In comedy, on the other hand, Johnson makes but few demands. "As the lighter species of dramatick poetry professes the imitation of common life, of real manners, and daily incidents, it apparently presupposes a familiar knowledge of many characters and exact observation of the passing world."

Johnson does not consider the opera of a very high order of literary merit. He tolerates the ballad opera because it has proved its own merit by continued popularity. "Much, however, must be allowed to the author of a new species of composition, though it be not of the highest kind. We owe to Gay the Ballad Opera; a mode of comedy which at first was supposed to delight only by its novelty, but has now by the experience of half a century been found so well accommodated to the disposition of a popular audience that it is likely to keep long possession of the stage." He does not even tolerate the Italian opera, but calls it "an exotick and irrational entertainment, which has been always combated and always has prevailed."
Another one of the lighter species of dramatic poetry is the masque. Since by its very nature it is light and airy, Johnson insists that it be treated accordingly. He finds Milton's "Comus" too heavy; "it is a drama in the epick style, inelegantly splendid, and tediously instructive." However, even though it is a lesser type of drama, yet truth must be the keynote. Again Johnson criticises "Comus," because as "a drama it is deficient. The action is not probable. A Masque, in those parts where supernatural intervention is admitted, must indeed be given up to all the freaks of imagination; but so far as the action is merely human it ought to be reasonable."

True poetry is that which conveys truth to the mind of the reader. In order to satisfy this determining poetic requisite, Johnson insists that it must teach truths derived from one or all of the following three sources: a moral understanding of right and wrong; a sympathetic interpretation of humanity; and a thorough knowledge of external nature. Since in the epic the reader finds truth from these three sources most effectually blended, Johnson considers the epic as the highest type of literature. In didactic poetry, in critical, satirical, and controversial verses, as well as in narrative, descriptive, and elegiac poetry, he finds one or the other source predominant.
In a translation, of course, he finds the characteristics of the original; and therefore Johnson's first caution to the translator, is to seek a work that may deserve a translation. In the drama, tragedy is greater than comedy or any of its varieties, because it affords better opportunities of presenting the truth derived from the combined three-fold source. Truth, therefore, is the touchstone by means of which Johnson estimates poetic merit.

II

AS RESPECTS PLEASURE

Not alone, however, is the concern of poetry with truth. Johnson says that "poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth"; for "we love better to be pleased than to be taught." Therefore, "that book is good in vain which the reader throws away. He only is the master who keeps the mind in pleasing captivity; whose pages are perused again; and whose conclusion is perceived with an eye of sorrow, such as the traveller casts upon departing day." "To a thousand cavils one answer is sufficient; the purpose of a writer is to be read, and the criticism which would destroy the power of pleasing
must be blown aside." "For to what use can the work be criticised that will not be read?" "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. ... Works of imagination excel by their allurement and delight; by their power of attracting and detaining the attention." "He who pleases many must have some species of merit"; for "the end of poetry is pleasure."

In spite of the fact that Johnson attributes every intellectual excellence to Milton's great epic, yet he deplores the absence of the power of attracting and detaining the attention. "The want of human interest is always felt. _Paradise Lost_ is one of the books which the reader admires and lays down, and forgets to take up again. ... Its perusal is a duty rather than a pleasure. We read Milton for instruction, retire harassed and overburdened, and look elsewhere for recreation; we desert our master, and seek for companions." However, the literary world has been taught how to appreciate Milton's masterpiece, chiefly through the criticisms of Addison; for, "by the blandishments of gentleness and facility he has made Milton an universal favourite with whom readers of every class think it necessary to be
Similarly, Prior's poem "Solomon" contains much knowledge and much thought; it has polished elegance, dignified with splendor and sublimity. To this poem Prior entrusted the protection of his name. He "perceived in it many excellences, and did not discover that it wanted that without which all others are of small avail, the power of engaging attention and alluring curiosity."

Not only in original poems, but in translations as well, Johnson demands this power of pleasing. Hence, although he cannot call Addison's translations scholarly because they are too licentiously paraphrastical, yet he highly approves of them. "They are ... for the most part smooth and easy, and, what is the first excellence of a translator, such as may be read with pleasure by those who do not know the originals."

1. PLEASURES OF THE MIND

Johnson distinguishes between two kinds of pleasures: the pleasures of the mind; and the pleasures of the heart. Besides the epic, the types of poetry in which he is most interested are didactic, controversial, and critical verses. All of these are predominantly intellectual in nature; yet he insists that all poems must afford pleasure to the
reader. How can purely intellectual poems please?

Johnson suggests two sources of intellectual pleasure, novelty and variety.

"The pleasures of the mind imply something sudden and unexpected; that which elevates must always surprise. What is perceived by slow degrees may gratify us with the consciousness of improvement, but will never strike with the sense of pleasure." "Novelty is the great source of pleasure," and it is "always grateful where it gives no pain." "The world has but little new"; and therefore "the highest praise of genius is original invention."

