

SAMUEL JOHNSON AND MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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Katie Marie Johnson

August 1971

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## ABSTRACT

Samuel Johnson's possible contribution to modern psychology has been ignored by literary critics as well as by modern historians of psychiatry. Johnson's formulation of psychological concepts resembling those assimilated in the twentieth century is further evidence of his astute intellect.

The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia (1759) is representative of Johnson's expressions on the nature of man. In writing Rasselas, Johnson manifests keen insight into human behavior, particularly in view of the age in which it was written. Two centuries after the writing of Rasselas, Johnson might be categorized as an empiricist or as a personality theorist. For the varied descriptions of human behavior and motivation illustrated in Rasselas, one may easily apply modern psychological terminology. There is evidence of Johnson's understanding of defense mechanisms used by both the normal and the abnormal individual, as well as accurate descriptions of neurotic and psychotic reactions.

Recent studies have indicated Johnson's great interest in and use of the scientific method in all of his writings. His ability to observe and mirror accurately and with integrity the facts about a subject; his adherence to scientific rules for critical writing and evaluation; his theories on

the normalcy of man; his insistence upon the "presentness" of life, as well as his humanitarian attitude toward the mentally ill, all place Johnson well in advance of many of the eighteenth and nineteenth century writers, indicating that he has been misjudged when placed in a rigidly fixed position in the neo-classical period.

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## I. INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION

According to Johnsonian scholars, there have been no detailed studies of Samuel Johnson's analysis of character and understanding of unconscious motivations in human behavior. Johnson's possible contribution to modern psychology has been ignored by literary critics as well as modern historians of psychiatry. A study of Johnson's formulation of psychological concepts resembling those assimilated in the twentieth century would provide further evidence of Johnson's keen insight, intellect, and varied experience.

Most of Johnson's serious writings from The Rambler (1750) through The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia (1759) contain views on the nature of man, the idea that man is egocentric, that passion generally outweighs reason, and that man is incapable of making a choice of life without innumerable doubts and unrealistic hopes for the future.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Samuel Johnson, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1963-69). See Rambler No. 2 for man's discontent with the present; Rambler No. 17 for contemplation on the necessity of death and the realization that "the disturbers of our happiness, in this world, are our desires, our griefs, and our fears. . . ."; Rambler No. 28 in which Johnson concerns himself with the various means of self-delusion; Rambler No. 41 on the advantages of memory, youth, and delusional hope for future; Adventurer No. 111 on the pleasures and advantages of industry; Adventurer No. 126 describing the dangers of solitude and withdrawal from society; Idler No. 44 and Idler No. 72 in which Johnson formulates the concept similar to the modern concept of "repression"; and Idler No. 58 on self-delusion in the form of schemes of merriment.

It is my observation that Rasselas is a condensed elaboration of the thoughts contained in Johnson's essays and poetry. Therefore, this paper will be based on the novel Rasselas as being representative of Johnson's expressions on the nature of man.

Critics have called Rasselas a novel, an apologue, a series of moral essays, an oriental tale, and The Vanity of Human Wishes written in prose,<sup>2</sup> but it may also be seen in the twentieth century as an introduction to modern psychology. In writing Rasselas, Johnson manifests keen insight into human behavior, particularly in view of the age in which it was written, a time when the psychological processes and dynamics underlying human behavior were not stressed as a science in the modern restrictive sense. Two centuries after the writing of Rasselas, Johnson might be categorized as an empiricist or as a personality theorist. For the varied descriptions of human behavior and motivation illustrated in Rasselas, one may easily apply modern psychological terminology.

<sup>2</sup>Reginald T. Davies, ed., Samuel Johnson, Selected Writings (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1965), p. 28. Davies describes Rasselas as a tale, but really more a series of moral essays on a common theme and setting; also, he comments that Rasselas is The Vanity of Human Wishes, in prose; See E. L. McAdam, Jr., Johnson & Boswell, a Survey of their Writings (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969), p. 50. McAdam calls Rasselas a tale on the order of Arabian Nights; and Sheldon Sacks, Fiction and the Shape of Belief (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1964), pp. 56-57, describes Rasselas as containing all of the qualities necessary for being labeled an apologue.



