SAMUEL JOHNSON'S EPISTOLARY ESSAYS: HIS USE OF PERSONAE

IN THE RAMBLER, THE ADVENTURER, AND THE IDLER

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In writing his periodical essays for the Rambler, Adventurer, and Idler series, Johnson was working within a well-established tradition. One device common to the genre was that of presenting material in the form of a letter ostensibly submitted by a reader. When Johnson employed this technique of the "epistolary essay," as he did in ninety-one of his periodical papers, he usually did more than simply sign a false name to his own undisguised opinions; he actually assumed the mask of a persona. He adopted the characters of young girls, of tradesmen, of parents, of fops. In short, he pretended to be persons utterly unlike Dr. Johnson, sometimes for satirical effect and sometimes for the purpose of arousing sympathy.

Chapter I offers a survey of twentieth-century scholarship relating to Johnson's periodical essays. Only during the last decade or so have the essays begun to receive their share of critical attention. They have at last been acquitted of the charge of dullness and are now recognized as a major source indispensable to any study of Johnson's moral, intellectual, and artistic convictions. Even so, however, this survey reveals that the epistolary essays have continued to be largely ignored as a group.
Chapter II briefly summarizes the history of both the familiar essay and the familiar letter, two distinct--but closely related--forms of literature. Johnson is shown to have worked well within the accepted conventions in his use of these forms, and his use of a persona was likewise traditional. The true persona, which most often appears in the epistolary essays, is distinguished from the mere use of a pseudonym.

Chapter III analyzes approximately half of the epistolary essays, those in which Johnson's persona serves as a kind of protagonist. In these papers the imaginary correspondent tells his own story with emphasis upon his own feelings and actions. These letters frequently approach the form of a short story narrated by the main character.

Chapter IV deals with the remaining epistolary essays, in which the persona functions more as an observer-reporter than as chief actor. This group includes those essays which are cast in letter form but which seem to reflect Johnson's own views rather than those of a true persona.

In Chapter V the society inhabited by Johnson's personae is described. The imaginary correspondents are drawn from various levels of the social hierarchy, and Johnson presents through these characters a reflection of the society which he himself knew firsthand. His views upon individual man's proper relation to society are also implicit in these essays.
Chapter VI analyzes the success with which Johnson utilized the letter-device. He seems to have found the epistolary essay to be highly suitable for his purposes of instruction and entertainment. This device allowed him to present specific human problems with the immediacy of a first-person narrative and, at the same time, offered many opportunities for irony and satire. The use of the various personae, moreover, permitted a wider range of direct testimony than might come from a single author. In utilizing the imaginary letter, Johnson wrote some of his most delightful prose; his literary reputation can only be enhanced by a critical reading of this substantial group of essays.
SAMUEL JOHNSON'S EPISTOLARY ESSAYS: HIS USE OF PERSONAE IN THE RAMBLER, THE ADVENTURER, AND THE IDLER

DISSERTATION

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By

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This study reflects an interest in Johnson's essays which was first kindled in a graduate course taught by Professor James B. Misenheimer at North Texas State University in the fall of 1969. In doing research for a report on Johnson and the essay, I made two discoveries: first, that Johnson's periodical writing had been largely ignored until about 1960; and second, that those works which had been ominously designated as "moral essays" actually included many delightfully satirical passages and some highly entertaining character portrayals which read more as short stories than essays.

The particular essays which this dissertation attempts to analyze seem to be especially significant because as a group they reveal an aspect of Johnson's literary genius which is all too frequently obliterated by his reputation for moral profundity. Johnson's moral purpose, to be sure, is still very much a part of his epistolary essays, but these works also display his talent for fiction and his gift for comedy.

Because it would be unrealistic to assume that most people enjoy a thorough familiarity with Johnson's essays, it has seemed appropriate to quote at length from many of the epistolary essays in order to illustrate their subtleties. In these quotations from the Yale Edition of Johnson's works, the original spelling, capitalization, and punctuation have
been carefully retained. Although there are many eccentricities and inconsistencies in these mechanical matters, I have used no interruptive markings of my own which might intrude upon the felicities of Johnson's style.
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CHAPTER I

A SURVEY OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY SCHOLARSHIP
IN THE FIELD OF JOHNSON'S ESSAYS

Twenty years ago the subject of Samuel Johnson's essays was not popular, even among devoted Johnsonians. In a bibliographical survey published in 1951, James L. Clifford noted the meager scholarship in the field: "There has been no... concerted effort to revive interest in Johnson's periodical essays. No scholarly edition of the Rambler, Adventurer, or Idler has so far appeared, or is in immediate prospect... [T]he concentrated morality of most of the essays appears too strong for modern stomachs to take in large doses." By 1965, however, Clifford had been forced to revise his pronouncements. Not only had the publication of a scholarly edition of the essays been undertaken, but there was much evidence of an increasing scholarly interest in these works. In the recently published Samuel Johnson: A Survey and Bibliography of Critical Studies, the current enthusiasm for Johnson's essays is described, an enthusiasm


which has replaced the general apathy—even antipathy—which was prevalent in earlier years:

What would have astonished older readers more than anything else is the way Johnson's periodical essays are being read by many of our younger readers. As the result of the inspired teaching of such men as Walter Jackson Bate at Harvard and Bertrand H. Bronson at California, students are now devouring the Rambler and Idler essays with avidity, and finding, to their surprise, that what they had somehow assumed to be hackneyed, ponderous pieces of stale morality are filled with pertinent, exciting observations. Johnson's sturdy independence of thought, his shrewd understanding of human motives, his witty summing up of the basic problems of human relationships, all make an immediate appeal to the members of a generation with few illusions.³

1900-1929

Of course, Johnson as essayist has had some champions all along. George Saintsbury found himself opposing the popular views in 1916 and boldly declared his nonconformity in The Peace of the Augustans:

It is the custom to run down Il Vagabondo (as the Italians so delightfully call The Rambler), yet some of us (if such rash blasphemy of possible judges be permitted) would as soon read it as most of the respectable papers to be found every Saturday morning on our club tables.⁴

As early as 1924 the first, and so far the only, published book-length work devoted exclusively to Johnson's essays


appeared, written by O. F. Christie and entitled Johnson the Essayist. This work, in its profound appreciation of Johnson's essays, seems to be unique in the first quarter of this century, for the essays had long been relegated to the darkest corner of the library. The most benevolent scholars could hardly do more than agree with Sir Walter Raleigh's designation of the Rambler as a "splendid repository of wisdom and truth" which, nevertheless, had understandably enough "ceased to attract readers." But Christie refused to subscribe to the notion that Johnson's essays are unreadable. His study attempts to consider all of Johnson's contributions to the genre. The emphasis of the book is upon Johnson's opinions, but some attention is paid to his style as well. Christie counters those critics who maintain that the essays are dull reading by providing copious quotations and urging the reader to judge for himself. Johnson the Essayist is not a definitive study by any means, but it is significant, not only for being far ahead of its time in recognition of Johnson's importance as an essayist, but also in its valiant attempt to be comprehensive. Christie must be commended for his ability to resist the literary prejudices of his time and to see the worth of a group of writings

5 Johnson the Essayist (London: Grant Richards, Ltd., 1924).
which was largely ignored and at best feebly defended in the literary world. In lamenting both the general depreciation of Johnson's essays following the rise of Romanticism and the fact that "Johnson the Conversationalist has long ago eclipsed Johnson the Essayist," Christie expresses the hope that "the tide is turning."\(^7\)

Whether or not the hope was actually justified at that time, many years were to pass before one might say that the tide had indeed turned. In fact, prior to 1960 the attention paid to Johnson's essays continued to be sporadic, although some excellent investigations relating to the works were published.

1930-1949

Even during the 1930's and 1940's, however, some readers staunchly refused to be frightened off by the forbidding reputation of Johnson's essays. An article on a single essay, "The Rambler, No. 191," by Mallie J. Murphy, reveals an extensive familiarity with the whole of the essay series in citing No. 191 as the only Rambler by Johnson in which he appears to choose a light, topical subject over serious moralizing.\(^8\) During the late 1930's Curtis Bradford exhibited a detailed knowledge of the Rambler in his

\(^7\) *Johnson the Essayist*, pp. 9, 15, 19.

discussion of Johnson's revisions of the Rambler essays. His study showed that Johnson's changes always involved matters of style and never altered the basic thought of a passage.  

As interest increased, relatively minor aspects of the essays aroused the curiosity of scholars such as Ellen B. Leyburn, who investigated the "Translations of the Mottoes and Quotations in the Rambler." Other very specialized studies dealing to some extent with the essays are found in the two books on Johnson's style by W. K. Wimsatt, The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson and Philosophic Words: A Study of Style and Meaning in the Rambler and Dictionary of Samuel Johnson. Although these very useful works are not concerned with the essays primarily as essays, but rather as specimens of prose writing, in the latter book Wimsatt does point out the often overlooked humor in the Rambler, observing that "as with all such classics, it is possible that there are more smiles upon the face of seriousness than a posterity of students will notice."  

10 "Translations of the Mottoes and Quotations in the Rambler," Review of English Studies, 16 (1940), 169-76.  
13 Ibid., p. 116.
An unusually perceptive work produced in this period is the unpublished dissertation of Boylston Green, "Samuel Johnson's Idler: A Critical Study." As noted above, such an extensive and detailed study of Johnson's essays was rare indeed before 1960, and it is surprising that the work was completed more than twenty years before the Yale edition of the Idler appeared to spark interest in the series and to provide a scholarly and authoritative text. Indeed, if it is possible to discern any kind of degree in the matter of critical neglect of Johnson's essays, the Idler and Adventurer were snubbed much more thoroughly than was the Rambler. Often the Rambler papers alone were cited in any account of Johnson's periodical writing, as though he wrote no others. Hence it is doubly surprising that Green's dissertation was written as early as 1941. The thoroughness of the work is exemplary; it includes an account of the various printings and scanty revisions of the essays, and it analyzes the differences between the Idler and the Rambler and Adventurer. Green makes an effective case for his belief that in the Idler papers may be found, more than in any other of his works, the Johnson of Boswell's Life.

Two important literary histories published during this period reflect thoughtful evaluation of Johnson's essays.

The Cambridge History of English Literature states that Johnson alone "revived the periodical essay" in the mid-eighteenth century and raised the form to a higher level of excellence than it had enjoyed before. But this praise is offset by the rather illogical contention that "Johnson was deficient in the qualifications of a periodical writer."¹⁵ George Sherburn, in A Literary History of England, expresses more wholehearted approval than did the Cambridge historians; he ranks the Rambler "second only to the Spectator and possibly to the Tatler." He accounts for the lesser popularity of Johnson's work in this fashion: "Bluntly, the contrast is between entertaining journalism and the ingenious display of the mind. Such a contest is likely to be weighted in favor of entertainment as opposed to intellect."¹⁶

1950-1959

During the 1950's a few significant endeavors in the field of Johnson's essays appeared, although the amount of scholarship does not exhibit an increase over previous years. Edward A. Bloom's thoroughly researched article "Symbolic Names in Johnson's Periodical Essays"¹⁷ is valuable to


anyone interested in the fictitious characters appearing in the essays and also illustrates Johnson's extensive knowledge of classical literature. Bloom contends that Johnson's literary flexibility is exemplified by his careful selection of names appropriate to the subject matter and the intended audience of any particular essay, and the results of his study lead Bloom to praise Johnson's "virtuosity as a familiar essayist" and his "complete mastery of this literary medium." Bloom is also the author of a book which reveals his continuing interest in Johnson's writing, Samuel Johnson in Grub Street. A chapter entitled "The Anxious Employment of a Periodical Writer" deals specifically with the composition of Johnson's essays. Bloom asserts the importance of these works to any student of literature in these words: "If prior to 1750 the essays of Addison and Steele are supreme in Britain, those of Johnson—especially the Rambler papers—are foremost in the second half of the century." In this book Bloom traces Johnson's career as a periodical essayist, paying some attention to the general character of the papers themselves, then concentrates upon Johnson's many essays which deal with the problems faced by authors.

Scholarship of the 1950's still tended, unfortunately, to take on a note of apology when dealing with Johnson's

18 Ibid., pp. 333, 335.
20 Ibid., p. 144.
essays. W. H. Graham, in an article entitled "Dr. Johnson's The Rambler," seems almost embarrassed to count himself among those who have "had the application and patience to read through the four volumes of The Rambler" and apparently feels that the general neglect of these essays is all that can be expected, considering "their didactic moral substance." All that Graham can muster by way of commendation is the less-than-enthusiastic observation that Johnson "has taken us at times through tiresome paths and difficult thoroughfares, but in the main we have been led to think on whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, and whatsoever things are of good report." 21

Walter Jackson Bate, however, in his important book The Achievement of Samuel Johnson, recognizes the significance of the essays and has a good deal to say about them, especially insofar as they are revelatory of Johnson's psychological perceptiveness. He avers that "the Rambler contains some of the ripest proverbial wisdom in the language," and he views the decade during which Johnson wrote his periodical essays (1750-1760) as the time of Johnson's attainment of "his full stature as a moralist directly concerned with the practical problems of human experience." 22 Bate cites individual

21 "Dr. Johnson's The Rambler," Contemporary Review, 184 (July 1953), 50, 53.

essays frequently to illustrate Johnson's thinking on various subjects and his profound psychological insight. Bate's study, by its very nature, renders the fact obvious that consideration of the essays is essential to making any estimate of Johnson's merit, either literary or moral.

Two literary histories published in the early part of this decade also suggest the necessity of studying the essays in order to achieve any real understanding of Johnson's thought and character. Louis I. Bredvold, in *A History of English Literature*, says that in the *Rambler* "appears the authentic and invigorating expression of the man."23 And R. C. Churchill, author of *English Literature of the Eighteenth Century*, while conceding that the essays are not widely read, argues against the charge of pedantry and says that a comparison between the essays and appropriate passages in Boswell's *Life* will reveal that the essays echo the famed "conversation."24

1960-1971

The rather apologetic tone which was affected by many Johnsonians when discussing the essays had almost disappeared by the 1960's, when scholarly interest in the works suddenly flourished. This decade saw the publication of the Yale


edition of the essays, at last providing an authoritative text of Johnson's *Idler*, *Adventurer*, and *Rambler* papers. Perhaps even more indicative of the increasing interest than this scholarly edition, however, is the selection of *Essays from the Rambler, Adventurer, and Idler*, edited by Walter Jackson Bate. In his preface Bate notes that the demand for such a collection, aimed at a more general audience than is the Yale edition, began after World War II and increased through the following two decades. That such a demand existed at all is evidence of the broad appeal inherent in these essays.

Not surprisingly, the flurry of interest in Johnson's essays has resulted in a number of dissertations. Each individual serial, for example, has been the subject of at least one detailed investigation. In "A Study of the *Adventurer (1752-54)*," Philip Mahone Griffith discusses the various contributors to the periodical and analyzes its popularity and subject matter. He refers to this essay serial as the "foster child" of the *Rambler* and views Johnson as the most important author of *Adventurer* papers. "Samuel Johnson's

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Idlers: A Study of Satire, Humor, and Irony," by Remi Gerard Dubuque, offers evidence that the Idler essays are essentially --not just occasionally--humorous, satirical, and ironic.28 That the Rambler is a prime example of Johnson's mature artistry is the thesis of John Louis Worden, Jr., in his dissertation, "The Themes and Techniques of Johnson's Rambler." Worden stresses Johnson's ability to arouse the reader's sympathies for either a correspondent or for Mr. Rambler himself and maintains that such involvement on the part of the reader compensates for Johnson's neglect of topical matters.29

In addition to these studies devoted to the separate essay serials are other investigations of various aspects of the essays. William Francis Keirce, for example, has dealt with "The Place of Samuel Johnson in the History of the Literary Character," concluding that although Johnson certainly understood the Theophrastan method of character portrayal, he boldly varied that method, in keeping with his conviction that literary forms should be flexible.30 Perry Alice Organ Carroll examines Johnson's methods of moral instruction in the genre of the novel as well as in that of


the essay in "Samuel Johnson and the Art of Moralizing: A Study of the Periodical Essays and Rasselas." Charlotte Anne Carter takes into consideration most of the important eighteenth-century essayists in her dissertation, entitled "Personae and Characters in the Essays of Addison, Steele, Fielding, Johnson, Goldsmith," and she asserts that Johnson differs from the other major essayists in his frequent emphasis upon compassion. At least two dissertations written in the 1960's and treating the subject of Johnson's satire also rely very heavily upon references to the essays. These studies are "Samuel Johnson's Satire," by Delbert Leroy Earisman, and "The Satire of Samuel Johnson," by Arnold MacLean Tibbetts.

A number of important articles on Johnson's essays have been published in scholarly journals since 1960. "The Moral Essays of Dr. Samuel Johnson," by Bernard Knieger, asserts that a study of Johnson's periodical essays reveals their author to be "an English Socrates." This article is rather


brief and offers no really fresh observations upon the subject, its thesis being that Johnson saw human vanity as a major source of unhappiness in the world, but the laudatory tone is representative of the increasing appreciation for the essays.

If Knieger's article is disappointingly general, Geoffrey Bullough's "Johnson the Essayist" is more satisfactory, for it succeeds in being one of the most comprehensive of recent articles. Bullough briefly considers the similarities and differences among the three serials containing Johnson's essays. He points out, for example, that the Rambler and Adventurer papers are lengthier than those of the Idler because the latter were published as part of a newspaper rather than separately. He also considers the major influences upon Johnson's essay-writing, mentioning not only the obvious, Addison and Steele, but also pointing out that Johnson read and admired Seneca, Cicero, Bacon, and Cowley.36 Bullough concludes his discussion of Johnson's methods of composition and possible influences by other writers with this definitely non-apologetic paragraph of admiration: "At times the essays coruscate with apparently effortless brilliance. But in the last resort it is not so much the style we remember

36 "Johnson the Essayist," The New Rambler, No. 105 (June 1968), pp. 16-17.
as the man behind it, with his quirks and prejudices, his wisdom and generosity, his immense power of applying general principles to particular issues, the homogeneity of imagination, understanding and character, which made him so formidable a critic and so reliable a friend."

Another scholar with profound knowledge of the essays of Johnson, A. T. Elder, has published two exceedingly important articles, "Irony and Humour in the Rambler" and "Thematic Patterning and Development in Johnson's Essays." In the latter article Elder attempts to discuss in a comprehensive fashion the definition and development of various themes treated by Johnson in his periodical essays. Elder also classifies individual essays according to theme, and he discerns an underlying pattern of thematic structure which unifies Johnson's essays of all three series—Rambler, Adventurer, and Idler. The central unifying theme, Elder believes, is "contributing to society," and six other themes, relating to this main theme as well as to one another, and accounting for more than eighty percent of the essays are (1) "seeing the world as it is," (2) "being true to one's qualities,"

37 Ibid., p. 33.

38 "Irony and Humour in the Rambler," University of Toronto Quarterly, 30 (1960), 57-71.

(3) "filling life usefully," (4) "seeking and promoting virtue," (5) "fitting into life," and (6) criticizing literature. 40

In "Irony and Humour in the Rambler," Elder challenges "the Rambler's exaggerated reputation for sobriety." 41 He cites many examples of ironic humor in Rambler essays and concludes that although "much of the periodical makes heavy going . . . the sobriety of the general tone adds piquancy to the humour and irony when they appear," and "one never knows when an apparently serious discussion, such as that in 193, will dissolve into irony." 42 In this article Elder does not attempt to deny the overall seriousness of purpose which Johnson held while writing the Rambler papers; he does argue, however, for a long overdue investigation of the lighter qualities exhibited in the essays.

Matters of technique and style have interested several scholars, who attempt to increase our understanding of all the implications of Johnson's essays by studying their structure. William Kenney, for example, compares Johnson's work with that of an illustrious predecessor in "Addison, Johnson, and the 'Energetick' Style." 43 The thesis of this article

40 Ibid., p. 628.
41 "Irony and Humour in the Rambler," p. 57.
42 Ibid., pp. 69, 71.
is that the writing styles of Johnson and Addison differed because their purposes differed and that to compare them without taking this fact into consideration is to be unfair to both of them. Each man chose and developed a style suitable to his subject matter, and Kenney feels that each deserves praise on his own merits. Michael Rewa considers a specific group of essays in "Aspects of Rhetoric in Johnson's 'Professedly Serious' Rambler Essays," concentrating on Johnson's use of devices such as the mask. John Cabell Riely undertakes a more comprehensive study and notes Johnson's tendency to instruct his reader by way of examples in "The Pattern of Imagery in Johnson's Periodical Essays." Other articles, such as Jim W. Corder's "Ethical Argument and Rambler No. 154," examine individual essays in detail. Also helpful in trying to determine Johnson's exact purposes in writing his essays is "Dr. Johnson on the Essay," a study of Johnson's criticism of the essay as a genre, by James B. Misenheimer, Jr.

The Rambler essays have always attracted more scholarly interest than the other two serials for which Johnson wrote,

but Patrick O'Flaherty has written an excellent article entitled "Johnson's Idler: The Equipment of a Satirist," in which he suggests that a "critical revaluation" of the Idler is called for now that Yale University Press has provided a scholarly edition of the work. He feels that these essays, in particular, have been underrated, and he points out that they were "written at the climax of Johnson's most productive decade as an author." O'Flaherty's study, which offers some interesting comments on satire in general, effectively concludes that Johnson could not be a true satirist because he possessed enormous compassion and because he saw himself as being just as imperfect as everyone else.

Enlightening information has been sought by some scholars in publications contemporary with Johnson's essay-writing. For instance, R. McKeen Wiles offers evidence in "The Contemporary Distribution of Johnson's The Rambler" that the Rambler's original audience was not so small as has been generally supposed. Although less than five hundred copies of each essay may have been purchased in London, Wiles asserts that many, perhaps all, of the papers were reprinted almost immediately in provincial newspapers, thus


49 Ibid., pp. 211, 213.

increasing by thousands the estimated number of Johnson's audience in 1750. Another widely held belief, that of Johnson's hasty composition of the Rambler essays, has been challenged by James L. Clifford in "Some Problems of Johnson's Obscure Middle Years." In surveying issues of major newspapers in London from the years during which the Rambler was being published, Clifford discovered an unusual practice of advertisement for the Rambler papers: the motto for individual essays was printed in the advertisements prior to the appearance of the essay itself. Since the motto, therefore, must necessarily have been selected fairly early in order to be printed, Clifford believes that the essays themselves may not have been composed entirely at the last possible minute as we have been led to believe.

The numerous periodical articles regarding Johnson's essays which have appeared during the past decade represent the bulk of the scholarship in the area so far, but recently published books also reflect the renewed interest in Johnson the essayist. In Samuel Johnson Donald J. Greene refers to Johnson's periodical essays as his "greatest achievement as a practical moralist" and asserts that "the seasoned reader of Johnson, faced with the challenge of selecting Johnson's

52 Ibid., p. 108.
greatest single work, may well find himself in the end going back to The Rambler as the most solid example of the essential Johnson."\(^53\) Paul Fussell devotes a lengthy chapter of Samuel Johnson and the Life of Writing to a detailed analysis of Johnson's composition of the essays and "their meaning . . . within the context of his paradoxical critical and moral equipment."\(^54\) In Samuel Johnson and Moral Discipline, Paul Kent Alkon presents an extended comparison between the essays of Johnson and those of Addison and also discusses the similarities between the forms of the essay and the sermon.\(^55\)

Conclusion

This brief survey of the scholarship in the field of Johnson's essays reveals that, with a few exceptions, the emphasis continues to be placed upon Johnson's moral purpose. Considering Johnson's importance as a moralist, one finds it difficult to argue against the propriety of such an emphasis, especially when one recalls Johnson's own declaration in the final Rambler paper that his main intention had ever been "to inculcate wisdom or piety" and that he had, therefore, "allotted few papers to the idle sport of imagination."\(^56\) But with the


\(^{56}\) The Rambler No. 208 ed W. L. Rate and Albrecht R
increasing interest in the essays as works of literature, it seems appropriate to consider some aspects of the works other than their morally uplifting nature, although, to be sure, it may be impossible to ignore that particular aspect for long. Geoffrey Bullough expresses the desire for some new approaches to Johnson's work in "Johnson the Essayist": "In the insistence on Johnson's personal involvement and solemn purpose in the Rambler, inadequate attention has been paid to his talent for fiction, the range of his comic invention, and the subtlety of his tone. An excellent anthology may have been made of his epistolary anecdotes, character-sketches, and fables, but I have not seen it."\(^5^7\)

One goal of the present study, to echo Bullough's words, is to emphasize Johnson's "talent for fiction, the range of his comic invention, and the subtlety of his tone." A substantial group of essays from all three serials, those written in the form of letters ostensibly submitted to the essayist by his readers, appears to offer many examples of the inventiveness of Johnson's mind, and it is to this group that the term epistolary essays refers. Johnson was following a well-established tradition in utilizing the device of the imaginary correspondent (a tradition which will be briefly traced in the following chapter), but the main objective of this dissertation is to analyze the various personae which Johnson adopted in these essays.

The preceding survey of scholarship indicates that no study of these particular essays has yet been made, although individual essays of the group have naturally been treated incidentally in many studies of Johnson's thought and writing; but a detailed investigation of these pieces appears to be justified by their sheer number, as well as by the breadth of their subject matter. The fact that Johnson wrote more than ninety of these "letters to the editor" seems to contradict the view of W. J. Bate that Johnson did not approve of the device, which Bate condemns as "so trivially artificial and irrelevant to his [Johnson's] interests and gifts as a moralist."\(^{58}\) Although it is true that in the hands of lesser writers, the letter device may have resulted in trivialities which he would have deplored, Johnson himself incorporated the device into his broad moral purpose and made it relevant. As William Alfred Bauer says in his excellent dissertation, which traces the history of the epistolary essay in English periodicals, "The letters to the editor in the \textit{Rambler} [and he might have added the \textit{Adventurer} and \textit{Idler}] are of interest in themselves, and there is little reason to feel that Johnson really was so contemptuous of the device as was suggested by a recent editor of the \textit{Rambler} [Bate]."\(^{59}\) And not the least

\(^{58}\) "Introduction," Essays from \textit{The Rambler, Adventurer,\ and Idler}, p. xiv, n. 2.

fascinating aspect of these essays is the fact that they present to us one of the great "characters" of all time assuming another "character" altogether. How convincing Johnson is in these various roles and what his purpose was in assuming them are questions this study will attempt to answer.
CHAPTER II

THE ESSAY, THE LETTER, AND THE PERSONA:
JOHNSON IN THE TRADITION

In order to consider the tradition of the epistolary essay, it is necessary first to investigate the development of two distinct, though closely related, forms of literature: the familiar essay and the familiar letter, whose kinship has already been recognized by numerous scholars. Maude Bingham Hansche, for example, came to the conclusion more than seventy years ago that "we are compelled to consider the letter and essay as co-ordinate, if not co-equal."1 Charles E. Whitmore, attempting to cut through the vagueness surrounding the term essay, calls the form finally "a mixture of types and of procedures" and traces it historically back to the Latin letter. He emphasizes the tendency of letter and essay to merge, citing by way of example the letters of Lamb, which he says are nothing but "miniature essays."2 Before undertaking a study of the combination of the two forms, however, it seems appropriate to review briefly the major points in the history of the essay and the letter respectively.


2 "The Field of the Essay," PMLA, 36 (1921), 551-56.
The Essay

Although the present investigation is primarily concerned with developments specifically in the field of the English essay, it is necessary to acknowledge the ultimate origins of the essay form in the epistolary writings of the Romans. Whitmore perceives the beginnings of the essay in the Latin epistle as revived during the Renaissance by Italian humanists such as Petrarch. In the hands of these men, the letter became "less a means of friendly intercourse than a medium of scholarly communication; it was carefully and conscientiously written, it often passed freely from hand to hand, it might attain a very considerable length. . . . The ostensible recipient was often forgotten, and the treatment became lengthy and formal." In their earliest stages, therefore, the forms of the letter and the essay were intertwined.

In speaking of the essay as we know it today, however, we need go back no farther than Montaigne (1533-1592), who is generally accepted as the originator of the familiar essay. And Montaigne very deliberately chose not to write in letter form, although he was, as Harold C. Binkley points out, "aware of a long-established tradition that letters were the aptest containers for casual and not fully digested comment".

3 Ibid., p. 554.
such as Montaigne was writing. Likewise, the man who introduced the English essay, Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), avoided the epistolary style, even though he too recognized the similarities between letter and essay. Thus, at the point where the essay comes into its own, it diverges from the letter and begins to travel for a while a separate path of development.

Although Montaigne first provided us with the name essay when he published his *Essais* in 1580, he did not invent a totally new genre, for literary historians would trace similar types of writing at least as far back as the second century B.C. to the informal pieces by Lucian. The name and the form were first utilized in England by Bacon when he published his ten *Essays* in 1597. It seems certain that Bacon was inspired by Montaigne's work, but, unlike the Frenchman, Bacon did not make himself the subject of his essays. Instead, he was concerned with the world outside himself, and he took all knowledge for his province. He is sometimes referred to as an "aphoristic essayist" because his essays appear to be elaborations of the aphorisms he recorded in a commonplace book, and he probably looked to the little writings of Cicero.

5 Ibid., p. 344.


and Seneca for models. Unlike Montaigne, whose tone is skep-
tical and musing, Bacon is obviously in earnest search of
ethical principles in his essays. 

Samuel Johnson's admiration for Bacon's work is well
known, and Johnson's essays reflect the characteristics
initiated by Bacon: a stately manner, a preference for
serious rather than light subjects, and a preoccupation with
ethical concerns. Bonamy Dobrée has suggested that all
essays "issue from Montaigne or Bacon. . . . Some, like
Lamb's, are purely and delightfully egotistical; they spring
from Montaigne. Others, such as Arnold's, try to arrive at
some definite truth or principle; they spring from Bacon." If
this particular distinction is accepted, it is easy to
place Johnson in the ranks of Bacon's descendants.

Although Bacon may be credited with founding a genre in
England, his immediate successors were few. The type of
writing which came into fashion early in the seventeenth
century and which contributed much to the development of the
essay was produced by the character-writers, and although they
were not imitating Bacon's subject matter, they owed to him

8 Dobrée, p. 8.

9 See, for example, James Boswell, Life of Johnson, ed.
III, 194, and Geoffrey Bullough, "Johnson the Essayist," New
Rambler, No. 105 (June 1968), p. 17.


11 Dobrée, p. 8.
their "concise, pointed and sententious" style. The form of the "character" goes back to Theophrastus, who was writing sometime around the third century B.C. Casaubon's translation of Theophrastus appeared in England in 1592 and stimulated interest in such writing. Authors turned out many character sketches during the seventeenth century, the most famous being those of John Earle, Joseph Hall, and Thomas Overbury. Their depiction of personality types gradually became a part of the essay, and happily so, according to Dobrée, who says that the introduction of characters into the essay tended "to relieve its purely thoughtful content--a kind of yeast in the dough--and to make us look at our fellow-creatures." Thus, the Theophrastan character is ultimately the source for the personalities encountered in the essays of Addison, Steele, and Johnson.

During the seventeenth century there were other advancements made toward the realization of the essay besides the addition of the character. An important development in style may be found in the works of Sir Thomas Browne, who mastered "the art of writing cadenced prose" and whose style Johnson

12 Walker, p. 38.
13 Dobrée, pp. 12, 13.
15 Walker, p. 70.
is said to have imitated. Abraham Cowley, whose essays Johnson also admired, cultivated even more deliberately than Browne did the intimate tone of the essay, approaching the manner of Montaigne and avoiding the profundity and weighty philosophy of Bacon. Dobrée says that "Cowley is, perhaps, our first really friendly essayist; he never pretends to be more enlightened or more exquisite in feeling that the average man. . . ." Two men who were politicians as well as literary men, Sir William Temple and George Savile, Lord Halifax, "helped forward the development of the essay" near the end of the century, but the most significant advance was made by John Dryden in his perfection "of a prose which is adapted to the everyday needs of expression, and yet has dignity enough to rise to any point short of the topmost peaks of eloquence."

These writers of the seventeenth century in England represent important points in the history of the English essay. But the full-blown version of this genre is not found until the eighteenth century, when it reached maturity in the

16 Boswell, I, 221-22.
17 Bullough, p. 17.
18 Walker, p. 82.
19 Dobrée, p. 16.
20 Walker, pp. 89-97.
periodical essays. The "periodicity" of these works has its roots, of course, in journalism rather than in the literary origins of the essay itself, which are discussed above. George S. Marr perceives "a faint adumbration" of periodical publication in the irregularly published work of the Elizabethan and Jacobean pamphleteers, such as Greene, Dekker, and Hash, and he sees in Swift's Journal to Stella the essence of periodical essays directed to a readership of one person. Richmond P. Bond defines the periodical in this way:

The periodical is usually a series of numbered and dated issues produced under a continuing title on a definite frequency for an indefinite period. It differs from a collection of related pamphlets or allied books in its very periodicity, and from its older, often mercurial, brother-in-print the newspaper in that the latter is more concerned with momentary matters and proceeds on a less leisurely course. The periodical is a publishing enterprise with editorial problems of contents and methods and deadlines, with business problems of production and circulation and solvency. Every issue of a periodical is a unit in serialization subject to the limitations and challenges of date, length, format, audience, purpose, material, techniques, editorship, authorship, and temper of the time; each number is a part of a whole.  