The chief reason that Johnson praises so highly Pope's "Rape of the Lock," is because of the twofold novelty exhibited in this poem; for in this work "new things are made familiar, and familiar things are made new." Pope "always considered the intermixture of the machinery with the action as his most successful exertion of poetical art. He indeed could never afterwards produce anything of such unexampled excellence. Those performances, which strike with wonder, are combinations of skilful genius with happy casualty; and it is not likely that any felicity, like the discovery of a new race
of preternatural agents, should happen twice to the same man."

Since the "essence of poetry is invention," Johnson recognizes poetic genius in such authors as Denham, Congreve, Gay, Savage, James Thomson, and Young. Denham's poem "Cooper's Hill" is the work "that confers upon him the rank and dignity of an original author, ... the author of a species of composition that may be denominated local poetry. ... To trace a new scheme of poetry has in itself a very high claim to praise, and its praise is yet more when it is apparently copied by Garth and Pope."

"Congreve has merit of the highest kind: he is an original writer, who borrowed neither the models of his plot nor the manner of his dialogue."

Gay is praised as the inventor of the ballad opera. "Whether this new drama was the product of judgement or of luck the praise of it must be given to the inventor; and there are many writers read with more reverence to whom such merit of originality cannot be attributed."

Johnson generally does not praise panegyrics, for the paths therein are so beaten that it is difficult to travel in them without treading in others' footsteps. However, he places above censure Savage's panegyric on the death of the queen; for by "transferring the mention of
her death to her birthday he has formed a happy combina-
tion of topics, which any other man would have thought
it very difficult to connect in one view, but which he
has united in such a manner that the relation between
them appears natural." Indeed, Johnson ranks Savage's
poem "among the best that the death of princes has
produced."

One of the very few nature poems that Johnson
mentions, is Thomson's poem, "The Seasons." Because of
the novelty of this poem, Johnson considers Thomson"en-
titled to one praise of the highest kind: his mode of
thinking and of expressing his thoughts is original. ... The reader of The Seasons wonders that he never saw
before what Thomson shews him, and that he never yet has
felt what Thomson impresses."

Although Johnson does not generally approve of
blank verse; yet he praises unreservedly Young's blank
verse and his rhyming lines. "His versification is his
own. ... He picks up no hemistichs, he copies no favourite expressions; he seems to have laid up no stores of thought
or diction, but to owe all to the fortuitous suggestion
of the present moment. ... He seems never to have studied
prosody, nor to have had any direction but from his own
ear. But, with all his defects, he was a man of genius
and a poet."

Very closely connected with novelty is variety. The former attracts the attention of the reader; the latter retains it. "Uniformity must tire at last, though it be uniformity of excellence. We love to expect; and when expectation is disappointed or gratified, we want to be again expecting. For this impatience of the present, whoever would please must make provision." Whoever does not provide against this impatience of the present is guilty of tediousness, which is indeed "the most fatal of all faults; negligences or errors are single and local, but tediousness pervades the whole. ... Unhappily this pernicious failure is that which an author is least able to discover. We are seldom tiresome to ourselves; and the act of composition fills and delights the mind with change of language and succession of images." Therefore, every poem, in order to afford intellectual pleasure by attracting and detaining the attention, must excel both in novelty and in variety.

2. PLEASURES OF THE HEART

Johnson enjoys intellectual poetry, such as didactic verse, criticism, or controversy; therefore he
prefers the pleasures of the mind to those of the heart. In those types of poetry, however, in which the human passions are portrayed or expressed, such as in the drama and in the lyric, he does insist that they be truthfully presented. The drama, much more than any other kind of poetry, deals with the passions of the human heart; and therefore its success depends upon a strong emotional appeal. Deep thought and careful reasoning may be lacking; but an appeal to the emotions is indispensable. Otway's play, "The Orphan," was exhibited in 1680. "This is one of the few plays that keep possession of the stage, and has pleased for almost a century through all the vicissitudes of dramatick fashion. ... Its whole power is upon the affections, for it is not written with much comprehension of thought or elegance of expression. But if the heart is interested, many other beauties may be wanting, yet not be missed." Another successful drama is Rowe's play, "Jane Shore." "This play, consisting chiefly of domestick scenes and private distress, lays hold upon the heart. ... This therefore is one of those pieces which we still welcome on the stage."

On the other hand, certain dramas have failed because they presented rather a succession of sentiments
than a representation of natural affections, or of any
state probable or possible in this life; for "poetical
pleasure must be such as human imagination can at least
conceive, and poetical terror such as human strength
and fortitude can combat." Addison's tragedy "Cato,"
which Johnson considers the noblest production of his
genius, has been styled rather a poem in dialogue than
a drama. "Nothing here 'excites or assuages emotion;' II,
here is 'no magical power of raising phantastick terror
or wild anxiety.' The events are expected without
solicitude, and are remembered without joy or sorrow. ... 
Neither gods nor men can have much attention; for there
is not one amongst them that strongly attracts either
affection or esteem."

