Introduction
The Criteria of the Heart

In *Poets* as true *Genius* is but rare,
True *Taste* as seldom is the *Critick's* share.
(Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, lines 11–12)[1]

Hold thine own, and work thy will!
Year will graze the heel of year,
But seldom comes the poet here,
And the Critic's rarer still.
(Tennyson, "Poets and Critics")[2]

Samuel Johnson: The Person and the Critic

The critical study of Johnson has burgeoned over time, and the rich variety of his reception on different terms and in different places is testament to his cultural reach.[3] Johnson is enjoyed both inside and outside the academic fold. His readership has traditionally extended to university students and to teachers of literature of the British eighteenth century, but the work of Johnson to a remarkable degree also speaks to learned professionals in

[1] *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, gen. ed. John Butt, 11 vols. (London: Methuen, 1939–69), vol. 1, p. 240.

[2] Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Poets and Critics," in *The Death of Œnone, Akbar's Dream and Other Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1892), p. 101.

[3] To mention only a small selection from the book-length publications and seminal essays of the last thirty years or so: We now have successive rewritings of the life of Johnson (by Bate, Nokes, Lipking, DeMaria); the examination of biographical works upon Johnson (Brownley); assessments of his politics (Greene, Erskine-Hill, Hudson, Weinbrot); his poetry (Venturo, Rudd); his religion (Chapin, Clark); his friendships with women (Clarke, Chisholm); his lexicography (Reddick, Lynch, McDermott, Mugglestone, Hitchings); his attitudes to slavery and gender (Basker, Kemmerer); his mentoring relationships (Lee); the bibliographical issues posed by the Johnsonian canon (Fleeman, Brack); translations of Johnson into Spanish and Catalan (Stone); his interest in the cultures of the East, especially China (Clingham) and China's interest in him (Xiaomin Xia, Tian Ming Cai). Ogawa and Suzuki's *Johnson in Japan* was published in 2021; its essays further emphasize the global availability of Johnson's writings and an appetite for critical commentary upon the range of his works. Publication details of these studies can be found in the bibliography.

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areas of practice touched by his personal interests and expertise, including the law, politics, journalism and medicine. There remains a significant audience of common readers. Recent examinations of Johnson's life and work address all these departments and, within the field of literary and critical history, perspectives have evolved with the progress of literature and criticism. As Hans-Georg Gadamer has argued in his reflections on "Historically Affected Consciousness," "Historical tradition can be understood only as something always in the process of being defined by the course of events."[4] The past does not change; but our perspective upon it does: Different parts of historical tradition come to light as the present fades into the past.

It is time, therefore, to return to Johnson's writing about writing. Numerous book-length studies and scholarly analyses of Johnson have appeared since the end of the Second World War. And consequent in part upon the rise of an American "New Criticism," an emphasis on the written texts has replaced the capacious image of the Victorian and Edwardian conversational sage fostered by Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791).[5] One such volume is the 1952 monograph on Johnson as critic by Jean Hagstrum. In later years there have appeared theoretically engaged, themed investigations by such scholars as Steven Lynn (1992) and Charles Hinnant (1994).[6] At about the same time, nuanced commentaries by Fred Parker (1989, on the Shakespeare criticism) and Greg Clingham (2002, on the *Lives*) have helped bring life, mind and critical text together.[7] Many valuable studies have moreover addressed particular issues of Johnson's criticism for anthologies, guides, selections or essay collections. Johnson's critical and creative relation to specific poets prominent as subjects of his criticism has produced more extended treatments, and the 2010 study of *Johnson's Milton* by Christine Rees is an eminent example.[8] All these items constitute the active, widely distributed life of the field, and no history of literary criticism could make acceptable sense without a chapter, or section,

[4] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Historically Affected Consciousness," in *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (1975; London: Sheed and Ward, 1989), p. 373.

[5] The "New Criticism" was a movement aimed at giving priority to the text and form of a work stripped of its biographical and historical context, especially a short poem, or "verbal icon."

[6] Jean H. Hagstrum, *Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1952); Steven Lynn, *Samuel Johnson after Deconstruction: Rhetoric and the Rambler* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992); Charles Hinnant, *"Steel for the mind": Samuel Johnson and Critical Discourse* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1994).