The regular production of a publication was the first step toward achieving such a genre, and John Dunton provided this regularity beginning in 1691 with his Athenian Gazette,


later renamed the Athenian Mercury. He added to the customary news items the answers to questions submitted by readers. Many of the questions appear to be mere excuses for Dunton to air his views on a large variety of subjects, and he frequently approached the light style which Addison and Steele would later perfect. 23

Another periodical which appeared before the Tatler (and which outlasted it) was Daniel Defoe's Review. As a part of this publication, Defoe presented Advice from the Scandalous Club, in which he employed the question-and-answer pattern established by his brother-in-law John Dunton. These portions of the Review bear a strong resemblance to the early issues of the Tatler, for Addison and Steele certainly derived a good deal of their inspiration from Defoe's work; from him came the Club idea at least. In short, the Scandalous Club appears to have been the immediate predecessor of the periodical essay proper, 24 although Defoe lacked the lightness of touch which characterized the Tatler and the Spectator. 25

Joseph Addison and Richard Steele are the men who actually initiated the eighteenth-century periodical essay, but it can truthfully be said that they were not so much originators as

24 Ibid., pp. 15-17.
25 Walker, p. 102.
they were combiners. They combined elements which made up the early essay with certain elements of recent journalism, and they luckily arrived at a composition which delighted the large new reading public in England. It was the work of these two men that established the character of the eighteenth-century periodical essay; most of their successors merely followed their lead in matters of subjects and techniques. The eidolon, the character sketch, the imaginary letter were all utilized by Addison and Steele, and their followers attempted, with varying degrees of success, to equal their accomplishments by adopting the same methods.

Bonamy Dobrée describes the achievement of Addison and Steele in this way:

There is no doubt that the two collaborators did a great deal to make society better; and society loved them for it. They imparted a great deal of learning, but they were never pedantic. They used all the devices the earlier essayists had taught them—the philosophic thought, the description, the character, and so on, and they developed and welded them together till their volumes seem half-way to the novel, especially since they brought their philosophic thoughts close to the life that everybody knew. Also, they enlarged the imagination. The range covered is amazing; from hen-pecked husbands to idolatry, from a grinning-match to the sublimities of Milton, from lap-dogs to the Vision of Mirza, from French frivolity to the meaning of tragedy. There were allegories and stories, descriptions of people, imaginary letters, discussions of the ballads: wit enlivened morality, and gentle satire gave spice to serious reproof.

26 Dobrée, p. 17.
27 Ibid., pp. 20-21.
The inevitable horde of imitators sought to obtain a share in the enormous popularity of the Tatler and the Spectator, but most literary scholars agree with Hugh Walker that in spite of the numbers of new periodicals which appeared, "In the interval between The Spectator and The Rambler . . . there was none which rivalled the two great originals. . . ." 28 Melvin R. Watson points out that the almost 150 essay periodicals which were published between 1709 and 1750 were generally the work of slightly gifted writers, who blatantly copied the earlier papers. Although some of these papers enjoyed respectably long runs, the form was languishing when Johnson's Rambler gave it fresh life beginning in 1750. The apparent difference between Johnson's essays and the earlier serials, however, is due to Johnson's inimitable manner rather than to any real break with tradition. In fact, many scholars, including Watson, feel that the genre was severely limited because of the universal acceptance of traditional methods of composition. As Watson observes, "No one in the eighteenth century was brave enough to break the chains which kept this Prometheus bound so long to the rock of the Spectator." 29

Johnson's place, then, as a writer of periodical essays is firmly in the tradition established by Addison and Steele

28 Walker, p. 129.

early in the century. The literary devices, including the letter form, which he employed were those which had been sanctioned for the genre many years before he wrote.

The Letter

Just as the origins of the essay may be found in antiquity, so may those of the letter. Egyptian letters dating back to the fifteenth century B.C. have been discovered, and by the time of Cicero, the first century B.C., "the letter had become established as one of the indispensable conveniences of life. . . ."30 The correspondence of Cicero is extremely important to a study of the letter because it provided the models after which pre-Elizabethan English letters were patterned. But another Latin writer, Pliny the Younger (61 A.D.-115 A.D.), actually produced a correspondence more truly literary than Cicero's in that he wrote with the casual reader in mind as well as the nominal recipient. Pliny was very conscious that his letters would probably be published.31

During the Middle Ages, Latin being the language for dignified pursuits, the Latin letter remained the ideal, and although it was by no means fictionalized, an emphasis on style and form maintained the letter's basically literary--

31 Ibid., pp. 4-7.
As opposed to merely utilitarian—nature. Despite collections of English correspondence such as the Paston Letters (1424-1526) and the Stonor Letters (1290-1483), which anticipate in their portrayal of social life the eighteenth-century usage of letters, the Latin tradition was the strongest influence upon early English letter-writing, and it resulted in rigidly observed formalities.

But letters written for the purposes of fiction had appeared very early also. Ovid, for instance, wrote fictional letters in verse in his *Heroides*; but a more important group of letters of this type were written in prose by Alciphron, who probably lived in the third century A.D. and was a younger contemporary of Lucian. He wrote two groups of letters: *Letters from the Country* and *Letters from the Town*, in which he adopts *persona*, creates characters, and even provides exchanges of letters—as between a mother and daughter—which anticipate the epistolary novel. Moreover, he depicts ordinary people and everyday manners.

In England, however, until the reign of Elizabeth, letters remained rather crude expressions of stilted prose. This is true of both the Paston and Stonor collections mentioned above and resulted from rigid instruction by educators

32 Ibid., pp. 8-14.
33 Ibid., pp. 14-17.
who had analyzed the method of Latin epistolary writing and had formulated rules for the proper composition of letters. They accepted as given specific forms of address and unvarying divisions into parts of the letter. The easy, familiar style was ignored. But in the sixteenth century, the familiar letter, extremely popular in Italy, found its way to England, and the art of writing such letters caught the interest of the Elizabethans. The "Complete Letter-writers," books offering models and instruction for writing letters, enjoyed their greatest popularity during this period in England, for the English sought to achieve the elegance of the Italians in their correspondence.

Near the beginning of the seventeenth century, Nicholas Breton published his Poste with a Packet of Mad Letters, which initiated the mode of the fictional letter in English. Similar to the eighteenth-century essays in their use of the imaginary correspondents, these letters offer advice concerning everyday problems of life and are, therefore, didactic. Also Breton, although his phrasing was still highly dignified, avoided the stilted language of early letters and used the language of his own time, thus anticipating the truly familiar letter.

34 Hansche, pp. 7-22.
35 Singer, pp. 27-33.
The essay and letter forms come near to uniting once more in the *Epistolae Ho-Elianae*, by James Howell (1594?-1666). In their variety of subject matter and casual style, these letters come close to the spirit of the essay. Extremely popular in their own day, they range from philosophy and politics to current gossip, and from domestic and foreign news to fanciful stories. Sometimes called "a journalist before the time of journalists," Howell in many ways anticipated the periodical essayists.\(^36\)

After the Restoration several writers conceived the idea of depicting life in London through a series of letters. Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, published an imaginary correspondence in 1664 which described in the course of 211 letters the society of the city. In 1678 the translation from French of the *Portuguese Letters*, written by a Portuguese nun to a French cavalier, suggested to Englishmen that letters could be used to tell stories. During the period in which editions of the *Portuguese Letters* continued to appear, the pathetic *Letters of Heloise and Abelard* were also translated and published in England. These works inspired a fad of letter-writing which bequeathed to the eighteenth century a number of short stories told through letters.\(^37\)

\(^{36}\) Walker, pp. 84-86.

\(^{37}\) Hansche, pp. 54-55.
The highest achievement in the complete letter-writers, which, as mentioned above, enjoyed their greatest fame during Elizabeth's reign, belongs to the eighteenth century. Samuel Richardson's *Familiar Letters on Important Occasions* (1741), the writing of which inspired his novel *Pamela*, raises the letter-writer to the ranks of literature, according to some critics. These letters reveal the narrative ability of their author in that many of them tell stories, and the development of character is perfected here as never before in letter form. Fictional character and plot have united with the letter.

The Letter and the Eighteenth-Century Essay

According to Harold C. Binkley, the letter came to be "used indiscriminately" in the eighteenth century "for any occasional short piece of writing. The very terms 'letter' and 'essay,' frequently interchangeable, became, we may suppose, almost synonymous." Although he notes in the essay a tendency to abstraction, which is usually lacking in the letter, Binkley concludes that "the essay temper differs from that of the letter not so much in a wholly new constitution as in recomposition of the same elements." From this standpoint it is easy to see why the periodical essayists would

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38 Singer, pp. 35-39.

find the letter appealing, especially when they wished to offer a concrete example of some generalization about human nature or society.

The employment of the letter form as a device in the eighteenth-century periodical essays was also encouraged by the successful question-and-answer periodicals, such as the Athenian Mercury and the British Apollo. In these publications is found a lively correspondence between the readers and the editors, fostering a vogue for the writing and publishing of letters to the editor. Alan Dugald McKillop credits Defoe with extending the question-and-answer format to essay-length letters and cites Defoe also as the originator of the fictitious letter to the editor. But William Alfred Bauer points out that one could claim the latter distinction for John Dunton, since "some of the queries in the Athenian Mercury have sufficient letter form, and almost certainly some were written by Dunton himself." In any case, it is a fact that Addison and Steele utilized the device many times. Nearly half the numbers of the Tatler, Spectator, and Guardian contain some kind of letter,


42 Bauer, p. 106, n. 1.
and although it is fairly certain that Steele was happy to use authentic letters at times to fill up an issue, many of the letters are from imaginary correspondents. The fictitious epistles are so similar to the real, however, that it is almost impossible to distinguish one from the other. 43

The extensive use of the letter by the essayists may be explained in various ways. Bauer attributes it to "the growing use of the letter to the editor throughout journalism" in the first half of the eighteenth century. Also this give-and-take with his reading public--real or imaginary--"showed that the periodical essayist operated in a world, if not tied to topical events like the newsman, at least bound up in the affairs of quotidian [sic] existence. He was no Montaigne in his tower." In addition, Bauer continues, the device "served in other ways to humanize the conception of the eidolon, while still preserving his dignity of somewhat aloof judgment." Through letters from others, the essayist himself could be characterized and relieved "from the gracelessness of zealous, repetitive insistence upon his main concerns." 44

Binkley, in considering the popularity of the letter device, suggests that "frequently when the general tone was informative, the letter was chosen . . . to avoid the implication of accurate and final treatment. In other instances the letter

43 Watson, pp. 8-9.
44 Bauer, pp. 520, 604-05.
was a fiction which disguised the real authorship or gave additional point to satirical utterances." 45

Melvin Watson notes all these factors contributing to the frequent use of the letter form, and he also points out that "it was an easy and natural device and was good publicity," since the receipt of letters from readers indicated a popular interest in the periodical. Too, the letters provided the variety both of subject matter and method which was a quality greatly desired in the periodicals. And finally, for the purpose of satirizing society and manners, "the letter was most convenient, since the attack seemed to be coming from an actual participant rather than from an impersonal observer of humanity." 46 For the opinion of one of the essayists himself, we can look at Spectator No. 542, in which Addison offers his rationale for using imaginary letters:


46 Watson, pp. 8-9.
Spectatorial would have suffered, had I published as from myself those several ludicrous Compositions which I have ascribed to fictitious Names and Characters. And lastly, because they often serve to bring in, more naturally, such additional Reflections as have been placed at the End of them.47

Addison's statement is important because he and Steele "were almost absolute dictators" over the genre of the periodical essay for more than a hundred years, and the use of the letter by subsequent essayists was due entirely to the influence of these two men.48 Watson defends this assertion as follows:

The naturalness of the letter device may account partially for its wide dispersion in the serials; the fact that so many people were writing chatty letters in ever increasing numbers on every conceivable subject may be part of the explanation; the epistolary novel may have had some influence; but my conviction remains: had Addison and Steele published no letters in their periodicals, most of the essayists who followed them would have neglected this fundamental device. Of the hundred magazine writers who included letters in their serials, most lacked the ingenuity, the foresight, or the originality to carry over a technique from fiction or life; they required a model from their own watertight genre. Just as the poets scrupulously avoided confusing dramatic and non-dramatic blank verse, so these essayists maintained the tradition established by their literary progenitors.49

Since most of the imitators lacked not only the genius but also the judgment of Addison and Steele, many of them carried

48 Watson, p. 29.
49 Ibid., p. 44.
the epistolary method to excess, some becoming so hopelessly addicted that they "existed on an almost unalleviated epistolary diet," according to Watson. The only attempt at originality is found in the Lady's Monthly Museum, to which "Kitty Pry," known as "The Post Office Spy," submits interesting examples of the mail which she intercepts in a provincial town. Most of the essayists, however, "used the letter frequently, sometimes effectively, but always in the firmly entrenched tradition."^50

When Johnson first subjected himself to what he termed in his last Rambler paper "the anxious employment of a periodical writer," the nature of the periodical essay was rather rigidly fixed by custom. He utilized the literary devices which had been deemed "proper" for the genre, and included among these devices was the epistolary essay. Whereas earlier essayists had been glad to receive and publish actual letters from readers, however, Johnson did not wish to make use of contributions from the public at large. Although he recognized the fact that the practice was expected of the essayist and even went so far as to include in some issues an invitation to leave messages with his publishers, Johnson apparently never had any intention of including in his serials the literary attempts of his readers.^51

^50 Ibid., pp. 44-46.

He expresses his opinion of most of those who submit letters to the periodicals in the *Adventurer*, No. 115:

Some, indeed, there are of both sexes, who are authors only in desire, but have not yet attained the power of executing their intentions; whose performances have not arrived at bulk sufficient to form a volume, or who have not the confidence, however impatient of nameless obscurity, to sollicit openly the assistance of the printer. Among these are the innumerable correspondents of public papers, who are always offering assistance which no man will receive, and suggesting hints that are never taken, and who complain loudly of the perverseness and arrogance of authors, lament their insensibility of their own interest, and fill the coffee-houses with dark stories of performances by eminent hands, which have been offered and rejected.\textsuperscript{52}

Most of the "letters to the editor" in Johnson's essay serials, then, were written by Johnson himself, and in creating such an imaginary correspondence, Johnson was, as has been shown above, working within the well-defined tradition of the genre. His use of the device, moreover, was frequent enough to indicate that he found it to be useful and appropriate to his purposes. In the *Rambler* there are sixty issues by Johnson composed in whole or in part as letters; in the *Idler* there are twenty-three, and in the *Adventurer* eight of the twenty-nine essays attributed to Johnson are epistolary. Thus, of a total of 325 essays, 91, or more than 25\%, are cast in letter form. This fact alone seems to belie Walter Jackson

\textsuperscript{52} The Idler and The Adventurer, ed. W. J. Bate et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 458.
Bate's assertion that Johnson was impatient "with this device--so trivially artificial and irrelevant to his interests and gifts as a moralist. . . ." Bate goes on to argue that Johnson's aversion to the letter form "is illustrated by the decline of its use in the Adventurer. For here he was actually contributing to the periodical series of another and might have been expected to use the letter form." Yet this "decline" is scarcely perceptible, for the percentage of letters among the Adventurer papers by Johnson remains about the same as in the Rambler and Idler papers; in fact, the percentage of letters to the Adventurer is slightly higher than the percentage to the Idler, which Bate claims was written "with less commitment than . . . the earlier series." Johnson simply wrote fewer Adventurer essays than he wrote for either of the other two serials, and the number of letters decreased in proportion to the total number of papers written. While choosing not to publish authentic letters to the editor, Johnson, nevertheless, did not hesitate to employ the device of the imaginary letter.

Yet the tendency of Bate and other readers to assume that Johnson disliked this device is understandable, for Johnson himself rather scornfully comments upon the use of feigned letters in his Rambler, No. 193:


54 Ibid., p. xxvi.
This art of happiness [self-flattery] has been long practised by periodical writers, with little apparent violation of decency. When we think our excellencies overlooked by the world, or desire to recall the attention of the publick to some particular performance, we sit down with great composure and write a letter to ourselves. The correspondent, whose character we assume, always addresses us with the deference due to a superior intelligence; proposes his doubts with a proper sense of his own inability; offers an objection with trembling diffidence; and at last has no other pretensions to our notice than his profundity of respect, and sincerity of admiration, his submission to our dictates, and zeal for our success. To such a reader it is impossible to refuse regard, nor can it easily be imagined with how much alacrity we snatch up the pen which indignation or despair had condemned to inactivity, when we find such candour and judgment yet remaining in the world.55

He goes on with an account of a particular letter of this type, and the humorous tone becomes even broader:

A letter of this kind I had lately the honour of perusing, in which, though some of the periods were negligently closed, and some expressions of familiarity were used, which I thought might teach others to address me with too little reverence, I was so much delighted with the passages in which mention was made of—universal learning—unbounded genius—soul of Homer, Pythagoras, and Plato—solidity of thought—accuracy of distinction—elegance of combination—vigour of fancy—strength of reason—and regularity of composition—that I had once determined to lay it before the publick. Three times I sent it to the printer, and three times I fetched it back. My modesty was on the point of yielding, when reflecting that I was about to waste panegyricks on myself, which might be more profitably reserved for my patron, I locked it up for a better hour, in compliance with the farmer's principle, who never eats at home what he can carry to the market.56

55 The Rambler, V, 247.
56 Ibid.
These delightful paragraphs are exemplary of what A. T. Elder cites as the frequently overlooked ironic humor in the Rambler. It is true that the first part of this Rambler essay is a wholly serious discussion of man's appetite for praise, but with the last two paragraphs, quoted above, Johnson makes good-natured fun of a common device used by periodical essayists. To infer from his remarks that he actually detested the practice seems unwarranted in light of both his humorous tone here and his own frequent use of the device. One might as well take literally his deprecatory definition of essay in the Dictionary, "a loose sally of the mind," and assume that he found the essay a distasteful genre and avoided it whenever he could. His imaginary letters are no more like that which he describes in Rambler, No. 193, than his essays are illustrative of the description offered in the Dictionary.

Although Johnson was working within a tradition, he was innovative to some extent in his use of the letter device; and Bauer points out that this fact "is worth stressing since the letters to Mr. Rambler are sometimes taken as of negligible interest in the context of the great moral essays in that paper. Johnson's contemporaries thought at least enough of the way he treated letters to the editor in his paper to

57 "Irony and Humour in the Rambler," University of Toronto Quarterly, 30 (1960), 57-71.
imitate some of the characteristics in theirs." In the *Rambler* Johnson seems to have originated the practice of presenting whole issues consisting entirely of a letter without any introductory or closing remarks by the essayist himself. The letters often contain a self-portrait of the writer, which is delineated through the recounting of anecdotes. This practice was faithfully followed in at least three succeeding essay serials: the *Adventurer*, *World*, and *Connoisseur*. Another peculiarity of Johnson's imaginary letters resulted, perhaps, from his desire to have it known that he depended upon no one besides himself for his material. Not wishing anyone to think that he was using real letters, he made no attempt to give the letters any appearance of authenticity. He avoided topical matters as subjects and almost never appended a date or a "return address" to the letters. The names he signed also lack versimilitude, being either Latin terms or obvious caractonyms, such as Dick Linger and Betty Broom.

**Johnson and the Use of Personae**

The epistolary essays, then, which are the subject of this dissertation, are those essays that Johnson wrote in the form of a letter, that is, those having a salutation, a body,

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58 Bauer, p. 566.
60 Ibid., p. 571.
and a closing of some kind in the manner of an epistle. Although this study is primarily concerned with the epistolary essays in which Johnson assumes a personality different from his own—that is, those in which the use of a real persona is involved—the epistolary essays which appear merely to reflect the undisguised views of Johnson himself will also be considered in the course of this investigation, even though they offer little characterization of the imaginary correspondent.

In considering Johnson's use of personae, it is also necessary to deal with the identity of the nominal essayist in each series: Messrs. Rambler, Adventurer, and Idler. To what extent are these figures actual personae?

Since, for the purposes of this investigation, a "true" persona is defined as an imaginary personality assumed by the real author, the three noms de plume mentioned above do not qualify, because no characterization is attached to them which distinguishes them from Samuel Johnson himself. As Michael Rewa observes, "[T]he Rambler differs from popular personae, especially in his lack of biographical definition," and Johnson "uses the mask as an extension of his personality rather than a disguise."^61 Rewa explains in some detail the nature of the Rambler:

Although Johnson assumes a persona, he makes no effort to give the Rambler substantial fictive life like the Tatler or Spectator, to invest him with imaginatively attractive particularity. He emphasizes not what the Rambler sees, hears, imagines, or learns (like the Tatler or Spectator), but what the Rambler knows. What he knows is general human nature, its aspirations and delusions. The Rambler is thus less a person or fictive character than he is the embodiment of certain attitudes, values, and skills. The Rambler needs no biographical history or imaginative detailing or character because his knowledge and concerns are timeless rather than popular, general rather than accidentally particular.62

Charlotte Anne Carter agrees that the Rambler "is essentially Johnson," but she goes on to assert that "he is Johnson laughing at himself." She cites Rambler, No. 134, on procrastination, as an example of Johnson's self-ridicule, and she suggests that this attitude of mockery on his part creates a certain distance between the reader and the essayist.63

The character of the Adventurer, when assumed by Johnson, is indistinguishable from that of the Rambler, but some critics feel that in the Idler Johnson approached a true persona. Patrick O'Flaherty agrees that "in the Rambler no effort is made to create a persona," but he believes that in the Idler papers "Johnson [is] trying to distance himself from the reader and from society itself by adopting and attempting to sustain a mask of whimsical, cynical idleness."64

62 Ibid., p. 81.
Charlotte Carter sees a similar difference from the Rambler and Adventurer in the Idler: "The 'Idler' persona has a misleadingly general name," she says, for it "denotes a quite specific and functional point of view which 'Rambler' and 'Adventurer,' the truly general names do not. . . ." But the fact remains that the Idler is still not developed substantially as a character, as an individual. In the Idler papers Johnson is, perhaps, a bit more familiar with his readers than he is in the earlier series, but the Idler is still basically Johnson himself.

The success of Johnson's nominal essayists may be measured against this description of the ideal persona by Richmond P. Bond:

The eidolon of an essay paper, if he would have a long and good life, must be an interesting individual in his own right, with enough personality to attract and to preserve his band of followers. He should have admirable traits without ascending to the dull paragon, but he can wander from normality and typicality with quirks and eccentric wiles so long as he does not descend to such disconformities as will forfeit him the confidence and respect and even affection that his audience expects and desires to give him. Furthermore, he must not aspire to the status of a hero, for he is not the leading character of the piece, which may contain no such figure at all. He cannot permit himself the center of the stage or a role overly developed; he should not steal the show through an unnecessarily complex personality or personality.

65 "Personae and Characters," p. 158.

excessive participation in the episodes and speculations that he presents in his serialized performance. Though he must be in a credible position to report or remark, he must not oppressively call attention to his person or his situation. The effective persona, we see, should establish himself in the minds and also the hearts of his day-to-week-to-month adherents as a man worthy of welcome acceptance, humanly constituted but not sacrosanct or enveloping, a participant in the current circus of mundane things but not its major end.  

By the standards Bond sets up for the eidolon, Johnson succeeds very well, but he does so without assuming a personality markedly different from his own. The small quantity of characterization that does exist for Mr. Rambler appears to be simply a further example of Johnson's self-mockery. For instance, in Rambler No. 109, Johnson's habitual melancholy is derided by "Florentulus," who proposes to relate "a species of wretchedness" perfectly suited to the Rambler's taste. He imagines the essayist's reaction to such a prospect:

I cannot but imagine the start of attention awakened by this welcome hint; and at this instant see the Rambler snuffing his candle, rubbing his spectacles, stirring his fire, locking out interruption, and settling himself in his easy chair, that he may enjoy a new calamity without disturbance. For, whether it be, that continued sickness or misfortune has acquainted you only with the bitterness of being; or that you imagine none but yourself able to discover what I suppose has been seen and felt by all the inhabitants of the world: whether you

intend your writings as antidotal to the levity and merriment with which your rivals endeavour to attract the favour of the publick; or fancy that you have some particular powers of dolorous declamation, and "warble out your groans" with uncommon elegance or energy; it is certain, that whatever be your subject, melancholy for the most part bursts in upon your speculation, your gaiety is quickly overcast, and though your readers may be flattered with hopes of pleasantry, they are seldom dismissed but with heavy hearts.68

Such a "characterization" is obviously, as Charlotte Carter says, an example of "Johnson laughing at himself,"69 rather than a description of a completely fictional persona.

The bulk of the following chapters of this dissertation will deal with Johnson's epistolary essays in which the nominal sender is characterized in the course of the letter. That is, the personae with which this study is concerned are not those which are adopted merely to preserve the true author's anonymity but those which offer a personality substantially different from that of Johnson. That these personae should be found in letters is not surprising, for, as Bauer says, "The history of the letter . . . has been from earliest times one in which the form has given writers the opportunity to speak in voices not necessarily their own."70 The motivation for adopting a voice different from

68 The Rambler, IV, 215.
70 Bauer, p. 76.
one's own probably varies from author to author, but Richard Steele explains his purpose in using a mask in Tatler No. 271: "I never designed in it to give any man secret wound by my concealment, but spoke in the character of an old man, a philosopher, a humourist, an astrologer, and a censor, to allure my reader with the variety of my subjects, and insinuate, if I could, the weight of reason with the agreeableness of wit." Bauer suggests that the writer may employ a mask for reasons which lie "somewhere between the sport of trying to write in the vein of some type who amused him and the labors of bringing his own views or problems to public attention for comment or sympathy." The subsequent chapters of the present study will attempt to evaluate both Johnson's purpose and his achievement in his use of personae. Of the ninety-one epistolary essays he wrote for his periodical serials, the following have been judged to involve true personae: Rambler, Nos. 12, 15, 16, 26, 27, 34, 35, 42, 46, 51, 55, 61, 62, 73, 75, 82, 84, 95, 101, 107, 109, 113, 115, 116, 119, 123, 126, 130, 132, 133, 138, 141, 142, 147, 149, 153, 157, 161, 163, 165, 167, 170, 171, 174, 177, 181, 191, 192, 194, 195, 197, 198, 199, 200; Idler, Nos. 13, 21, 26, 28, 29, 35, 39, 46, 47, 53, 55, 62, 64, 78, 83, 86, 95, 100; and Adventurer, Nos. 34, 41, 53, 62, 74, 84, 102. The twelve


72 Bauer, p. 83.
remaining epistolary essays appear to express the views of Johnson himself, even though they may be signed with a pseudonym: *Rambler*, Nos. 45, 54, 57, 72, 98, 117; *Idler*, Nos. 8, 18, 22, 25, 41; and *Adventurer*, No. 92. Each of these essays will be analyzed in the next two chapters.
CHAPTER III

THE PERSONA AS PROTAGONIST

In approximately half of Johnson's epistolary essays, the imaginary correspondent himself appears to be the primary concern. That is, the persona is telling his own story with emphasis upon his own feelings, his own actions, or--as is frequently the case--his own foolishness. This chapter will survey these particular essays, in which the nominal author serves as a protagonist. The following chapter will deal with those essays in which the persona seems to function more as a reporter than as chief actor.

Most of the essays are easily included in one category or the other after brief consideration, but the classification of a very small number might be open to question, for it becomes a matter of weighing degrees of emphasis. Some letters reveal enough about the correspondent to distinguish him as a fictional personage; yet the main portion of the letter is devoted to a character sketch of someone else, thus relegating the persona to the role of observer rather than protagonist. Such a letter comprises Rambler, No. 61, in which Ruricola, a country-dweller, describes Mr. Frollick, who feels superior to the rural inhabitants simply because he has come recently from the city and knows the latest news.
The major portion of this essay is devoted to a delineation of the character of Frolick and others like him; Ruricola's feelings are of secondary importance. In *Rambler*, No. 12, however, the character sketches offered by Zosima are incidental to the account of her own plight as an impecunious gentlewoman forced to seek employment as a maid. Thus, Zosima seems more like a protagonist than a mere observer. The role of Misargyrus, who writes to the Adventurer from Fleet Prison, is that of protagonist in his first two letters (Nos. 34 and 41), where he recounts his degenerate youth; but he becomes a character-writer in *Adventurer*, Nos. 53 and 62, which contain histories of some of his fellow inmates and concentrate on various failings which may lead a man to debtors' prison.

The correspondents depicted by Johnson face a wide range of problems. Some solicit advice, but Johnson as essayist rarely comments directly upon any of the letters, although he often deals with the same general subjects elsewhere. The letters in which the fictional writer serves as protagonist frequently approach the form of a short story narrated by the main character. Some major themes developed in their stories are reflected in the subheadings of the following survey.

**False Values and Useless Activity**

Several of Johnson's personae suffer from the effects of misguided parental influence. As children they were taught
to value one goal in life at the expense of all other accomplishments, and at best such shortsightedness has resulted in a severely limited human being. Florentulus (Rambler, No. 109) and Papilius (Rambler, No. 141), for instance, have grown up to be nothing but dandies as a result of the values instilled by their parents.

Florentulus attributes his unhappiness to the fact that he was the only child of overly solicitous parents who valued social success above all other accomplishments. He was not, therefore, sent to school for fear of his being tainted by vulgar scholarship. By the time he was twelve years old, Florentulus had been so well tutored in the manners of society that he had managed to overcome "every appearance of childish diffidence." A few years later he was ready to enter the society of London, and he found what he thought to be the ultimate satisfaction in the admiration and caresses of the ladies. His happiness began to wane, however, and Florentulus realized that his existence was empty of lasting pleasures. He sought to change his way of life but discovered to his humiliation that it was too late to begin anew:

I . . . found that my flatterers had very little power to relieve the languor of satiety, or recreate weariness, by varied amusement; and therefore endeavoured to enlarge the sphere of my pleasures, and to try what satisfaction might be found in the

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1 The Rambler, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), IV, 218. All further references to The Rambler are to this edition and will be cited in the text only by volume and page.
society of men. I will not deny the mortification with which I perceived, that every man whose name I had heard mentioned with respect, received me with a kind of tenderness nearly bordering on compassion; and that those whose reputation was not well established, thought it necessary to justify their understandings, by treating me with contempt. One of these witlings elevated his crest, by asking me in a full coffee-house the price of patches; and another whispered, that he wondered why Miss Frisk did not keep me that afternoon to watch her squirrel. (IV, 219)

Rebuffed by other men, then, Florentulus can only return to the ladies and renew his dedication to their pleasures. Unfortunately, however, he now finds that his feminine admirers have married or grown too old for the youthful social whirl, and the younger group of beauties are interested in boys their own age. Florentulus is thus "welcome only to a few grave ladies, who, unacquainted with all that gives either use or dignity to life, are content to pass their hours between their bed and their cards, without esteem from the old, or reverence from the young" (IV, 220).

Florentulus concludes his letter with a petulant complaint that he is ignored in age by the women to whose pleasure he devoted his youth. "They that encourage folly in the boy," he says, "have no right to punish it in the man" (IV, 220). He has some understanding of his failure, but he is unwilling to accept the blame for it.

Papilius (Rambler, No. 141) is at once more aware of his own foolishness and more bitter than Florentulus. Papilius was encouraged in youth to value "good humour" above all else, for he found that it gained him both praise
and friends. Upon arriving in London as a young man, he quickly became the darling of the ladies, much as Florentulus had done. Papilius is now fully conscious of the degrading role he chose to play and describes it with obvious disgust:

A lady's wit is a man who can make ladies laugh, to which, however easy it may seem, many gifts of nature and attainments of art must commonly concur. He that hopes to be received as a wit in the female assemblies, should have a form neither so amiable as to strike with admiration, nor so coarse as to raise disgust, with an understanding too feeble to be dreaded, and too forcible to be despised. The other parts of the character are more subject to variation; it was formerly essential to a wit, that half his back should be covered with a snowy fleece, and at a time yet more remote no man was a wit without his boots. In the days of the Spectator a snuff-box seems to have been indispensable; but in my time an embroidered coat was sufficient, without any precise regulation of the rest of his dress. (IV, 386)

False values have led both of these men into socially useless lives, and Johnson obviously views their unproductive activities with repugnance. Edward A. Bloom notes that "some of Johnson's most forceful detestation of the entire breed of idlers is concentrated in the depiction of Papilius..." Yet the poignant side of such men's existence is not ignored by Johnson either. Papilius entreats Mr. Rambler to "consider... and compassionate the condition of a man who has taught every company to expect from him, a continual feast of laughter... The task of every other slave has an end.

2 "Symbolic Names in Johnson's Periodical Essays," Modern Language Quarterly, 13 (1952), 341. This article contains etymologies for many of the Latin names which Johnson gave to his personae.
The rower in time reaches the port; the lexicographer at last finds the conclusion of his alphabet; only the hapless wit has his labour always to begin, the call for novelty is never satisfied, and one jest only raises expectation of another" (IV, 386-87). The sympathy suggested by this passage and in a subsequent account of the wit's pitiful stratagems to arouse laughter is no doubt laced generously with irony, but Papilius does reveal a degree of self-knowledge, although at forty-five years of age, he feels unable to profit from it. "I am under the melancholy necessity," he concludes, "of supporting that character by study, which I gained by levity, having learned too late that gaiety must be recommended by higher qualities, and that mirth can never please long but as the efflorescence of a mind loved for its luxuriance, but esteemed for its usefulness" (IV, 388).

Rambler, No. 174, presents another foolish man who, as one critic says, "condemns himself that others may profit." Dicaculus, upon entering adulthood, "desired nothing beyond the title of a wit" (V, 155) and set about to accomplish his goal of creating merriment. Willing to go to any lengths to amuse the company, he learned to satirize any weaknesses or mistakes of his acquaintances: "... I was able to relate of every man whom I knew some blunder or miscarriage; to betray the most circumspect of my friends into follies, by a judicious flattery of his predominant passion; or expose him  

3 Ibid.
to contempt, by placing him in circumstances which put his prejudices into action, brought to view his natural defects, or drew the attention of the company on his airs of affectation" (V, 157). Not surprisingly, such "wit" eventually cost Dicaculus all his friends, for no one could trust him. Although he recognizes his mistake now, he is condemned to solitude for his folly.