In like manner, Johnson deplores Dryden's defi-
cient dramatic faculties, although he recognizes the
wide range of the latter's poetic abilities. "Perhaps I,
no nation ever produced a writer that enriched his 469
language with such variety of models." Yet, "upon I
occasions that were presented he studied rather than felt, 457
and produced sentiments not such as Nature enforces,
but meditation supplies. With the simple and elemental
passions, as they spring separate in the mind, he seems
not much acquainted." He neither understood nor appre-
ciated love and pathos, - the two fundamental emotions upon which the drama is based. "Dryden's was not one of the 'gentle bosoms:' Love, as it subsists in itself, with no tendency but to the person loved and wishing only for corresponding kindness; such love as shuts out all other interest ... was too soft and subtle to put his faculties in motion. ... He is therefore, with all his variety of excellence, not often pathetick; and had so little sensibility of the power of effusions purely natural, that he did not esteem them in others. Simplicity gave him no pleasure; and for the first part of his life he looked on Otway with contempt, though at last, indeed very late, he confessed that in his play 'there was Nature, which is the chief beauty.'"

Similarly it may be doubted whether James Thomson was much qualified for tragedy; for it "does not appear that he had much sense of the pathetick." Hence, the success of a tragedy depends upon the convincing portrayal of genuine emotions.

In lyric poetry, which is entirely subjective, the poet must experience the emotions which he professes to express; otherwise his verses do not satisfy the first requisite of poetry, since they are not based upon truth:
nor, where there is no pleasure in the writer, will any
be found in him who reads the work. For "the basis of
all excellence is truth; he that professes love ought
to feel its power. Petrarch was a real lover, and
Laura doubtless deserved his tenderness. Of Cowley
we are told by Barnes, ... he in reality was in love
but once, and then never had resolution to tell his
passion." Therefore, Johnson does not value highly
Cowley's lyric, the "Mistress," since the author himself
declared that he wrote love poems only to be considered
a freeman among poets, who must sooner or later pledge
themselves to be true to Love.

Lyric poetry must be based upon actual experiences
of an order calculated to please. Prior, also, was
unsuccessful in his amorous effusions; "for they are not
d dictated by nature or by passion, and have neither
gallantry nor tenderness. They have the coldness of
Cowley without his wit; the dull exercises of a skilful
versifier resolved at all adventures to write something
about Chloe, and trying to be amorous by dint of study."

Johnson insists that love-lyrics must be
emotional; he condemns them if they are cold and passion-
less, because then they are not genuine effusions of the
heart. However, he condemns even more severely those
lyrics which violate truth by exaggeration. Waller's amorous verses he considers sentimental, for they contain "too much love and too many trifles. Little things are made too important; and the Empire of Beauty is represented as exerting its influence further than can be allowed by the multiplicity of human passions and the variety of human wants. Such books therefore may be considered as shewing the world under a false appearance, and, so far as they obtain credit from the young and unexperienced, as misleading expectation and misleading practice."

Yet, strange as it may seem, Johnson does not believe in "poetic inspiration." He is surprised that so great a genius as Milton should have declared that with the advance of the spring he felt the increase of his poetical force. "This dependance of the soul upon the seasons, those temporary and periodical ebbs and flows of intellect, may, I suppose, justly be derided as the fumes of vain imagination. ... Our powers owe much of their energy to our hopes; 'possunt quia posse videntur.'" Although Johnson praises highly Gray's "Elegy," because it makes such a genuine and universal appeal to the human heart, yet he criticises the author for having this peculiarity, "that he had a notion ... that he could not write but at certain times, or at happy moments; a fantastick foppery, to
which my kindness for a man of learning and of virtue wished to have been superior."

**B. JOHNSON'S OPINION REGARDING FORM OF POETRY**

**I AS RESPECTS STYLE**

"Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason." For all this, Johnson maintains that the excellence of poetry must be distinguished, not only by its content, but by its form as well. For "truth indeed is always truth, and reason is always reason; they have an intrinsick and unalterable value, and constitute that intellectual gold which defies destruction: but gold may be so concealed in baser matter that only a chymist can recover it; sense may be so hidden in unrefined and plebeian words that none but philosophers can distinguish it; and both may be so buried in impurities as not to pay the cost of their extraction."

In Dryden's critical works, as well as in Rymer's performances, the content matter is truth; but each writer presents truth in a different way. "With Dryden we are wandering in quest of Truth, whom we find, if we find her
at all, drest in the graces of elegance; and if we miss her, the labour of the pursuit rewards itself: we are led only through fragrance and flowers. Rymer, without taking a nearer, takes a rougher way; every step is to be made through thorns and brambles, and Truth, if we meet her, appears repulsive by her mien and ungraceful by her habit. Dryden's criticism has the majesty of a queen; Rymer's has the ferocity of a tyrant."

Blackmore's poem on "Creation" has two constituent parts: ratiocination and description. Johnson admits that it is difficult to reason in verse, but he maintains that Blackmore not only reasons well, but very often reasons poetically. Moreover, in his descriptive passages, both of life and of nature, "the poet and the philosopher happily co-operate; truth is recommended by elegance, and elegance sustained by truth."