[7] Fred Parker, *Johnson's Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Greg Clingham, *Johnson, Writing, and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[8] Christine Rees, *Johnson's Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

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devoted to Johnson.[9] But over the last twenty years general monographs specializing in the criticism have proved rare.

Books on the criticism may never finally resolve the tensions between the critical writing and the person of Johnson, nor eliminate the mental paradigm shifts we have to make when measuring Johnson's historical meaning against his critical pertinence. Nevertheless, set against the broad horizon of interest, this volume aims to consolidate bonds between the accessible traits of Johnson's personality and the nature of his critical writings. "Johnson's utterances are valuable," Matthew Arnold has written, "because they are the utterances of a great and original man."[10] And it is to capture productive tensions within this relationship that I emphasize throughout Johnson's criteria of the heart. Johnson's reading of many authors and works generates a corpus of emotional experience realized as principles of art. We identify the principles that Johnson derives from the best and the worst of poetry, and we see these standards in the light of his moral and intellectual commitments in contexts of life and literature; we compare one judgment with another; but we also relate Johnson's poetical estimates to the large and complex personality actualized through critical judgment and the artistry he brought to its expression. "Judgment is forced upon us by experience," writes Johnson in his "Life of Pope": "He that reads many books must compare one opinion or style with another; and when he compares, must necessarily distinguish, reject, and prefer" (*Lives*, vol. IV, p. 5). Johnson defined the methods of his criticism in these remarks, and through them he pursued truth in literary judgment at a moral and even religious level.

Biographical and personal narratives "enchain the heart [of the reader] with irresistible interest," writes Johnson (*Rambler* 60, Works III, p. 319); the "mournful distraction of Ophelia fills the heart with tenderness" (Works VIII, p. 1011). This latter remark evokes Johnson's heartfelt response to the tragic heroine of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but also recalls his openness to the plight of other female characters from the plays who inspire unguarded sympathy. The emotional register – again Johnson's

[9] In the event, the standard modern authority, H. B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson, eds., *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. IV: *The Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), adopts a thematic approach. The effect is to fragment commentary on Johnson's criticism within a large number of different fields such as "Poetry, after 1740" or "Generality and Particularity." Jack Lynch notes that Johnson's name appears in *The Cambridge History* "nearly 300 times" but that "it is not always clear what he stands for." Lynch, "Criticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Jack Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 192.

[10] Matthew Arnold, Preface to *The Six Chief Lives from Johnson's "Lives of the Poets"* (London: Macmillan, 1886), p. xxv.

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motive for elevating the pleasures of the biographical arts – is a point of reference, a criterion, a baseline of excellence.[11] A network of demands, technical, linguistic and intellectual, constitute Johnson's test of art; but the heart's role as a principle of judgment is primary.

Key Questions: History, Text and Context

The discussions which follow examine Johnson's criteria from poetical, biographical, controversialist, philosophic, editorial and structural points of view. Each category permits me to consider one or more leading traits of Johnson's intellectual and artistic personality. In one or another way, these traits focus present problems of interpretation, and they foreground aspects of Johnson's critical character I have analyzed in previous studies composed over recent years at different times. I have adapted and rethought a number of earlier essays where appropriate; but I have also supplemented them in order to connect and complement their themes and to trace the path to new conclusions about Johnson and criticism. I present my selected topics for discussion as parts of a single critical-historical enterprise, an intellectual project in the history of criticism that makes Johnson its case in point. I hope thereby to enhance appreciation of Johnson's critical integrity and to recognize more fully the heart of the man that is at the heart of the critical work.

I therefore explore at various stages the reasons for the reputation Johnson has acquired and how well this reputation is founded. How, I ask, might we continue to think historically while reading the texts of his criticism more closely; and what happens to our idea of his criticism when we make comparisons with figures commonly associated with Johnson or seeming to reflect the critical norms of his period? Behind the "Artistry and Thought" of my subtitle are touchstones of poetry, argument, philosophy, history, text and rhythm. Each art, constituent of art or object of artistic examination provides for evaluation of Johnson at a suitable level. Such terms draw attention to voice, emotional incitements, choice of language, models of thought, textual status, critical conduct and style and a way of listening to the language in the process of judging the criticism. I begin then by showing how Johnson's critical expression conveys an experience as inspiriting as poetry – as if it were poetry, as if,

[11] "[T]he common voice of the multitude uninstructed by precept, and unprejudiced by authority . . . in questions that relate to the heart of man, is, in my opinion, more decisive than the learning of Lipsius." *Rambler* 52, Works III, p. 280.