These three men have all led foolish and trivial lives, but Pertinax, in Rambler, No. 95, is misled even more dangerously than they by his disputatious parents and has suffered from "an intellectual malady, which, though at first it seizes only the passions, will, if not speedily remedied, infect the reason, and, from blasting the blossoms of knowledge, proceed in time to canker the root" (IV, 143). Pertinax was reared in an atmosphere of discord, for his parents continually argued and taught to him by example "all the arts of domestic sophistry" and "a thousand low stratagems, nimble shifts, and sly concealments" (IV, 144). At school and at the university, Pertinax continued to engage in disputes and in time settled upon a career in law. Sent to the Temple, he "declared war against all received opinions and established rules" (IV, 145), and the unhealthy result was a loss of all reason:

It had been happy for me could I have confined my scepticism to historical controversies, and philosophical disquisitions; but having now violated my reason, and accustomed myself to
enquire not after proofs, but objections, I had perplexed truth with falsehood till my ideas were confused, my judgment embarrassed, and my intellects distorted. The habit of considering every proposition as alike uncertain, left me no test by which any tenet could be tried; every opinion presented both sides with equal evidence, and my fallacies began to operate upon my own mind in more important enquiries. It was at last the sport of my vanity to weaken the obligations of moral duty, and efface the distinctions of good and evil, till I had deadened the sense of conviction, and abandoned my heart to the fluctuations of uncertainty, without anchor and without compass, without satisfaction of curiosity or peace of conscience; without principles of reason, or motives of action. (IV, 146-47)

Discovering at last that only the ignorant and the wicked were interested in his conversation, Pertinax was shocked into a revaluation of his argumentative practices. He has now "retired from all temptations to dispute," and he reports with relief, "By this method I am at length recovered from my argumental delirium, and find myself in the state of one awakened from the confusion and tumult of a feverish dream. I rejoice in the new possession of evidence and reality, and step on from truth to truth with confidence and quiet" (IV, 147-48).

Misocapelus, one of several second sons among Johnson's characters, relates in Rambler, No. 116, how he was taught by his mother to desire wealth above all else. She described the glories of London and the extravagant wealth of tradesmen so vividly that Misocapelus was overjoyed to find himself bound to a haberdasher, and he applied himself so well to his
employment that he soon was a master of his trade. Unfortunately he discovered that his accomplishments did not impress his friends in the country when he returned home for a visit: "... at the first publick table to which I was invited, appeared a student of the Temple, and an officer of the Guards, who looked upon me with a smile of contempt, which destroyed at once all my hopes of distinction, so that I durst hardly raise my eyes for fear of encountering their superiority of mien" (IV, 256). His puzzlement was complete, for he knew that neither of these gentlemen had more money than he, yet they were obviously preferred as company to Misocapelus. His mother attempted to comfort him by reiterating the importance of wealth, but Misocapelus had come to doubt her wisdom and had begun to consider her "as one whose ignorance and prejudice had hurried me, though without ill intentions, into a state of meanness and ignominy, from which I could not find any possibility of rising to the rank which my ancestors had always held" (IV, 257).

Misocapelus, therefore, returned to his job without the enthusiasm he had displayed earlier, and his resulting negligence caused his master to transfer him to an obscure position in a warehouse. After many months, Misocapelus was saved from this dreary existence by the demise of his elder brother, who "died of drunken joy, for having run down a fox that had baffled all the packs in the province" (IV, 258). Now an
heir and a gentleman, Misocapelus gladly embarked upon his new life, the vicissitudes of which are recounted in another letter, *Rambler*, No. 123.

In his second letter Misocapelus describes his attempts to prove himself equal to the rank of gentleman, but, as one critic says, he was never able to rid himself of "the taint of trade." After the death of his brother, he did his best to assume the airs of the propertied gentleman. He sadly relates that when he exerted himself to please the ladies, "there was always some unlucky conversation upon ribbands, fillets, pins, or thread, which drove all my stock of compliments out of my memory, and overwhelmed me with shame and dejection" (IV, 295). He ends his letter on a note of resignation, having decided that instead of wasting his life "in vain endeavours after accomplishments which, if not early acquired, no endeavours can obtain," he will "hope to secure esteem by honesty and truth" (IV, 295).

A young woman called Victoria writes in *Rambler*, No. 130, of her mother's emphasis on physical beauty as the only worthwhile goal for a young lady. The girl dutifully heeded her mother's admonitions and blossomed into an extraordinarily lovely creature. At the height of her charms, however, she began to wonder if something had been neglected in her education:

When I had singled out one [admirer] from the rest as more worthy of encouragement, I proceeded in my measures by the rules of art; and yet when the ardour of the first visits was spent, generally found a sudden declension of my influence; I felt in myself the want of some power to diversify amusement, and enliven conversation, and could not but suspect that my mind failed in performing the promises of my face. This opinion was soon confirmed by one of my lovers, who married Lavinia with less beauty and fortune than mine, because he thought a wife ought to have qualities which might make her amiable when her bloom was past. (IV, 329-30)

Her mother, however, refused to admit any other necessity than beauty for a woman, and when Victoria's beauty was marred by smallpox, the girl faced an existence robbed of all meaning: "... when I looked again on that face which had been often flushed with transport at its own reflexion, and saw all that I had learned to value, all that I had endeavoured to improve, all that had procured me honours or praises, irrecoverably destroyed, I sunk at once into melancholy and despondence" (IV, 330).

The second letter from Victoria (Rambler, No. 133) continues her dismal account. Her mother was ashamed of the girl's scarred face and for some time hid her away while ineffectual cosmetics were vainly applied in an attempt to restore her beauty. At last driven back into society by the boredom of solitude, Victoria found that the men ignored her and the women offered only an insolent sympathy. "None had any care to find amusements for me," she writes, "and I had no power of amusing myself. Idleness exposed me to melancholy,
and life began to languish in motionless indifference" (IV, 344). Victoria finally confided her misery to Euphemia, her only real friend, and the letter closes with Euphemia's words of wisdom, which doubtless express the attitude of Johnson himself:

We must distinguish . . . my Victoria, those evils which are imposed by providence, from those to which we ourselves give the power of hurting us. Of your calamity, a small part is the infliction of heaven, the rest is little more than the corrosion of idle discontent. You have lost that which may indeed sometimes contribute to happiness, but to which happiness is by no means inseparably annexed. You have lost what the greater number of the human race never have possessed; what those on whom it is bestowed for the most part possess in vain; and what you, while it was yours, knew not how to use: You have only lost early what the laws of nature forbid you to keep long, and have lost it while your mind is yet flexible, and while you have time to substitute more valuable and more durable excellencies. Consider yourself, my Victoria, as a being born to know, to reason, and to act; rise at once from your dream of melancholy to wisdom and to piety; you will find that there are other charms than those of beauty, and other joys than the praise of fools. (IV, 344-45)

The implication is that Victoria will heed this advice and overcome her early indoctrination.

Perdita, writing in Adventurer, No. 74, has also suffered the consequences of accepting without question the values of older people. She discusses the nature of advice generally, then progresses to her own particular situation:

I, being naturally of a ductile and easy temper, without strong desires or quick resentments, was always a favourite amongst the elderly ladies, because I never rebelled against seniority, nor could be charged with thinking myself wise
before my time; but heard every opinion with submissive silence, professed myself ready to learn from all who seemed inclined to teach me, paid the same grateful acknowledgements for precepts contradictory to each other, and if any controversy arose, was careful to side with her who presided in the company.

Of this compliance I very early found the advantage; for my aunt Matilda left me a very large addition to my fortune, for this reason chiefly, as she herself declared, because I was not above hearing good counsel, but would sit from morning till night to be instructed, while my sister Sukey, who was a year younger than myself, and was, therefore, in greater want of information, was so much conceited of her own knowledge, that whenever the good lady in the ardour of benevolence reproved or instructed her, she would pout or titter, interrupt her with questions, or embarrass her with objections.

I had no design to supplant my sister by this complaisant attention; nor, when the consequence of my obsequiousness came to be known, did Sukey so much envy as despise me; I was, however, very well pleased with my success; and having received, from the concurrent opinion of all mankind, a notion that to be rich was to be great and happy, I thought I had obtained my advantages at an easy rate, and resolved to continue the same passive attention, since I found myself so powerfully recommended by it to kindness and esteem.5

Perdita for a while continued to believe that she was truly enlightened by the advice she received and considered herself well qualified to face the challenge of life, that is, the challenge of acquiring a suitable husband. Unfortunately, Perdita discovered that by trying to follow all the advice

5 The Idler and The Adventurer, ed. W. J. Bate et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 396-97. All further references to The Idler or The Adventurer are to this edition. Since it is Volume II of The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, references will be cited in the text by this volume number and page.
she received, she was forced to reject or alienate all her suitors one by one: "Some, indeed, I was permitted to encourage; but miscarried of the main end by treating them according to the rules of art which had been prescribed me: Altilis, an old maid, infused into me so much haughtiness and reserve, that some of my lovers withdrew themselves from my frown and returned no more; others were driven away by the demands of settlement, which the widow Trapland directed me to make; and I have learned," Perdita concludes, "... that to ask advice is to lose opportunity" (II, 399-400).

If it is not too late for Perdita to make amends for her past foolishness, the unnamed correspondent of *Rambler*, No. 35, is less fortunate. This gentleman is suffering the consequences of having chosen a wife for the wrong reasons. In his late twenties he wearied of city life and decided to manage his estate in the country. After a short time he became bored with his new life and desired a companion. He was compassionate and wise enough to deplore the attempts of his neighbors to provide him with a wife: "I saw not without indignation, the eagerness with which the daughters, wherever I came, were set out to show; nor could I consider them in a state much different from prostitution, when I found them ordered to play their airs before me, and to exhibit, by some seeming chance, specimens of their musick, their work, or their housewifery" (III, 192). But despite the fact that
he knew "these overtures not to proceed from any preference of me before another equally rich," his judgment was affected adversely: "I will not deny that, by hearing myself loudly commended for my discretion, I began to set some value upon my character, and was unwilling to lose my credit by marrying for love. I therefore resolved to know the fortune of the lady whom I should address, before I enquired after her wit, delicacy, or beauty" (III, 192-93).

This mercenary attitude resulted in the choice of Mitissa for a bride, who, it turned out, had on her part equally prudent motives for marriage. She replaced all her husband's servants with her own, and he writes that "they established a family, over which I had no authority, and which was in a perpetual conspiracy against me; for Mitissa considered herself as having a separate interest, and thought nothing her own, but what she laid up without my knowledge" (IQI, 194). This correspondent realizes that his marriage is no more nor less than he bargained for, and he explains that he is writing simply "to warn others against marrying those whom they have no reason to esteem" (III, 195).

False values may lead to useless activity as in the cases of the would-be wits discussed above, but perhaps the epitome of uselessness is found in the industry of the virtuoso, the collector of curiosities for no purpose except possession. Quisquilius, who writes in Rambler, No. 82, is an extreme example of this type; he is obsessed with his gathering of
unusual items and proclaims himself to be "the most laborious and zealous virtuoso that the present age has had the honour of producing" (IV, 65). One scholar calls this essay a superb example of "mad irony without venom," and the following quotations may indicate the aptness of that appellation:

It was observed, from my entrance into the world, that I had something uncommon in my disposition, and that there appeared in me very early tokens of superior genius. I was always an enemy to trifles; the play-things which my mother bestowed upon me I immediately broke that I might discover the method of their structure, and the causes of their motions; of all the toys with which children are delighted I valued only my coral, and as soon as I could speak, asked, like Peiresc, innumerable questions which the maids about me could not resolve. As I grew older I was more thoughtful and serious, and instead of amusing myself with puerile diversions, made collections of natural rarities, and never walked into the fields without bringing home stones of remarkable forms, or insects of some uncommon species. I never entered an old house, from which I did not take away the painted glass, and often lamented that I was not one of that happy generation who demolished the convents and monasteries, and broke windows by law.

When I was two and twenty years old, I became, by the death of my father, possessed of a small estate in land, with a very large sum of money in the public funds, and must confess that I did not much lament him, for he was a man of mean parts, bent rather upon growing rich than wise. He once fretted at the expense of only ten shillings, which he happened to overhear me offering for the sting of a hornet, though it was a cold moist summer, in which very few hornets had been seen. He often recommended to me the study of physick, in which, said he, you may at once gratify your curiosity after natural history, and encrease

your fortune by benefiting mankind. I heard him, Mr. Rambler, with pity, and as there was no prospect of elevating a mind formed to grovel, suffered him to please himself with hoping that I should sometime follow his advice. For you know that there are men, with whom when they have once settled a notion in their heads, it is to very little purpose to dispute.

But my ruling passion is patriotism: my chief care has been to procure the products of our own country; and as Alfred received the tribute of the Welch in wolves' heads, I allowed my tenants to pay their rents in butterflies, till I had exhausted the papilionaceous tribe. I then directed them to the pursuit of other animals, and obtained, by this easy method, most of the grubs and insects, which land, air, or water can supply. I have three species of earthworms not known to the naturalists, have discovered a new ephemera, and can shew four wasps that were taken torpid in their winter quarters. I have, from my own ground, the longest blade of grass upon record, and once accepted, as a half year's rent for a field of wheat, an ear containing more grains than had been seen before upon a single stem.

I do not wish to raise the envy of unsuccessful collectors, by too pompous a display of my scientifick wealth, but cannot forbear to observe, that there are few regions of the globe which are not honoured with some memorial in my cabinets. I flatter myself that I am writing to a man who will rejoice at the honour which my labours have procured to my country, and therefore, I shall tell you that Britain can by my care boast of a snail that has crawled upon the wall of China; a humming bird which an American princess wore in her ear; the tooth of an elephant who carried the queen of Siam; the skin of an ape that was kept in the palace of the great mogul; a ribbon that adorned one of the maids of a Turkish sultana; and a symeter once wielded by a soldier of Abas the Great. (IV, 65-69)

Poor Quisquilius, however--whose name, incidentally, means "waste or refuse"--has allowed his enthusiasm to lead him to bankruptcy, and he must sell his collection in order

to pay his debts. In his calm manner he concludes his letter to Mr. Rambler, "I submit to that which cannot be opposed, and shall, in a short time, declare a sale. I have, while it is yet in my power, sent you a pebble, pick'd up by Tavenier on the banks of the Ganges; for which I desire no other recompense than that you will recommend my catalogue to the public" (IV, 70).

As one scholar says, this "final solicitation, coming from such an innocuous person, arouses our compassion, not our contempt," and Johnson himself found this character to be worthy of additional comment, for in the very next Rambler paper, he considers the virtuoso again and warns that "it is dangerous to discourage well-intended labours, or innocent curiosity," for harmless activity is surely preferable to mischief (IV, 71). He concludes that probably the worst he can say is that the virtuoso "may be sometimes culpable for confining himself to business below his genius, and losing in petty speculations, those hours by which if he had spent them in nobler studies, he might have given new light to the intellectual world" (IV, 75).

8 Worden, p. 236.

9 In his book Samuel Johnson and the Life of Writing (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 167, Paul Fussell asserts that in this second essay Johnson offers "an elaborate justification of just such activities as his previous paper has been at pains to deride." The phrase "elaborate justification" seems a bit strong. Johnson, as will be noted later in this study, frequently presents both sides of a question.
Vivaculus recounts, in *Rambler*, No. 177, his own encounter with learning devoid of practicality. Upon the death of his father, he inherited enough money to devote his life to "curiosity . . . and without any confinement . . . to wander over the boundless regions of general knowledge" (V, 168). After some years passed in this delightful activity, however, Vivaculus found that his immersion in books was having ill effects on his personality:

... I began to find my mind contracted and stiffened by solitude. My ease and elegance were sensibly impaired; I was no longer able to accommodate myself with readiness to the accidental current of conversation, my notions grew particular and paradoxical, and my phraseology formal and unfashionable; I spoke, on common occasions, the language of books. My quickness of apprehension, and celerity of reply, had entirely deserted me: When I delivered my opinion, or detailed my knowledge, I was bewildered by an unseasonable interrogatory, disconcerted by any slight opposition, and overwhelmed, and lost in dejection, when the smallest advantage was gained against me in dispute. I became decisive and dogmatical, impatient of contradiction, perpetually jealous of my character, insolent to such as acknowledged my superiority, and sullen and malignant to all who refused to receive my dictates. (V, 169)

Desiring to cure this intellectual malady, Vivaculus hastened to London, where he sought out a group of learned men who met every week to exchange ideas. When he became acquainted with these men, Vivaculus was disgusted by their insularity and egotism, for each one smugly devoted all his energies to some trivial collection. Hirsutus, for instance,
collected English books "printed in the black character"
(one of which he discussed purchasing from Quisquilius), and
Ferratus collected English copper (V, 170).

Vivaculus expresses nothing but contempt for this group,
but Johnson, as he did in the case of Quisquilius, seems
compelled to defend their activities in another of his rare
direct comments upon a letter:

It is natural to feel grief or indignation, when
any thing, necessary or useful, is wantonly wasted,
or negligently destroyed; and therefore, my correspon-
dent cannot be blamed for looking with uneasiness on
the waste of life. Leisure and curiosity might soon
make great advances in useful knowledge, were they not
diverted by minute emulation and laborious trifles.
It may, however, somewhat mollify his anger to reflect,
that perhaps, none of the assembly which he describes,
was capable of any nobler employment, and that he who
does his best, however little, is always to be distin-
guished from him who does nothing. Whatever busies
the mind without corrupting it, has at least this use,
that it rescues the day from idleness, and he that is
never idle will not often be vitious (V, 172)

An unsigned letter to the Idler (No. 55) relates the
correspondent’s sadly unappreciated efforts in the study of
nature. This gentleman, having the desire to be an author,
was encouraged by the curiosity of a lady with whom he took
a walk to write a monumental natural history of his county of
residence. He recounts the extraordinary difficulties he
faced in compiling this history and describes his hopes for
fame and fortune upon its completion. He set out for London
with the finished work and assumed he would be welcomed by
all learned men, but he was to be disappointed:
I took lodgings near the house of the Royal Society, and expected every morning a visit from the president: I walked in the park, and wondered that I overheard no mention of the great naturalist. At last I visited a noble earl, and told him of my work; he answered, that he was under an engagement never to subscribe. I was angry to have that refused which I did not mean to ask, and concealed my design of making him immortal. I went next day to another, and, in resentment of my late affront, offered to prefix his name to my new book; he said, coldly, that "there were too many books," and another would "talk with me when the races were over."

Being amazed to find a man of learning so indecently slighted, I resolved to indulge the philosophical pride of retirement and independence. I then sent to some of the principal booksellers the plan of my book, and bespoke a large room in the next tavern, that I might more commodiously see them together, and enjoy the contest, while they were out-bidding one another. I drank my coffee, and yet nobody was come; at last I received a note from one, to tell me, that he was going out of town; and from another, that natural history was out of his way; at last there came a grave man, who desired to see the work, and, without opening it, told me, that a book of that size "would never do."

I then condescended to step into shops, and mentioned my work to the masters. Some never dealt with authors; others had their hands full; some never had known such a dead time; others had lost by all that they had published for the last twelvemonth. One offered to print my work, if I could procure subscriptions for five hundred, and would allow me two hundred copies for my property. I lost my patience, and gave him a kick, for which he has indicted me. (II, 173-74)

The deluded man refuses to recognize his true situation and maintains that there is a plot against him: "I can easily perceive, that there is a combination among them to defeat my expectations, and I find it so general, that I am sure it must have been long concerted. I suppose some of my friends, to whom I read the first part, gave notice of my design, and,
perhaps, sold the treacherous intelligence at a higher price than the fraudulence of trade will now allow me for my book" (II, 174). Patrick O'Flaherty notes that the poignancy in this letter sets it apart from other satires on scholars, such as Pope's portrait of Annius and Mummius in The Dunciad, for instance. "And yet, for all the pathos in the essay," O'Flaherty points out, "the humour is still pervasive."10

One correspondent, Hermeticus (Rambler, No. 199), appears to be well satisfied with his many years of devotion to scientific experiment. He asserts the claim that he has ever "laboured for the benefit of mankind," and proudly describes his selfless activities:

> I was born to no fortune, and therefore had only my mind and body to devote to knowledge, and the gratitude of posterity will attest, that neither mind nor body have been spared. I have sat whole weeks without sleep by the side of an athanor, to watch the moment of projection; I have made the first experiment in nineteen diving engines of new construction; I have fallen eleven times speechless under the shock of electricity; I have twice dislocated my limbs, and once fractured my skull in essaying to fly; and four times endangered my life by submitting to the transfusion of blood. (V, 272).

He writes that he has achieved his goal of finding a means "of preserving the connubial compact from violation, and setting mankind free for ever from the danger of supposititious children, and the torments of fruitless vigilance and anxious suspicion" (V, 273). Hermeticus owes his discovery

to an ancient philosopher, Abraham Ben Hannase, who wrote of a magnet which can detect unfaithfulness in wives, and Hermeticus cannot imagine why the wondrous fact has not been publicized before now: "Full of this perplexity, I read the lines of Abraham to a friend, who advised me not to expose my life by a mad indulgence of the love of fame; he warned me by the fate of Orpheus, that knowledge or genius could give no protection to the invader of female prerogatives . . . ." (V, 274).

But Hermeticus refuses to believe his friend's account of the world's corruption and blithely details his plan for marketing the lodestone in various sizes and degrees of strength. Such a fanciful project is, no doubt, as harmless as the activities of the virtuoso described above, but despite his claims to the contrary, Hermeticus can hardly be considered a significant benefactor of mankind.

Dick Linger, who writes in Idler, No. 21, explains how sheer boredom has led him into useless activity. Being a second son, he did not have an inheritance to depend upon; he therefore "passed some years in the most contemptible of all human stations, that of a soldier in time of peace" (II, 66). Upon the death of an uncle, however, he received a legacy which allowed him to be independent, so he quit the army. For a short time he enjoyed his freedom: "I amused myself for two years, in passing from place to place, and comparing one
convenience with another; but being at last ashamed of enquiry and weary of uncertainty, I purchased a house, and established my family" (II, 67). Soon, however, boredom attacked Linger again, and he is now suffering from its evil effects:

Time with all its celerity, moves slowly to him, whose whole employment is to watch its flight. I am forced upon a thousand shifts to enable me to endure the tediousness of the day. I rise when I can sleep no longer, and take my morning walk; I see what I have seen before, and return. I sit down and persuade myself, that I sit down to think, find it impossible to think without a subject, rise up to enquire after news, and endeavour to kindle in myself, an artificial impatience for intelligence of events, which will never extend any consequence to me, but that a few minutes they abstract me from myself.

When I have heard any thing that may gratify curiosity, I am busied for a while, in running to relate it. I hasten from one place of concourse to another, delighted with my own importance, and proud to think that I am doing something tho' I know that another hour would spare my labour.

I had once a round of visits, which I paid very regularly, but I have now tired most of my friends. When I have sat down I forget to rise, and have more than once over-heard one asking another when I would be gone. I perceive the company tired, I observe the mistress of the family whispering to her servants, I find orders given to put off business till to-morrow, I see the watches frequently inspected, and yet cannot withdraw to the vacuity of solitude, or venture myself in my own company. (II, 67-8)

There seems to be little hope that Linger will be able to rouse himself from his listlessness although he concludes with the vow that he is "now beginning in earnest to begin a reformation" (II, 68), for he also admits that he has been resolving to reform for the past twenty years. All of his activities are useless because their only purpose is to kill time, and he receives no satisfaction or pleasure from them.
The Importance of Wealth

One example of the baleful effects that can arise from an undue emphasis upon monetary gain has been treated above in the story of the gentleman who chose his wife solely upon the basis of her wealth (Rambler, No. 35), but several other correspondents also confess their regret for having allowed the desire for money to direct their lives.

One of the most bizarre accounts (Rambler, No. 181) comes from an unnamed man who became obsessed with lotteries. Highly successful as a linen draper at an exceedingly young age, he was prevailed upon one day to buy a lottery ticket. Later, upon learning that the number next to his had won, he says, "My heart leaped at the thought of such an approach to sudden riches, which I considered myself, however contrarily to the laws of computation, as having missed by a single chance; and I could not forbear to revolve the consequences which such a bounteous allotment would have produced, if it had happened to me" (V, 188).

The young man began devoting all his energies to plotting how he might win future lotteries. He tried various methods of choosing supposedly lucky numbers, all to no avail, and his business began to suffer because of his lack of attention. After many disappointments he decided to adopt a new strategy:

Miscarriage naturally produced diffidence; I began now to seek assistance against ill luck, by an alliance with those that had been more successful. I enquired diligently, at what office any prize had
been sold, that I might purchase of a propitious vendor; solicited those who had been fortunate in former lotteries, to partake with me in my new tickets; and, whenever I met with one that had in any event of his life been eminently prosperous, I invited him to take a larger share. I had, by this rule of conduct, so diffused my interest, that I had a fourth part of fifteen tickets, an eighth of forty and a sixteenth of ninety. (V, 190)

As might be expected, when one of his tickets finally did win a prize of five thousand pounds, it was one of which he had sold all but a sixteenth part. The shock of having parted with the major portion of a fortune resulted in the man's surrender to grief and despair until he was visited by a clergyman, Eumathes, who offered him wise counsel concerning the dangers of trusting one's happiness to luck. In the following *Rambler* paper, Johnson comments upon this subject also, broadening the application of the correspondent's example: "The folly of untimely exultation and visionary prosperity is by no means peculiar to the purchasers of tickets; there are multitudes whose life is nothing but a continued lottery; who are always within a few months of plenty and happiness, and how often soever they are mocked with blanks, expect a prize from the next adventure" (V, 192).

There are three legacy hunters who write to Mr. Rambler of their dreary existence in anticipation of "visionary prosperity." These creatures, like several of the correspondents discussed above, can also attribute their unhappiness to the values inculcated in them as children.
Captator, for instance, tells in Rambler, No. 197, how his parents "knew the force of early education, and took care that the blank of my understanding should be filled with impressions of the value of money" (V, 262). Although he soon discovered that he had not been born into a fortune, Captator learned that he was related to three persons with considerable wealth and no direct heirs: "My mother's aunt had attended on a lady, who, when she died, rewarded her officiousness and fidelity with a large legacy. My father had two relations, of whom one had broken his indentures and run to sea, from whence, after an absence of thirty years, he returned with ten thousand pounds; and the other had lured an heiress out of a window, who dying of her first child, had left him her estate . . ." (V, 263). To complicate matters, however, each of these relations of Captator despised the other two; thus, the young man, whose parents and inclinations insisted on his settling for no less than all three legacies, was faced with the difficult task of trying to please all the relatives at once.

The results of his efforts are reported in a second letter (Rambler, No. 198), immediately following the first. For a while he succeeded, through devious and hypocritical means, in being the favorite of each relative, but the old sailor created a problem when he arranged to have the boy sent to sea. Captator was struck with terror at the very prospect of sailing,
but the old seaman was adamant, and the boy and his parents were forced into seeming compliance. Feigning a serious illness, Captator managed to avoid going to sea, but his mother's maid revealed his deceitfulness to his uncle in order to encourage the uncle's amorous interest. She succeeded, for the uncle "stormed and raved, and declaring that he would have heirs of his own, and not give his substance to cheats and cowards, married the girl in two days, and has now four children" (V, 270). Captator, therefore, found himself unfortunately revealed for what he was, and his letter concludes with an account of his current inauspicious circumstances, for which he blames his parents:

Cowardice is always scorned, and deceit universally detested. I found my friends, if not wholly alienated, at least cooled in their affection; the squire, though he did not wholly discard me, was less fond, and often enquired when I would go to sea. I was obliged to bear his insults, and endeavoured to rekindle his kindness by assiduity and respect, but all my care was vain; he died without a will, and the estate devolved to the legal heir.

Thus has the folly of my parents condemned me to spend in flattery and attendance those years in which I might have been qualified to place myself above hope or fear. I am arrived at manhood without any useful art or generous sentiment; and, if the old woman should likewise at last deceive me, am in danger at once of beggary and ignorance. (V, 270)

Constantius, who writes in Rambler, No. 192, does not present so utterly contemptible a figure as Captator, but he is equally unsuccessful at winning and maintaining the affection of a wealthy relative. The family fortune having been foolishly depleted through several generations, an uncle of Constantius was finally allowed to enter a trade, although
such an expedient was repugnant to the aristocratic pretensions of the family. The man gradually obtained a large fortune and desired to re-establish his family in their rightful rank. Since he had never married, his logical choice of an heir appeared to be Constantius.

Once his prospects became known, Constantius found himself suddenly befriended by other gentlemen who had previously ignored him. He was wise enough to see this adulation for what it was and to remain unimpressed until the beautiful Flavilla appeared, for whom he was overwhelmed with love. Lucius, Flavilla's father, promised her hand to Constantius on the condition that Constantius should indeed inherit the uncle's estate, and the betrothal was thus delayed until the old man should die. Constantius was not unhappy with this arrangement since he was permitted the company of Flavilla, but his conscience did not leave him entirely in peace: "I began to be ashamed of sitting idle, in expectation of growing rich by the death of my benefactor, and proposed to Lucius many schemes of raising my own fortune by such assistance as I knew my uncle willing to give me" (V, 242). But Lucius did not wish to risk a change in the affections of Constantius and dissuaded him from projects which would remove him from Flavilla's company.

When the uncle finally died, however, he left his estate to the younger brother of Constantius. The brother had devoted
himself to the uncle's well-being while Constantius was court-ing Flavilla and had ingratiated himself while presenting unfavorable reports of Constantius, who concludes his letter morosely:

My condition was soon known, and I was no longer admitted by the father of Flavilla. I repeated the protestations of regard, which had been formerly returned with so much ardour, in a letter which she received privately, but returned by her father's footman. Contempt has driven out my love, and I am content to have purchased, by the loss of fortune, an escape from a harpy who has joined the artifices of age to the allurements of youth. I am now going to pursue my former projects with a legacy which my uncle bequeathed me, and if I succeed, shall expect to hear of the repentance of Flavilla. (V, 243)

Perhaps the most artfully depicted legacy hunter among Johnson's characters is Cupidus, who recounts his woeful life in Rambler, No. 73. One critic has called this piece a prime instance of "Johnson's mastery in the handling of irony." Like Constantius, Cupidus was born into a family whose members had managed to dissipate the ancestral fortune to the extent that his father, as Cupidus relates, "had not enough left for the support of a family, without descending to the cultivation of his own grounds, being condemned to pay three sisters the fortunes allotted them by my grandfather . . . who, perhaps without design, enriched his daughters by beggaring his son" (IV, 18). These aunts of Cupidus were old maids, and his father looked forward to the reversion of their fortunes to

his own family upon the deaths of the ladies. Cupidus, therefore, was forbidden to seek lucrative employment, which would harm his social standing, and instead was forced to live in expectation of future wealth.

This perpetual assignment of all satisfaction to a future event had deleterious effects upon Cupidus and his parents: "We had none of the collateral interests, which diversify the life of others with joys and hopes, but had turned our whole attention on one event, which we could neither hasten nor retard, and had no other object of curiosity, than the health or sickness of my aunts, of which we were careful to procure very exact and early intelligence" (IV, 19). The strain of this existence exasperated the father into the observation that "no creature had so many lives as a cat and an old maid" (IV, 19), and when one of his sisters recovered unexpectedly from an ague, his depression led him to an early grave, and his wife shortly followed him.

Cupidus continued the mode of life he had been taught, waiting on the aunts. Finally, the eldest died, but she left her money to her second sister. And when this second sister passed on, her will directed her double fortune to Cupidus, but not until after the death of the youngest sister. Cupidus says of his reaction to this development: "I was now relieved from part of my misery; a larger fortune, though not in my power, was certain and unalienable; nor was there now any danger, that I might at last be frustrated of my hopes by
a fret of dotage. . . . But my wealth was yet in reversion, my aunt was to be buried before I could emerge to grandeur and pleasure; and there were yet, according to my father's observation, nine lives between me and happiness" (IV, 20).

The aunt appears to have used all the lives allotted to her, for Cupidus, although frequently flattered by her hypochondria into expecting her immediate demise, grew old himself in anticipation. Finally, he relates, "after near half a century, I buried her on the fourteenth of last June, aged ninety-three years, five months, and six days" (IV, 22). But the decades of anticipation have destroyed any hope of lasting happiness for Cupidus:

For two months after her death I was rich, and was pleased with that obsequiousness and reverence which wealth instantaneously procures. But this joy is now past, and I have returned again to my old habit of wishing. Being accustomed to give the future full power over my mind, and to start away from the scene before me to some expected enjoyment, I deliver up myself to the tyranny of every desire which fancy suggests, and long for a thousand things which I am unable to procure. Money has much less power, than is ascribed to it by those that want it. I had formed schemes which I cannot execute, I had supposed events which do not come to pass, and the rest of my life must pass in craving solicitude, unless you can find some remedy for a mind, corrupted with an inveterate disease of wishing, and unable to think on any thing but wants, which reason tells me will never be supplied. (IV, 22)

The tale of Cupidus thus ends with the correspondent's pathetic realization that his life has been wasted and that the "habit of wishing" will continue to rob him of tranquility. A. T. Elder, who points out the expertly handled irony in this essay, analyzes Johnson's artistry in this way:
Considered in essence, the experience of Cupidus is bitterly ironic, but Johnson's treatment of his material so insulates the reader that he does not receive the full emotional shock which the events differently handled could produce. For one thing, the behaviour of the family of Cupidus verges on the ridiculous... And though Cupidus is fully aware of the tragedy of his wasted life, even as he describes the anguish of waiting for the decease of the last remaining aunt he is conscious of a ludicrous element in his experience... The enumeration of the exact number of days, months, and years that the aunt lived adds a final touch of grim humour.12

Besides those individuals who make wealth their only goal in life, there are also those who are victims of the importance other people place upon money. Already noted above is the case of Constantius, who lost his bride-to-be along with his expected fortune. But two other correspondents, who are innocent of avarice themselves, learn bitter lessons concerning the role that money plays in society.