1. CLASSIFICATION OF STYLE

There are two phases of poetic form which Johnson considers: style and versification. "All polished languages have different styles: the concise, the diffuse, the lofty, and the humble." The concise and the diffuse are the antitheses of each other, while the lofty and the humble are opposed to each other. In point of time, the
Concise Style

concise precedes the diffuse. "There is a time when nations emerging from barbarity, and falling into regular subordination, gain leisure to grow wise, and feel the shame of ignorance and the craving pain or unsatisfied curiosity. To this hunger of the mind plain sense is grateful; that which fills the void removes uneasiness, and to be free from pain for a while is pleasure; but repletion generates fastidiousness, a saturated intellect soon becomes luxurious, and knowledge finds no willing reception till it is recommended by artificial diction. Thus it will be found in the progress of learning that in all nations the first writers are simple, and that every age improves in elegance."

The concise style, then, is peculiarly adapted to poems conveying information. Johnson mentions Dryden and Swift as poets who write in this simple, direct way. Dryden's style is always clear and vigorous, yet it is always varied. "Dryden is always 'another and the same;' he does not ... appear to have any art other than that of expressing with clearness what he thinks with vigour." Swift, also found delight in simplicity. He studied purity; and it was his desire to attain an easy and safe conveyance of meaning. "All his verses exemplify his own definition of a good style, they consist of 'proper words in proper places.'" For purposes merely didactic,
when something is to be told that was not known before, Johnson considers the concise style the best mode of expressing thought: "but against that inattention by which known truths are suffered to lie neglected it makes no provision; it instructs, but does not persuade."

Therefore, as nations become more fastidious, poets add touches of luxury and elegance to their poetry. Because of this increased literary demand for poetic beauties, Johnson approves of and applauds Pope's version of the "Iliad." "I suppose many readers of the English Iliad, when they have been touched with some unexpected beauty of the lighter kind, have tried to enjoy it in the original, where, alas! it was not to be found. Homer doubtless owes to his translator many Ovidian graces not exactly suitable to his character; but to have added can be no great crime if nothing be taken away. Elegance is surely to be desired if it be not gained at the expense of dignity."

Here many poets, however, make their fatal mistake; for they gain elegance at the expense, not only of dignity, but even of lucidity and of perspicuity. In James Thomson's poem, "The Seasons," the great defect is want of method. Johnson finds some excuse for it in this poem,
however: because, "of many appearances subsisting all at once, no rule can be given why one should be mentioned before another; yet the memory wants the help of order, and the curiosity is not excited by suspense or expectation." In West's "Institution of the Garter," there is sufficient knowledge of the manners that prevailed in the age to which it referred, as well as great elegance of diction; "but, for want of a process of events, neither knowledge nor elegance preserve the reader from weariness." Similarly, readers of Savage's poem, "The Wanderer," have generally objected "that the disposition of the parts is irregular; that the design is obscure, and the plan perplexed; that the images, however beautiful, succeed each other without order; and that the whole performance is not so much a regular fabric as a heap of shining materials thrown together by accident, which strikes rather with the solemn magnificence of a stupendous ruin than the elegant grandeur of a finished pile."

Young's style is sometimes diffusive and sometimes concise. Johnson criticises his method of composition. "His plan seems to have started in his mind at the present moment, and his thoughts appear the effects of chance, sometimes adverse and sometimes lucky, with very little operation of judgement." In his first great performance,
"The Last Day," many paragraphs are noble, and few are mean, "yet the whole is languid; the plan is too much extended, and a succession of images divides and weakens the general conception."

Of all writers of the diffuse style, Johnson finds none who uses it more successfully than Cowley does in his poem, "The Chronicle," which Johnson considers "a composition unrivalled and alone: such gaiety of fancy, such facility of expression, such a succession of images, and such a dance of words, it is vain to expect except from Cowley. His strength always appears in his agility; his volatility is not the flutter of a light, but the bound of an elastic mind. His levity never leaves his learning behind it; the moralist, the politician, and the critic, mingle their influence even in this airy frolick of genius."

His "Davideis," however, is not so successful; for here "we find wit and learning unprofitably squandered. Attention has no relief; the affections are never moved; we are sometimes surprised, but never delighted, and find much to admire, but little to approve." "The fault of Cowley ... is that of pursuing his thoughts to their last ramifications, by which he loses the grandeur of generality, for of the greatest things the parts are little."
Cowley is a poet who used the diffuse style, sometimes happily, sometimes disastrously. He is one of the most successful exponents of a group of authors known as metaphysical poets. Johnson admits that these were men of learning, but he censures them because it was their whole endeavor to show their learning. He refuses to recognize most of their verses as poetry, because they fail to satisfy his poetic demands both in regard to content and to form. These authors violated truth by their supply of hyperbole, as well as by their violent and unnatural fiction. They afforded no pleasure, for they lacked wit and emotion. Their thoughts were "often new, but seldom natural. ... Their courtship was void of fondness and their lamentations of sorrow. Their wish was only to say what they hoped had never been said before."

The metaphysical poets exaggerated in form as much as in content; they used the diffuse style, as their "attempts were always analytick: they broke every image into fragments, and could no more represent by their slender conceits and laboured particularities the prospects of nature or the scenes of life, than he who dissects a sunbeam with a prism can exhibit the wide effulgence of a summer moon." They could not reach the lofty style; for "sublimity is produced by aggregation, and littleness
by dispersion. Great thoughts are always general, and consist in positions not limited by exceptions, and in descriptions not descending to minuteness."