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that is, the organization of the words on the critical or biographical page functioned with a completeness and depth, a rhythm or pulse, or evinced a "latent meaning" more typically accorded to poetry than prose.[12] "His mind was so full of imagery," writes his biographer Boswell, "that he might have been perpetually a poet" (Boswell, vol. v, p. 17). Johnson's is one unaccredited variant of the "Impassioned Prose" that Virginia Woolf identified in her essay of that title when thinking of Sir Thomas Browne, Thomas De Quincey, John Ruskin, Emily Brontë, Thomas Carlyle and Walter Savage Landor.[13] But Johnson's prose passion is not that of writers who have rebelliously sought innovation. There is no poetical unshackling of prose syntax nor sign of the streamed consciousness of Johnson's great admirer and advocate, Virginia Woolf herself. "In the best examples of 'impassioned prose,'" writes Woolf, "The prose writer has subdued his army of facts; he has brought them all under the same law of perspective. They work upon our minds as poetry works upon them."[14] Johnson's impassioned prose is a crafted product of what Christopher Ricks, following Coleridge, has called "The Best Words in the Best Order."[15]

The Poetry of Criticism

It is to this end that I examine how the modern American poet David Ferry has transformed into the music of poetry Johnson's prose depiction

[12] The expression "latent meaning" is that of Robert Graves, "Observations on Poetry (1922–1925)," in *The Common Asphodel* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), pp. 1–33, at 3. See also T. S. Eliot, "Johnson as Critic and Poet," in *On Poetry and Poets* (1944; London: Faber, 1957), pp. 162–92. This influential essay sees Johnson's tastes and principles as a literary critic determined by the kind of poetry he was himself able to write. Eliot discovers a false note in *London* but in the *Vanity of Human Wishes* he believes that Johnson "found the perfect theme for his abilities." He complains, however, that Johnson was not good at structuring his poetry. See, more recently, Howard D. Weinbrot, "Johnson's Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to Samuel Johnson*, ed. Greg Clingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 34–50. Weinbrot's critical survey also links the writing of Johnson's poetry to the power of his prose. He points out how the personifications in the poetry turn abstractions into persons and emphasizes the extensive Christian content alongside the classical sources and inspirations. The essay contains detailed discussion and analysis of several individual poems including the "Drury Lane Prologue," "An Extempore Elegy," *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*.

[13] Virginia Woolf, "Impassioned Prose," *TLS* (September 16, 1926), pp. 601–02, reprinted in *Collected Essays by Virginia Woolf*, 2 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), vol. I, p. 164.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ricks is echoing Samuel Taylor Coleridge on poetry from *Table Talk*. See the essay based on Ricks's inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry at the University of Oxford, November 2004, printed as "The Best Words in the Best Order" in *Along Heroic Lines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 1–18. Ricks makes a particularly compelling case for the poetical power of Shakespearean prose.

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of the physical disabilities endured by Alexander Pope (*Lives*, vol. IV, pp. 54–55). The pathos and pitch of this arresting section of the "Life of Pope," highlighted by Ferry's adaptation, I place alongside Johnson's bleak narrative of the decline and death of Jonathan Swift (*Lives*, vol. III, pp. 207–08). Together these two passages of personal tragedy reveal a liberating absence of sentimentality combined with a poignancy more intense for withholding explicit emotional display. There is doubtless an ingredient of what Carl Gustav Jung calls "objective cognition" or intellectual remoteness "in which the observer stays completely objective."[16] But in both examples we see that Johnson joins detachment with an unshrinking grasp of what it means for human beings to suffer. The same sympathetic intelligence reappears in Ferry's poem "That Evening at Dinner," where we read back to the suffering humanity depicted within the *Lives* from Ferry's poetical reworking of the devastating logic of Johnson's review of Soame Jenyns's *Free Enquiry into Nature and Origin of Evil* of 1757.