Melissa introduces herself, in Rambler, No. 75, as "one who has been taught to know mankind by unwelcome information" (IV, 28), and she goes on to explain that as heiress of a large fortune, she had devoted a good deal of her time to learning and books. Her intellectual accomplishments were greatly admired, and she, being human, attributed the admiration to her proven abilities: "I shall make no scruple of confessing that I was pleased with this universal veneration, because I always considered it as paid to my intrinsic qualities and inseparable merit, and very easily persuaded myself

12 Ibid., p. 68.
that fortune had no part in my superiority" (IV, 29). Thus, when she learned, at twenty-six years of age, that most of her fortune had been lost, Melissa accepted the fact with dignity and simply set about to reduce the grandeur of her way of life with no thought of trying to conceal her diminished monetary worth. "Indeed," she says, "I did not know how much I had lost, for, having always heard and thought more of my wit and beauty, than of my fortune, it did not suddenly enter my imagination, that Melissa could sink beneath her established rank, while her form and her mind continued the same; that she could cease to raise admiration but by ceasing to deserve it, or feel any stroke but from the hand of time" (IV, 30).

Alas, Melissa found that her friends and suitors disappeared with her fortune, and she was forced to admit that "it is impossible for those that have only known affluence and prosperity, to judge rightly of themselves or others. The rich and the powerful live in a perpetual masquerade, in which all about them wear borrowed characters; and we only discover in what estimation we are held, when we can no longer give hopes or fears" (IV, 33).

Melissa, on the whole, appears to be a sensible and intelligent young woman who has been rudely awakened to the facts of life. There is a hint, however, of self-importance which may have accounted in part for her sudden fall in the social hierarchy. She insists that "the only pain" she feels
in her new position "is the loss of influence which I had always exerted on the side of virtue, in the defence of innocence, and the assertion of truth" (IV, 32). The self-righteous attitude suggested by this statement makes the reader wonder whether Melissa's ostracism is totally undeserved after all.

_Rambler, No. 153,_ is an account by an unnamed young man who, like Melissa, has learned through experience the difference that money can make in the way a person is treated in society. One of the many younger sons among Johnson's characters, this gentleman was sent to the university to prepare himself to undertake some kind of employment. An old friend of his father subsequently came to stay with the family (it was his wealth which called forth the invitation), and in the course of his visit, the old man became so fond of the younger son that he declared his intention of making him his heir. The envious and disappointed brother and father drove the pair from the house, and the correspondent relates how he and the old adventurer took up residence in London. The benefactor, deciding to accustom the young man to the possession of money, provided him with a liberal allowance, but his charge was determined to practice moderation in spite of his new wealth:

[He] set apart for my expences such a revenue as I had scarcely dared to image. I can yet congratulate myself that fortune has seen her golden cup once tasted without inebriation. Neither my modesty nor prudence were overwhelmed by affluence; my elevation was without insolence, and my expence without profusion.
Employing the influence which money always confers, to the improvement of my understanding, I mingled in parties of gaiety, and in conferences of learning, appeared in every place where instruction was to be found, and imagined that by ranging through all the diversities of life I had acquainted myself fully with human nature, and learned all that was to be known of the ways of men. (V, 51)

The young man found to his sorrow, however, that he had not fully learned "the ways of men." Upon the sudden death of his benefactor, he discovered that the old man had never accomplished the rewriting of his will to favor his young friend. In his disappointment, the correspondent relates, he yet thought with satisfaction of the many important friends he had made while he had possessed his temporary wealth. He congratulated himself on his "prospect of . . . innumerable roads to honour and preferment" and recalls, "I believed nothing necessary but that I should continue that acquaintance to which I had been so readily admitted, and which had hitherto been cultivated on both sides with equal ardour" (V, 52).

Needless to say, the gentleman found that, without his wealth, he was unacceptable company to his former friends. He recounts the various ways he was snubbed by men, then wryly speaks of his reception among the ladies: "Wherever I come I scatter infirmity and disease; every lady whom I meet in the Mall is too weary to walk; all whom I entreat to sing are troubled with colds; if I propose cards, they are afflicted with the head-ach; if I invite them to the gardens, they cannot bear a crowd" (V, 53). His letter concludes with a
statement of the lesson both he and Melissa have learned through necessity: "Such, Mr. Rambler, is the power of wealth, that it commands the ear of greatness and the eye of beauty, gives spirit to the dull, and authority to the timorous, and leaves him from whom it departs, without virtue and without understanding, the sport of caprice, the scoff of insolence, the slave of meanness, and the pupil of ignorance" (V, 54).

The Thirst for Fame

A common human weakness depicted frequently by Johnson is the desire to be envied by others, a passion which results in various ludicrous attempts to appear impressive and occasionally in delusions of grandeur. One of Johnson's best known Adven-turer papers, No. 84, describes the inhabitants of a stage coach, each of whom pretends to be an important personage. The account is written by Viator, who was himself one of the passengers. He relates that no one was fooled by the others, that "every one was apparently suspected of endeavouring to impose false appearances upon the rest; all continued their haughtiness, in hopes to enforce their claims; and all grew every hour more sullen, because they found their representations of themselves without effect" (II, 410). Viator admits his own participation in this foolishness, but he appears to have repented:

I could not forbear to reflect on the folly of practising a fraud, which, as the event showed, had been already practised too often to succeed,
and by the success of which no advantage could have been obtained; of assuming a character, which was to end with the day; and of claiming upon false pretences honours which must perish with the breath that paid them.

But Mr. Adventurer, let not those who laugh at me and my companions, think this folly confined to a stage coach. Every man in the journey of life takes the same advantage of the ignorance of his fellow travellers, disguises himself in counterfeited merit, and hears those praises with complacency which his conscience reproaches him for accepting. Every man deceives himself while he thinks he is deceiving others; and forgets that the time is at hand when every illusion shall cease; when fictitious excellence shall be torn away; and All must be shown to All in their real state. (II, 411)

Serotinus, another younger son, writes in Rambler, No. 165, of his early ambitions for fame:

My eagerness to distinguish myself in publick, and my impatience of the narrow scheme of life to which my indigence confined me, did not suffer me to continue long in the town where I was born, I went away as from a place of confinement, with a resolution to return no more, till I should be able to dazzle with my splendor those who now looked upon me with contempt, to reward those who had paid honours to my dawning merit, and to show all who had suffered me to glide by them unknown and neglected, how much they mistook their interest in omitting to propitiate a genius like mine. (V, 112)

Having found in the city the success he dreamed of, Serotinus was able to retire to ease at an early age and recalled his youthful resolution to return in glory to his native village. He describes his preparations for his return: "Full of the admiration which I should excite, and the homage which I should receive, I dressed my servants in a more ostentatious livery, purchased a magnificent chariot, and resolved to dazzle the
inhabitants of the little town with an unexpected blaze of greatness" (V, 113). He even planned his greetings to former friends, deciding that he should be haughty and accept their praises with indifference. Upon arriving in town, Serotinus noted with displeasure that his face was unrecognized as he proceeded in his carriage. He learned his first lesson in humility when he had alighted from his carriage: "... my name, I suppose, was told by my servants, for the barber stept from the opposite house, and seized me by the hand with honest joy in his countenance, which according to the rule that I had prescribed to myself, I repressed with a frigid graciousness. The fellow, instead of sinking into dejection, turned away with contempt, and left me to consider how the second salutation should be received." Serotinus learned his lesson quickly, for he goes on to say, "The next friend was better treated, for I soon found that I must purchase by civility that regard which I had expected to enforce by insolence" (V, 115).

Fame itself can have a debilitating effect, as Hilarius attests in Rambler, No. 101. Having left the university because he felt himself there to be "a gem hidden in the mine," he polished his talents as a wit and "became on a sudden the idol of the coffee-house" (IV, 174). Hilarius explains the satisfaction he gained from the success of his endeavors:
You will not wonder, Mr. Rambler, that I mention my success with some appearance of triumph and elevation. . . . The colloquial wit has always his own radiance reflected on himself, and enjoys all the pleasure which he bestows; he finds his power confessed by every one that approaches him, sees friendship kindling with rapture, and attention swelling into praise.

The desire which every man feels of importance and esteem, is so much gratified by finding an assembly, at his entrance, brightened with gladness and hushed with expectation, that the recollection of such distinctions can scarcely fail to be pleasing whenever it is innocent. And my conscience does not reproach me with any mean or criminal effects of vanity; since I always employed my influence on the side of virtue, and never sacrificed my understanding or my religion to the pleasure of applause. (IV, 174-75)

The happiness of Hilarius appeared to be well established, for to add to the pure pleasure of fame, he was favored by the wealthy Demochares, who made him his daily companion and allowed him to enjoy "all the luxury of affluence, without expense or dependence" (IV, 175). He was highly pleased when Demochares invited him to be his guest in the country, knowing he was invited for his wittiness. One day, however, Demochares informed him that all the gentlemen of the neighborhood had been invited to dinner. Hilarius recalls the conversation: "He informed me what prejudices my reputation had raised in my favour, and represented the satisfaction with which he should see me kindle up the blaze of merriment . . . ." (IV, 176). The words of Demochares had a disastrous effect upon Hilarius:
This declaration, by which he intended to quicken my vivacity, filled me with solicitude. I felt an ambition of shining, which I never knew before; and was therefore embarrassed with an unusual fear of disgrace. I passed the night in planning out to myself the conversation of the coming day; recollected all my topicks of raillery, proposed proper subjects of ridicule, prepared smart replies to a thousand questions, accommodated answers to imaginary repartees, and formed a magazine of remarks, apothegms, tales, and illustrations. The morning broke at last in the midst of these busy meditations. I rose with the palpitations of a champion on the day of combat; and, notwithstanding all my efforts, found my spirits sunk under the weight of expectation. The company soon after began to drop in, and every one, at his entrance was introduced to Hilarius. What conception the inhabitants of this region had formed of a wit, I cannot yet discover; but observed that they all seemed, after the regular exchange of compliments, to turn away disappointed, and while we waited for dinner, they cast their eyes first upon me, and then upon each other, like a theatrical assembly waiting for a shew. (IV, 176-77)

Intimidated by the expectations aroused as a result of his renown, Hilarius was unable to utter a witty sentence. The guests went away disgusted, and Demochares accused him of intentionally causing him embarrassment. Hilarius concludes his letter with an appeal for understanding and urges sympathy for other celebrated wits who might fail to perform on schedule.

One of Johnson's most delightful essays is Rambler, No. 16, which is a letter from a certain Misellus, a would-be author who has taken Mr. Rambler's advice and had a pamphlet published that he wrote. The plight in which Misellus finds himself as a result of this venture is summed up in his observation that
"a great genius can never return to his former state" (III, 88).

The irony of this letter, as Misellus describes his predicament with never a glimmer of true understanding, may be savored in the following passages:

I am now, Mr. Rambler, known to be an author, and am condemned, irreversibly condemned, to all the miseries of high reputation. The first morning after publication my friends assembled about me; I presented each, as is usual, with a copy of my book. They looked into the first pages, but were hindered, by their admiration, from reading farther. The first pages are, indeed, very elaborate. Some passages they particularly dwelt upon, as more eminently beautiful than the rest; and some delicate strokes, and secret elegancies, I pointed out to them, which had escaped their observation. I then begged of them to forbear their compliments, and invited them, I could not do less, to dine with me at a tavern. After dinner, the book was resumed; but their praises very often so much overpowered my modesty, that I was forced to put about the glass, and had often no means of repressing the clamours of their admiration, but by thundering to the drawer for another bottle.

Next morning another set of my acquaintance congratulated me upon my performance, with such importunity of praise, that I was again forced to obviate their civilities by a treat. On the third day I had yet a greater number of applauders to put to silence in the same manner; and, on the fourth, those whom I had entertained the first day come again, having, in the perusal of the remaining part of the book, discovered so many forcible sentences and masterly touches, that it was impossible for me to bear the repetition of their commendations. I, therefore, persuaded them once more to adjourn to the tavern, and choose some other subject, on which I might share in the conversation. But it was not in their power to withhold their attention from my performance, which had so entirely taken possession of their minds, that no intreaties of mine could change their topick, and I was obliged to stifle, with claret, that praise, which neither my modesty could hinder, nor my uneasiness repress.
The whole week was thus spent in a kind of literary revel, and I have now found that nothing is so expensive as great abilities, unless there is join'd with them an insatiable eagerness of praise; for to escape from the pain of hearing myself exalted above the greatest names dead and living of the learned world, it has already cost me two hogsheads of port, fifteen gallons of arrack, ten dozen of claret, and five and forty bottles of champagne.

I was resolved to stay at home no longer, and, therefore, rose early and went to the coffee-house; but found that I had now made myself too eminent for happiness, and that I was no longer to enjoy the pleasure of mixing, upon equal terms, with the rest of the world. As soon as I enter the room, I see part of the company raging with envy, which they endeavour to conceal, sometimes with the appearance of laughter, and sometimes with that of contempt; but the disguise is such, that I can discover the secret rancour of their hearts, and as envy is deservedly its own punishment, I frequently indulge myself in tormenting them with my presence.

But, though there may be some slight satisfaction received from the mortification of my enemies, yet my benevolence will not suffer me to take any pleasure in the terrors of my friends. I have been cautious, since the appearance of my work, not to give myself more premeditated airs of superiority, than the most rigid humility might allow. It is, indeed, not impossible that I may sometimes have laid down my opinion, in a manner that shewed a consciousness of my ability to maintain it, or interrupted the conversation, when I saw its tendency, without suffering the speaker to waste his time in explaining his sentiments; and, indeed, I did indulge myself for two days in a custom of drumming with my fingers, when the company began to lose themselves in absurdities, or to encroach upon subjects which I knew them unqualified to discuss. But I generally acted with great appearance of respect, even to those whose stupidity I pitied in my heart. Yet, notwithstanding this exemplary moderation, so universal is the dread of uncommon powers, and such the unwillingness of mankind to be made wiser, that I have now for some days found myself shunned by all my acquaintance. (III, 88-90)
The humor toward the end of this letter borders on the farcical as Misellus has become more and more deluded:

"Others may be persecuted, but I am haunted; I have good reason to believe that eleven painters are now dogging me, for they know that he who can get my face first will make his fortune. I often change my wig, and wear my hat over my eyes, by which I hope somewhat to confound them; for you know it is not fair to sell my face, without admitting me to share the profit. I am, however, not so much in pain for my face as for my papers, which I dare neither carry with me nor leave behind. I have, indeed, taken some measures for their preservation, having put them in an iron chest, and fixed a padlock upon my closet. I change my lodgings five times a week, and always remove at the dead of night. (III, 91)

His desire for fame has led Misellus into a preposterous state of self-delusion, and the depiction of this foolish young man's misapprehension should be enough by itself to dispel the notion that Johnson lacked a sense of humor.

The Disappointments of Success

A number of Johnson's imaginary correspondents suffer the most perplexing disappointment of all—disappointment in an accomplished goal. Johnson frequently portrays the person who has striven for a particular achievement and attained it only to find no real satisfaction. Even Misellus finds no happiness in what he thinks is his success. The irony of disappointed hopes pervades Johnson's writing in prose and poetry, but the letters of the personae discussed in the following paragraphs exemplify the theme pointedly.
Tim. Ranger, who writes to the Idler (Nos. 62 and 64), describes his futile attempts to attain happiness now that he possesses all that he thought he ever could desire—namely, wealth. Born to parents with only a modest estate, Ranger was selected by a rich uncle to be his heir, and although he was far from being a Captator or a Cupidus, Ranger "could not forbear sometimes to imagine . . . the pleasure of being rich" (II, 194). The day finally arrived on which Ranger came into his inheritance, and he found himself with a much larger fortune than he had expected. He first indulged himself by dressing in splendid finery, and although he was initially self-conscious of his new appearance, he soon became used to it, and his "dress was without pain, and without pleasure" (II, 195). He then sampled the activities of a rake, but he found that he was too old and had no taste for riotous behavior. He tried owning race horses, building a house, gambling, and the pursuits of a virtuoso, but nothing gave him satisfaction. He concludes his second letter with a mournful plea for advice: "After all this, tell me, dear Idler, what I must do next; I have health, I have money, and hope that I have understanding, yet, with all these, I have never yet been able to pass a single day which I did not wish at an end before sun-set. Tell me, dear Idler, what I shall do" (II, 201).

Mercator, who writes in Adventurer, No. 102, achieved his success in trade. At the end of several years of industry, he
realized his desire for great wealth. After accumulating his money, he next set his heart upon retiring to the country, and soon, he says, "I found the fatigues of my employment every day more oppressive . . ." (II, 435). Finally, after many delays, Mercator actually purchased his country estate and, leaving his business with his son-in-law, "commenced lord of a spacious manor," where, he says, "for some time I found happiness equal to my expectations" (II, 437). He remodeled his house and grounds, and he impressed visitors with his opulence, but after a while, these activities palled:

I was envied; but how little can one man judge of the condition of another? The time was now coming, in which affluence and splendor could no longer make me pleased with myself. I had built till the imagination of the architect was exhausted; I had added one convenience to another till I knew not what more to wish or to design; I had laid out my gardens, planted my park, and compleated my water-works; and what now remained to be done? what, but to look up to turrets of which when they were once raised I had no farther use, to range over apartments where time was tarnishing the furniture, to stand by the cascade of which I scarcely now perceived the sound, and to watch the growth of woods that must give their shade to a distant generation. (II, 437)

His disappointment in retired life leads Mercator to reflect upon his earlier years: "In my happy days of business I had been accustomed to rise early in the morning, and remember the time when I grieved that the night came so soon upon me, and obliged me for a few hours to shut out affluence and prosperity" (II, 439). Presumably, then, even avarice is to be preferred to having no goal at all. Mercator ends his letter
with a melancholy reflection upon his present life: "Such, Mr. Adventurer, is the life to which I am condemned by a foolish endeavour to be happy by imitation; such is the happiness to which I pleased myself with approaching, and which I considered as the chief end of my cares and my labours. I toiled year after year with cheerfulness, in expectation of the happy hour in which I might be idle; the privilege of idleness is attained, but has not brought with it the blessing of tranquillity." (II, 440).

Verecundulus (Rambler, No. 157) is disappointed to find that his success in academic matters does not automatically bring social success. Like many of the letter-writers discussed above, his values were shaped at a very early age, although in his case the effects would not seem to be necessarily harmful; for his father "inculcated nothing but the dignity of knowledge, and the happiness of virtue" (V, 71). At the university Verecundulus found no evidence which inclined him to change his ideas; therefore, he says, "I was . . . confirmed in the doctrines of my old master, and thought nothing worthy of my care but the means of gaining or imparting knowledge" (V, 71). He returned home in due course "covered with academical laurels, and fraught with criticism and philosophy. . . . To please will always be the wish of benevolence, to be admired must be the constant aim of ambition; and I therefore considered myself as about to receive the reward of my honest labours, and to find the efficacy of learning and of virtue" (V, 72).
The expectations of Verecundulus were disappointed at his very first social gathering. He found himself confused by the many people who greeted him, and he became virtually tongue-tied with embarrassment. Such a state of mind tends to perpetuate itself, and the poor man writes that he has been unable to overcome his social awkwardness. He humbly appeals to Mr. Rambler for advice and queries, "... Have I spent my life in study only to become the sport of the ignorant, and debarred myself from all the common enjoyments of youth to collect ideas which must sleep in silence, and form opinions which I must not indulge?" (V, 75). This discourse illustrates the fact that even a genuine wit—not only the fops, such as Papilius and Florentulus—may be subject to disappointment in his achieved goals.

Euphelia, a twenty-two-year-old woman, writes of her disappointment in the country in Rambler, Nos. 42 and 46. She blames her friends for filling her head with false pictures of the country. Their descriptions caused her to long for "some nameless pleasure in the rural life," and in order to pass the time until her departure from the city, she "sometimes heard a studious lady . . . read pastorals . . ." (III, 229). Euphelia blames most the authors of pastoral literature for arousing her expectations falsely, for, she says, in the books she has read,

... I have found almost every page filled with the charms and happiness of a country life; that life to which every statesman in the highest elevation of his
prosperity is contriving to retire; that life to which every tragick heroine in some scene or other wishes to have been born, and which is represented as a certain refuge from folly, from anxiety, from passion, and from guilt.

It was impossible to read so many passionate exclamations, and soothing descriptions, without feeling some desire to enjoy the state in which all this felicity was to be enjoyed; and therefore I received with raptures the invitation of my good aunt, and expected that by some unknown influence I should find all hopes and fears, jealousies and competitions vanish from my heart upon my first arrival at the seats of innocence and tranquillity; that I should sleep in halcyon bowers, and wander in elysian gardens, where I should meet with nothing but the softness of benevolence, the candour of simplicity, and the cheerfulness of content; where I should see reason exerting her sovereignty over life, without any interruption from envy, avarice, or ambition, and every day passing in such a manner as the severest wisdom should approve.

This, Mr. Rambler, I tell you I expected, and this I had by an hundred authors been taught to expect. By this expectation I was led hither, and here I live in perpetual uneasiness, without any other comfort than that of hoping to return to London. (III, 249-50)

Euphelia's boredom is mainly due to her inability to direct her own activities without the diversions of the city, and she recognizes this deficiency in her character. She laments, "Thus am I condemned to solitude. . . . I am forced to be awake at least twelve hours, without visits, without cards, without laughter, and without flattery" (III, 230). But she seeks advice from Mr. Rambler as to how she may learn to find satisfaction in being alone:

. . . I have heard, Mr. Rambler, of those who never thought themselves so much at ease as in solitude, and cannot but suspect it to be some way or other my own fault, that, without great pain, either of mind or body, I am thus weary of myself; that the current of youth stagnates, and that I am languishing in a dead calm, for want of some external impulse. I shall therefore think you a benefactor to our sex, if you
will teach me the art of living alone; for I am confident that a thousand and a thousand and a thousand ladies, who affect to talk with ecstacies of the pleasures of the country, are in reality, like me, longing for the winter, and wishing to be delivered from themselves by company and diversion.

(III, 231)

Disappointment in the very achievement of their wishes is common among the personae of Johnson's essays. These examples just discussed reveal that neither money, academic success, nor idyllic retirement to the country is sufficient for the human heart to attain contentment.

The Miseries of Dependence

Johnson's well known detestation of patronage is reflected in Rambler, No. 163, which includes not only a letter but also some introductory remarks by Mr. Rambler, beginning, "None of the cruelties exercised by wealth and power upon indigence and dependance, is more mischievous . . . than the encouragement of expectations which are never to be gratified, and the elation and depression of the heart by needless vicissitudes of hope and disappointment" (V, 100). An example of these cruelties is recounted in the letter from Liberalis, who, after an illustrious career at the university, determined to become an author. He proceeded to London, had his first work printed, and enjoyed the praises it received. At last his book seller advised him that Aurantius, "the standing patron of merit" (V, 103), had expressed the desire to make the acquaintance of this new author.
Liberalis went to meet Aurantius with great excitement, for he knew that the support of a patron was critical to his career. The initial interview passed agreeably, and Liberalis subsequently became a regular guest at the house of Aurantius. But as their familiarity increased, Aurantius made no concrete offers of assistance; Liberalis "could never, in his most private or jocund hours, obtain more from him than general declarations of esteem, or endearments of tenderness, which included no particular promise, and therefore conferred no claim" (V, 104). When Liberalis hinted that Pollio, a rival of Aurantius, had been soliciting his company, Aurantius quickly expressed his intention of surprising Liberalis with an important position, said he had been silently arranging the matter, "and should continue his good offices, unless he found the kindness of others more desired" (V, 104). Liberalis found this seeming benevolence impossible to resist and entrusted his hopes to the intentions of Aurantius:

From that instant I gave myself up wholly to Aurantius, and . . . expected every morning a summons to some employment of dignity and profit. One month succeeded another, and in defiance of appearances I still fancied myself nearer to my wishes, and continued to dream of success, and wake to disappointment. At last the failure of my little fortune compelled me to abate the finery which I hitherto thought necessary to the company with whom I associated, and the rank to which I should be raised. Aurantius from the moment in which he discovered my poverty, considered me as fully in his power, and afterwards rather permitted my attendance than invited it, thought himself at liberty to refuse my visits whenever he had other amusements within reach, and often suffered me to wait, without pretending any
necessary business. When I was admitted to his table, if any man of rank equal to his own was present, he took occasion to mention my writings, and commend my ingenuity, by which he intended to apologize for the confusion of distinctions, and the improper assortment of his company; and often called upon me to entertain his friends with my productions, as a sportsman delights the squires of his neighborhood with the curvets of his horse, or the obedience of his spaniels. (V, 104-05)

After seven years of servitude, Liberalis found himself in extreme want, and Aurantius finally offered to him a minor position on the condition that he marry a cast-off mistress of Aurantius. Liberalis did not even consider accepting his proposition, and his letter ends with the expression of his just contempt for Aurantius but with no prospects for a better future.

The experiences of Eubulus (Rambler, Nos. 26 and 27) with various patrons are similar to that of Liberalis, but Eubulus is more fortunate in that he finally inherited enough money to live independently. Having foolishly offended a generous uncle who had been supporting him, Eubulus at first was unconcerned, being convinced that his friends "would be proud to open their purses" (III, 143) at his request and that his native wit assured him of a brilliant future. The friends, however, proved to be less than friendly when they learned of his diminished resources, and Eubulus sought new acquaintances in hopes of gaining employment. He describes the despicable state to which he descended:
I had now entered into a state of dependence, and had hopes, or fears, from almost every man I saw. If it be unhappy to have one patron, what is his misery who has many? I was obliged to comply with a thousand caprices, to concur in a thousand follies, and to countenance a thousand errors. I endured innumerable mortifications, if not from cruelty, at least from negligence, which will creep in upon the kindest and most delicate minds, when they converse without the mutual awe of equal condition. I found the spirit and vigour of liberty every moment sinking in me, and a servile fear of displeasing, stealing by degrees upon all my behaviour, till no word, or look, or action, was my own. As the solicitude to please increased, the power of pleasing grew less, and I was always clouded with diffidence where it was most my interest and wish to shine. (III, 145-46)

The second letter from Eubulus describes several individual patrons whose favor he courted. At first he attached himself to other young men, who, in the warmth of jovial friendship, pledged to him their help, but who were continually diverted from pursuing the interests of Eubulus by their own pleasure-seeking. He subsequently turned to older men for assistance and eventually found a statesman whose favor was "more permanent than that of the others, for there was a certain price at which it might be bought; he allowed nothing to humour, or to affection, but was always ready to pay liberally for the service that he required" (III, 150). Eubulus discovered in this relationship the worst corruption of patronage, for the demands of his benefactor, he says, "were, indeed, very often such as virtue could not easily consent to gratify; but virtue is not to be consulted when men are to raise their fortunes by the favour of the great."
His measures were censured; I wrote in his defence, and was recompensed with a place, of which the profits were never received by me without the pangs of remembering that they were the reward of wickedness . . ." (III, 150). But, luckily, Eubulus was granted the opportunity to repent of his follies, for his uncle died without a will, and he inherited a legacy which allowed him to "retire to an humbler state" (III, 150) and renounce his patron.

Hyperdulus writes in Rambler, No. 149, of a dependence forced upon him as a child. He begins his letter with some general comments on the universal denunciation of ingratitude. He agrees that "those that can return evil for good, and repay kindness and assistance with hatred or neglect, [should be considered] as corrupted beyond the common degrees of wickedness," but he also suggests that perhaps some "patrons and protectors . . . consulted only their pleasure or vanity, and repaid themselves their petty donatives by gratifications of insolence and indulgence of contempt" (V, 28).

Hyperdulus goes on to recount his own experience with dependence. He and his younger sister were sent to live with an uncle after their parents had destroyed their fortune and themselves through immoderate living. He describes the various indignities which they subsequently suffered at the hands of their relatives, and concludes by demanding of Mr. Rambler whether gratitude is owed "to beneficence, exerted on
terms like these? to beneficence which pollutes its gifts with contumely, and may be truly said to pander to pride?" (V, 32).

The unkind treatment of Hyperdulus and his sister by their relatives is hardly to be excused, and yet, as in the case of Melissa, discussed above, there is a certain ambiguity in the statements of Hyperdulus himself which may affect the reader's evaluation of the correspondent. For example, Hyperdulus rather smugly accounts for his and his sister's initial mistreatment in this way: "It was unfortunate that our early introduction into polite company and habitual knowledge of the arts of civility, had given us such an appearance of superiority to the awkward bashfulness of our relations, as naturally drew respect and preference from every stranger . . ." (V, 29-30). A. T. Elder notes this "example of the ambivalence of Johnson's characters" and remarks that "we may very well wonder whether our sympathy ought to belong to the uncle."13

The frequently sad plight of servants did not escape Johnson's attention. Domestic servitude was one of the few respectable avenues open to a woman of the eighteenth century who was forced to find employment, and Johnson presents as

sympathetic personae two young women who must seek positions as servants. Geoffrey Bullough suggests that in these "vignettes of social life Johnson shows . . . the sympathy for the underdog which he proved by so many generous acts."\textsuperscript{14}

Zosima is the daughter of a country gentleman, whose fortune was so depleted by the failure of a lawsuit that she and the other younger children were forced to seek their own livings. Writing in \textit{Rambler}, No. 12, Zosima describes how she suffered from the unkindness of the cousin she stayed with in London as well as from the incivilities of prospective employers.

This letter provides some devastating satirical portraits of the women to whom Zosima applied for a job. Madame Bombasine "was two yards round the waist, her voice was at once loud and squeaking, and her face brought to . . . mind the picture of the full-moon" (III, 63). She was so impressed with her own position that she assumed the privilege of insulting Zosima, accusing her of putting on airs as an excuse for not hiring her. As she continued her search for a position, Zosima found all the women she approached to be capricious and rude. Lady Lofty rejected her because her dress was too fine for a maid, and she would offer competition; for her next interview,

therefore, Zosima wore a plain gown and was promptly dismissed for being a dowdy. Her cousin refused to believe that Zosima was not refusing to take positions offered to her and predicted a tragic fate for her.

Zosima finally discovered a kind soul in the person of Euphemia, who was, like herself, a victim of diminished fortunes. Euphemia had already hired another young woman when Zosima applied to her, but upon hearing the story of Zosima's trials in the city, she took the girl under her protection. Zosima concludes her letter with the remark that she is sending her story to the Rambler as a way of expressing her gratitude to Euphemia.

Betty Broom, who recounts her experiences in *Idler*, Nos. 26 and 29, unlike Zosima, was born to poverty and was educated in a charity school. Her success in her studies attracted to her much favorable attention until one of the patrons of the school acquired on a visit to London the conviction that poor girls should not be taught to read and write, because education caused them to disdain hard work. This lady soon managed to win over the other contributors to the school to her belief "that the nation would be ruined if the children of the poor were taught to read and write," for, as Betty Broom observes, "few listen without a desire of conviction to those who advise them to spare their money" (II, 81).
After the school was dissolved, Betty decided to seek a new life in London, where she tried several unsatisfactory positions in the households of tradesmen. She lost her next job when her mistress discovered her reading a book, and another lady turned her out for writing an account of a day's kitchen expenses. Finally, after these and other unpleasant experiences, Betty was hired by a woman suffering from consumption, who especially wanted a literate maid. For four years, until the woman's death, Betty served her and was rewarded for her patient tolerance of the woman's capriciousness with a legacy of five hundred pounds. Betty's story, then, has a relatively happy ending, but her rather illogical intention, proclaimed in the closing sentence of her second letter, is to return to her birthplace and teach "poor girls to read and write" (II, 92).

By far the most unfortunate victim of dependence among all of Johnson's characters is Misella, who relates her tale in Rambler, Nos. 170 and 171. She was born into a family with more children than the father could well support, and her parents allowed a wealthy relation to rear her with his own daughters. After the death of her parents, Misella was totally dependent upon this guardian, and her position in the family came to be little above that of a servant. While she was contemplating how she might escape from the indignity of her situation, Misella was surprised by a change in the behavior
of her guardian. He began giving her money secretly, blaming his wife's partiality to her own daughters for Misella's shabby treatment by the rest of the family. In her innocence, Misella felt only gratitude to her relative for what she though was his benevolence toward her, but eventually his true motives were revealed, and he brought about "the ruin of an orphan whom his own promises had made indigent, whom his indulgence had melted, and his authority subdued" (V, 138).

Misella was forced to leave her guardian's house when she became pregnant, and although he provided for her for awhile, he soon abandoned her altogether when she would not surrender herself to wantonness. Left with no resources at all, Misella was inevitably driven into the streets, where she has spent the last four years, "sometimes the property of one man, and sometimes the common prey of accidental lewdness; at one time tricked up for sale by the mistress of a brothel, at another begging in the streets to be relieved of hunger by wickedness; without any hope in the day but of finding some whom folly or excess may expose to my allurements, and without any reflection at night, but such as guilt and terror impress upon me" (V, 144). The characterization of this persona reveals Johnson's great compassion for the pathetic women of London's streets.

The Follies of Youth

The tragic story of Misella is perhaps the most serious of Johnson's imaginary letters to the editor. The other extreme may be found among those dealing with youthful
foolishness, some of which offer examples of Johnson's mood at its lightest.