The lofty style Johnson therefore considers superior to the diffuse style. The greatest example of this mode of writing, is Milton's "Paradise Lost." "Its end is to raise the thoughts above sublunary cares or pleasures.... The characteristic quality of this poem is sublimity. Milton 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: he therefore chose a subject on which he might tire his fancy without the censure of extravagance."

Not every author, however, can reach a lofty style of writing. Certain types of poetry demand sublimity; and therefore the writer tries to invest such poems with this lofty quality. If he is unable to do this naturally,
his verses are labored. Johnson finds Gray's poem, "The Bard," unpleasant, because it fails to reach the sublimity for which it strives. "The mind of the writer seems to work with unnatural violence. ... He has a kind of strutting dignity, and is tall by walking on tiptoe. His art and his struggle are too visible, and there is too little appearance of ease and nature."

Thus the lofty style is used only by a great poetic genius. But not every poetic genius can descend to the humble style. "Milton never learned the art of doing little things with grace; he overlooked the milder excellence of suavity and softness: he was a 'Lion' that had no skill 'in dandling the Kid!'" Therefore, the humble style has its characteristics and its charms quite as distinct as any other mode of writing, even if it is used by lesser poets than those who are masters of the sublime style.

Johnson chooses to term the verses written in the humble style as "pretty poems." "What is little can be but pretty, and by claiming dignity becomes ridiculous." Walsh's poems have more elegance than vigor, and so they seldom rise higher "than to be pretty." In like manner, Sheffield is "at best but pretty. His songs are upon
common topics; he hopes, and grieves, and repents, and

despairs, and rejoices, like any other maker of little

stanzas; to be great he hardly tries; to be gay is hardly

in his power."

Humble poems are usually written by poets not of

the first rank. But genius "now and then produces a

lucky trifle." We still read the Dove of Anacreon

and Sparrow of Catullus, and a writer naturally pleases

himself with a performance which owes nothing to the subject.

But compositions merely pretty have the fate of other

pretty things, and are quitted in time for something useful;

they are flowers fragrant and fair, but of short duration;

or they are blossoms to be valued only as they foretell

fruits."

2. SOURCES OF STYLISTIC EFFECT

A poet, therefore, may choose any one of four styles:

the concise, the diffuse, the lofty, and the humble. In

each case, there are two sources of style: diction and

figures of speech. Johnson is a classicist; he believes in

a poetic diction, both grave and elegant. "Every language

of a learned nation necessarily divides itself into dic-
tion scholastick and popular, grave and familiar, elegant

and gross; and from a nice distinction of these different

parts arises a great part of the beauty of style." Johnson
laments that there was little delicacy of selection among early authors. With the exception of a few favorites of nature, poets did not discriminate between words scholastick and popular; "our speech lay before them in a heap of confusion, and every man took for every purpose what chance might offer him. There was therefore before the time of Dryden no poetical diction: no system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestick use and free from the harshness of terms, appropriated to particular arts. Words too familiar or too remote defeat the purpose of a poet. From those sounds which we hear on small or on coarse occasions, we do not easily receive strong impressions or delightful images; and words to which we are nearly strangers, whenever they occur, draw that attention on themselves which they should transmit to things."

Dryden and Pope used such choice poetic diction, that the entire English world awoke to a new literary appreciation. Pope said that he could select from Dryden's works "better specimens of every mode of poetry than any other English writer could supply." Johnson in turn says that Pope's version of the "Iliad" may be said "to have tuned the English tongue, for since its
appearance no writer, however deficient in other powers, has wanted melody."

Poetic diction excludes words too familiar as well as words too remote. "Language is the dress of thought and as the noblest mien or most graceful action would be degraded and obscured by a garb appropriated to the employments of rusticks and mechanicks, so the most heroick sentiments will lose their efficacy, and the most splendid ideas drop their magnificence, if they are conveyed by words used commonly upon low and trivial occasions, debased by vulgar mouths, and contaminated by inelegant applications."

Johnson considers expletives, and such small verbs as "do" and "did," entirely too familiar for poetic use. "Exclamation seldom succeeds in our language, and I think it may be observed that the particle O! used at the beginning of a sentence always offends." He also excludes "the words do and did, which so much degrade in present estimation the line that admits them."

Moreover, Johnson excludes from poetic diction, along with words too familiar, those that are too remote; for instance, foreign words and idioms, obsolete language, newly-coined words, and technical expressions. He disapproves of some of Pope's latter productions, in which
"the diction is sometimes vitiated by French idioms." He criticises the Proeme to Gay's pastorals, because it is written in such obsolete language and in such a style as was "never spoken nor written in any age or in any place." He condemns Gray's use of newly-coined words; for the latter was "too fond of words arbitrarily compounded. 'Many-twinkling' was censured as not analogical; we may say many-spotted, but scarcely many-spotting." And finally he excludes such technical terms as "diapason," which Dryden uses in the "Ode for St. Cecilia's Day," as well as all words or phrases used exclusively in any art, science, or trade. "It is a general rule in poetry that all appropriated terms of art should be sunk in general expressions, because poetry is to speak an universal language. This rule is still stronger with regard to arts not liberal or confined to few, and therefore far removed from common knowledge."