In 1955, Walter Jackson Bate made the assertion that Samuel Johnson's serious writings provide "the closest anticipation of Freud to be found in psychology or moral writing before the twentieth century,"<sup>3</sup> and in 1957, Nicholas Joost intimated a possible Freudian interpretation of Rasselas, suggesting that the departure from the happy valley (XIII-XV) is an allegory of the birth experience, and that the pronounced regressive tendencies and the fantasies which Johnson describes in this episode are neurotic.<sup>4</sup> Magdi Wahba, in 1962, recognized the need for a detailed study concerning Johnson's possible contribution to the science of human behavior,<sup>5</sup> and, in 1965, Donald J. Greene, after reviewing Kathleen Grange's exploratory studies on certain psychoanalytic concepts in Johnson's writings, indicates a need for further investigation:

It seems very probable that much more analysis along Miss Grange's lines will be done in the future—at least, it certainly ought to be done—leading in time, one hopes, to the much needed synthesis of Johnson's 'moral position', which many have prematurely and unsuccessfully tried to formulate.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Walter Jackson Bate, The Achievement of Samuel Johnson (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1955), p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Joost, "Whispers of Fancy on the Meaning of Rasselas," Modern Age, 1 (1957), 166-67.

<sup>5</sup> Magdi Wahba, ed., Johnsonian Studies (Cairo: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 277.

<sup>6</sup> Donald J. Greene, ed., Samuel Johnson, A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 5-6.

Richard Hovey in 1954 observed that Johnson, rather than looking ahead to the twentieth century, was looking backward to the seventeenth century, to Robert Burton and to The Anatomy of Melancholy.<sup>7</sup>

Burton, in Anatomy, has written on innumerable subjects: poetry, medicine, psychology, old wives' tales, philology, wars, antiquarian lore, theology, morals, history, climatology, food, travel, love, hate, ambition, pride, astrology, art, politics, and a scheme for the establishment of Utopia. He has borrowed many passages from many authors: "When all that Burton has borrowed is put in quotation marks, as in some modern reprints, there seems little of Burton left. . . ." <sup>8</sup> In his own time, he defended himself against such accusations: "I have laboriously collected this Cento out of divers Writers, and that without injury, I have wronged no author, but given every man his own . . . I cite and quote mine Authors . . . I have borrowed, not stolen. . . ." <sup>9</sup> Thematically, Burton is concerned with man's limitations and with his "incredible madness and folly." Anatomy is written in a style of humor and of satire, and not with the same seriousness of purpose and humanitarian attitude that Johnson conveys in Rasselas.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Hovey, "Dr. Samuel Johnson, Psychiatrist," MLQ 15 (Dec. 1954), 321-25.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy, ed. Floyd Dell (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1948), p. vii.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

From a scientific aspect, Burton's work is merely a "quaint curiosity":

He patiently rehearsed all the remedies known to the times, from taking hellebore to boring a hole in the skull to let out the 'fugilinous vapours', adding such philosophic consolations as he could by way of giving full measure. But his interest in the subject was actually not so scientific as artistic.<sup>10</sup>

Hovey discusses Bergen Evans' Psychiatry of Robert Burton and Evans' indication of the influence of the Anatomy upon Johnson: ". . . its general effect on his [Johnson's] talk and writing; his paraphrasing and at times applying to himself Burton's prescription against melancholy;. . . Evans says nothing, however, of the influence of Burton upon one of Johnson's most personal works, Rasselas."<sup>11</sup> Hovey's position seems to indicate Johnson was something of a mediator between the seventeenth-century anatomist's views and the twentieth-century psychologist's views:

If, as Evans suggests, it is a curious fact in the history of Western intellect that the study of the human psyche in some ways retrogressed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries so that present-day ideas in this field . . . were arrived at in complete independence of Burton, then we have here another instance of the depth and breadth of Dr. Johnson's understanding. For this intellectual acuteness, impelled by the agony of his heart, led him to see more clearly into Burton's meanings than did his own age and several generations which followed him.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Burton, p. xiii.

<sup>11</sup> Hovey, p. 325.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Hovey seems to have solved the dilemma, at least to my satisfaction, that if Burton's Anatomy did influence Johnson's writings, Johnson was able to understand and to develop Burton's meanings in a more precise manner than anyone has done until the scientific observations of the twentieth century. Hovey seems to have suggested that Johnson's writings have bridged a generation gap of several hundred years in the study of the human psyche.