For instance, Rambler, No. 107, includes a letter from fifteen-year-old Properantia, which, according to A. T. Elder, "should dispel completely the notion that Johnson is invariably ponderous."\(^{15}\) Properantia is very interested in what she has heard about the proposed change in England from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar. Having inquired of a scholar the particulars of the proposal, she takes a delightfully imper- tinent view of the whole question:

> I have since listened very attentively to every one that talked upon this subject, of whom the greater part seem not to understand it better than myself; for though they often hint how much the nation has been mistaken, and rejoice that we are at last growing wiser than our ancestors, I have never been able to discover from them, that any body has died sooner or been married later for counting time wrong; and, therefore, I began to fancy, that there was a great bustle with little consequence. (IV, 206)

If this passage appears to reflect an excessive amount of Johnsonian common sense, the following paragraph perhaps more nearly captures the giddiness of the young girl's enthusiasm:

> At last two friends of my papa, Mr. Cycle and Mr. Starlight, . . . began to talk about the new stile. Sweet Mr. Starlight--I am sure I shall love his name as long as I live; for he told Cycle roundly, with a fierce look, that we should never be right without a "year of confusion." Dear Mr. Rambler, did you ever hear any thing so charming? a whole year of confusion! When there has been a rout at mamma's, I have thought one night of confusion worth a thousand nights of rest; and if I can but see a year of confusion, a whole year,

\(^{15}\) Elder, "Irony and Humour in the Rambler," p. 60.
of cards in one room, and dancing in another, here
a feast, and there a masquerade, and plays, and
coaches, and hurries, and messages, and milancers,
and raps at the door, and visits, and frolicks, and
new fashions, I shall not care what they do with
the rest of the time, nor whether they count it by
the old stile or the new; for I am resolved to break
loose from the nursery in the tumult, and play my
part among the rest; and it will be strange if I
cannot get a husband and a chariot in the year of
confusion. (IV, 206-07)

Another young girl, at least as naive as Properantia,
writes to the Rambler in No. 191. Bellaria, confined at home
with a cold, has been provided with some of the Rambler's
essays, which she does not find to her taste. She describes
her frivolous life, which she adores, composed of dances,
clothes, walks, and cards, and asks when she should ever have
time for the books her mother and aunts recommend to her. In
the course of her letter, Bellaria reveals herself to be a
headstrong, foolish girl, who is determined to ignore the
wisdom of her elders. Her head having been turned completely
by flattery, she is convinced that her mother and aunts have
intentionally kept her ignorant of her beauty and have tried
to frighten her of men unnecessarily:

... I am most at a loss to guess for what
purpose they related such tragick stories of the
cruelty, perfidy, and artifices of men, who, if
they ever were so malicious and destructive, have
certainly now reformed their manners. I have not,
since my entrance into the world, found one who does
not profess himself devoted to my service, and ready
to live or die, as I shall command him. ... Are
these, Mr. Rambler, creatures to be feared? Is it
likely that any injury will be done me by those who
can enjoy life only while I favour them with my
presence?

As little reason can I yet find to suspect them
of stratagems and fraud. When I play at cards, they
never take advantage of my mistakes, nor exact from me a rigorous observation of the game. Even Mr. Shuffle, a grave gentleman, who has daughters older than myself, plays with me so negligently, that I am sometimes inclined to believe he loses his money by design, and yet he is so fond of play, that he says, he will one day take me to his house in the country; that we may try by ourselves who can conquer. I have not yet promised him; but when the town grows a little empty, I shall think upon it, for I want some trinkets, like Letitia's, to my watch. I do not doubt my luck, but must study some means of amusing my relations. (V, 237-38)

This letter from Bellaria is cited by one critic as the only Rambler essay by Johnson that is not basically moralistic. Mallie J. Murphy suggests that this paper not only fails to specify a moral, but may even suggest immorality, and that Johnson "temporarily lowered his standards in a bid for increased circulation." It is difficult, however, to see this letter as any less "serious" than the letter from Properantia. And as for the moral, many of Johnson's personae, as we have already seen, represent a negative example. But Rambler, No. 191, it is true, offers Johnson in a role which is vastly different from that of the stern and humorless philosopher, with which most people seem to associate him. Such essays as this reveal the occasional playfulness of Johnson's genius, which is all too often overlooked, even by his admirers.

Another sprightly letter in which Johnson impersonates a young girl appears in *Rambler*, No. 84. Myrtylla is being reared in the country by an aunt, who has taught her "all the common rules of decent behaviour, and standing maxims of domestick prudence" (IV, 77), and her life was quite satisfactory until Flavia arrived from the city to visit relatives in the neighborhood. Myrtylla was most impressed with Flavia's self-assurance and worldly knowledge. The city-bred girl soon convinced Myrtylla that their elders were not necessarily wiser than they, and she also introduced her to the excitement to be found in books. The aunt was horrified when she discovered that Myrtylla was neglecting her needle for her reading.

Myrtylla is writing to the Rambler for his opinion as to whether she is old enough at sixteen to conduct her own life as she chooses, without regard to her aunt's wishes. She is a rather ambivalent figure, as are many of Johnson's *personae*, for on the one hand, she exhibits a good deal of native common sense and intelligence, but on the other hand, she is obviously headstrong and dangerously attracted to the worst elements of Flavia's character. It is difficult, for example, to take the aunt's side against the girl's interest in books, for the aunt would have women devote their entire lives to housekeeping. 17 Myrtylla describes her aunt's reaction to her new interest in literature:

17 Cf. the portraits of Lady Bustle, Mrs. Busy, and other compulsive housewives discussed in the next chapter.
...[S]he snatches my book out of my hand, tears my paper if she finds me writing, burns Flavia's letters before my face when she can seize them, and threatens to lock me up, and to complain to my father of my perverseness. If women, she says, would but know their duty and their interest, they would be careful to acquaint themselves with family-affairs, and many a penny might be saved; for while the mistress of the house is scribbling and reading, servants are junketing, and linnen is wearing out. She then takes me round the rooms, shews me the worked hangings, and chairs of tent-stitch, and asks whether all this was done with a pen and a book. (IV, 80)

Myrtylla seems justified, then, in resisting her aunt's attempts to curtail her intellectual pursuits, and, moreover, she is wise enough to doubt the claims of the older generation that they, when young themselves, never rebelled against their own elders. "I cannot but fancy," she remarks, "that this boast is too general to be true, and that the young and the old were always at variance" (IV, 81).

But even if she is right in opposing her aunt's overzealous household economy, Myrtylla reveals her headstrong nature in the following paragraph:

These menaces, Mr. Rambler, sometimes make me quite angry; for I have been sixteen these ten weeks, and think myself exempted from the dominion of a governess, who has no pretensions to more sense or knowledge than myself. I am resolved, since I am as tall and as wise as other women, to be no longer treated like a girl. Miss Flavia has often told me, that ladies of my age go to assemblies and routs, without their mothers and their aunts; I shall therefore, from this time, leave asking advice, and refuse to give accounts. I wish you would state the time at which young ladies may judge for themselves, which I am sure you cannot but think ought to begin before sixteen; if you are inclined to delay it longer, I shall have very little regard to your opinion. (IV, 80-1)
Rhodoclia, who writes in Rambler, No. 62, is, like Myrtylla, a girl who has been reared in the country. Her contentment with her life has also been shattered by the visit of two young people from the city, who gave her "such a detail of the elegance, the splendour, the mirth, the happiness of the town," that she is "resolved to be no longer buried in ignorance and obscurity, but to share with other wits the joy of being admired and divide with other beauties the empire of the world" (III, 333).

Rhodoclia is more fortunate than Myrtylla in that her parents have finally been persuaded to send her to London for a visit, now that she is "on the borders of twenty" (III, 330). Her purpose in writing to Mr. Rambler is to request of him advice as to how she can endure the tediousness of the three weeks yet remaining until her departure. Her concluding words echo the impudent tone of Myrtylla: "... If you will not sooth my impatience, heighten my ideas, and animate my hopes, you may write for those who have more leisure, but are not to expect any longer the honour of being read by those eyes which are now intent only on conquest and destruction" (III, 334). If she had written a second letter about her visit to the city, Rhodoclia would no doubt have joined the ranks of those personae who find only disappointment in the fulfillment of their wishes.
Although Johnson seems to have enjoyed portraying the giddiness of young girls, he did not ignore the follies to which young men are subject. Eubulus, whose unhappy experiences with patrons are discussed above, brought all of his troubles upon himself by indulging his youthful vanity and exuberance. In his first letter (Rambler, No. 26) Eubulus describes his actions with the ironic tone of a mature man looking back upon the foolishness of his youth:

... I easily obtained the reputation of a great genius, and was persuaded that, with such liveliness of imagination, and delicacy of sentiment, I should never be able to submit to the drudgery of the law. I therefore gave myself wholly to the airy and elegant parts of learning, and was often so much elated with my superiority to the youths with whom I conversed, that I began to listen with great attention, to those that recommended to me a wider and more conspicuous theatre; and was particularly touched with an observation, made by one of my friends; That it was not by lingering in the university, that Prior became ambassador, or Addison secretary of state.

... My uncle in the mean time frequently harrassed me with monitory letters, which I sometimes neglected to open for a week after I received them, and generally read in a tavern with such comments as might shew how much I was superior to instruction or advice. I could not but wonder, how a man confined to the country, and unacquainted with the present system of things, should imagine himself qualified to instruct a rising genius, born to give laws to the age, refine its taste, and multiply its pleasures.

The postman, however, still continued to bring me new remonstrances; for my uncle was very little depressed by the ridicule and reproach which he never heard. But men of parts have quick resentments; it was impossible to bear his usurpations for ever; and I resolved, once for all, to make him an example to those who imagine themselves wise because they are old, and...
to teach young men, who are too tame under representation, in what manner grey-bearded insolence ought to be treated. I, therefore, one evening took my pen in hand, and, after having animated myself with a catch, wrote a general answer to all his precepts, with such vivacity of turn, such elegance of irony, and such asperity of sarcasm, that I convulsed a large company with universal laughter, disturbed the neighbourhood with vociferations of applause, and five days afterwards was answered, that I must be content to live upon my own estate. (III, 142-43)

Young men as well as young women who reside in the country are easily impressed by elegant visitors from the city. Rambler, No. 147, is a letter from an unnamed young man who was reared in the country, where his accomplishments were praised enough to make him confident of his own perfection. His father's brother came to visit from London, however, and made the boy aware of his own shortcomings:

I soon discovered that he possessed some science of graciousness and attraction which books had not taught, and of which neither I nor my father had any knowledge; that he had the power of obliging those whom he did not benefit; that he diffused upon his cursory behaviour and most trifling actions a gloss of softness and delicacy by which every one was dazzled; and that by some occult method of captivation, he animated the timorous, softened the supercilious, and opened the reserved. I could not but repine at the inelegance of my own manners, which left me no hopes but not to offend, and at the inefficacy of rustick benevolence which gained no friends but by real service. (V, 19-20)

The nephew's admiration did not go unnoticed by the uncle, who enjoyed it enough to invite the young man to accompany him on his journey back to London, where the lad could learn the arts of politeness. The invitation was accepted with joy, but the nephew was soon disillusioned with his relative, who,
he discovered, hid a "poverty of ideas" under "the tinsel of politeness" (V, 20). Now that the young man is in London, the uncle and aunt have undertaken to instill in their guest the quality of assurance, which is the only personal excellence that they recognize. They continually harrass the boy:

I never sit silent in company when secret history is circulating, but I am reproached for want of assurance. If I fail to return the stated answer to a compliment; if I am disconcerted by unexpected raillery; if I blush when I am discovered gazing on a beauty, or hesitate when I find myself embarrassed in an argument; if I am unwilling to talk of what I do not understand, or timorous in undertaking offices which I cannot gracefully perform; if I suffer a more lively tatler to recount casualties of a game, or a nimbler fop to pick up a fan, I am censured between pity and contempt, as a wretch doomed to grovel in obscurity for want of assurance. (V, 21)

His foolish admiration of superficial politeness in his uncle has led the correspondent to his present distasteful position. He rejects the values of his aunt and uncle, but he must suffer their condescension until the end of his visit.

The most dangerous follies of youth are described by Misargyrus in the Adventurer, Nos. 34 and 41. These letters, and two others from Misargyrus, are unique among Johnson's epistolary essays in that they bear a return address, "Fleet-prison." In his first letter Misargyrus describes the foolish actions which resulted in the loss of his fortune and his present incarceration. "As I entered the world very young," he says, "with an elegant person, and a large estate, it was
not long before I disentangled myself from the shackles of religion; for I was determined to the pursuit of pleasure, which according to my notions consisted in the unrestrained and unlimited gratification of every passion and every appetite . . . " (II, 340). He describes his libertinism and his susceptibility to gross flattery and concludes, " . . . I may be truly said to have squandered my estate, without honour, without friends, and without pleasure. The last may, perhaps, appear strange to men unacquainted with the masquerade of life: I deceived others, and I endeavoured to deceive myself; and have worn the face of pleasantry and gaiety, while my heart suffered the most exquisite torture" (II, 343-44).

In his second letter Misargyrus describes his attempts to extricate himself from his financial dilemma. He appealed to money-lenders and found himself deeper and deeper in debt. When his hopes of inheriting a legacy from his uncle were destroyed, Misargyrus grasped at the last straw available: marriage. He had won the heart of the rich Miss Biddy Simper, but before the proposal could be offered and accepted, a former mistress betrayed him to the bailiff, and he was arrested.

Thus ends the account Misargyrus gives of his own life. In his next two letters, he concentrates on the experiences of some of his fellow prisoners, and he is, therefore, no longer the protagonist of the "story" he tells. He and the other personae who function as observers will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV

THE PERSONA AS OBSERVER

The epistolary essays to be analyzed in this chapter may be divided into two main groups: those in which Johnson actually impersonates a fictitious correspondent and those in which he appears merely to cast his own observations in letter-form with, perhaps, a pseudonym attached. Even though these latter essays do not involve a real persona in the sense with which this study is primarily concerned, they are, nevertheless, presented as letters to the editor and, as such, must be recognized in any consideration of Johnson's epistolary essays. They will, therefore, be discussed individually in the second part of the present chapter. The first section of the chapter will deal with those essays in which an imaginary correspondent is obviously involved. The subheadings reflect major themes or topics treated in these works.

1

Courtship and Marriage

The subject of marriage occurs rather frequently in Johnson's essays. He obviously was very much aware of the extent to which one's happiness depended upon choosing a spouse wisely. The subject is introduced as early as Rambler, No. 18, where Johnson notes "that marriage, though the dictate
of nature, and the institution of providence, is yet very often the cause of misery, and that those who enter into that state can seldom forbear to express their repentance, and their envy of those whom either chance or caution has withheld from it" (III, 98). He proceeds to relate the histories of several people who "failed to obtain happiness, for want of considering that marriage is the strictest tye of perpetual friendship; that there can be no friendship without confidence, and no confidence without integrity; and that he must expect to be wretched, who pays to beauty, riches, or politeness, that regard which only virtue and piety can claim" (III, 103).

The example of the young man who married Mitissa for her fortune (Rambler, No. 35) and soon regretted his action was discussed in the previous chapter. Another unnamed young man, however, proves to be much wiser than Mitissa's unfortunate husband. This gentleman, who writes in Rambler, No. 34, refused to be rushed by his relatives into marriage with the rich and beautiful Anthea, for, as he explains, "I was . . . too old to be given away without my own consent, and having happened to pick up an opinion, which to many of my relations seemed extremely odd, that a man might be unhappy with a large estate, determined to obtain a nearer knowledge of the person with whom I was to pass the remainder of my time" (III, 186).
Because this prudent young man realized that the usual visits and entertainments he shared with Anthea did not provide any opportunity to become acquainted with the "private character" of his lady, he arranged for the two of them to travel with a small group "and spend a day in viewing a seat and gardens a few miles distant" (III, 186). This outing began ominously, for as soon as Anthea came down to the coach, she "started back with great appearance of terror, and told us that she durst not enter, for the shocking colour of the lining had so much the air of the mourning coach, in which she followed her aunt's funeral three years before, that she should never have her poor dear aunt out of her head" (III, 186). The coach was duly exchanged for one with a brighter color, but Anthea did not remain satisfied for long:

... we were amusing ourselves with the expectation of what we should see, when, upon a small inclination of the carriage, Anthea screamed out, that we were overthrown. We were obliged to fix all our attention upon her, which she took care to keep up by renewing her outcries, at every corner where we had occasion to turn: at intervals she entertained us with fretful complaints of the uneasyness of the coach, and obliged me to call several times on the coachman to take care and drive without jolting. The poor fellow endeavoured to please us, and therefore moved very slowly, 'till Anthea found out that this pace would only keep us longer on the stones, and desired that I would order him to make more speed. He whipped his horses, the coach jolted again, and Anthea very complaisantly told us how much she repented that she made one of our company.

Thus we passed on, over ways soft and hard, with more or with less speed, but always with new vicissitudes of anxiety. If the ground was hard,
we were jolted, if soft, we were sinking. If we went fast, we should be overturned, if slowly, we should never reach the place. At length she saw something which she called a cloud, and began to consider that at that time of the year it frequently thundered. This seemed to be the capital terror, for after that the coach was suffered to move on; and no danger was thought too dreadful to be encountered, provided she could get into a house before the thunder. (III, 186-87)

Nothing pleased Anthea during the entire outing, and she insisted upon preventing everyone else's enjoyment as well. The day was well spent, however, from the standpoint of the correspondent, for he found out that marriage with Anthea would be a miserable condition indeed. He sums up his description of her by referring to her as a foolish woman who "mistakes cowardice for elegance, and imagines all delicacy to consist in refusing to be pleased" (III, 189).

Hymenaeus writes in Rambler, Nos. 113 and 115, of his frustrated attempts to find a woman he can esteem in marriage. He has been searching for a wife for so long and has found so many women to be wanting the necessary qualifications that he admits that he is now "considered as an adversary by half the female world" (IV, 237). He defends himself, however, by reiterating the sincerity of his desire to marry and explains his failure to do so in these terms: "... I never forsook a mistress for a larger fortune, or brighter beauty, but because I discovered some irregularity in her conduct, or some depravity in her mind; not because I was charmed by another, but because I was offended by herself" (IV, 238). Specific examples follow this general statement.
The first lady to whom the youthful Hymenaeus paid his court was the vivacious Ferocula; he was charmed by her "wit never exhausted, and spirit never depressed" (IV, 238). He also admired "her readiness of expedients, contempt of difficulty, assurance of address, and promptitude of reply," although he was, to be sure, "somewhat disturbed by the unshaken perseverance with which she enforced her demands of an unreasonable settlement" (IV, 238). The plans for the marriage were well underway when Hymenaeus one day happened to observe his bride-to-be "in the presence of hundreds, disputing for six-pence with a chairman" (IV, 239). This spectacle prompted Hymenaeus to provoke the lady into breaking off the engagement.

After his experience with sparkling wit, Hymenaeus sought a wife who was learned. He settled with great satisfaction upon Misothea, but she turned out to be an extremely poor choice, as Hymenaeus explains in the following passage:

The queen of the Amazons was only to be gained by the hero who could conquer her in single combat; and Misothea's heart was only to bless the scholar who could overpower her by disputation. Amidst the fondest transports of courtship she could call for a definition of terms, and treated every argument with contempt that could not be reduced to regular syllogism. You may easily imagine, that I wished this courtship at an end; but when I desired her to shorten my torments, and fix the day of my felicity, we were led into a long conversation, in which Misothea endeavoured to demonstrate the folly of attributing choice and self-direction to any human being. It was not difficult to discover the danger of committing myself for ever to the arms of one who might at any time mistake the dictates of passion, or the
calls of appetite, for the decree of fate; or consider cuckoldom as necessary to the general system, as a link in the everlasting chain of successive causes. I therefore told her, that destiny had ordained us to part; and that nothing should have torn me from her but the talons of necessity. (IV, 239)

"The calm, the prudent, the economical Sophronia" caught the fancy of Hymenaeus next, for, in contrast to Misothea, she "considered wit as dangerous, and learning as superfluous; and thought that the woman who kept her house clean, and her accounts exact, took receipts for every payment, and could find them at sudden call, enquired nicely after the condition of the tenants, read the price of stocks once a week, and purchased every thing at the best market, could want no accomplishments necessary to the happiness of a wise man" (IV, 240). Convinced that this lady would at the very least protect him from poverty, Hymenaeus proceeded to seek her hand. Before the marriage, however, Sophronia's maid came to Hymenaeus, begging him to speak to her mistress, who had dismissed her for breaking a tortoise-shell comb. Since the girl was destitute and without friends or relations in the city, Hymenaeus quickly appealed to his fiancée. Her reply and his reaction were as follows:

. . . upon my first application to Sophronia [I] was answered with an air which called for approbation, that if she neglected her own affairs, I might suspect her of neglecting mine; that the comb stood her in three half-crowns; that no servant should wrong her twice; and that indeed, she took the first opportunity of parting with Phyllida, because, though she was honest, her constitution was bad, and she thought
her very likely to fall sick. Of our conference
I need not tell you the effect; it surely may be
forgiven me, if on this occasion I forgot the
decency of common forms. (IV, 240)

In his second letter (Rambler, No. 115) Hymenaeus con-
tinues with his account of the women he has courted. He also
amusingly describes the matchmakers he has encountered:

You must have observed in the world a species
of mortals who employ themselves in promoting matri-
mony, and without any visible motive of interest or
vanity, without any discoverable impulse of malice
or benevolence, without any reason, but that they
want objects of attention, and topicks of conversa-
tion, are incessantly busy in procuring wives and
husbands. They fill the ears of every single man
and woman with some convenient match, and when they
are informed of your age and fortune, offer a partner
of life with the same readiness, and the same indif-
ference, as a salesman, when he has taken measure by
his eye, fits his customer with a coat.

I was known to possess a fortune, and to want a
wife; and therefore was frequently attended by these
hymeneal solicitors, with whose importunity I was
sometimes diverted, and sometimes perplexed; for they
contended for me as vulturs for a carcase; each employed
all his eloquence, and all his artifices, to enforce
and promote his own scheme, from the success of which
he was to receive no other advantage than the pleasure
of defeating others equally eager, and equally indus-
trious. (IV, 247-48)

As a result of his friends' matchmaking activities,
Hymenaeus made the acquaintance of Camilla, for whom, despite
his wariness, he "could not suppress some raptures of admira-
tion, and flutters of desire" (IV, 249). After a short while,
however, Hymenaeus discovered that Camilla affected to detest
her own sex. She ridiculed women in general and associated
with men alone whenever possible, frequently stating "that
when she considered the behaviour, or heard the conversation,
of her sex, she could not but forgive the Turks for suspecting them to want souls" (IV, 249). Hymenaeus assumes that "Camilla doubtless expected, that what she lost on one side, she should gain on the other," but she found that "she was persecuted by the ladies as a deserter, and at best received by the men only as a fugitive. I, for my part," Hymenaeus continues, "amused myself a while with her fopperies, but novelty soon gave way to detestation, for nothing out of the common order of nature can be long borne" (IV, 250).

The gentle Nitella was the next lady whom Hymenaeus sought out, but he was discouraged from approaching her seriously by noting in her what he feared to be the "kind of anxious cleanliness" which he recognized "as the characteristic of a slattern" (IV, 250). Upon investigation he learned "that Nitella passed her time between finery and dirt; and was always in a wrapper, night-cap, and slippers, when she was not decorated for immediate shew" (IV, 251).

Charybdis reigned over the heart of Hymenaeus until her expensive demands nearly exhausted his fortune, and then Imperia replaced her. But Imperia's early "perusal of romances" had so impressed her that she "expected nothing less than vows, altars, and sacrifices; and thought her charms dishonoured, and her power infringed, by the softest opposition to her sentiments, or the smallest transgressions of her commands" (IV, 252).
Hymenaeus thus concludes his second letter with the hope that he will yet find a woman without these faults that he has described. Although his friends tell him that he is unrealistic in his expectation, his concept of marriage is so lofty that he refuses to settle for less than he desires in a wife.

In Rambler, No. 18, Johnson remarks that women have usually been forced to bear the blame for the frequency of unhappy marriages because men have done most of the writing on the subject. Hymenaeus, for example, has catalogued the various faults to which women are subject. But since Johnson wished to be fair and impartial, he presents in Rambler, No. 119, the feminine counterpart to Hymenaeus.

Tranquilla is a mature lady who has never married for the same reason that Hymenaeus gives—she cannot find a suitable mate. Like Hymenaeus, also, she has refused to give up hope that decent men do actually exist and that marriage can be the happiest state of human life. "If... I am yet a stranger to nuptial happiness," she says, "I suffer only the consequences of my own resolves, and can look back upon the succession of lovers whose addresses I have rejected, without grief and without malice" (IV, 272).

Tranquilla's account of her various suitors begins with Venustulus, whose handsome appearance and manners appealed to her youthful fancy. Although the young man was lacking in
any real wit, he managed to entertain his mistress with "treats and diversions" so well that she was delighted with him until his true nature was revealed:

I was for a while pleased with the care which Venustulus discovered in securing me from any appearance of danger or possibility of mischance. He never failed to recommend caution to his coachman, or to promise the waterman a reward if he landed us safe; and always contrived to return by day-light for fear of robbers. This extraordinary solicitude was represented for a time as the effect of his tenderness for me, but fear is too strong for continued hypocrisy. I soon discovered, that Venustulus had the cowardice as well as elegance of a female. His imagination was perpetually clouded with terrors, and he could scarcely refrain from screams and outcries at any accidental surprize. He durst not enter a room if a rat was heard behind the wainscoat, nor cross a field where the cattle were frisking in the sunshine; the least breeze that waved upon the river was a storm, and every clamour in the street was a cry of fire. I have seen him lose his colour when my squirrel had broke his chain; and was forced to throw water in his face on the sudden entrance of a black cat. Compassion once obliged me to drive away with my fan, a beetle that kept him in distress, and chide off a dog that yelped at his heels, to which he would gladly have given up me to facilitate his own escape. (IV, 273)

After ridding herself of this cowardly fellow, Tranquilla, like Hymenaeus, found herself the object of matchmaking schemes on the part of her friends. They prevailed upon her to permit the attentions of Fungoso, whose prudence so much impressed Tranquilla's parents that she was very nearly doomed to wed him; but, fortunately, a fraud was found in the marriage settlement, and she was not obliged to marry a man who, "having been bred in a counting-house, ... spoke a language unintelligible in any other place" (IV, 273).
After six months with no suitor at all, Tranquilla "at last became the idol of the glittering Flosculus, who prescribed the mode of embroidery to all the fops of his time," but she soon discovered that he "was rather a rival than an admirer" and, therefore, unsuitable as a mate (IV, 273-74). Flosculus was followed by Dentatus, who loved only to eat and whose pride all lay in his culinary abilities. Tranquilla's negligence in praising his dishes made him easy to dismiss.

These men, and many others not specified by name, sought the hand of Tranquilla, but she detected in each a quality which would have made her wretched as his wife. Her purpose in recounting her experiences is explained in the final paragraph of her letter:

I have now sent you a narrative, which the ladies may oppose to the tale of Hymenaeus. I mean not to depreciate the sex, which has produced poets and philosophers, heroes and martyrs; but will not suffer the rising generation of beauties to be dejected by partial satire; or to imagine, that those who censure them, have not likewise their follies, and their vices. I do not yet believe happiness unattainable in marriage, though I have never yet been able to find a man, with whom I could prudently venture an inseparable union. It is necessary to expose faults, that their deformity may be seen; but the reproach ought not to be extended beyond the crime, nor either sex to be condemned, because some women, or men, are indelicate, or dishonest. (IV, 274-75)

The individual letters of Hymenaeus and Tranquilla have a unique sequel in Johnson's essays, for in Rambler, No. 167, appears a letter from the two of them announcing their marriage. These two correspondents appear to have, as A. T.
Elder says, "no unreasonable expectation of finding connubial bliss," for they have entered the wedded state with as few illusions as possible:

... we have allowed our minds to form no unreasonable expectations, nor vitiated our fancies in the soft hours of courtship, with visions of felicity which human power cannot bestow, or of perfection which human virtue cannot attain. That impartiality with which we endeavoured to inspect the manners of all whom we have known was never so much overpowered by our passion, but that we discovered some faults and weaknesses in each other; and joined our hands in conviction, that as there are advantages to be enjoyed in marriage, there are inconveniences likewise to be endured; and that, together with confederate intellects and auxiliar virtues, we must find different opinions and opposite inclinations. (V, 121)

Moreover, the couple's letter echoes the Rambler's own statement in No. 18 that marriage is "the strictest tye of perpetual friendship" (III, 103). Hymenaeus and Tranquilla explain, "we considered marriage as the most solemn league of perpetual friendship, a state from which artifice and concealment are to be banished for ever, and in which every act of dissimulation is a breach of faith" (V, 124).

Not everyone is as wise and fortunate as this happy couple, however, and this fact is illustrated in the Idler papers, which include several letters from men and women with complaints about their respective spouses. Johnson's avowed

1 "Irony and Humour in the Rambler," University of Toronto Quarterly, 30 (1960), 66.
impartiality is exemplified by the equal space given to wives and husbands: there are three letters from men and three from women.

Peter Plenty writes in *Idler*, No. 35, of his wife, who is a compulsive bargain-hunter. "Whatever she thinks cheap, she holds it the duty of an oeconomist to buy; in consequence of this maxim," Plenty laments, "we are incumbered on every side with useless lumber... and my house has the appearance of a ship stored for a voyage to the colonies" (II, 109). Nor does Mrs. Plenty neglect her many purchases, even though they are too numerous to be used every day. Her husband grimly describes her diligent maintenance of the household:

> It is the great care of her life that the pieces of beef should be boiled in the order in which they are bought; that the second bag of peas shall not be opened till the first are eaten; that every feather-bed shall be lain on in its turn; that the carpets should be taken out of the chests once a month and brushed, and the rolls of linen opened now and then before the fire. She is daily enquiring after the best traps for mice; and keeps the rooms always scented by fumigations to destroy the moths. She employs workmen, from time to time, to adjust six clocks that never go, and clean five jacks that rust in the garret; and a woman in the next alley lives by scouring the brass and pewter, which, are only laid up to tarnish again. (II, 111)

Although other husbands tell him to make the best of his wife's eccentricity, some of his bachelor friends advise him to auction off her goods, and Peter Plenty concludes his letter
with a statement of the possibility of such a sale. His decision is noticeably hesitant, however, and it seems highly improbable that the proposal will be countenanced by the thrifty housewife.

An unnamed gentleman, writing in *Idler* No. 53, is also suffering from his wife's foolishness. When he moved his family to a neighborhood inhabited by members of the nobility, his wife became obsessed with the desire to enter into the society of great ladies. Her husband reports that "if ever she met a lady of quality, [she] forced herself into notice by respect and assiduity. Her advances were generally rejected, and she heard them, as they went downstairs, talk how some creatures put themselves forward" (II, 165-66). But she refused to be discouraged, and eventually "she appeared at the card-table of Lady Biddy Porpoise, a lethargick virgin of seventy-six, whom all the families in the next square visited very punctually when she was not at home" (II, 166). Through this connection, the social-climbing wife became acquainted with Lady Tawdry, and after being accepted in the homes of both these ladies, she achieved the goal of participating in the various social activities of the upper class. Her husband suffers the consequences of her new social status:

> You will easily imagine that much of my domestick comfort is withdrawn. I never see my wife but in the hurry of preparation, or the languor of weariness. To dress and to undress is almost her whole business in private, and the servants take advantage of her negligence to
increase expense. But I can supply her omissions by my own diligence, and should not much regret this new course of life, if it did nothing more than transfer to me the care of our accounts. The changes which it has made are more vexatious. My wife has no longer the use of her understanding. She has no rule of action but the fashion. She has no opinion but that of the people of quality. She has no language but the dialect of her own set of company. She hates and admires in humble imitation; and echoes the words "charming" and "detestable" without consulting her own perceptions.

If for a few minutes we sit down together, she entertains me with the repartees of Lady Cackle, or the conversation of Lord Whiffler and Miss Quick, and wonders to find me receiving with indifference sayings which put all the company into laughter. (II, 166-67)

This correspondent can merely watch and deplore the folly of his wife, hoping, no doubt, that she will finally regain her senses.

Tim Warner, who writes in Idler, No. 100, has only himself to blame for his unfortunate marriage, for he sought his bride very deliberately and with the judgment of maturity. Having resolved to suppress his passions and to marry only as reason directed, he outlined on paper "all female virtues and vices, with the vices which border upon every virtue, and the virtues which are allied to every vice" (II, 305). With this chart as a guide, Warner deliberately sought a "lady in whom nature and reason had reached that happy mediocrity which is equally remote from exuberance and deficience" (II, 306). His search led him to Miss Gentle, who "was universally allowed to be a good sort of woman" (II, 306), and her evenness of temper, exhibited during their courtship, suited Warner so
well that he joyfully married her. The first month or so after the wedding was happy enough for the couple, but Warner soon began to realize his mistake:

... the time soon came when we were left to ourselves, and were to receive our pleasures from each other, and I then began to perceive that I was not formed to be much delighted by a good sort of woman. Her great principle is, that the orders of a family must not be broken. Every hour of the day has its employment inviolably appropriated, nor will any importunity persuade her to walk in the garden, at the time which she has devoted to her needlework, or to sit up stairs in that part of the forenoon, which she has accustomed herself to spend in the back parlour. She allows herself to sit half an hour after breakfast, and an hour after dinner; while I am talking or reading to her, she keeps her eye upon her watch, and when the minute of departure comes, will leave an argument unfinished, or the intrigue of a play unravelled. She once called me to supper when I was watching an eclipse, and summoned me at another time to bed when I was going to give directions at a fire. (II, 307)

In addition to describing his wife's inflexibility, Warner also bemoans her shallowness and her lack of discrimination. He blames his mistake in choosing a wife upon undefined terms and concludes his characterization with this statement: "This, Mr. Idler, I have found to be the character of a good sort of woman, which I have sent you for the information of those by whom 'a good sort of woman' and 'a good woman' may happen to be used as equivalent terms, and who may suffer by the mistake..." (II, 308).

These gentlemen's complaints against their wives may be grievous enough, but Johnson was not to deny the feminine side
in questions of marital disagreements. In fact, a letter in *Idler*, No. 28, although unsigned, appears to be the wife's rebuttal to an earlier letter signed "Zachary Treacle" (*Idler*, No. 15). The first letter, attributed to Bonnell Thornton, describes an idle and shrewish wife, whom the husband, Treacle, calls "a dead weight upon me" and "rather a clog than an help-mate" (II, 50). Johnson apparently felt there was another side to this story, however, and he presents that other side by allowing the wife to answer the husband's charges one by one, as follows:

I am the unfortunate wife of the grocer whose letter you published about ten weeks ago, in which he complains, like a sorry fellow, that I loiter in the shop with my needle-work in my hand, and that I oblige him to take me out on Sundays, and keep a girl to look after the child. Sweet Mr. Idler, if you did but know all, you would give no encouragement to such an unreasonable grumbler. I brought him three hundred pounds, which set him up in a shop, and bought in a stock on which with good management we might live comfortably, but now I have given him a shop, I am forced to watch him and the shop too. I will tell you, Mr. Idler, how it is. There is an alehouse over the way with a ninepin alley, to which he is sure to run when I turn my back, and there loses his money, for he plays at nine-pins as he does every thing else. While he is at this favourite sport, he sets a dirty boy to watch his door, and call him to his customers, but he is long in coming, and so rude when he comes, that our custom falls off every day.