That Johnson suffers in his turn informs his critical practice. And here his mastery of Latin is a primary psychic shield of his emotional defences, a resort of Johnsonian classical expertise that restrains the indulgence of emotional excess. The distancing effect of the ancient language allows unbearable feeling expression. Two years after the death of his beloved Tetty, Johnson records in his diaries that "Fluunt lacrymae" ("The tears flow"; Works I, p. 53). It is only later, in one of the letters to Hester Thrale Piozzi of July 8, 1784, written after unwelcome news of her second marriage, the fallout that ensued and the agony of regret, that Johnson can dispense with the protections of Latin and write remorsefully to his old friend in his life's last year that "The tears stand in my eyes" (*Letters*, vol. IV, p. 344). Remembering, in old age, the experience of being taught to swim by his father in the Lichfield mill-stream as a boy, Johnson composes "In Rivum a Mola Stoana Lichfeldiae Diffluentum" ("On the stream flowing away from the Stowe Mill at Lichfield"; Works VI, pp. 342–43), made English verse by Ferry as "The Lesson." Translation brings out at this point how some memories may be too painful in any language but that of Latin.

Johnson's emotional nature makes the heart the arbiter of final appeal in matters of critical resistance and preference. When feeling is absent from

[16] I draw here on the thinking of Ilse Vickers in her "Dr Johnson and the Grandeur of Generality," *The New Rambler* (2017–18), 49–55, at 55. Vickers cites Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston, ed. Aniela Jaffe (London: Fontana Press, 2011), p. 345.

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English poetry Johnson's evaluations are strongly negative. His crushing remarks on *Lycidas*, a poem purporting to lament the death of a college friend via the fancies of pastoral cliché, are notorious. The Metaphysical poets, to their discredit, sacrifice what the heart requires to cold and clever conceits, and they emerge less excellent than they might have been. Even Dryden, the great poet of the last age, was not much acquainted with the "simple and elemental passions" (*Lives*, vol. II, p. 148). Emotional language is embedded in Johnson's most rigorously analytical passages. Thus, the spectator attending a play laments the tragic event not because any bad thing has happened in her own life but because the stage performance suggests what might. The plight of the audience is that of the mother who "weeps over her babe, when she remembers that death may take it from her" (Works VII, p. 78). But it is again restraint – when there is something to restrain – that wins Johnson's strongest assent. He responds adversely to untoward displays of emotion in the greatest of literary practitioners: Shakespeare's most celebrated declamatory speeches can be "commonly cold and weak" (Works VII, p. 73). The holding back of explicit emotion Johnson exalts in an exceptional scene from *Henry VIII*, his editorial commentary rejecting the pervasive sentimentalism of his day for something deeper.

Critical Contestation and Poetry's Historical Remains

Ferry's verse reimaginings of Johnson make "poetical" the right term for his tragically charged passages of "impassioned" biographical prose and cohere with his call for emotion in poems. In the discussions of Part II, however, I turn to comparison between Johnson and critics of poetry who write with other criteria to the fore. Johnson's own critical past has not completely faded and old arguments still count. To this end I examine the response by Johnson to a critical predecessor both feared and ridiculed in his day, the relentless antagonist of Pope, scorned among the "Dunces" of Pope's great satire, the irascible John Dennis. First when writing on Shakespeare and then in his "Lives" of Addison and Pope (1781) Johnson engaged with Dennis at surprising length. He finds critical and human flaws of a serious kind but also the shared interest that makes rational disagreement possible. We see that Dennis engenders Johnson's respect; together they preserve the tradition of bold disputatiousness that marks out English criticism.

By the time of Johnson's maturity Dennis's combative style had with some exceptions softened into the more detached demeanor of philosophical aesthetics, the critical abstractions of *belles lettres* or the vast

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unearthings of Johnson's antiquarian contemporary Thomas Warton. In the second chapter of Part II I compare and contrast Johnson's and Warton's arts of poetical history and I chart both unity of purpose and a parting of the ways. For Johnson's learned colleague old poems revealed the "history of society" (*Warton's History*, vol. II, p. 209). In Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* they enhanced the pleasures of the world in which he lived and they helped mitigate its pains. Warton was more willing to bear "the burden of the past," but the distinction focuses their narrative methods more closely.[17] We find in Warton a new model of poetical history that is a major advance on earlier traditions of compendia, collections of "beauties" and biographical dictionaries of poets.[18] This stands in critical tension with the distinctive historical insights of Johnson's *Lives* and discovers a different role for narrative in revealing the process of change over time in poetry.