Poetic diction then, by excluding words too familiar and words too remote, enhances poetic style. Another means of securing a distinctly characteristic style is the careful use of figures of speech. Johnson mentions and criticises four types frequently used by poets:
simile, metaphor, alliteration, and onomatopoeia. "A poetical simile is the discovery of likeness between two actions in their general nature dissimilar, or of causes terminating by different operations in some resemblance of effect. But the mention of another like consequence from a like cause, or of a like performance by a like agency, is not a simile, but an exemplification. It is not a simile to say that the Thames waters fields as the Po waters fields. ... When Horace says of Pindar, that he pours his violence and rapidity of verse, as a river swoln with rain rushes from the mountain; ... he ... produces a simile: the mind is impressed with the resemblance of things generally unlike, as unlike as intellect and body. ... A simile may be compared to lines converging at a point and is more excellent as the lines approach from greater distance: an exemplification may be considered as two parallel lines which run on together without approximation, never far separated, and never joined."

"A simile, to be perfect, must both illustrate and ennoble the subject; ... but either of these qualities may be sufficient to recommend it. In didactic poetry, of which the great purpose is instruction, a simile may be praised which illustrates, though it does not ennoble;
in heroicks, that may be admitted which ennobles though it does not illustrate. That it may be complete it is required to exhibit, independently of its references, a pleasing image; for a simile is said to be a short episode."

Johnson considers Pope's comparison of a student's progress in the sciences with the journey of a traveler in the Alps, (as found in the "Essay on Criticism," as the best simile that English poetry can show; for it both illustrates and ennobles the subject, while the image in itself is pleasing. Not all of Pope's similes, however, are pleasing; for Johnson criticises Pope for the grossness of his images in "The Dunciad."

Johnson blames poets, not only for faulty similes, but also for mixed metaphors. In Addison's "Letter from Italy," there is a noted example of a broken metaphor:

"Fir'd with that name -
I bridle in my struggling Muse with pain,
That longs to launch into a nobler strain."

Johnson tartly remarks: "To bridle a goddess is no very delicate idea; but why must she be bridled? because she longs to launch; an act which was never hindered by a bridle: and whither will she launch? into a nobler strain. She is in the first line a horse, in the second
a boat; and the care of the poet is to keep his horse or his boat from singing."

In Pope's poetry, too, mixed metaphors are occasionally found.

"The well-sung woes shall soothe my [pensive] ghost;

He best can paint them who shall feel them most."

Regarding the above figure, Johnson says: "Martial exploits may be painted; perhaps woes may be painted; but they are surely not painted by being well-sung: it is not easy to paint in song or to sing in colours."

Gray, also, "seems in his rapture to confound the images of 'spreading sound' and 'running water.' A 'stream of musick' may be allowed; but where does Musick, however 'smooth and strong,' after having visited the 'verdant vales,' 'rowl down the steep amain,' so as that 'rocks and nodding groves rebellow to the raor'? If this be said of Musick, it is nonsense; if it be said of Water, it is nothing to the purpose."

Johnson recommends the use of both simile and metaphor, if care and consistency are shown. He does not, however, approve of the use of alliteration," of using in the same verse many words beginning with the same letter. But this knack, whatever be its value, was so frequent among early writers, that Gascouign, a writer of the sixteenth
warns the young poet against affecting it." He regrets Gray's use of it in "The Bard"; for the "initial re-
semblances, or alliterations, 'ruin,' 'ruthless,' 
'helm nor hauberk,' are below the grandeur of a poem that endeavors at sublimity."

Johnson disapproves, not only of alliteration, but also of onomatopoeia, or "representative harmony," as he chooses to term it. "Beauties of this kind are commonly fancied; and when real are technical and nugatory, not to be rejected and not to be solicited." "Verse can imitate only sound and motion." "This notion of representative metre, and the desire of discovering frequent adaptations of the sound to the sense, have produced, in my opinion, many wild conceits and imaginary beauties. All that can furnish this representation are the sounds of the words considered singly, and the time in which they are pronounced. Every language has some words framed to exhibit the noises which they express, as thump, rattle, growl, hiss. These, however, are but few, and the poet cannot make them more, nor can they be of any use but when sound is to be mentioned. The time of pronunciation was in the dactylick measures of the learned languages capable of considerable variety; ... but our language having little flexibility our verses can differ very little in their cadence. The fancied resemblances, I fear, arise sometimes
merely from the ambiguity of words; there is supposed to be some relation between a soft line and a soft couch, or between hard syllables and hard fortune."

II

AS RESPECTS PROSODY

1. METER

Style, then, has two leading sources, diction and figures of speech; which, by a variety of uses, characterize style either as concise, diffuse, lofty, or humble. But in considering poetry, Johnson discusses another phase of poetic form besides style; namely, versification. Just as Johnson considers truth as the keynote of poetic content, whether intellectual or emotional; so he also considers regularity as the keynote of poetic form. "The essence of verse is regularity, and its ornament is variety." This regularity Johnson finds more in Pope's verses than in any other poetry; hence he considers Pope's poetry as the acme of perfection. "New sentiments and new images others may produce, but to attempt any further improvement of versification will be dangerous. ... If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to be found?" Pope's characteristic form is the heroic couplet; hence, Johnson praises the predecessors of Pope who have attempted to use
the couplet. "After about half a century of forced thoughts and rugged metre some advances toward nature and harmony had been already made by Waller and Denham; they had shewn that long discourses in rhyme grew more pleasing when they were broken into couplets, and that verse consisted not only in the number but the arrangement of syllables." Johnson, however, credits Dryden with establishing this new versification; for, from his time "it is apparent that English poetry has had no tendency to relapse to its former savageness."