Those who cannot govern themselves must be governed. I have resolved to keep him for the future behind his counter, and let him bounce at his customers if he dares. I cannot be above stairs and below at the same time, and have therefore taken a girl to look after the child and dress the dinner; and, after all, pray who is to blame?

On a Sunday, it is true, I make him walk abroad, and sometimes carry the child; I wonder who should
carry it! but I never take him out till after church time, nor would do it then, but that if he is let alone, he will be upon the bed. On a Sunday, if he stays at home, he has six meals, and when he can eat no longer, has twenty stratagems to escape from me to the alehouse; but I commonly keep the door locked, till Monday produces something for him to do.

This is the true state of the case, and these are the provocations for which he has written his letter to you. I hope you will write a paper to shew, that if a wife must spend her whole time in watching her husband, she cannot conveniently tend her child, or sit at her needle. (II, 88-9)

Deborah Ginger, who writes in Idler, No. 47, describes herself as "the unfortunate wife of a city wit" (II, 146) and feels that her status as such deserves all compassion. Her husband set up his business as a shopkeeper soon after their marriage and achieved great success in a short time as a result of his conscientiousness. At a tavern, however, Mr. Ginger fell in with a group of "criticks." These idle fellows lured him to the theatre, "which at first he did not seem much to heed; for he owned, that he very seldom knew what they were doing, and that, while his companions would let him alone, he was commonly thinking on his last bargain," but "having once gone, . . . he went again and again . . . [and] grew uneasy if he missed a night . . ." (II, 147). Now, his wife complains, "he has . . . lost his regard for everything but the playhouse; he invites, three times a week, one or other to drink claret, and talk of the drama" (II, 148). Moreover, he devotes hardly any time to his business. "Since one of his friends told him that he had a genius for tragick
poetry," Deborah reports, "he has locked himself in an upper room six or seven hours a day, and when I carry him any paper to be read or signed, I hear him talking vehemently to himself, sometimes of love and beauty, sometimes of friendship and virtue, but more frequently of liberty and his country" (II, 148).

Mrs. Ginger's concern for her husband's folly is summarized in her concluding paragraph:

By this course of life our credit as traders is lessened, and I cannot forbear to suspect, that my husband's honour as a wit is not much advanced, for he seems to be always the lowest of the company, is afraid to tell his opinion till the rest have spoken. When he was behind his counter, he used to be brisk, active, and jocular, like a man that knew what he was doing, and did not fear to look another in the face; but among wits and critics he is timorous and awkward, and hangs down his head at his own table. Dear Mr. Idler persuade him, if you can, to return once more to his native element. Tell him, that wit will never make him rich, but that there are places where riches will always make a wit. (II, 149)

This correspondent, however, reveals in her letter enough about herself to cast doubt upon her own judgment. In her pleasure at their increasing fortune early in their marriage, Deborah revealed her own ambitions: "I will not deny, that, imagining myself likely to be in a short time the sheriff's lady, I broke off my acquaintance with some of my neighbors, and advised my husband to keep good company, and not to be seen with men that were worth nothing" (II, 147). As is the case in many of Johnson's imaginary letters, there is here at
least a hint that the ostensible victim is not completely blameless and may even have been partly responsible for her husband's foolish behavior.

Another young wife, Peggy Heartless, writes in *Idler*, No. 86, of her impatience with her husband. Very recently married, this couple decided that their first year of wedded life should properly be devoted to frivolous activities in London, before the arrival of a family should limit them "to domestick cares and domestick pleasures" (II, 267). Upon arriving in London, they discovered that a cousin of Mr. Heartless, Miss Biddy Trifle, had secured temporary lodgings for them on a second floor. These accommodations greatly displeased Peggy, especially when she was forced to receive visitors in such unfashionable surroundings. She reports that her husband has been searching for more suitable rooms, but in his inexperience he is relying upon the judgment of a Mr. Ned Quick, a friend who possesses "great skill in rooms and furniture, who sees, at a single glance, whatever there is to be commended or censured" (II, 268). Unfortunately, Mr. Quick believes that his discriminating taste is proved only by his refusal to be pleased with any apartments submitted for his appraisal, and since Mr. Heartless refuses to take new lodgings without his friend's approval, Peggy continues to suffer on her second floor.
Peggy's surname does not seem quite appropriate to her letter, for her displeasure with her husband and Ned Quick appears to be justified. Perhaps her "heartlessness" is simply to be inferred from her concluding paragraph, which might be construed as a warning to her mate that her patience may be near its end:

In this distress to whom can I have recourse. I find my temper vitiated by daily disappointment, by the sight of pleasures which I cannot partake, and the possession of riches which I cannot enjoy. Dear Mr. Idler, inform my husband that he is trifling away, in superfluous vexation, the few months which custom has appropriated to delight; that matrimonial quarrels are not easily reconciled between those that have no children; that wherever we settle he must always find some inconvenience; but nothing is so much to be avoided as a perpetual state of enquiry and suspense. (II, 269)

Parenthood

In several of the essays discussed in the preceding chapter, there are characters whose misfortunes appear to have been brought about because they were, as A. T. Elder says, "led by their parents to value the wrong goals in life."^2 Johnson obviously recognized the importance of parental influence, and in Rambler Nos. 132, 194 and 195, he offers an account of a child whose parents exhibit a shocking irresponsibility in the education of their only son.

These three letters are written by Eumathes, a scholar whose fortune has been exhausted by his devotion to his studies. Having been forced to seek employment, he has accepted a position as tutor to a young nobleman. The pupil himself is an intelligent and agreeable boy, but Eumathes finds that his student's mother has actually very little regard for learning; she considers her son's social training to be much more important than his intellectual progress. But in spite of her attitude, Eumathes, after a while, succeeded in winning his pupil's interest, and the boy began by degrees "to feel the quick impulses of curiosity, and the honest ardour of studious ambition" (IV, 338).

Unfortunately, however, his parents decided to spend the winter in London, and even though Eumathes argued against introducing the boy into society at such an early age, the proud mother was determined to show her son to the world. Eumathes accompanied the family to the city, and his first letter concludes with his account of the effect of the activities upon the boy: "He has at once caught the infection of high life. . . . He begins already to look down on me with superiority, and submits to one short lesson in a week, as an act of condescension rather than obedience . . . " (IV, 339-40).

Eumathes' description of his wayward pupil does not continue in the Rambler papers until seven months later, in
Nos. 194 and 195. A. T. Elder says that these last two letters appear to be "the result of Johnson's sudden recollection that he has not finished the account. How else can one explain a gap of sixty-two issues before the story is taken up again?" In any case, however, Eumathes resumes his story with no apology for the delay. "That vanity which keeps every man important in his own eyes," he says, "inclines me to believe that neither you nor your readers have yet forgotten the name of Eumathes. ... I shall therefore continue my narrative, without preface or recapitulation" (V, 248).

The young nobleman's fascination with the society of London is described in more detail in Rambler, No. 194, than in the previous letter from Eumathes. The boy, his tutor relates, upon his arrival in the city, "immediately lost the reserve and timidity which solitude and study are apt to impress upon the most courtly genius; was able to enter a crowded room with airy civility; to meet the glances of a hundred eyes without perturbation; and address those whom he never saw before with ease and confidence. In less than a month his mother declared her satisfaction at his proficiency by a triumphant observation, that she believed, 'nothing would make him blush'" (V, 249). Worst of all, perhaps, the boy's head

3 Ibid., p. 615, n. 14.
was soon turned by praise, and he began to fancy himself a
wit. Eumathes has tried to correct his pupil's excesses but
is unable to convince him of his folly:

The indulgence which his youth has hitherto obtained,
and the respect which his rank secures, have hitherto
supplied the want of intellectual qualifications; and
he imagines, that all admire who applaud, and that all
who laugh are pleased. He therefore returns every day
to the charge with encrease of courage, though not of
strength, and practises all the tricks by which wit is
counterfeited. He lays trains for a quibble; he con-
trives blunders for his footman; he adapts old stories
to present characters; he mistakes the question, that
he may return a smart answer; he anticipates the argu-
ment, that he may plausibly object; when he has nothing
to reply, he repeats the last words of his antagonist,
then says, "your humble servant," and concludes with
a laugh of triumph. (V, 252)

In his third and final letter, Eumathes continues his
account in hopes, he says, that it "may be of use to young
men who are in too much haste to trust their own prudence,
and quit the wing of protection before they are able to shift
for themselves" (V, 253). Encouraged by his mother's indul-
gence, Eumathes' young charge became cocky and considered
himself ready to enter the world. Finally, his foolishness
led him into an escapade that even his fond mother could not
excuse. One night, Eumathes relates,

... [the boy] returned from a petty gaming-table,
with his coat torn, and his head broken; without his
sword, snuff-box, sleeve-buttons and watch.
Of this loss or robbery, he gave little account;
but, instead of sinking into his former shame,
endeavoured to support himself by surliness and
asperity, "He was not the first that had played
away a few trifles, and of what use were birth and
fortune if they would not admit some sallies and
and expences.' His mamma was so much provoked by the cost of this prank, that she would neither palliate nor conceal it; and his father, after some threats of rustication which his fondness would not suffer him to execute, reduced the allowance of his pocket, that he might not be tempted by plenty to profusion. This method would have succeeded in a place where there are no pandars to folly and extravagance, but was now likely to have produced pernicious consequences; for we have discovered a treaty with a broker, whose daughter he seems disposed to marry, on condition that he shall be supplied with present money, for which he is to repay thrice the value at the death of his father. (V, 256-57)

The boy has finally overreached himself, even in the eyes of his mother, and he is condemned to spend the next two years in the country. But the fond mother can still be touched by her son's tears; she "declared, that she thought him too much of a man to be any longer confined to his book, and he therefore begins his travels to-morrow under a French governor" (V, 257). Poor Eumathes, who has attempted to prevent the follies of his pupil, find that he himself is "a victim of ingratitude."^4

A young lady who writes anonymously in Rambler, No. 55, suffers from having a mother who is just the opposite of indulgent. She explains that her father died when she was only ten years old, and her mother's "year of mourning was spent in caresses, consolation, and instruction" (II, 295). At the end of this period, however, the young widow was urged by her acquaintances to change her conduct, and soon she was prevailed

upon to make "her second entrance into the world," after which "she began to feel the happiness of acting without control, of being unaccountable for her hours, her expenses, and her company; . . . and confessed that she loved to go and come as she pleased" (III, 296).

For awhile, the lady still found time for occasional attention to her children, but soon she discovered "that it was impossible to educate children properly at home" (III, 297) and sent them away to boarding schools. "At first," the daughter recalls, "she visited me at school, and afterwards wrote to me; but in a short time, both her visits and her letters were at an end, and no other notice was taken of me than to remit money for my support" (III, 297).

When the girl finally came home on vacation, her mother received her coldly, noting her rapid growth. On her second visit home, six months later, her mother was even more annoyed at her young womanhood and openly expressed her displeasure. When the girl left school altogether to live with her mother, she was "considered . . . as an usurper that had seized the rights of a woman before they were due, and was pushing her [mother] down the precipice of age" (III, 298). The daughter concludes her letter with details of her unhappy existence and entreats Mr. Rambler to advise mothers against such mistreatment of their daughters:
... I am on one pretence or other generally excluded from her assemblies, nor am I ever suffered to visit at the same place with my mamma. Every one wonders why she does not bring Miss more into the world, and when she comes home in vapours I am certain that she has heard either of my beauty or my wit, and expect nothing for the ensuing week, but taunts and menaces, contradiction and reproaches.

Thus I live in a state of continual persecution, only because I was born ten years too soon, and cannot stop the course of nature or of time, but am unhappily a woman before my mother can willingly cease to be a girl. I believe you would contribute to the happiness of many families, if, by any arguments or persuasions, you could make mothers ashamed of rivalling their children; if you could shew them, that though they may refuse to grow wise, they must inevitably grow old; and that the proper solaces of age are not musick and compliments, but wisdom and devotion; that those who are so unwilling to quit the world will soon be driven from it; and that it is therefore their interest to retire while there yet remain a few hours for nobler employments. (III, 298-99)

Another foolish mother is described in Idler, No. 13. This unsigned letter is written by a father whose wife refuses to allow their three daughters to be educated. She is another one of the over-zealous housewives among Johnson's characters: "She is an irreconcileable enemy to idleness, and considers every state of life as idleness, in which the hands are not employed, or some art acquired, by which she thinks money may be got or saved" (II, 43). Through her insisting that her girls stay busy at their needlework, the father reports, "We have [accumulated] twice as many fire-skreens as chimneys, and three flourished quilts for every bed... [My wife] has boxes filled with knit garters and braided shoes. She has twenty covers for side saddles embroidered with silver
flowers, and has curtains wrought with gold in various figures, which she resolves some time or other to hang up" (II, 44).

The mother is exceedingly proud of her daughters' work and frequently refers to the money that has been saved, but the father is unhappy with his children's lack of education. He complains of their constant immersion in menial household tasks:

In the mean time the girls grow up in total ignorance of every thing past, present, and future. Molly asked me, the other day, whether Ireland was in France, and was ordered by her mother to mend her hem. Kitty knows not, at sixteen, the difference between a Protestant and a Papist, because she has been employed three years in filling the side of a closet with a hanging that is to represent Cranmer in the flames. And Dolly, my eldest girl, is now unable to read a chapter in the Bible, having spent all the time, which other children pass at school, in working the interview between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. (II, 44-45)

His wife is oblivious to his criticism, however, and the husband requests Mr. Idler's help in resolving this family problem.

Idler, No. 95, instead of attacking the foolishness of a parent, describes the folly of a son as viewed by the father. Tim. Wainscot, who is a successful tradesman, unhappily recounts his son's vain attempts to become a gentleman. The son had begun as a dutiful and diligent helper to his father, and for several years they lived and worked together "with mutual confidence" (II, 293). Then one day the son was visited by two schoolmates, who had entered the army. They "invited him to a tavern, where ... they ridiculed the meanness of commerce, and wondered how a youth of spirit could spend the prime of life behind a counter" (II, 293).
These observations had a profound effect upon Wainscot's son, who gradually became useless to his father's business. Finally, Wainscot discovered his son's secret wardrobe of finery, which may have been "taken upon credit, or purchased with money subducted from the shop" (II, 294). Following this discovery, the son has become defiant and "openly declares his resolution to be a gentleman; says that his soul is too great for a counting-house" (II, 294). Wainscot ends his letter with the sad acknowledgement of his son's inability to attain his goal of being a gentleman:

All this is very provoking, and yet all this might be borne, if the boy could support his pretensions. But whatever he may think, he is yet far from the accomplishments which he has endeavoured to purchase at so dear a rate. I have watched him in publick places. He sneaks in like a man that knows he is where he should not be; he is proud to catch the slightest salutation, and often claims it when it is not intended. Other men receive dignity from dress, but my booby looks always more meanly for his finery. Dear Mr. Idler, tell him what must at last become of a fop, whom pride will not suffer to be a trader, and whom long habits in a shop forbid to be a gentleman.

(II, 294-95)

Country Dwellers

Johnson's fondness for London is well known, and he often expressed his preference for city-life over country-life. Boswell notes that Johnson's "love of a London life was so strong, that he would have thought himself an exile in any
other place, particularly if residing in the country."\(^5\) Several of his periodical essays deal with inhabitants of the country and their peculiar foibles.

Rambler, No. 138, for example, is a letter from Bucolus, who defends the country as a place of inexhaustible variety. "If writers would more frequently visit those regions of negligence and liberty," he asserts, "they might diversify their representations, and multiply their images, for in the country are original characters chiefly to be found. In cities, and yet more in courts, the minute discriminations which distinguish one from another are for the most part effaced, the peculiarities of temper and opinion are gradually worn away by promiscuous converse . . ." (IV, 365). Country dwellers, Bucolus argues, feel free to indulge their eccentricities and sometimes exhibit "remarkable particularities of conduct or manner" (IV, 367).

The example which Bucolus chooses to detail is that of Mrs. Busy, a widow who has turned her estate into a farm, which she manages herself. Like the mother of the three daughters discussed above, Mrs. Busy's obsession is thriftiness, and idleness is her aversion. Having lost her husband in her thirtieth year, Bucolus reports,

Mrs. Busy was too much an economist to feel either joy or sorrow at his death. She received the compliments and consolations of her neighbours in a dark room, out of which she stole privately every night and morning to see the cows milked; and after a few days declared that she thought a widow might employ herself better than in nursing grief; and that for her part, she was resolved that the fortunes of her children should not be impaired by her neglect.

She soon disencumbered herself from her weeds and put on a riding-hood, a coarse apron, and short petticoats, and has turned a large manor into a farm, of which she takes the management wholly upon herself. She rises before the sun to order the horses to their geers, and sees them well rubbed down at their return from work; she attends the dairy morning and evening, and watches when a calf falls that it may be carefully nursed; she walks out among the sheep at noon, counts the lambs, and observes the fences, and, where she finds a gap, stops it with a bush till it can be better mended. In harvest she rides afield in the waggon, and is very liberal of her ale from a wooden bottle. At her leisure hours she looks goose eggs, airs the wool room, and turns the cheese.

When respect or curiosity brings visitants to her house, she entertains them with prognosticks of a scarcity of wheat, or a rot among the sheep, and always thinks herself privileged to dismiss them, when she is to see the hogs fed, or to count her poultry on the roost.

The only things neglected about her are her children, whom she has taught nothing but the lowest household duties. In my last visit I met Miss Busy carrying grains to a sick cow, and was entertained with the accomplishments of her elder son, a youth of such early maturity, that though he is only sixteen, she can trust him to sell corn in the market. Her younger daughter, who is eminent for her beauty, though somewhat tanned in making hay, was busy in pouring ale to the plowmen, that every one might have an equal share.

I could not but look with pity on this young family doomed by the absurd prudence of their mother to ignorance and meanness; but when I recommended a more elegant education, was answered, that she never saw bookish or finical people grow rich, and that she was good for nothing herself till she had forgotten the nicety of the boarding-school. (IV, 368-69)
O. F. Christie, in Johnson the Essayist, suggests that there might be another side to this story: "We may admire the pluck and energy of Mrs. Busy; it was not her fault that her own education had been defective, and it would not have been surprising if she had spent the years of her widowhood in idleness and extravagance." But, of course, as Christie later admits, "Johnson was satirizing a carefulness carried to excess," and "worst of all, the education of children was sacrificed."^7

Rambler, No. 51, contains a portrait of Lady Bustle, who may be viewed as Mrs. Busy's complement. "Had they been able to work together," Christie observes, "they would have made any landed estate extremely profitable."^8 This character sketch is conveyed by a young relative of Lady Bustle, Cornelia, who is visiting her relations in the country. Cornelia first described her surprise upon arriving at the home of Lady Bustle to find not the tranquility she had expected but rather a continual turmoil:

... The old lady, who is my father's relation, was, indeed, very full of the happiness which she received from my visit. ... But, amidst all her kindness and caresses, she very frequently turned her head aside, and whispered, with anxious earnestness, some order to her daughters, which never failed to

^6 Johnson the Essayist (London: Grant Richards, Ltd., 1924), p. 162.
^7 Ibid., p. 163.
^8 Ibid., p. 158.
send them out with unpoltite precipitation. Sometimes her impatience would not suffer her to stay behind; she begged my pardon, she must leave me for a moment; she went, and returned and sat down again, but was again disturbed by some new care, dismissed her daughters with the same trepidation, and followed them with the same countenance of business and solicitude.

However I was alarmed at this show of eagerness and disturbance, and however my curiosity was excited by such busy preparations as naturally promised some great event, I was yet too much a stranger to gratify myself with enquiries; but finding none of the family in mourning, I pleased myself with imagining that I should rather see a wedding than a funeral. (III, 274)

This diligence, however, turned out to be merely the normal routine of the household, and Cornelia gradually became acquainted with her hostess's housewifely zeal:

It is, indeed, the great business of her life, to watch the skillet on the fire, to see it simmer with the due degree of heat, and to snatch it off at the moment of projection; and the employments to which she has bred her daughters, are to turn rose-leaves in the shade, to pick out the seeds of currants with a quill, to gather fruit without bruising it, and to extract bean-flower water for the skin. Such are the tasks with which every day, since I came hither, has begun and ended, to which the early hours of life are sacrificed, and in which that time is passing away which never shall return.

Lady Bustle has, indeed, by this incessant application to fruits and flowers, contracted her cares into a narrow space, and set herself free from many perplexities with which other minds are disturbed. She has no curiosity after the events of a war, or the fate of heroes in distress; she can hear, without the least emotion, the ravage of a fire, or devastations of a storm; her neighbours grow rich or poor, come into the world or go out of it, without regard, while she is pressing the gelly-bag, or airing the store-room; but I cannot perceive that she is more free from disquiets than those whose understandings take a wider range. Her marigolds when they are almost cured, are often scattered by the wind, the
rain sometimes falls upon fruit when it ought to be gathered dry. While her artificial wines are fermenting, her whole life is restlessness and anxiety. Her sweetmeats are not always bright, and the maid sometimes forgets the just proportions of salt and pepper, when venison is to be baked. Her conserves mould, her wines sour, and pickles mother; and, like all the rest of mankind, she is every day mortified with the defeat of her schemes, and the disappointment of her hopes.

With regard to vice and virtue she seems a kind of neutral being. She has no crime but luxury, nor any virtue but chastity; she has no desire to be praised but for her cookery, nor wishes any ill to the rest of mankind, but that whenever they aspire to a feast, their custards may be wheyish, and their pye-crusts tough. (III, 275-76, 278-79)

Cornelia's last paragraph poses the question of whether she should look on Lady Bustle as a model of her sex, but her tone throughout the previous portions of her letter indicate that she knows very well that Lady Bustle is not a woman to be emulated.

Although these two essays just discussed concern feminine shortcomings, Johnson was far from recognizing only the faults of the ladies in the country. If "housekeeping cares narrowed women's minds, and deadened their spirits: the useless, aimless routine of sport absorbed the time and energies of men."9 The husbands of both Mrs. Busy and Lady Bustle are described as sportsmen, and, as Christie points out, "Johnson was always sarcastic about hunting."10

9 Christie, p. 152.
10 Ibid., p. 167.
The lengthy description of Squire Bluster, in *Rambler*, No. 142, however, reveals a despicable tyrant, not a mere sportsman. Vagulus is writing of his visit to the country estate of his friend Eugenio. While sojourning in the neighborhood, Vagulus has been informed of the nature of Squire Bluster, who was reared and spoiled by his grandmother, who taught him to spy meanly on the servants and to hoard his money. When he came of age, Bluster found himself to be the richest man in the county.

Instead of using his wealth to attain happiness for himself and others, however, Squire Bluster has spent his whole life "in meditating or executing mischief" (IV, 392). Vagulus offers these examples of his depravity:

... It is his common practice to procure his hedges to be broken in the night, and then to demand satisfaction for damages which his grounds have suffered from his neighbour's cattle. An old widow was yesterday soliciting Eugenio to enable her to replevin her only cow then in the pound by Squire Bluster's order, who had sent one of his agents to take advantage of her calamity, and persuade her to sell the cow at an under rate. He has driven a day-labourer from his cottage, for gathering blackberries in a hedge for his children; and has now an old woman in the county-jail for a trespass which she committed, by coming into his grounds to pick up acorns for her hog.

Money, in whatever hands, will confer power. Distress will fly to immediate refuge, without much consideration of remote consequences. Bluster has therefore a despotic authority in many families, whom he has assisted, on pressing occasions, with larger sums than they can easily repay. The only visits that he makes are to these houses of misfortune, where he enters with the insolence of absolute command, enjoys the terrors of the family, exacts their obedience, riots at their charge, and in the height of his joy insults the father with menaces, and the daughters with obscenity. (IV, 392-93)
To sum up the character of Squire Bluster, Vagulus concludes, "He is wealthy without followers; he is magnificent without witnesses; he has birth without alliance, and influence without dignity. His neighbours scorn him as a brute; his dependents dread him as an oppressor; and he has only the gloomy comfort of reflecting, that if he is hated, he is likewise feared" (IV, 393).

A less grim portrait is drawn by Ruricola, in Rambler, No. 61, of Mr. Frolick, a former rural inhabitant. Ruricola begins his letter by characterizing Londoners in the country. He explains the plight of country dwellers, who must depend upon visitors from the city for their news. Visitors from the city, much to Ruricola's vexation, treat him "with the utmost superciliousness of contempt, for not knowing what no human sagacity can discover" and "seem to attribute to the superiority of their intellects what they only owe to the accident of their condition" (III, 325). Ruricola admits, however, that these visitors are encouraged by the behavior of the natives to feel exalted:

... no sooner is the arrival of one of these disseminators of knowledge known in the country, than we crowd about him from every quarter, and by innumerable enquiries flatter him into an opinion of his own importance. He sees himself surrounded by multitudes, who propose their doubts, and refer their controversies to him, as to a being descended from some nobler region, and he grows on a sudden oracular and infallible, solves all difficulties, and sets all objections at defiance.

There is, in my opinion, great reason for suspecting, that they sometimes take advantage of this reverential modesty, and impose upon rustick understandings with a false show of universal intelligence; for I do not find that they are willing to own themselves ignorant
of any thing, or that they dismiss any enquirer with a positive and decisive answer. (III, 325)

As a specific example of one of these visitors, Ruricola offers a character sketch of Mr. Frolick, an account which "pleasantly exemplifies Johnson's powers of sustained sarcasm": 11

It is well remember'd here, that, about seven years ago, one Frolick, a tall boy, with lank hair, remarkable for stealing eggs, and sucking them, was taken from the school in this parish, and sent up to London to study the law. As he had given amongst us no proofs of a genius designed by nature for extraordinary performances, he was, from the time of his departure totally forgotten, nor was there any talk of his vices or virtues, his good or his ill fortune, till last summer a report burst upon us, that Mr. Frolick was come down in the first post-chaise which this village had seen. . . .

Mr. Frolick next day appeared among the gentlemen at their weekly meeting on the bowling-green, and now were seen the effects of a London education. His dress, his language, his ideas, were all new, and he did not much endeavour to conceal his contempt of every thing that differed from the opinions, or practice, of the modish world. . . . When any of his phrases were unintelligible, he could not suppress the joy of confessed superiority, but frequently delayed the explanation, that he might enjoy his triumph over our barbarity.

When he is pleased to entertain us with a story, he takes care to crowd into it names of streets, squares and buildings, with which he knows we are unacquainted. The favourite topicks of his discourse are the pranks of drunkards, and the tricks put upon country gentlemen by porters and link-boys. When he is with ladies he tells them of the innumerable pleasures to which he can introduce them; but he never fails to hint, how much they will be deficient, at their first arrival, in the knowledge of the town. What it is "to know the town" he has not indeed hitherto informed us, tho' there

11 Christie, p. 144.
is no phrase so frequent in his mouth, nor any
science which he appears to think of so great a
value, or so difficult attainment.

But my curiosity has been most engaged by the
recital of his own adventures and achievements. I
have heard of the union of various characters in
single persons, but never met with such a constella-
tion of great qualities as this man's narrative
affords. Whatever has distinguished the hero; what-
ever has elevated the wit; whatever has endeared the
lover, are all concentered in Mr. Frolick, whose life
has, for seven years, been a regular interchange of
intrigues, dangers, and waggeries, and who has
distinguished himself in every character that can
be feared, envied, or admired.

I question whether all the officers of the royal
navy can bring together, from all their journals, a
collection of so many wonderful escapes as this man
has known upon the Thames, on which he has been a
thousand and a thousand times on the point of perishing,
sometimes by the terrors of foolish women in the same
boat, sometimes by his own acknowledged imprudence in
passing the river in the dark, and sometimes by shoot-
ing the bridge, under which he has rencountred moun-
tainous waves, and dreadful cataracts.

Nor less has been his temerity by land, nor fewer
his hazards. He has reeled with giddiness on the top
of the monument; he has crossed the street amidst the
rush of coaches; he has been surrounded by robbers
without number; he has headed parties at the play-
house, he has scaled the windows of every toast of
whatever condition; he has been hunted for whole
winters by his rivals; he has slept upon bulks, he
has cut chairs, he has bilked coachmen; he has rescued
his friends from the bailiffs, has knocked down the
constable, has bullied the justice, and performed
many other exploits, that have filled the town with
wonder and with merriment.

With every man whose name occurs in the papers of
the day, he is intimately acquainted; and there are very
few posts, either in the state or army, of which he has
not more or less influenced the disposal. He has been
very frequently consulted both upon war and peace; but
the time is not yet come when the nation shall know how
much it is indebted to the genius of Frolick. (III, 326-28)
Although the extravagance of Frolick's claims is enough to discredit them entirely, poor Ruricola is so accustomed to being ignorant of what goes on in London that he asks of Mr. Rambler whether Frolick really is a great man in the city. As A. T. Elder observes, "... though the main attack is upon Frolick, the correspondent is exposed to ironic statement" for his lack of confidence in his own judgment of the charlatan.12

In his conclusion Ruricola declares that, should Frolick be the fraud he believes him to be, "I shall treat him with rustick sincerity, and drive him as an imposter from this part of the kingdom to some region of more credulity" (III, 329). O. F. Christie considers this harshness to be the unfortunate result of Johnson's being a moralist. "I think it would have been a pity to show up Mr. Frolick," Christie says, "and kinder to suffer him to continue infusing a little colour into the drabness of his native parish. But Johnson must finish with a castigation."13

Various Characters

There are a great many memorable characters in Johnson's periodical essays, a number of which have already been discussed in the present study. Frequently, as has been demonstrated

above, the imaginary author of the epistolary essays has as his primary goal the description of a character or a group of characters. The following essays are those which deal in characterization and which do not fit thematically into the groups of essays previously analyzed.

Misargyrus, whose dissolute youth is described in the Adventurer, Nos. 34 and 41, writes again in Nos. 53 and 62, where he discusses some of his fellow inmates at Fleet Prison. In No. 53 he relates the stories of five of his companions, each of whom Misargyrus judges to be justly imprisoned. These five are "men whom prosperity could not make useful, and whom ruin cannot make wise" (II, 370).

Edward Scamper is the first of these gentlemen. In his desire to increase his fortune, he gambled all he owned and all he could borrow on a horse named Bay-Lincoln. Scamper himself rode the horse and lost the race when his girth broke. Timothy Snugg squandered his moderate fortune in pretending to have a larger estate than he had indeed inherited. Jack Scatter, whose education and upbringing had been left up to his father's servants, turned his estate over to these servants, who soon reduced it to nothing. Dick Serge--much like the husband of Deborah Ginger and the son of Tim. Wainscot, discussed above--was a successful draper, but unfortunately "he became enamoured of wit and humour" (II, 369). Not only did he neglect his business; he also opened his pockets to the
wits he admired and was soon bankrupt. Bob Cornice found himself in prison after he exhausted his fortune in decorating a house.

Misargyrus suggests that none of these gentlemen deserve our pity since they do not "appear to solicit compassion," but rather "applaud their own conduct" (II, 370). In fact, Misargyrus says, "It were happy if the prisons of the kingdom were filled only with characters like these ..." (II, 370). But in contrast to this group of men are three other inmates, "whose virtue has made them unhappy, or whose misfortunes are at least without a crime" (II, 378). They are described in Adventurer, No. 62.

Serenus languishes in prison because he could not see another person's distress without trying to help. He offered himself as surety for a friend who had been arrested for debt, and when the debtor fled his responsibilities, Serenus had to go to jail in his place. Though he has offered to repay the creditor whatever amount was lost by the departure of his friend, Serenus finds the creditor's "avarice and brutality [to be] ... hitherto inexorable" (II, 379).

A man with "the same virtuous ductility" (II, 379) as Serenus, Candidus, is also a prisoner. Wishing to help the destitute son of a patron who had been generous to him, Candidus apprenticed the young man to an eminent merchant and "gave bonds to a great value as a security for his conduct" (II, 380).
The youth quickly involved himself in riotous activities, but since he attended to his work satisfactorily, his master, depending on the bondsman to protect his interests, chose to ignore the manner in which the boy spent his hours away from the shop. The young man was eventually charged with a serious crime, and in his fear and inexperience, he stole a large sum of money and disappeared. The result was, of course, the ruin of his bondsman, Candidus, and Misargyrus attacks the laws which allow a man to suffer such a "ruin surely undeserved and irreproachable" (II, 380): "... nothing is more inequit- able than that one man should suffer for the crimes of another, for crimes which he neither prompted nor permitted, which he could neither foresee nor prevent" (II, 381).

Lentulus, another prisoner in Fleet, is a man who spent all of his money in attempting to maintain the dignity of his family by following his relatives into public office. He was encouraged by potential patrons to attend court, but after years of this attendance, which required expensive dress and indulgence in expensive amusements, Lentulus lost all his prospects at once, whereupon his creditors demanded that he be imprisoned until his relatives could be prevailed upon to pay his debts. Misargyrus deplores this practice of coercing one person to pay the debts of another: ". . . surely, that man must be confessedly robbed, who is compelled, by whatever means, to pay the debts which he does not owe; nor can I look
with equal hatred on him, who, at the hazard of his life, holds out his pistol and demands my purse, as on him who plunders under shelter of law, and, by detaining my son or my friend in prison, extorts from me the price of their liberty. . . . He is less destructive to mankind that plunders cowardice, than he that preys upon compassion" (II, 383).

Serenus, Candidus, and Lentulus are presented as victims of unjust laws, unlike the men described in Adventurer, No. 53, who, Misargyrus seems to feel, have been rightly incarcerated. The three gentlemen whose stories are related in No. 62 cannot, Misargyrus admits, "be wholly acquitted from imprudence or temerity," but "in the eye of all who can consider virtue as distinct from wealth, the fault of two of them, at least, is out-weighed by the merit, and that of the third is so much extenuated by the circumstances of his life, as not to deserve a perpetual prison" (II, 383).