The methods of Johnson and Warton, the one critical and the other antiquarian, nevertheless explain with joint authority how poetry "was brought into the State in which we now behold it."[19] The logic of becoming is shared. Poetical history tells a story, records change, introduces new truth-claims into critical discussion, heightens consciousness of context and permits a combination of generalization, detailed analysis and direct quotation.[20] Historical form itself is opened to question. New narratives arise from the period's broadening of taste as works hidden in the distant past of nonclassical poetry are retrieved for the present. "Literary history," writes David Perkins, "differs from history because the works it considers are felt to have a value quite different from and often far transcending their significance as part of history. In other words, literary history is also literary criticism."[21] In both Johnson and Warton we encounter "the history of poetry" as a critical genre; but a secondary effect is that the disciplines of history raise criticism above the rampant opinion-mongering, interest, party, peevishness and triumphalism of forms Pope had satirized and in which Dennis had revelled. Through closer assimilation of the critic to the historian, the critic of poetry attracted increasingly serious regard.

[17] Walter Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

[18] See Lawrence Lipking, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

[19] Preface to *The Preceptor* (1748), in *Samuel Johnson's Prefaces and Dedications*, ed. Allen T. Hazen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1937), p. 182.

[20] For a discussion of the "history" in literary history see April London, *Literary History Writing, 1770–1820* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[21] David Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 177.

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Thought, Life and Time

That Shakespeare's plays contain thought, and are themselves acts of thought, has intrigued philosophers interested in the medium of thinking dramatically: I discuss their opinions in the first of two chapters of Part III. The Johnson whose heart is touched by the fate of Ophelia appreciates Shakespeare more highly than any poet of his own age, and portrayals of human nature by Shakespeare he sees as preempting insights that formal methods of philosophy would later reveal. While the fashions of intellectual life change with time, Johnson famously notes that the world of Shakespearean dramatic representation expresses the uniformity of a "general nature" that both animates thought and qualifies its reach.

The second chapter of Part III compares and contrasts Johnson and Montaigne and examines the promise of bringing them together. The late sixteenth-century *Essais* of Montaigne, translated by Shakespeare's friend John Florio in 1603 and by Charles Cotton in successive editions from 1685, embrace the classics with a free-minded flexibility that a conventional "neoclassical" diagnosis cannot account for.[22] A banned book in France throughout the period,[23] Montaigne enjoyed prestige in the English eighteenth century, but his comparability with Johnson has rarely been developed very far. The results of such pairings can be unpredictable, providing a sideways look at the history of literature and the evolution of thought. As cases in point I highlight for comparison the "*ondoyant et divers*" ("wavelike and varying") form and matter of Montaigne, the outlook of Johnson's Shakespearean "mingled" drama and the consolatory philosophy of *Rasselas*.[24] That Johnson does not often refer explicitly to Montaigne does not rule out how treatments of pleasure, the nature of happiness, reading, life and death can suggest unforced parallels that should be pursued. Johnson enjoys parity with Montaigne in the extended community of European philosophical life on which Bacon and Erasmus had made their distinctive mark.

[22] For critical analysis of some attempts to demonstrate that Shakespeare read, and was influenced by, Montaigne, see Philip Smallwood, "Shakespeare, Montaigne, and Philosophical Anti-Philosophy," in *Shakespeare and Philosophy*, ed. Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 77–87.

[23] Montaigne was placed on the Roman Index in 1676. For details see Richard Scholar, *Montaigne and the Art of Free Thinking* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010).

[24] This description was accorded to Montaigne by Matthew Arnold, "Hamlet Once More," *Pall Mall Gazette* (1884), reprinted in *Selected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 168–71, at 170.