The remainder of Hovey's article is devoted to a study of Johnson's personal problems and how they might relate to his writings. Extensive studies have been done in the analysis of Johnson's own personality,<sup>13</sup> but this type of analysis and Johnson's possible mental problems in relation to his work are not within the scope of this paper. This paper will deal primarily with Johnson's contribution, through his writings, to modern psychology.

Kathleen Grange's assertion that Johnson's possible contribution to modern psychology has been ignored by modern historians of psychiatry<sup>14</sup> applies also to the literary critics who have virtually ignored the same

<sup>13</sup>Katherine C. Balderston, "Johnson's Vile Melancholy," in The Age of Johnson: Essays presented to C. B. Tinker (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1949). Richard Hovey, "Dr. Samuel Johnson, Psychiatrist," MLQ, 15 (Dec. 1954), 321-25. George Irwin, "Dr. Johnson's Troubled Mind," Samuel Johnson Critical Essays, ed. Donald Greene, pp. 22-29. Joseph Wood Krutch, Samuel Johnson (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1944). Charles Norman, Mr. Oddity: Samuel Johnson, LL.D. (New York: Collier Books, 1951). William Kinney, "Dr. Johnson and the Psychiatrists," AI, 17 (Spring 1960), 75-82.

<sup>14</sup>Kathleen M. Grange, "Samuel Johnson's Account of Certain Psycho-analytic Concepts," J. of Nerv. Ment. Dis. 135, No. 2 (August 1962), 93-98.

possibility since the only in depth studies along these lines have been done by Kathleen Grange, Division of General Medical Sciences, United States Public Health Service.<sup>15</sup> Grange gives a detailed study of schizophrenic behavior manifested by the astronomer from one episode of Rasselas (XL-XLVII).<sup>16</sup> She does not discuss his paranoia, however, nor does she discuss the various neurotic and psychoneurotic reactions of the other characters in the novel. She does not analyze behavior other than the psychotic behavior of the astronomer illustrated in those seven chapters. In another article, Grange indicates Johnson's use of the mechanism of repression.<sup>17</sup> This mechanism is important because it underlies all human behavior and is of particular importance in psychotic reactions. Grange examines Johnson's use of repression in many of his writings; however, most of the references are to Johnson's essays rather than to Rasselas. She discusses Rasselas as it relates to the astronomer episode. Grange does not indicate Johnson's descriptions and use of the other defense mechanisms known to modern psychologists. Miss Grange concludes her study with the following remarks:

<sup>15</sup>The research for these studies was carried out during a postdoctoral fellowship from the Division of General Medical Sciences, United States Public Health Service.

<sup>16</sup>Grange, "Dr. Samuel Johnson's Account of a Schizophrenic Illness in Rasselas (1759)," Medical History, 6 (Spring 1962), 162-68.

<sup>17</sup>Grange, "Certain Psychoanalytic Concepts," 93-98.

- It is suggested that his [Johnson's] insights may prompt new areas of inquiry at the present time. Keenly aware of neurotic manifestations in normal behavior, Johnson gave great emphasis to the role of consciously-determined mental mechanisms. Above all, while prefiguring modern theories, he firmly maintained the moralist's standpoint. Even discounting his brilliant language and metaphor which in themselves deserve our respect, a study of Johnson's writing may serve to focus attention on certain deficiencies in the modern viewpoint. His essays in the Rambler, Idler, and Adventurer series should be of more than passing historical interest to the modern physician.<sup>18</sup>

And, as suggested by Greene, perhaps a study of Johnson's understanding of the levels of consciousness and the stratified human mind will help modern literary scholars formulate Johnson's true "moral position."<sup>19</sup>

In the present study, I do not suggest that Freud, or any modern psychologist, has borrowed from Johnson's writings. I suggest, as do Grange, Bate, and Hovey, that the psychoanalytic interpretation of Johnson's writings has been totally overlooked by historians as well as by critics. This study is to demonstrate Johnson's acute observation and understanding of human behavior, presented by him in a systematized, controlled manner anticipating a scientific method—another aspect of his astute intellect.

There is increasing evidence to suggest Johnson's great interests in

<sup>18</sup>Grange, "Certain Psychoanalytic Concepts," p. 98.