Robin Spritely writes twice to the Idler, in Nos. 78 and 83. He has spent the summer at Tunbridge Wells, where the rich and idle go "whenever they fancy themselves offended by the heat of London" (II, 242), and he observes that in the relatively small group of people at this resort, the peculiarities of each individual are more noticeable than they are in the city. In particular he describes the members of "a select sett, supposed to be distinguished by superiority of intellects," whose company he frequented until he "had learned the art by which each endeavoured to support his character" (II, 243).
Tom Steady, for example, "was a vehement assertor of uncontroverted truth" (II, 243). When Spritely attempted to present a balanced view of an eminent man by mentioning his faults as well as his virtues, Steady launched into a lengthy speech:

... "Sir," said Mr. Steady, "that he has faults I can easily believe, for who is without them? No man, Sir, is now alive, among the innumerable multitudes that swarm upon the earth, however wise, or however good, who has not, in some degree, his failings and his faults. If there be any man faultless, bring him forth into publick view, shew him openly, and let him be known; but I will venture to affirm, and, till the contrary be plainly shewn, shall always maintain, that no such man is to be found. Tell not me, Sir, of impeccability and perfection; such talk is for those that are strangers in the world: I have seen several nations, and conversed with all ranks of people; I have known the great and the mean, the learned and the ignorant, the old and the young, the clerical and the lay, but I have never found a man without a fault, and I suppose shall die in the opinion, that to be human is to be frail."

To all this nothing could be opposed. I listened with a hanging head; Mr. Steady looked round on the hearers with triumph, and saw every eye congratulating his victory; he departed, and spent the next morning in following those who retired from the company, and telling them, with injunctions of secrecy, how poor Spritely began to take liberties with men wiser than himself; but that he suppressed him by a decisive argument, which put him totally to silence. (II, 244-45)

The other four men whom Spritely describes in his letter are delightfully characterized in the following passages:

Dick Snug is a man of sly remark and pithy sententiousness: he never immerses himself in the stream of conversation, but lies to catch his companions in the eddy: he is often very successful in breaking narratives and confounding eloquence. A gentleman, giving the history of one of his acquaintance, made mention of a lady that had many lovers; "Then," said Dick, "she was
either handsome or rich." This observation being well received, Dick watched the progress of the tale; and hearing of a man lost in a shipwreck, remarked, that "no man was ever drowned upon dry land."

Will Startle is a man of exquisite sensibility, whose delicacy of frame, and quickness of discernment, subjects him to impressions from the slightest causes; and who therefore passes his life between rapture and horror, in quiverings of delight, or convulsions of disgust. His emotions are too violent for many words; his thoughts are always discovered by exclamations. "Vile, odious, horrid, detestable"; and "sweet, charming, delightful, astonishing," compose almost his whole vocabulary, which he utters with various contortions and gesticulations, not easily related or described.

Jack Solid is a man of much reading, who utters nothing but quotations; but having been, I suppose, too confident of his memory, he has for some time neglected his books, and his stock grows every day more scanty. . . .

Dick Misty is a man of deep research, and forcible penetration. Others are content with superficial appearances; but Dick holds, that there is no effect without a cause, and values himself upon his power of explaining the difficult, and displaying the abstruse. Upon a dispute among us which of two young strangers was more beautiful, "You," says Mr. Misty, turning to me, "like Amaranthia better than Chloris. I do not wonder at the preference, for the cause is evident: there is in man a perception of harmony, and a sensibility of perfection, which touches the finer fibres of the mental texture; and before reason can descend from her throne, to pass her sentence upon the things compared, drives us towards the object proportioned to our faculties, by an impulse gentle, yet irresistible; for the harmonick system of the universe, and the reciprocal magnetism of similar natures, are always operating towards conformity and union; nor can the powers of the soul cease from agitation, till they find something on which they can repose." To this nothing was opposed, and Amaranthia was acknowledged to excel Chloris. (II, 244-46)

In his second letter Spritely continues the account of his companions at Tunbridge Wells, but the four men he describes here are not so deliciously satirized as are those in his first letter. He designates as one of the most outstanding intellects
of the group "Sim Scruple, who lives in a continual equipose of doubt" and whose favourite topick of conversation is the narrowness of the human mind, the fallaciousness of our senses, the prevalence of early prejudice, and the uncertainty of appearances" (II, 259). Dick Wormwood establishes his superiority by finding fault with everything, and Bob Sturdy refuses ever to alter a single opinion, no matter what evidence is brought against it. Phil Gentle has no opinions of his own "and therefore willingly catches from the last speaker such as he shall drop. This flexibility of ignorance is easily accommodated to any tenet; his only difficulty is, when the disputants grow zealous, how to be of two contrary opinions at once" (II, 261).

Idler, No. 46, written by Molly Quick, waiting-maid to a great lady, offers a characterization of the correspondent's employer. The lady is in many ways a good mistress, but she has one quirk that is making Molly's life miserable: "She always gives her directions obliquely and allusively, by the mention of something relative or consequential, without any other purpose than to exercise my acuteness and her own" (II, 144). Some of the examples Molly cites of this behavior are as follows:

... When she would have something put into its place, she bids me "lay it on the floor." If she would have me snuff the candles, she asks "whether I think her eyes are like a cat's?" If she thinks her chocolate delayed, she talks of "the benefit of abstinence." If any needle-work is forgotten, she supposes "that I have heard of the lady who died by pricking her finger."
She always imagines that I can recall every thing past from a single word. If she wants her head from the milliner, she only says, "Molly, you know Mrs. Tape." If she would have the mantua-maker sent for, she remarks "that Mr. Taffaty the mercer was here last week." She ordered, a fortnight ago, that the first time she was abroad all day I should chuse for her a new sett of coffee-cups at the china-shop: of this she reminded me yesterday, as she was going down stairs, by saying, "you can't find your way now to Pall-Mall." (II, 144)

Molly remarks that this little game would not disturb her if her mistress were saving herself some trouble by it, but she notes that the lady must rather put herself out at least to some extent in order to create her obscure hints. Molly suspects that her employer is motivated by something other than mere whim:

It is not without some indignation, Mr. Idler, that I discover, in these artifices of vexation, something worse than foppery or caprice; a mean delight in superiority, which knows itself in no danger of reproof or opposition; a cruel pleasure in seeing the perplexity of a mind obliged to find what is studiously concealed, and a mean indulgence of petty malevolence, in the sharp censure of involuntary, and very often of inevitable, failings. When, beyond her expectation, I hit upon her meaning, I can perceive a sudden cloud of disappointment spread over her face, and have sometimes been afraid lest I should lose her favour by understanding her, when she means to puzzle me. (II, 145)

One of Johnson's most famous periodical essays is Rambler, No. 200, most of which is composed of a letter from Asper, who characterizes his old acquaintance Prospero, a gentleman "lately raised to wealth by a lucky project, and too much intoxicated by sudden elevation, or to little polished by thought or conversation, to enjoy his present fortune with elegance and decency" (V, 278). Asper and Prospero had "set
out in the world together; and for a long time mutually assisted each other ..., as either happened to have money or influence beyond his immediate necessities" (V, 278). Now that his friend has increased his fortune, however, Asper has found, upon visiting him, that Prospero wishes to indulge his sense of superiority:

When I told my name at the door, [Asper writes] the footman went to see if his master was at home, and, by the tardiness of his return, gave me reason to suspect that time was taken to deliberate. He then informed me, that Prospero desired my company, and showed the staircase carefully secured by mats from the pollution of my feet. The best apartments were ostentatiously set open, that I might have a distant view of the magnificence which I was not permitted to approach; and my old friend receiving me with all the insolence of condescension at the top of the stairs, conducted me to a back room, where he told me he always breakfasted when he had not great company. (V, 278-79)

Prospero continued to display his pride while he served tea, much to the disgust of Asper, who departed finally "without any intention of seeing him again, unless some misfortune should restore his understanding" (V, 280). At the conclusion of this letter, the reader is in complete sympathy with Asper, for Prospero's actions are grossly insulting to his friend. Strangely enough, however, Johnson appends to this account one of his infrequent comments upon an imaginary correspondence. He expresses the hope that Asper will not break off all relations with Prospero, whose insults have doubtless sprung from stupidity rather than from malice, and he concludes with a general admonition against too fine a sensitivity:
He that too much refines his delicacy will always endanger his quiet. Of those with whom nature and virtue oblige us to converse, some are ignorant of the arts of pleasing, and offend when they design to caress; some are negligent, and gratify themselves without regard to the quiet of another; some, perhaps, are malicious, and feel no greater satisfaction in prosperity, than that of raising envy and trampling inferiority. But whatever be the motive of insult, it is always best to overlook it, for folly scarcely can deserve resentment, and malice is punished by neglect. (V, 281)

A. T. Elder cites this "gentle reproof to Asper for having too many scruples" as an example of "the subtlety of Johnson's treatment of character,"\(^1\) and Paul Fussell asserts that the "dynamics" of this Rambler paper "are really those of a dialogue: one of Johnson's modes and styles speaks first, and then another is permitted its say. . . . The final 'official' reprehension of Asper's annoyance does nothing to diminish the attractiveness of his rhetoric and the charm of his narration: those things stick in the mind in dynamic opposition to the cooler second thought of the 'conclusion'--a conclusion which, not being a logical one, is a conclusion in which nothing is concluded."\(^2\)

Miscellaneous Topics and Complaints

Johnson appears to have used the letter device occasionally to deal with various topics which he could have written about


directly but which, for some reason, he deemed more properly treated by a persona. In *Idler*, No. 39, for instance, Tom Toy presents a discussion of women's bracelets, mildly satirical in tone. He suggests appropriate designs for women of different orders:

> In many countries the condition of every woman is known by her dress. Marriage is rewarded with some honourable distinction which celibacy is forbidden to usurp. Some such information a bracelet might afford. The ladies might enroll themselves in distinct classes, and carry in open view the emblems of their order. The bracelet of the authoress may exhibit the muses in a grove of laurel; the housewife may shew Penelope with her web; the votress of a single life may carry Ursula with her troop of virgins; the gamester may have Fortune with her wheel; and those women that "have no character at all" may display a field of white enamel, as imploring help to fill up the vacuity. (II, 123)

Tom concludes his letter with a jibe at the military, suggesting that soldiers wear inspirational bracelets into battle.

If Tom Toy gives us little clue as to his own character, Timothy Mushroom, in *Idler*, No. 28, projects a more distinct identity, even though his letter is much briefer than Tom's. Timothy reveals that he has frequently voiced his strong disapproval of publishing marriage announcements in the newspapers. But in spite of his protestations, Timothy ruefully admits that, when he had celebrated his own nuptials, he was forced to submit to the wishes of his in-laws and publicize his marriage to Miss Polly Mohair.

This same *Idler* paper includes also a very short letter from an unnamed chairman, who complains of overweight
customers. "It is common," he writes, "for men of the most unwieldy corpulence to crowd themselves into a chair, and demand to be carried for a shilling as far as an airy young lady whom we scarcely feel upon our poles. Surely we ought to be paid like all other mortals in proportion to our labour. Engines should be fixed in proper places to weigh chairs as they weigh waggons; and those whom ease and plenty have made unable to carry themselves, should give part of their superfluities to those who carry them!" (II, 89).

*Rambler*, No. 126, is another unusual paper among Johnson's periodical essays, for it, like *Idler*, No. 28, is also composed of more than a single letter. The first of the three epistles in this *Rambler* is from Thraso, who begins by discussing the character of Venustulus, who was judged to be a coward by Tranquilla in *Rambler*, No. 119. Thraso reports that his friends defended Venustulus against the charge of cowardice and argued that his specific fears were justified, despite Tranquilla's scorn. Thraso discusses the causes, manifestations, and conquest of fear, and he observes that "fear is a passion which every man feels so frequently predominant in his own breast, that he is unwilling to hear it censured with great asperity, and, perhaps, if we confess the truth, the same restraint which would hinder a man from declaiming against the frauds of any employment among those who profess it, should with-hold him from treating fear with contempt among human beings" (IV, 307).
According to Edward A. Bloom, Johnson's choice of the name "Thraso" for his correspondent in this letter offered the eighteenth-century reader "a familiar as well as paradoxical channel of identification," for the name was borrowed from the braggart soldier in Terence's play *The Eunuch*. This name would thus be associated immediately with fear, although Johnson's correspondent is not, of course, a braggart, but rather "a level-headed psychologist who pleads with his readers for toleration and examination of the facts concerning accusations of fear and cowardice."\(^{16}\)

The second letter included in *Rambler*, No. 126, is from Misocalax, who complains of women who solicit compliments from their guests. He considers himself persecuted when he is constantly asked to admire the furniture, the china, or some article of the lady's apparel. He requests that Mr. Rambler "will inform [these ladies] . . . that no man should be denied the privilege of silence, or tortured to false declarations; and that though ladies may justly claim to be exempt from rudeness, they have no right to force unwilling civilities" (IV, 310).

Johnson reveals in the third letter of this *Rambler* his understanding of the frustration which faced an intelligent

woman in the eighteenth century. The letter is written by
Generosa, who would no doubt be a participant in the women's
liberation movement of today. She writes of the problems
encountered by women who seek knowledge:

... The world seems to have formed an universal
conspiracy against our understandings; our questions
are supposed not to expect answers, our arguments are
confuted with a jest, and we are treated like beings who
transgress the limits of our nature whenever we aspire
to seriousness or improvement.

I enquired yesterday of a gentleman eminent for
astronomical skill, what made the day long in summer,
and short in winter; and was told that nature protracted
the days in summer, lest ladies should want time to
walk in the park; and the nights in winter, lest they
should not have hours sufficient to spend at the card-
table.

I hope you do not doubt but I heard such information
with just contempt, and I desire you to discover to
this great master of ridicule, that I was far from want-
ing any intelligence which he could have given me. I
asked the question with no other intention than to set
him free from the necessity of silence, and gave him
an opportunity of mingling on equal terms with a polite
assembly from which, however uneasy, he could not then
escape, by a kind introduction of the only subject on
which I believed him able to speak with propriety.

(IV, 310-11)

In Rambler, No. 15, Johnson introduces the correspondence
with some comments upon gambling. He indicates that the let-
ters he is about to present are more convincing than his
observations because his correspondents have actually suffered
from the effects of gambling. As A. T. Elder points out,
Johnson's opening remarks imply that the letter which follows
immediately will expound "the dire effects of the vice," but
ironically, the youthful Cleora, who is the letter's author,
is merely complaining that people are too absorbed in their cards to pay any attention to her. Having been brought up in the country, Cleora was thrilled when she was invited to visit her aunt in London. Upon her arrival, however, her expectations of delightful social gatherings were disappointed when she discovered that the only entertainment of her aunt's friends was playing cards. She tells the Rambler that she has become convinced that this mania for gambling is part of a plot:

I cannot but suspect, Sir, that this odious fashion is produced by a conspiracy of the old, the ugly, and the ignorant, against the young and beautiful, the witty and the gay, as a contrivance to level all distinctions of nature and of art, to confound the world in a chaos of folly, to take from those, who could outshine them, all the advantages of mind and body, to withhold youth from its natural pleasures, deprive wit of its influence, and beauty of its charms, to fix those hearts upon money, to which love has hitherto been entitled, to sink life into a tedious uniformity, and to allow it no other hopes, or fears, but those of robbing and being robbed. (III, 84)

Rambler, No. 161, is composed of an unsigned letter from a man who rather playfully recounts the history of the garret in which he resides. Although the previous inhabitants of the garret were undistinguished, the correspondent justifies his research by explaining that he has "always thought it unworthy of a wise man to slumber in total inactivity only because he happens to have no employment equal to his ambition or genius" (V, 90-1). The most delightful portion of this letter is the

17 "Irony and Humour in the Rambler," p. 60.
description of a tenant who bears a striking resemblance to Johnson himself:

At last, a . . . man, in a tarnish'd waistcoat, desired to see the garret, and when he had stipulated for two long shelves and a larger table, hired it at a low rate. When the affair was completed, he looked round him with great satisfaction, and repeated some words which the woman did not understand. In two days he brought a great box of books, took possession of his room, and lived very inoffensively, except that he frequently disturbed the inhabitants of the next floor by unseasonable noises. He was generally in bed at noon, but from evening to midnight he sometimes talked aloud with great vehemence, sometimes stamped as in rage, sometimes threw down his poker, then clattered his chairs, then sat down in deep thought, and again burst out into loud vociferations; sometimes he would sigh as oppressed with misery, and sometimes shake with convulsive laughter. When he encountered any of the family he gave way or bowed, but rarely spoke, except that as he went up stairs he often repeated . . . hard words, to which his neighbours listened so often, that they learned them without understanding them. What was his employment she did not venture to ask him, but at last heard a printer's boy enquire for the author. My landlady was very often advised to beware of this strange man, who, tho' he was quiet for the present, might perhaps become outrageous in the hot months; but as she was punctually paid, she could not find any sufficient reason for dismissing him, till one night he convinced her by setting fire to his curtains, that it was not safe to have an author for her inmate. (V, 93-4)

2.

The twelve epistolary essays in which Johnson does not employ a clearly defined persona deal with a wide variety of topics, some of which Johnson treats in other essays also. For instance, in Rambler, No. 45, he offers some general comments on marriage, and in Idler, No. 22, he argues against imprisonment for debts. These twelve essays are considered
as a group here simply because they do not develop obviously fictitious personalities for their supposed authors, although Johnson is still, to be sure, "masking" himself in varying degrees. Johnson seems to have merely cast his own ideas into letter-form and, in some cases, signed a pseudonym. His reasons for doing so are not always evident, but conjectures may be made.

Rambler, No. 54, for example, is written as a letter from Athanatus, who reflects upon the subject of death. John Louis Worden, Jr., suggests that this essay is attributed to an imaginary author in order to establish "a contrast of extreme sobriety, to correct the frequent accusation . . . that Mr. Rambler is gloomy." Edward A. Bloom says that the sober contents of the essay are most fittingly "expressed by one whose very designation is a reminder of eternity," Athanatus having been derived from the Greek word meaning "immortal." In this essay, the writer states that he has been led to think on such serious matters as a result of a friend's recent death. Although Johnson does not seem to have actually lost a close friend at this time (September, 1750), he may have had bereavement on his mind because of his sympathy for James Elphinston, whose mother had recently died. In any case,


20 See Boswell, I, 211-12, for Johnson's beautiful letter of condolence to Elphinston. The essay and the letter are dated, respectively, 22 September and 25 September 1750; it is not certain, therefore, that Johnson would have known of the death when he wrote the essay.
the reflections presented in this Rambler paper echo Johnson's thoughts on death expressed elsewhere and are not the imagined reactions of a wholly fictitious character.

Idler, No. 41, springs obviously from Johnson's personal bereavement in the loss of his mother. The unsigned epistolary essay is introduced in the voice of Mr. Idler: "The following letter relates to an affliction perhaps not necessary to be imparted to the publick, but I could not persuade myself to suppress it, because I think I know the sentiments to be sincere, and I feel no disposition to provide for this day any other entertainment" (II, 128). The essay then discusses the subject of death and bereavement in some of Johnson's most poignant passages:

Nothing is more evident than that the decays of age must terminate in death; yet there is no man, says Tully, who does not believe that he may yet live another year; and there is none who does not, upon the same principle, hope another year for his parent or his friend; but the fallacy will be in time detected; the last year, the last day must come. It has come and is past. The life which made my own life pleasant is at an end, and the gates of death are shut upon my prospects.

The loss of a friend upon whom the heart was fixed, to whom every wish and endeavour tended, is a state of dreary desolation in which the mind looks abroad impatient of itself, and finds nothing but emptiness and horror. The blameless life, the artless tenderness, the pious simplicity, the modest resignation, the patient sickness, and the quiet death, are remembered only to add value to the loss, to aggravate regret for what cannot be amended, to deepen sorrow for what cannot be recalled.

Surely there is no man who, thus afflicted, does not seek succour in the Gospel, which has brought "life and immortality to light." The precepts of Epicurus, who
teaches us to endure what the laws of the universe make necessary, may silence but not content us. The dictates of Zeno, who commands us to look with indifference on external things, may dispose us to conceal our sorrow, but cannot assuage it. Real alleviation of the loss of friends, and rational tranquillity in the prospect of our own dissolution, can be received only from the promises of him in whose hands are life and death, and from the assurance of another and better state, in which all tears will be wiped from the eyes, and the whole soul shall be filled with joy. Philosophy may infuse stubbornness, but religion only can give patience. (II, 129-31)

In this essay Johnson appears to be expressing his own profound grief with no attempt to hide behind a mask. He does not even sign a pseudonym to this paper.

In several of his essays, Johnson is, in effect, carrying on a discussion with himself. In some of the essays discussed above, we have already observed how Johnson frequently appears anxious to present both sides of a situation, as in the case of Zachary Treacle's wife (Idler, Nos. 15 and 28) or the alleged cowardice of Venustulus (Rambler, Nos. 119 and 126). Similarly, in Idler, No. 18, an unsigned letter challenges Johnson's earlier (Idler, No. 16) criticism of Ned Drugget, one of those unfortunate creatures whose success in attaining his goals has left him unsatisfied, although he pretends to find great pleasure in his retirement. In Idler, No. 18, Johnson seems to be reproaching himself for having satirized a general human failing:

You cannot . . . wonder that your observations on human folly, if they produce laughter at one time, awaken criticism at another; and that among the numbers whom you have taught to scoff at the retirement of
Drugget, there is one that offers his apology.
The mistake of your old friend is by no means peculiar. The public pleasures of far the greater part of mankind are counterfeit. Very few carry their philosophy to places of diversion, or are very careful to analyse their enjoyments. The general condition of life is so full of misery, that we are glad to catch delight without inquiring whence it comes, or by what power it is bestowed.

If Drugget pretended to pleasures, of which he had no perception, or boasted of one amusement where he was indulging another, what did he which is not done by all those who read his story? of whom some pretend delight in conversation, only because they dare not be alone; some praise the quiet of solitude, because they are envious of sense and impatient of folly; and some gratify their pride, by writing characters which expose the vanity of life. (II, 56-59)

The subject of imprisonment for debt, which Misargyrus deals with in Adventurer, Nos. 53 and 62, is treated again by Johnson in an unsigned epistolary essay comprising Idler, No. 22. Here, more directly and broadly than in the letters supposed to be from Misargyrus, Johnson attacks the system "which experience shews to be ineffectual" in preventing excessive debts (II, 71). What Misargyrus depicted through specific cases, Johnson expresses here in general terms: "The confinement, therefore, of any man in the sloth and darkness of a prison, is a loss to the nation, and no gain to the creditor. For of the multitudes who are pining in those cells of misery, a very small part is suspected of any fraudulent act by which they retain what belongs to others. The rest are imprisoned by the wantonness of pride, the malignity of revenge, or the acrimony of disappointed expectation" (II, 69).
Marriage is a subject which Johnson treated often in the Rambler papers, and No. 45 is an unsigned epistle offering general comments upon the frequent failure of people to find happiness in their conjugal relationships. The major points presented in this essay are as follows:

... I believe, an accurate view of the world will confirm, that marriage is not commonly unhappy, otherwise than as life is unhappy; and that most of those who complain of connubial miseries, have as much satisfaction as their nature would have admitted, or their conduct procures in any other condition.

It is, indeed, common to hear both sexes repine at their change, relate the happiness of their earlier years, blame the folly and rashness of their own choice, and warn those whom they see coming into the world against the same precipitance and infatuation. But it is to be remembered, that the days which they so much wish to call back, are the days not only of celibacy but of youth, the days of novelty and improvement, of ardour and of hope, of health and vigour of body, of gayety and lightness of heart. It is not easy to surround life with any circumstances in which youth will not be delightful; and I am afraid that whether married or unmarried, we shall find the vesture of terrestrial existence more heavy and cumbrous, the longer it is worn.

That they censure themselves for the indiscretion of their choice, is not a sufficient proof that they have chosen ill, since we see the same discontent at every other part of life which we cannot change.... Every man recounts the inconveniences of his own station, and thinks those of any other less, because he has not felt them. Thus the married praise the ease and freedom of a single state, and the single fly to marriage from the weariness of solitude....

Whoever feels great pain naturally hopes for ease from change of posture; he changes it, and finds himself equally tormented: and of the same kind are the expedients by which we endeavour to obviate or elude those uneasinesses, to which mortality will always be subject. It is not likely that the married state is eminently miserable, since we see such number whom the death of their partners has set free from it, entering it again.
Wives and husbands are, indeed, incessantly complaining of each other. . . . We are always willing to fancy ourselves within a little of happiness, and when, with repeated efforts, we cannot reach it, persuade ourselves that it is intercepted by an ill-paired mate, since, if we could find any other obstacle, it would be our own fault that it was not removed.

The whole endeavour of both parties, during the time of courtship, is to hinder themselves from being known, and to disguise their natural temper, and real desires, in hypocritical imitation, studied compliance, and continued affectation. From the time that their love is avowed, neither sees the other but in a mask, and the cheat is managed often on both sides with so much art, and discovered afterwards with so much abruptness, that each has reason to suspect that some transformation has happened on the wedding-night, and that by a strange imposture one has been courted, and another married.

I desire you, therefore, Mr. Rambler, to question all who shall hereafter come to you with matrimonial complaints, concerning their behaviour in the time of courtship, and inform them that they are neither to wonder nor repine, when a contract begun with fraud has ended in disappointment. (III, 243-45, 247)

James Worden suggests that this essay "is imputed to a correspondent because it seems too bitter to accord with Mr. Rambler's ethos of genial good nature," but, although Worden's observation is probably valid, this essay is essentially another instance of Johnson's carrying on a discussion with himself, and the letter-device lends itself to this practice of presenting contrasting or complementary views.

Idler, No. 25, is also an example of such a discussion contained in one paper. The number begins with an unsigned letter in which guidelines for critics of the theatre are suggested:

The care of the critic should be to distinguish error from inability, faults of inexperience from defects of nature. Action irregular and turbulent may be reclaimed; vociferation vehement and confused may be restrained and modulated; the stalk of the tyrant may become the gait of a man; the yell of inarticulate distress may be reduced to human lamentation. All these faults should be for a time overlooked, and afterwards censured with gentleness and candour. But if in an actor there appears an utter vacancy of meaning, a frigid equality, a stupid languor, a torpid apathy, the greatest kindness that can be shewn him, is a speedy sentence of expulsion. (II, 79)

In his comments following the letter, Johnson, as Mr. Idler, agrees with the views of the correspondent but wishes to extend these views to include youthful authors as well as actors:

But surely this laudable forbearance might be justly extended to young poets. The art of the writer, like that of the player, is attained by slow degrees. The power of distinguishing and discriminating comic characters, or of filling tragedy with poetical images, must be the gift of nature, which no instruction nor labour can supply; but the art of dramatic disposition, the contexture of the scenes, the opposition of characters, the involution of the plot, the expedients of suspension, and the stratagems of surprize, are to be learned by practice; and it is cruel to discourage a poet for ever, because he has not from genius what only experience can bestow. (II, 79)

Furthermore, Johnson continues, this forbearance should be shown to all young people, whatever their endeavors. His conclusion is that inexperience deserves tolerant understanding.

In Rambler, No. 57, Johnson again takes up a subject which he apparently feels he did not treat adequately in a previous essay. This letter, a discussion of frugality, is signed "Sophron," and its "author" explains his purpose in writing to Mr. Rambler by referring to Rambler, No. 53: "Your late
paper on frugality was very elegant and pleasing, but, in my opinion, not sufficiently adapted to common readers, who pay little regard to the musick of periods, the artifices of connection, or the arrangement of the flowers of rhetoric; but require a few plain and cogent instructions, which may sink into the mind by their own weight" (III, 305). Once again Johnson wishes to treat a subject at greater length than he has done previously, adding some second thoughts, no doubt, to his initial observations; and he also manages to mock himself a bit in the process.

Rambler, No. 72, is written as a letter from Philomides, who accuses Mr. Rambler of neglecting "to recommend good humour to the world, though a little reflection will shew you that it is the 'balm of being,' the quality to which all that adorns or elevates mankind must owe its power of pleasing" (IV, 13). Defining good humor as "a habit of being pleased" (IV, 13), Johnson in this letter discusses the positive aspects of the quality which he has shown many of his characters in other essays to be lacking.

Like Philomides, Eutropius, who writes in Rambler, No. 98, is critical of the Rambler for ignoring an important subject. Again, Johnson appears to be criticizing himself:

You have often endeavoured to impress upon your readers an observation of more truth than novelty, that life passes, for the most part, in petty transactions; that our hours glide away in trifling amusements and slight gratifications; and that there very seldom emerges any occasion that can call forth great virtue or great abilities.
You have truly described the state of human beings, but it may be doubted whether you have accommodated your precepts to your description; whether you have not generally considered your readers as influenced by the tragick passions, and susceptible of pain or pleasure only from powerful agents and from great events.

To an author who writes not for the improvement of a single art, or the establishment of a controverted doctrine, but equally intends the advantage, and equally courts the perusal of all the classes of mankind, nothing can justly seem unworthy of regard, by which the pleasure of conversation may be increased, and the daily satisfactions of familiar life secured from interruption and disgust.

For this reason you would not have injured your reputation, if you had sometimes descended to the minuter duties of social beings, and enforced the observance of those little civilities and ceremonious delicacies, which, inconsiderable as they may appear to the man of science, and difficult as they may prove to be detailed with dignity, yet contribute to the regulation of the world, by facilitating the intercourse between one man and another, and of which the French have sufficiently testified to their esteem by terming the knowledge and practice of them Scavoir vivre, "the art of living." (IV, 160-61)

Eutropius goes on to define what he conceives to be true politeness, offering a negative example in the character of Trypherus, who "without any settled purposes of malignity, partly by his ignorance of human nature, and partly by the habit of contemplating with great satisfaction on his own grandeur and riches, is hourly giving disgust to those whom chance or expectation subject to his vanity" (IV, 163). In his last paragraph Eutropius generalizes that almost any man is likely to "indulge his own pride by forcing others into a comparison with himself, when he knows the advantage is on his side, without considering . . . that it is little more criminal to deprive another of
some real advantage, than to interrupt that forgetfulness of its absence which is the next happiness to actual possession" (IV, 164).

One of Johnson's most humorous essays is *Rambler*, No. 117, which turns out to be--after a ponderously serious introduction--a "theory of the garret." The letter is signed "Hypertatus," a name which is acknowledged to be false. Some of the most delightful portions of the "theory" are these:

That the professors of literature generally reside in the highest stories, has been immemorially observed. The wisdom of the ancients was well acquainted with the intellectual advantages of an elevated situation: why else were the Muses stationed on Olympus or Parnassus by those who could with equal right have raised them bowers in the vale of Tempe, or erected their altars among the flexures of Meander? Why was Jove himself nursed upon a mountain? or why did the goddesses, when the prize of beauty was contested, try the cause upon the top of Ida? Such were the fictions by which the great masters of the earlier ages endeavoured to inculcate to posterity the importance of a garret.

The institution has, indeed, continued to our own time; the garret is still the usual receptacle of the philosopher and poet; but this, like many ancient customs, is perpetuated only by an accidental imitation, without knowledge of the original reason for which it was established.

Some have imagined, that the garret is generally chosen by the wits, as most easily rented; and concluded that no man rejoices in his aereal abode, but on the days of payment. Others suspect, that a garret is chiefly convenient, as it is remoter than any other part of the house from the outer door, which is often observed

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to be infested by visitants, who talk incessantly of beer, or linen, or a coat, and repeat the same sounds every morning, and sometimes again in the afternoon. . . . Others talk of freedom from noise, and abstraction from common business or amusements; and some, yet more visionary, tell us that the faculties are enlarged by open prospects, and that the fancy is more at liberty, when the eye ranges without confinement.

These conveniencies may perhaps all be found in a well chosen garret; but surely they cannot be supposed sufficiently important to have operated unvariably upon different climates, distant ages, and separate nations. Of an universal practice, there must still be presumed an universal cause, which, however recondite and abstruse, may be perhaps reserved to make me illustrious by its discovery, and you by its promulgation.

It is universally known, that the faculties of the mind are invigorated or weakened by the state of the body, and that the body is in great measure regulated by the various compressions of the ambient element. . . . Heads in appearance empty have teemed with notions upon rising ground, as the flaccid sides of a football would have swelled out into stiffness and extension.

For this reason I never think myself qualified to judge decisively of any man's faculties, whom I have only known in one degree of elevation; but take some opportunity of attending him from the cellar to the garret, and try upon him all the various degrees of rarefaction and condensation, tension and laxity. . . .

Another cause of the gaiety and sprightliness of the dwellers in garrets is probably the encrease of that vertiginous motion, with which we are carried round by the diurnal revolution of the earth. The power of agitation upon the spirits is well known; every man has felt his heart lightened in a rapid vehicle, or on a galloping horse; and nothing is plainer, than that he who towers to the fifth story, is whirled through more space by every circumrotation, than another that grovels upon the ground-floor. . . .

If you imagine that I ascribe to air and motion effects which they cannot produce, I desire you to consult your own memory, and consider whether you have never known a man acquire reputation in his garret, which, when fortune or a patron had placed him upon the first floor, he was unable to maintain. . . .
That a garret will make every man a wit, I am very far from supposing; I know there are some who would continue blockheads even on the summit of the Andes, or on the peak of Teneriffe. But let not any man be considered as unimproveable till this potent remedy has been tried. . . . (IV, 259-64)

In the conclusion of this letter is what A. T. Elder calls an example of Johnson's outbursts "of self mockery." Hypertatus explains, "As an elaborate performance is commonly said to smell of the lamp, my commendation of a noble thought, a sprightly sally, or a bold figure, is to pronounce it fresh from the garret; an expression which would break from me upon the perusal of most of your papers, [Mr. Rambler] did I not believe, that you sometimes quit the garret, and ascend into the cock-loft" (IV, 264).