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Part IV, "Time, Truth and History," elaborates related issues in philosophy also pertinent to literary evaluation. While Time is a perplexity of philosophy it is evidently a "mode of existence" ("most obsequious to the imagination") to which Johnson can appeal in making critical judgments. To this purpose I turn again to Johnson's critique of the unities of place and time when defending Shakespeare (Works VII, pp. 75–81). Johnson advocates "general nature" as a critical test independent of historical time and examines the ironies of time's passage in *Rasselas*. But he allows that poetry must sometimes be appreciated according to the norms and standards prevailing in its period of composition, as when he explains the changing tastes that had made Pope's *Iliad* (1715–20) seem artificial by 1781. Other contexts include the burdens Pope imposed upon himself when he undertook the translation, began to see the labors ahead and realized that when running against Time he was doomed to come second. A melancholy sensitivity to time's passing is a major anxiety throughout the *Diaries, Prayers, and Annals* collected in the Yale edition (Works I), and in his private moments time's unnegotiable divisions of calendar and clock are a perpetual reminder to Johnson of his own fallings short under the eye of his Maker. When as a critic Johnson complains of tediously unendurable literary works he measures what is lost from life by reading them, a loss that cannot be regained.

In the second chapter of Part IV I examine how far Johnson prefers works based on actual events recorded in historical time. Could Johnson, whose criteria are of the heart, really be so literal-minded? I suggest that the "undisputed history" underpinning Dryden's celebrated music ode *Alexander's Feast*, and the same demand expressed in slightly different terms in connection with the story of Pope's *Eloisa* (my two test cases), appear to add value for Johnson. In both of Johnson's responses, historical narratives compound the experience of art and provide a stabilizing reality that checks unfettered fancy. But comparison with other Johnsonian judgments of poetical work also rooted in history reveals that an artistic dependence on real events verified by the historical record is no substitute for the imagined and imaginary world that brings the facts of history to life. The Truth that Johnson seeks from poetry, unclouded by the numinous or mystical – as these instances show – is something the heart must naturally favor.

Surveying the Whole

To probe the criteria of Johnson requires authoritative texts, and as part of understanding Johnson's current accessibility as a critic I examine how new editorial procedures can mediate his critical significance, what these

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procedures have in common and how they diverge. Part v, "Editing *Lives*, and Life," is one of the first assessments of the critical consequences for our evaluation of Johnson of two full-scale editions of the *Lives*, these being the first of such an ambitious nature to appear since 1905, when George Birkbeck Hill published his version in three volumes. I suggest how the new editions evidence the enduring stature of Johnson and I ask what editorial practices we should defend. The purpose is to get under the skin of the critic whose meanings we think we know well. The late editions bring fresh scrutiny to bear on the primary evidence of the text; their devotion to detail shows how much Johnson's criticism has continued to matter, how much remains unknown or is now known for the first time. Roger Lonsdale's editing of the *Lives* for Oxford University Press (2006) and the tireless efforts of the team of scholars who brought the Yale edition successfully to press (2010) recall Johnson's own scholarly endurance.

In my final chapter, I suggest how the newly edited *Lives* illuminate a "latent meaning" and call upon our awareness of the collection's abstract form. Johnson here offers a vision of life more complete and richer in detail than perhaps any other of his works, and this vision comes into sharper focus as his own life approaches its close. The illustration of personal experiences, authorial circumstance, degrees of skill, variations of style and states of mind evokes the "general nature" of a coherent poetical community that is a variety of human world. The play between tragic and comic biographical strokes, tension and release, elements of the remembered, the mistaken and the forgotten recall the incongruities and symmetries of the world created by Shakespeare's "mingled" drama (Works vii, p. 66). The narrative transitions between "Lives" have artistic effects. We see that the *Lives* started out as a commercially driven project with inclusions largely determined by the London booksellers, but then became significantly transformed. Johnson reshapes the material of his commission by enlarging some prefatory remarks into book-length works; but he also evokes the flux of individual lives (and within "Lives"), and weaves a fabric of experience in his movements between them. Under this aspect one can fancy the *Lives* having more in common with the multiformity of Chaucer, Ovid or the Lucretian themes of Montaigne, or indeed Shakespeare, than any rule-bound neoclassic enterprise. The new editions help recover the whole work as a unit of value that cannot be found in selections and excerpted texts designed with easy accessibility in mind. The volumes restore an artistic organization lost to convenience and utility.