Johnson names several examples of this "former savageness" of verse; for instance: Pindaric odes, sonnets, triplets, alexandrines, as well as hemistichs and run-over lines. He is particularly distressed by the "Pindaric infatuation" or "madness," which had taken possession of the literary world. "This lax and lawless versification so much concealed the deficiencies of the barren and flattered the laziness of the idle, that it immediately overspread our books of poetry; all the boys and girls caught the pleasing fashion, and they that could do nothing else could write like Pindar." Johnson fails to see any beauty in that style of poetry, which considers "its near affinity to prose"as the highest kind of praise. He considers some of Watts's odes "deformed by the Pindarick
folly then prevailing." To Congreve, however, "it must be confessed that we are indebted for the correction of a national error, and for the cure of our Pindarick madness. He first taught the English writers that Pindar's odes were regular."

Another imported verse of which Johnson disapproves, is the sonnet; for "the fabric of a sonnet, however adapted to the Italian language, has never succeeded in ours, which, having greater variety of termination, requires the rhymes to be often changed."

Since the essence of verse is regularity, Johnson considers alexandrines and triplets as violations too great to be admitted into approved verse. "To write verse is to dispose syllables and sounds harmonically by some known and settled rule - a rule however lax enough to substitute similitude for identity. ... The English heroic admits of acute or grave syllables variously disposed; ... but the English alexandrine breaks the lawful bounds, and surprises the reader with two syllables more than he expected. The effect of the triplet is the same: the ear has been accustomed to expect a new rhyme in every couplet; but is on a sudden surprised with three rhymes together, to which the reader could not accomodate his voice did he not obtain notice of the change from the braces of the margins."
Surely there is something unskilful in the necessity of such mechanical direction."

Another irregularity of which Johnson disapproves is the hemistich. He criticises Cowley's "Davideis," because the author introduced some verses left imperfect, in imitation of Virgil, whom Cowley evidently supposed "not to have intended to complete them: that this opinion is erroneous may be probably concluded, because this truncation is imitated by no subsequent Roman poet; because Virgil himself filled up one broken line in the heat of recitation; because in one the sense is now unfinished; and because all that can be done by a broken verse, a line intersected by a caesura and a full stop will equally effect."

Not only incomplete lines, but also run-over lines offend, by giving to the reader a rhythm different from that which he expected. Prior, in his "preface to Solomon ... proposes some improvements, by extending the sense from one couplet to another, with variety of pauses. This he has attempted, but without success; his interrupted lines are unpleasing, and his sense as less distinct is less striking."

2. **RHYME.**

Thus Johnson considers regular meter a requisite
of verse; but it is not the only characteristic which he demands of versifications, for "the essence of verse is order and consonance." Hence, he insists that poetry have rhyme as well as metrical rhythm. Because of this demand, he fails to appreciate much that is poetic, since blank verse occupies an important place in English literature. Johnson admits that poetry "may subsist without rhyme, but English poetry will not often please; nor can rhyme ever be safely spared but where the subject is able to support itself. Blank verse ... has neither the easiness of prose nor the melody of numbers." He considers blank verse an importation, probably from the Italian literature; and he maintains that the English heroic line is unsuited to blank verse, because its music strikes the ear so faintly that it is easily lost, "unless all the syllables of every line co-operate together; this co-operation can be only obtained by the preservation of every verse unmingled with another as a distinct system of sounds, and this distinctness is obtained and preserved by the artifice of rhyme."

Among all English poets, from Cowley to Lyttleton, Johnson finds only three whom he considers to have used blank verse effectively: Milton, Thomson, and Young. Regarding Milton's epic, Johnson says: "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 of astonishing may write blank verse, but those that hope only to please must condescend to rhyme." Similarly he finds "The Seasons" one of the works in which blank verse seems properly used; Thomson's wide expansion of general views, and his enumeration of circumstantial varieties, would have been obstructed and embarrassed by the frequent intersection of the sense, which are the necessary effects of rhyme." And finally, Young's "Night Thoughts" is also "one of the few poems in which blank verse could not be changed for rhyme but with disadvantage. The wild diffusion of the sentiments and the digressive sallies of imagination would have been compressed and restrained by confinement to rhyme."