Idler, No. 8, presents another example of Johnson in an unusually satirical mood. In this unsigned epistle he makes ironic proposals for improving the lacklustre reputation of English soldiers. He suggests that a representation of a French city be constructed and supplied with an abundance of food. Hungry soldiers may then "conquer" the fortification and feast, so that they gradually come to associate victory with a full stomach. After this is accomplished, French prisoners, forbidden to harm the British soldiers, could be introduced into the mock city in hopes that "our army will soon be brought to look an enemy in the face" (II, 28).

23 "Irony and Humour in the Rambler," p. 58.
This essay is atypical of Johnson's periodical papers not only in the nature of its satire but also in its topical references to the war and current military problems.

Johnson's only epistolary essay which deals exclusively with literary criticism is found in _Adventurer_, No. 92, which is signed "Dubius" and is a discussion of Virgil's pastorals. Paul Fussell notes that in spite of Johnson's well known distaste for pastoral poetry, this essay contains "no denigration whatever" of the genre. Why Johnson should have cast a purely literary essay in letter-form is not entirely clear, but by assuming the identity of an alter ego, he is able to present contradictory points of view without the necessity of explaining his inconsistency. He also has the opportunity to indulge in a wry mockery of himself, as when Dubius begins his letter with this extravagant praise: "In the papers of criticism which you have given to the public, I have remarked a spirit of candour and love of truth, equally remote from bigotry and captiousness; a just distribution of praise amongst the antients and the moderns; a sober deference to reputation long established, without a blind adoration of antiquity; and a willingness to favour later performances, without a light or puerile fondness for novelty" (II, 417). The ironic possibilities inherent in the letter device led Johnson to employ this convention with excellent results in his periodical essays.

CHAPTER V
THE SOCIAL MILIEU OF THE PERSONAE

The imaginary correspondents of Johnson's periodical essays represent several levels of the social hierarchy which Johnson knew firsthand and to which the bulk of his audience belonged. His fictitious letter-writers may, therefore, belong to the well-to-do class of London, but they are never kings or even lords. Many of them, as we have seen in the previous chapters, are financially insecure. Country gentry and city tradesmen appear frequently in Johnson's epistolary essays; less frequent are letters from servants. At the bottom of the social scale are the prostitute and the inmate of Fleet Prison. These various personae populate the world that Johnson himself inhabited. Their problems and their foibles are usually the everyday sort, which he knew his readers would have experienced themselves or would have observed in their acquaintances. "Johnson's society as portrayed in the essays grows out of the same human impulses which shape his individual characters," observes one scholar. "His society is mainly a generalization of the individual." ¹

That every person is under obligation to fulfill his particular role in society is one of the main themes recurring throughout Johnson's periodical papers. The importance of man as a social being and the interdependence of the individual members of society are often emphasized in the epistolary essays. For instance, Eutropius writes in Rambler, No. 98, on the subject of true politeness, a quality which enhances man's social behavior. Good humor is another characteristic which tends to improve a person's sociability; it is recommended by Philomides in Rambler, No. 72. On the other hand, peevishness works to the detriment of one's social relationships; examples of this fault are presented in various essays, notably through the character of Anthea, described in Rambler, No. 34. But if he sometimes depicts with devastating satire the shortcomings of people, Johnson also advocates tolerance of human imperfections. In Rambler, No. 200, for example, he mildly reproaches the correspondent Asper for having become angered at Prospero's insults. "Such improprieties often proceed rather from stupidity than malice," Johnson remarks, and Prospero "has yet committed nothing that should exclude him from common degrees of kindness" (V, 281).

Several of Johnson's personae, however, are themselves victims of just such an exclusion from the "common degrees of

kindness." Dicaculus, in *Rambler*, No. 174, alienated all of his friends by making them the butt of his jokes, and he is now left alone. Even genuine learning is no substitute for the society of other people, as Verecundulus found. He recounts in *Rambler*, No. 157, how he devoted all of his energies to his studies, first at home and then at the university. When he finally attempted to participate in social activities, he found that he was totally unable to interact successfully with large numbers of people. He became awkward and tongue-tied, and having found that such misery has a way of propagating itself, he begs the Rambler for advice: "Inform me, dear sir, by what means I may rescue my faculties from these shackles of cowardice, how I may rise to a level with my fellow beings, recall myself from this languor of involuntary subjection to the free exertion of my intellects, and add to the power of reasoning the liberty of speech" (V, 75). In the *Rambler* paper immediately following this letter from Verecundulus, Johnson discusses further the problem of bashfulness as a deterrent to social interaction. And in a later paper, *Rambler*, No. 177, another persona, Vivaculus, tells how he faced a similar difficulty when he sought to rejoin society after years of devotion to his studies.

To function successfully in society, one must know and accept his true position in that society. Johnson considered social and economic distinctions to be facts of life, and to
be desirable facts as well. For example, on one occasion he told Boswell, "Sir, ... I am a friend to subordination, as most conducive to the happiness of society. There is a reciprocal pleasure in governing and being governed."³ And another time, Boswell reports, Johnson answered George Dempster's argument for distinctions based only on merit:

Why, Sir, mankind have found that this cannot be. How shall we determine the proportion of intrinsic merit? Were that to be the only distinction amongst mankind, we should soon quarrel about the degrees of it. Were all distinctions abolished, the strongest would not long acquiesce, but would endeavour to obtain a superiority by their bodily strength. But, Sir, as subordination is very necessary for society, and contentions for superiority very dangerous, mankind, that is to say, all civilised nations, have settled it upon a plain invariable principle. A man is born to hereditary rank; or his being appointed to certain offices, gives him a certain rank. Subordination tends greatly to human happiness. Were we all upon an equality, we should have no other enjoyment than mere animal pleasure.⁴

He believed that since men are manifestly unequal, social subordination is inevitable, just as economic subordination is inevitable due to the limited amount of goods available. Social distinctions based merely on wealth, however, were generally mistrusted by Johnson, for he felt that emphasis on wealth simply created the kind of contention which arbitrary social distinctions were designed to discourage.⁵


⁴ Ibid., p. 442.

explained to Boswell his preference for hereditary rank by pointing out that "there would be a perpetual struggle for precedence, were there no fixed invariable rules for the distinctions of rank, which creates no jealousy, as it is allowed to be accidental."  

The importance of accepting one's position in society is illustrated in Johnson's epistolary essays mainly by negative examples. The two letters to the Rambler from Misocapelus (Nos. 116 and 123) recount the correspondent's futile efforts to be accepted as a gentleman after he has established himself as a haberdasher. In spite of his succession to the paternal estate upon the death of his elder brother, Misocapelus was never able to lose what O. F. Christie calls "the taint of trade."  

After ten years "in vain endeavours after accomplishments, which, if not early acquired, no endeavours can obtain," Misocapelus resigned himself to his social identity as a tradesman and concludes his letter with this resolve: "... I shall confine my cares to those higher excellencies which are in every man's power; and though I cannot enchant affection by elegance and ease, hope to secure esteem by honesty and truth" (IV, 295).

Three of the fictional letters to the Idler are from correspondents who are concerned about the social ambitions

6 Boswell, I, 448.
of loved ones. In *Idler*, No. 47, Deborah Ginger writes of her husband, a successful tradesman, who has decided to be a wit and a poet. Not only is his business suffering from his lack of attention to it, but among the wits whom he admires, his position is the lowest of the company, and he maintains their friendship only by his generosity with goods and money. Tim. Wainscot, a well-to-do merchant, describes in *Idler*, No. 95, a similar situation involving his son, whose head has been turned by a pair of old school friends who urged him to become a gentleman. The son was formerly industrious and frugal, but now he neglects his work and spends enormous sums of money on lavish clothes and entertainments. Like Deborah Ginger's husband, however, and like Misocapelus, he finds that his attempts to be elegant are all in vain. Another letter to the *Idler* (No. 53) characterizes the correspondent's wife, who has become a social climber since their move to a fashionable neighborhood. Her desire to join the society of aristocrats is boundless, and she succeeds primarily in making a fool of herself.

Not only do people attempt to improve their social status; they may also seek the prestige of an intellectual reputation which they do not deserve. Misellus, who writes in *Rambler*, No. 16, is a man who wants so desperately to be an author that, after publishing a book, he deludes himself into believing that he is a great and famous wit. With never a glimmer of true
understanding, he reveals how he alienated all of his friends by his pretentiousness and then attributes their desertion to jealousy. This obtuse creature offers Johnson the opportunity for some of his most delightful irony, but even though the story is presented humorously, Misellus illustrates the serious fault of not accepting his proper role in society.

Just as important as accepting one's social position, in Johnson's view, is the obligation to make a worthwhile contribution to the human race. As he told Boswell, "It is our first duty to serve society, and, after we have done that, we may attend wholly to the salvation of our own souls." Robert Voitle has also noted Johnson's emphasis upon contributing to the well-being of others: "... although Johnson exhibits a concern with good intentions ..., he disagrees with those contemporaries who make morality principally a matter of virtuous character. He does not regard morality as mainly consisting in being goodhearted or in being anything, because above all morality to him means doing." Whatever a single man does may appear insignificant, but the individual contributions of men combine for the benefit of all. Johnson writes in Adventurer, No. 137:


9 Boswell, II, 10.

10 Voitle, pp. 149-50.
The power, indeed, of every individual is small, and the consequence of his endeavours imperceptible in a general prospect of the world. Providence has given no man ability to do much, that something might be left for every man to do. The business of life is carried on by a general cooperation; in which the part of any single man can be no more distinguished, than the effect of a particular drop when the meadows are floated by a summer shower: yet every drop increases the inundation, and every hand adds to the happiness or misery of mankind. (II, 489)

The possibility of service to humanity is not denied even to the inhabitants of the lowest levels of society, for Misargyrus, the inmate of debtors' prison, begins his first letter to the Adventurer by remarking that "to a benevolent disposition, every state of life will afford some opportunities of contributing to the welfare of mankind." He goes on to explain: "Opulence and splendor are enabled to dispel the cloud of adversity, to dry up the tears of the widow and the orphan, and to increase the felicity of all around them: their example will animate the pursuit of virtue, and retard the progress of vice. And even indigence and obscurity, though without power to confer happiness, may at least prevent misery, and apprize those who are blinded by their passions that they are on the brink of irremediable calamity" (II, 339). Misella, the prostitute who writes to the Rambler, even in her miserable state expresses the desire to be of some help to others: "I am convinced that nothing would more powerfully preserve youth from irregularity, or guard inexperience from seduction, than a just description of the condition into which the wanton
plunges herself, and therefore hope that my letter may be a sufficient antidote to my example" (V, 140).

Johnson's concern with society in his essays is a concern with individual members rather than with any kind of broad social theory. Thus, the device of the epistolary essay is ideally suited to his main purpose, which is, in the words of the Idler, "to direct the practice of common life" (II, 220). In Johnson's essays, as Voitle points out, "theory is not immediately relevant, and . . . much of Johnson's moral discourse consists of applied psychology and of prudential maxims." The various personae which Johnson employed offer excellent examples of his "applied psychology" when they reveal, consciously or unconsciously, their own motives or those of other people. His self-deluded correspondents, such as the would-be wits, illustrate what W. J. Bate refers to as "the exactness and fidelity with which Johnson senses motives, blows them up, and then punctures them after edging them into the absurd." So keen was Johnson's perception of the "strati-fied mind," that at least one psychologist believes that "his accounts of repression, frustration, and of a psychic structure which included a superego and an unconscious were quite

11 Ibid., p. 118.

remarkable" and are "discussed from a point of view which the modern physician will find cogent even when he disagrees." In terms somewhat less technical than these, Bate also discusses Johnson's perspicacity in psychological matters. He uses a phrase of Johnson's, "the treachery of the human heart" (IV, 134), to refer to "the unwitting betrayal by man of his own ultimate interests which is the theme of The Vanity of Human Wishes." In other words, a man's tendency to thwart his own happiness is the same quality that isolates him from the rest of society. Bate goes on to say, "The 'treachery' arises from the fact that the natural human desire for security, importance, or reassurance can so easily become snarled by panic or chronic discontent that our attention is then switched to ourselves. The heart then concentrates solely on what relieves or confirms its own personal ambitions or fears; it begins instinctively to regard others as rivals to be feared or means to be used, and to wall itself still more firmly behind barriers through which only a warped perception of reality filters." The result of this "treachery of the human heart" is that most of the imaginary correspondents in Johnson's


14 Bate, The Achievement of Samuel Johnson, p. 95.

15 Ibid., pp. 95-6.
essays are victimized in one way or another--either by their own delusions or by the hostility or thoughtlessness of other people--regardless of their social status.

In the upper levels of the society depicted in Johnson's essays, money is, of course, a major concern. The great emphasis placed upon a person's fortune is illustrated in several essays which describe the effects of a lack of wealth upon a person's social evaluation. Melissa writes in Rambler, No. 75, of her loss of fortune and of her consequent descent in the social hierarchy. A similar fate befell the unnamed correspondent in Rambler, No. 153, who discovered that the influential friends he acquired while he possessed a temporary wealth no longer had time for him when his expected inheritance was bestowed elsewhere. Likewise, Constantius, writing in Rambler, No. 192, enjoyed the favor of the most elegant families while he was supposed to be the future heir to his uncle's vast wealth. When the uncle ultimately left his estate to another nephew, however, Constantius found himself barred from the society of those who had warmly welcomed him earlier.

Beauty and youth are almost as necessary as a fortune to the woman who wishes to partake of the joys of fashionable society. Victoria relates, in Rambler, Nos. 130 and 133, how her extraordinary beauty enhanced her social activities and how the destruction of that beauty by smallpox resulted in her being virtually ostracized. The mother of the unnamed
correspondent in *Rambler*, No. 55, is so unwilling to give up the pleasures of being considered young and beautiful herself that she cruelly tries to prevent her daughter's emergence as a young woman.

The activities and values of the members of elegant society are revealed in many of Johnson's imaginary letters. Card games are mentioned frequently as a major form of entertainment, and Cleora, in *Rambler*, No. 15, complains that the passion for cards among Londoners leaves time for little else but playing. The unsigned letter in *Rambler*, No. 147, discusses the emphasis in the fashionable circles of London upon "assurance," which is achieved by a suave elegance of manner and little real feeling or knowledge. Tom Toy describes in *Idler*, No. 39, some of the frivolous interests of the society through his discussion of women's bracelets. Robin Spritely's letters to the *Idler* (Nos. 78 and 83) describe some of the persons whose affluence permits them to patronize resorts such as Tunbridge Wells.

Certain aspects of the upper levels of society are revealed by personae who serve that society in some way. Letters from servants frequently offer incidental views of the life of the rich, and the unfortunate men who must seek patrons among the wealthy are also able to report on life in the mansions. Hilarius, for example, in *Rambler*, No. 101, is himself a kind of luxury of the rich, for his popularity as a wit led Demochares
to patronize him. Thus, Hilarius enjoys the social advantages of the upper class, although he is not himself a member of this class.

Several of Johnson's epistolary essays deal with the country gentry, a group of people whom he apparently observed on numerous occasions and whose manner of living interested him in spite of his well-known preference for city life. As one scholar observes, "There seems to have been no detail of country life that he had not weighed and pondered." The society of the country is, of course, less fashionable than that of the city, but its hierarchy is just as rigid. Money is as important to the country dweller as to the resident of the city. The mercenary marriage arrangements to be found in rural villages are described and deplored by the unnamed correspondent in *Rambler*, No. 35, and Squire Bluster's tyranny over his social inferiors, recounted in *Rambler*, No. 142, is made possible by their financial obligations to him. Those who lived any significant distance at all from London could not hope to keep up with current events and fashions and were doomed to be always behind the times, a situation of which Ruricola complains in *Rambler*, No. 61.


Johnson's imaginary correspondents generally express their disapproval of country life, although Bucolus, in Rambler, No. 138, appears to defend the country—perhaps ironically—as having an atmosphere more conducive than that of the city to individuality among its inhabitants. The sentimental concept of the country as offering a more serene and innocent society than the city is frequently refuted by Johnson's fictional letter-writers, most emphatically by Euphelia in Rambler, No. 46:

... I am now no longer an absolute stranger to rural conversation and employments, but am far from discovering in them more innocence or wisdom, than in the sentiments or conduct of those with whom I have passed more cheerful and more fashionable hours.

It is common to reproach the tea-table, and the park, with giving opportunities and encouragement to scandal. I cannot wholly clear them from the charge; but must, however, observe in favour of the modish prattlers, that, if not by principle, we are at least by accident less guilty of defamation than the country ladies. For having greater numbers to observe and censure, we are commonly content to charge them only with their own faults or follies, and seldom give way to malevolence, but such as arises from some injury or affront, real or imaginary, offered to ourselves. But in these distant provinces, where the same families inhabit the same houses from age to age, they transmit and recount the faults of a whole succession. I have been informed how every estate in the neighbourhood was originally got, and find, if I may credit the accounts given me, that there is not a single acre in the hands of the right owner. I have been told of intrigues between beaus and toasts that have been now three centuries in their quiet graves, and am often entertained with traditionary scandal on persons of whose names there would have been no remembrance, had they not committed somewhat that might disgrace their descendents.

... Thus malice and hatred descend here with an inheritance, and it is necessary to be well versed in history, that the various factions of this county may be understood.
You cannot expect to be on good terms with families who are resolved to love nothing in common; and, in selecting your intimates, you are perhaps to consider which party you most favour in the barons wars. (III, 250-52)

Johnson appears to have enjoyed satirizing some of the foibles peculiar to the country dweller, and his preference for the city is apparent even through the mask of a persona. But the account that he offers of eighteenth-century rural life, though frequently exaggerated for humorous effect, is basically accurate according to R. W. Ketton-Cremer: "He had a much firmer grasp of country realities, a far clearer understanding of what really went on there—the agriculture, the economy, the general way of life—than so confirmed a town-dweller would be likely to possess today."

Intend as he was upon emphasizing the everyday concerns of life, Johnson could not fail to treat the subject of marriage often in his essays. Many of the problems described by his personae have to do with the failings of a spouse or with the need to obtain a suitable mate. Johnson considered marriage to be potentially the most rewarding institution of society, but he also recognized the fact that the majority of married people appear to be unhappy with their situation. Since the careful choice of a mate seems to be the most important step in achieving a satisfactory marriage, several of Johnson's personae urge caution in the undertaking. In the

Ibid., p. 65.
course of the essays dealing with courtship and married life, many details of the eighteenth-century customs are revealed. The fortune of a prospective spouse was, of course, a major concern among the members of the wealthy classes. Young women were still apt, in eighteenth-century England, to be coerced into marriage by their parents, for even the strong-minded Tranquilla was nearly forced to marry the distasteful Fungoso (Rambler, No. 119). The social functions and customs of the day made it difficult for young people to become well acquainted except in a superficial way. The young man who was considering marrying Anthea (Rambler, No. 34) was able to discover her true nature only by arranging an all-day excursion with her as a member of a group.

All of the personae who deal with the subject seek to find happiness in the state of matrimony, but most are disappointed. Perdita, writing in Adventurer, No. 74, has followed so assiduously all the advice offered her that she has necessarily rejected or offended every suitor she has had. Hymenaeus and Tranquilla report to the Rambler their individual disappointments in their respective searches for a marriage partner until they finally and happily announce their engagement to each other in Rambler, No. 167. In all of these essays dealing with marriage, Johnson indicates that the husband and wife should be of the same general social level, in order to

19 According to Boswell, III, 377, Johnson himself "maintained that a father had no right to control the inclinations of his daughters in marriage."
maintain "the subordination of a civilized society," and that a monetary agreement should precede the wedding. The roles of men and women are distinct, and even though Johnson presents several wives as sympathetic personae in conflict with their husbands, he implies that the husband should properly assert his leadership in the family. Total equality between marriage partners was not viewed as desirable by Johnson if we can take seriously the comments of the persona Florentulus in Rambler, No. 109:

The abilities of my father and mother were not perceptibly unequal, and education had given neither much advantage over the other. . . . When there is such a parity between two persons associated for life, the dejection which the husband, if he be not completely stupid, must always suffer for want of superiority, sinks him to submissiveness. My mamma therefore, governed the family without controul; and except that my father still retained some authority in the stables, and now and then, after a supernumary bottle, broke a looking-glass or china dish to prove his sovereignty, the whole course of the year was regulated by her direction, the servants received from her all their orders, and the tenants were continued or dismissed at her discretion. (IV, 216-17)

A successful marriage and family life required, in Johnson's view, the superiority of the husband and father.

People of the merchant class figure rather prominently in Johnson's epistolary essays. Perhaps because the Idler was the only series to be published in an urban newspaper, city tradesmen and their families are treated more frequently and more sympathetically in them than in the pages of either the

Ibid., II, 328-29.
Rambler or the Adventurer. In fact, as Boylston Green observes, in the Idler's essays Johnson evinces a degree of admiration for the middle class which is surprising for a conservative and a Tory of the eighteenth century. Elsewhere Johnson could sometimes judge businessmen quite harshly. For example, although Ned Druggett, the retired shopkeeper, is discussed with sympathy by a persona in Idler, No. 18, Johnson himself once told Boswell that he disliked retired traders: "For, Sir, (said he,) they have lost the civility of tradesmen, without acquiring the manners of a gentleman."

Also appearing in the Idler are several sympathetic portraits of wives of tradesmen. Mrs. Treacle, for instance, is allowed to present in Idler, No. 28, her defense against her husband's accusations which had appeared earlier in Idler, No. 15. But Johnson was capable of presenting such women as exceedingly unpleasant people. For example, in Rambler, No. 12, Zosima, in search of employment, suffers from the overbearing pretentions of Mrs. Bombasine and Mrs. Standish, both of whom are married to wealthy tradesmen. Similar women, with whom Betty Broom comes in contact in Idler, Nos. 26 and 29, are much more pleasant, although Betty does have trouble retaining her employment through no fault of her own. The contrast between

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22 Boswell, II, 120.
Zosima's and Betty's experiences is just one instance in which it is obvious that Johnson's attitude toward the middle class is perceptibly more genial in the *Idler* than it is in the *Rambler* papers. The depiction of merchants' wives in the *Idler* seems especially flattering when one recalls Johnson's comment to Boswell that "the wives of tradesmen ... are the worst creatures upon the earth, grossly ignorant and thinking viciousness fashionable." So prevalent is the middle-class viewpoint in the *Idler* that Boylston Green calls its collected essays a "unique ... middle-class document" which is characterized by "a broad, unprejudiced social outlook and a true note of geniality." The next level down in the social hierarchy of Johnson's personae is occupied by those who must make their livings by performing services rather than by producing or selling goods. Eumathes, for example, who writes in *Rambler*, Nos. 132, 194, and 195, is employed as a tutor to a young nobleman. His situation at first appeared to him to be more than satisfactory. His employers treated him with polite respect, and he was allowed to enjoy many of the luxuries of the wealthy. It soon became obvious, however, that his opinions were not

23 Green, p. 75.
24 Boswell, III, 353.
25 Green, p. 192.
considered of importance to the parents of the boy. When Eumathes complained that his pupil was unwisely permitted to slight his studies, he was simply reminded "that rank and fortune might reasonably hope for some indulgence" (IV, 338). In spite of this "indulgence," however, Eumathes was gradually awakening the boy's intellectual curiosity when the parents decided, against Eumathes' advice, to take their son to London. Quickly becoming accustomed to the glitter of high society in the town, Eumathes' pupil soon forgot his studies and adopted a condescending attitude toward his tutor. In his final letter Eumathes reports that he must once more seek employment, for his pupil has prevailed upon his mother to replace Eumathes with a French governor.

Working women who write in Johnson's essays are personal servants to ladies. Zosima, writing to the Rambler (No. 12), is actually a gentlewoman whose father has lost his fortune. Her letter recounts her unpleasant experiences in looking for a job and presents a rather bleak picture of the humiliations to which a servant girl was vulnerable.

Betty Broom tells the Idler, in Nos. 26 and 29, of her problems in finding permanent employment. Having been educated in a charity school, she finds that many prospective employers distrust a servant who can read and write. As Zosima does, Betty must try to cope with the capriciousness and just plain cruelty of her social superiors.
Molly Quick, who writes in Idler, No. 46, appears to have a secure position, but her peace of mind is threatened constantly by the whimsical nature of her mistress. Rarely choosing to tell Molly directly what service is required, the lady instead delivers her orders in the form of riddles.

No male household servants are represented among Johnson's personae, but there is a short letter from a chairman in Idler, No. 28. His complaint is one shared, no doubt, by all other members of his profession, and perhaps Johnson was moved to publicize the problem by conversing with some of these men. The unnamed chairman feels that when he and his fellows are called upon to carry a corpulent gentleman, they should be paid more than when they carry "an airy young lady" (II, 89). The correspondent simply wishes to be paid in proportion to his work.

At the bottom of the society peopled by Johnson's personae are Misargyrus, the inmate of Fleet Prison, and Misella, the prostitute. Misargyrus wasted his youth and his fortune in riotous behavior, and he writes to the Adventurer from behind the bars of debtors' prison. He has repented of his earlier indiscretions, but it is too late for him to do more than warn others against his own mistakes. Although the sins of Misargyrus were serious, Johnson's disapproval of imprisonment for debt finds expression in the three letters from this persona. That disapproval is even more directly
stated in two *Idler* papers, Nos. 22 and 38, where Johnson stresses the loss which society suffers when its laws force men who could work to languish in prison.

Johnson's pity for the women of the streets is well documented in Boswell's *Life* and elsewhere. Boswell reports that on one occasion Johnson carried home with him a prostitute whom he had discovered collapsed in the street from exhaustion: "Instead of harshly upbraiding her, he had her taken care of with all tenderness for a long time, at considerable expense, till she was restored to health, and endeavoured to put her into a virtuous way of living."\(^\text{26}\) When approached by a prostitute one evening while walking with Boswell, Johnson simply said to her, "No, no, my girl . . . it won't do," and then spoke of the miserable condition of such a woman.\(^\text{27}\)

Johnson appears to have been highly interested in the prostitute's life. He admitted, Boswell says, "that he used to take women of the town to taverns, and hear them relate their history."\(^\text{28}\) In fact, the story told by Misella in *Rambler*, Nos. 170 and 171, is said to have been told to Johnson by "a girl . . . under a tree in the King's Bench Walk in the Temple."\(^\text{29}\) The role which Misella plays in

\(^{26}\) Boswell, IV, 321-22.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., I, 457.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., IV, 396.

society is undoubtedly the most wretched of all those presented by Johnson's personae.

The social milieu of Johnson's personae reflects the everyday concerns of most of his readers. Domestic problems, financial worries, and personal misunderstandings and disagreements dominate the letters, with only a few correspondents, such as Misella, recounting stories which depict an unusual degree of misery. Even in cases such as Misella's, however, the problems stem ultimately from a failure to establish satisfactory relationships with other people. She was victimized by her brutal cousin, whom she did not recognize as her enemy. Many of Johnson's personae suffer from the cruelty or pettiness of other people, and still other personae create their own problems as a result of a faulty sense of values. In almost every case, however, the importance of society to each individual is at least implicit. Johnson shows that a person's interaction with other people is the basis of both his greatest satisfactions and his profoundest disappointments.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Although Johnson stresses the importance of human social functions, his epistolary essays are far from being mere reflections of manners. In this respect Bonamy Dobrée has observed a significant difference between Johnson and one of his most noted predecessors: "While Addison's standard was the social one, Johnson's was the ethical one, with the result that he seems less out of date, since manners change more than ethics do."¹ Johnson's concept of society goes beyond people's superficial activities at any given point in history and emphasizes the fundamental needs which bind men together in all times and all cultures. As he says in Rambler, No. 104, "The apparent insufficiency of every individual to his own happiness or safety, compels us to seek from one another assistance and support. The necessity of joint efforts for the execution of any great or extensive design, the variety of powers disseminated in the species, and the proportion between the defects and excellencies of different persons, demand an interchange of help, and communication of intelligence, and by frequent reciprocations of beneficence unite mankind in society and friendship" (IV, 190). The goal of


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society, he states in another *Rambler*, No. 56, is "mutual beneficence" (III, 299), and his views on almost every subject reflect his profound belief in man's responsibility to man.

This conviction on Johnson's part that every individual is obligated to contribute to the betterment of society accounts at least in part for his insistence upon didacticism in literature. His purpose in writing being always to instruct as well as to delight, we may be sure that he used the epistolary essay for its didactic as well as for its artistic possibilities. The use of a *persona* enables the writer to make his point in an oblique fashion; by adopting a mask, the author can lead his reader through an ironic process of discovery. Johnson's tendency to instruct by way of examples also made the epistolary essay appropriate for his use. The imaginary correspondents describe individual problems about which Johnson can then generalize in a subsequent paper if he so desires,² and the use of these *personae* allows him to present a broader range of direct testimony than would be possible were the essays limited to the views and experiences of just one man. In assuming the personalities of his various correspondents, he is practicing to some extent what he advocated in *Idler*, No. 24: "It is the part of

every inhabitant of the earth to partake the pains and pleasures of his fellow beings . . ." (II, 77).

Johnson used the letter device in his periodical essays, first of all, because it was an accepted element of the genre. The tradition was already well established, and Johnson could hardly help following it. But had he found the device inappropriate to his broad purposes of moral instruction, he would surely not have employed it to the extent that he did. Walter Jackson Bate's assertion that Johnson considered the fictitious letter to the editor to be "irrelevant to his interests and gifts as a moralist" is simply not supported by a study of the epistolary essays. As Paul Fussell observes, "Johnson clearly enjoys wearing the masks of the various letter-writers who send in their contributions: those fictive correspondents are male and female, young and empty as well as experienced and wise--maltreated servants, eccentric collectors, impatient heirs, awkward scholars embarrassed in fine society. By this gallery of masks Johnson constructs an image of a whole society deeply dipped in folly but capable of a step toward redemption through literary means, that is, though [sic] its capacity for regretting and confessing its follies in letters. . . ."^3


Johnson's identification with these correspondents reflects his interest in man as an individual and his tendency to view himself as a member of the group that he is instructing rather than as a perfect being whose mission is to correct the ways of his moral inferiors. In his sensitive adoption of the various personae, he reveals his acceptance of "human nature for what it is. . . . He is not preaching tolerance and understanding, he is exhibiting them. . . ."^5

As the initial chapter of this study shows, a modern appreciation of the entire body of Johnson's essays has only recently blossomed. Thanks to the industry and enthusiasm of many outstanding scholars, the excellence of his contributions to the periodical essay is finally being recognized, but the epistolary essays have still been largely ignored as a group. One scholar notes this neglect with regard to the Rambler series: "Critics have paid insufficient attention to the impersonated correspondents of The Rambler, often brushing them aside as being merely imitative of the seventeenth-century Theophrastan 'characters' tradition, and generally omitting them from collections of Johnson's work. However, impersonation is of great rhetorical importance to the series, in that the fictitious correspondents, through engaging in dialogue with Mr. Rambler, establish a dramatic situation wherein various writers interact among themselves and with

^5 Dobrée, pp. 22-23.
Moreover, it is in these essays that Johnson most "vividly portrays the tragic errors and frustrations of ordinary life," and according to James L. Clifford and Donald J. Greene, "it is this aspect of his writing which today proves so fascinating."7

The question of Johnson's artistic success in adopting personae allows for a good deal of critical disagreement. Bate, of course, as has been noted above, describes Johnson's imaginary letters as "not always too felicitous" and attributes this lack of excellence to Johnson's "impatience" with a device "so trivially artificial."8 This judgment, however, appears to be based entirely upon a faulty evaluation of Johnson's attitude toward the fictitious letter. A more specific criticism of these essays, and one which is well founded, is that Johnson seldom manages to sound like anyone but himself. The rolling sentences and the Latinate expressions find their way into the essays no matter who the nominal writer is supposed to be. Boswell observed this quality in the letters which are attributed to women, for it is in these pieces that the style seems most inappropriate:


"Johnson's language . . . must be allowed to be too masculine for the delicate gentleness of female writing. His ladies, therefore, seem strangely formal, even to ridicule; and are well denominated by the names which he has given them, as Misella, Zozima, [sic] Properantia, Rhodoclia."\(^9\) Although this lack of verisimilitude must, perhaps, be admitted to be an artistic flaw in the essays, it is nevertheless true that there is a certain delightful incongruity to be savored in those letters in which we can visualize the figure of Johnson himself only partially hidden behind the disguise. The fact that the mask does not always completely conceal the real author is frequently a source of ironic humor in Johnson's epistolary essays.

In his last Rambler paper (No. 208), Johnson discusses the various types of essays he wrote for the series. Most of the epistolary essays he would categorize as "pictures of life," and his goal in these papers was to present realistic characters and situations. He sought to avoid exaggeration in these "pictures," for "as they deviate farther from reality, they become less useful, because their lessons will fail of application" (V, 320). As always, Johnson was mainly "concerned with the practical problems of human experience";\(^10\)


hence these essays deal with ordinary sins and tribulations. Their "messages" are more or less universally applicable, in accordance with Johnson's literary theory.

It is surprising that so little critical attention has been paid to Johnson's epistolary essays, for in these are combined beautifully the delight as well as the instruction which Johnson believed to be necessary components of literature. One of the few scholars to consider these essays as a group asserts the importance of Johnson's fictional characters in these words: "Dramatization demonstrates Johnson's versatility as a literary artist more compellingly than any other technique employed in _The Rambler_. . . . Johnson puts the reader sometimes on the side of the correspondent and sometimes on that of Mr. Rambler, endeavoring always to draw the reader out of himself, to engage him in the dramatic conflict, and ultimately to bring him ever more firmly into an alliance with Mr. Rambler's moral vision."^{11}

Johnson found the epistolary essay to be a device ideally suited to his purposes as literary artist and moralist; for it offered him the opportunity for irony and satire, and at the same time it contained the immediacy of first-person narrative. In utilizing the imaginary letter, Johnson wrote some of his most delightful prose and expressed some of his most penetrating observations of human nature. His literary reputation can only be enhanced by a critical reading of this substantial group of essays.

^{11} Worden, p. 254.
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