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Cultural Displacement and the Judgment of the Heart

It is a measure of Johnson's survival of historical change that he remains a target of the judgmental criticism he once practiced, and an Appendix to this study takes issue with the dismissive handling of his key judgments by one of the most formative and formidable British critics of the twentieth century, F. R. Leavis.[25] The arguments Leavis has with Johnson over Shakespeare and Milton show how criticism two hundred years after Johnson could employ strategies of critical history – conscious or unconscious – that limit his pertinence. I suggest ways in which Leavis contradicts himself when interpreting Johnson; but I also observe that Johnson has remained a critical antagonist worth arguing with, a last bastion – for Leavis and for others – of an archaic culture requiring displacement for criticism to move on. Leavis's interaction with critical history, as I proceed to explain, gives an account of the culture of the critical past that is pointedly reductive. Histories of critical values, I suggest, may be traced on terms current within the period but subject to a less confidently ungrounded interpretation. "The sovereign Rule for treating of *Manners*," writes René Rapin in Thomas Rymer's powerful 1674 translation of the French critic,

> is to copy them after *Nature*, and above all to study well the *heart* of Man, to know how to distinguish all its *motions*. 'Tis this which none are acquainted with: the *heart* of man is *abyss*, where none can sound the bottom: it is a *mystery*, which the most quick-sighted cannot pierce into, and in which the most cunning are mistaken.[26]

Or as Rapin's contemporary the poet Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux advocated in line 96 of Chant 3 of his versified *L'art poétique*: "aller au coeur la route la plus sûre." ("to take the surest passage to the heart").[27] So it is that when Johnson compares the merits of Joseph Addison's celebrated tragedy of *Cato* with the greater dramatic power of Shakespeare's *Othello*, he finds "artificial and fictitious manners" and "just and noble sentiments" delivered in "diction easy, elevated and harmonious." But, crucially for Johnson, the hopes and fears of *Cato* "communicate no vibration to the

[25] See F. R. Leavis, "Johnson as Critic," *Scrutiny*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1944), pp. 187–200, and "Doctor Johnson," *Kenyon Review*, vol. 8 (1946), pp. 637–57. See also his "Johnson and Augustanism," in *The Common Pursuit* (London: Penguin Books, 1952), pp. 110–11.

[26] René Rapin, *Rapin's Reflections on Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie*, trans. Thomas Rymer (London, 1674), p. 38.

[27] Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *Satires épitres art poétique*, ed. Jean-Pierre Collinet (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1985), p. 242.

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heart" (*Preface to Shakespeare*, Works VII, p. 84). However numerous and strong the qualifications that Johnson makes, such a judgment is fatal.

Johnson's criteria of the heart suggest a critical history ungoverned by the specters of a contemporary "neoclassicism," a latter-day "liberal-humanism" or the cultural catch-all that Leavis typically prefers: the "Augustan." (The list could be longer.) Reading Johnson's criticism requires not jumping to the conclusions that find these classifications early, if at all. Critical inconsistency may be taken to prove a defective method and inferior intelligence. But much as the enigmas special to poetry invite us to read and read again the words of a difficult poem as they sink progressively deeper into our consciousnesses, so the artistry of Johnson's criticism presents us with a textual and human experience that no overarching theorem could predict or contain. After all, "One cannot really speak of poetry," as Friedrich Schlegel has observed, "except in the language of poetry."[28] And a poem, according to Neil Astley in the Introduction to his poetical anthology *Staying Alive*, "lives in its language": "the paraphraseable meaning is less than the poem itself."[29] Johnson's criticism, as Johnson called Dryden's, is "the criticism of a poet" (*Lives*, vol. II, p. 120) and comes hauntingly, melodiously and sometimes rapturously to life where paraphrase falls short. Johnson's reputation as the great rationalist critic of the English tradition deserves full weight; but his criteria of the heart may be his own best guarantee of staying alive.

[28] Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, trans. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968), p. 54.

[29] I take these expressions from Neil Astley's Introduction to *Staying Alive: Real Poems for Unreal Times* (Hexham: Bloodaxe Books, 2002), pp. 20–21.

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