However, "if blank verse be not timid and gorgeous, it is crippled prose;" and Johnson considers the greater part of blank verse as crippled prose. "Blank verse left merely to its numbers has little operation either on the ear or mind: it can hardly support itself without bold figures and striking images. A poem frigidly didactick without rhyme is so near to prose that the reader
only scorns it for pretending to be verse." As an example of such verse, he mentions Roscommon's "Essay," in which there is an interposition of a long paragraph of blank verse, which Johnson considers as "unwarrantably licentious." In like manner J. Philips "unhappily pleased himself with blank verse;" while Fenton's "translation from Homer into blank verse will find few readers while another can be had in rhyme." Johnson does not approve of the choice of subject matter in Dyer's poem, "The Fleece"; "and the disgust which blank verse encumbering and encumbered, superadds to an unpleasing subject, soon repels the reader, however willing to be pleased." Of Mallet's "Amyntor and Theodora," Johnson's comment is effective, though brief: "But it is blank verse." Akenside is commended for having "fewer artifices of disgust than most of his brethren of the blank song." Yet, even Akenside does not escape censure, for the pedant intrudes into this work; - "but when was blank verse without pedantry?" "The exemption which blank verse affords from the necessity of closing the sense with the couplet, betrays luxuriant and active minds into such self-indulgence that they pile image upon image, ornament upon ornament, and are not easily persuaded to close the sense at all. Blank verse will therefore,
I fear, be too often found in description exuberant, in argument loquacious, and in narration tiresome."

Consequently, unless the subject can support itself, Johnson prefers rhymed meter to blank verse.

But even in rhyme Johnson lays down certain rules.

In the first place, rhyme must always be subservient to sense; no words must be tolerated which are introduced merely for the sake of rhyme. He objects to Savage's fragment, "London and Bristol delineated," because "some II, of the lines are rather inserted to rhyme to others than to support or improve the sense." Similarly, Pope's epitaph on the Duke of Buckingham is weak, because "art III, is... used for arts that a rhyme may be had to heart." 271

Besides supporting the sense, Johnson demands that rhyme have both order and consonance. He advocates regularity as the key-note of rhyme-scheme, as well as of meter. Therefore he prefers the rhymed couplet, in which the rhymes succeed each other regularly; and he disapproves of Dryden's "Ode for St. Cecilia's Day," because "the rhymes are too remote from one another." Another defect of the rhyme-scheme of this poem, is that "some of the lines are without correspondent rhymes."

Thus Johnson demands orderly arrangement of rhyme; but he also insists upon the consonance of the words them-
selves. Rhyming words must not be too similar as "night" and "light"; neither may they be too dissimilar as "breath" and "birth." They must be varied, for variety is one of the sources of pleasure. Johnson criticises Denham for using the word "die" to rhyme three couplets in six. Finally, the words themselves must be important, suggestive words; otherwise the rhyme weakens, rather than strengthens the line. "Every rhyme should be a word of emphasis, nor can this rule be safely neglected, except where the length of the poem makes slight inaccuracies excusable, or allows room for beauties sufficient to overpower the effects of petty faults." Therefore he disapproves of Pope's use of the word "too" in his epitaph on Sir William Trumbal; of Waller's use of the word "so," twice within ten lines; of Dryden's practice of ending the first line of a couplet with a weak or grave syllable, thus rhyming such words as "tyranny" and "sky," and finally of Cowley's frequent use of "pronouns or particles, or the like unimportant words, which disappoint the ear and destroy the energy of the line."

Thus Johnson briefly states his theory of versification in these words: "the essence of verse is order and consonance." Both meter and rhyme-scheme must be
regular, while the rhymes themselves must be consonant."

CONCLUSION
SUMMARY

To conclude, we have noted that Johnson defines poetry as "the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason." Therefore, poetic truth and poetic pleasure determine a twofold content of poetry; an intellectual element and an emotional appeal.

In order to be complete, poetic truth must present a religious and moral knowledge of right and wrong; a sympathetic understanding of humanity; or a thorough study of external nature. Because they fail to present poetic truth, Johnson excludes from the realm of true poetry, the following types of verse: fiction, myth, pastoral, encomiastic and occasional verses, epitaph, burlesque, and verses written in imitation of others. He also excludes contemplative sacred verse because the truths contained therein are beyond the dignity and grandeur of poetry. On the other hand, because the following present at least some phase of poetic truth, Johnson approves of other types of poetry; namely: epic, didactic, critical and controversial works, satire, translation, narrative, descriptive, elegiac, and dramatic poetry.
Another requisite remains. Poetry is the art of presenting truth pleasurably. A poem therefore, besides an intellectual element, must contain an emotional appeal. Johnson, however, distinguishes between two kinds of pleasures: those of the mind, and those of the heart. The sources of the former are twofold, - novelty and variety; while the sources of the latter consist in the expression and portrayal of the passions of the human heart, as found chiefly in the drama and in the lyric.

Moreover, along with its content, poetry must have form. Johnson discusses two phases of form, - style and prosody. Of style, he names four kinds: the concise, the diffuse, the lofty, and the humble. Of each of these the sources are diction and figures of speech. Prosody treats of meter and rhyme; with the latter Johnson dispenses only when the subject is able to support itself.

Johnson expresses his ideas regarding poetry in four different works: "The Rambler," "Rasselas," the Shakespeare "Preface," and the "Lives of the English Poets." In the three first-mentioned works these criticisms are occasional and incomplete. In the "Lives of the English Poets," however, Johnson presents his mature critical doctrine in its fullest form. It may be summed up in two statements: the keynote of poetic content is truth; of poetic structure, is regularity.
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