<sup>19</sup>Recognizing Johnson's understanding of the unconscious motivations of man could explain his views on subordination, religion, and society, and his realization of man's need for control. Also see Freud's similar position on these subjects. These views will be discussed in Chapter II of this paper.

and use of the scientific method in his writings. Supplementing studies by Jean Hagstrum and Robert Voitle, John Wright (January 1971) has indicated the general nature of the insightful methodological statement which Johnson's writings contain:

We need to see his discourse about literature and criticism, as well as other subjects, not only from the point of view of the theories and opinions he analyzed and synthesized but from his methodological perspective as well if we are to see his work as he saw it himself, or if we would see clearly his place in western intellectual history and his relevance for the critical thought of our own time.<sup>20</sup>

Johnson describes precisely the method of analysis in his writings, and his precepts are anchored not only in Locke and Newton and the scientific revolution of the preceding century, but in basic requirements of the whole methodological tradition.<sup>21</sup>

Hagstrum has illustrated from Johnson's Life of Boerhaave that he shows theoretical comprehension and approval of the scientific method. Johnson's theory of knowledge is rooted in experience. He defines experience in his Dictionary as practice or trial with his own use of experience leading to three important constituents: (1) sensation and first-hand observation, (2) scientific experiment and research, (3) the general processes of learning and of scholarship.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup>John W. Wright, "Samuel Johnson and Traditional Methodology," PMLA, 86 (Jan. 1971), 40.

<sup>21</sup>Wright, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup>Jean H. Hagstrum, Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism (Chicago, Ill.: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 8-10.

Voitle has suggested that "Johnson very explicitly describes the basic method by which truth may be attained as a process requiring a balanced collaboration of several intellectual powers," quoting from Idler No. 101:

When a number of distinct images are collected, . . . the fancy is busied in arranging them; and combines them into pleasing pictures with more resemblance to the realities of life as experience advances, and new observations rectify the former.

As we see more, we become possessed of more certainties, and consequently gain more principles of reasoning, and found a wider basis of analogy.

We first discard absurdity and impossibility, then exact greater and greater degrees of probability. . . . Whatever may lull vigilance, or mislead attention, is contemptuously rejected, and every disguise in which error may be concealed, is carefully observed, till, by degrees, a certain number of incontestable or unsuspected propositions are established, and at last concatenated into arguments, or compacted into systems.<sup>23</sup>

Johnson's words form a clear understanding and statement of the traditional methodological process of scientific analysis. Further, Hagstrum has observed that Johnson accepted the Baconian conception that the mind must collect materials through empirical observation and search, accepted it not only as the proper explanation of the relations between observation and reason, but as a fundamental epistemological truth applicable to the relations between experience and any kind of mental operation. Johnson has made the observation that imagination is useless without knowledge and that nature gives in vain the power of combination, unless study and

<sup>23</sup>Robert Voitle, Samuel Johnson, The Moralists (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1961), p. 20.



observation supply materials to be combined.<sup>24</sup> This concept of experience places Johnson in the Lockean school of "sensationalism," the idea that all knowledge is perceived through the senses and through experience, a philosophy germane to eighteenth-century thought.

For Wright, Johnson "rarely offers invented or discovered principles, but he habitually presented critical and other problems in discourse that carefully formulates relationships of principle and consequence."<sup>25</sup> Johnson denies the possibility that human reason might apprehend the metaphysical nature of phenomena in an intuitive, certain manner, and thereby obtain axioms of unquestionable truth, whose deducible consequences would lead unconditionally to certain evaluations or explanations of experience.<sup>26</sup> His primary emphasis is ". . . striking certainty about what is regularly observable and on what is said to be the case, not on certainty about what is the case."<sup>27</sup> Johnson's general theory of inquiry, then, consists of rejecting metaphysical, intuitive certainty for the

<sup>24</sup>Hagstrum, p. 6. "On his tour of the Hebrides with Boswell, Johnson expressed the opinion that the poetry of St. Kilda must be very poor because the locality was barren of images and therefore starved the poet's fancy. To Boswell's objection that even what material there was could be combined into poetry by 'a poetical genius', Johnson replied: 'But, sir, a man cannot make fire but in proportion as he has wood. He cannot coin guineas but in proportion as he has gold.'"

<sup>25</sup>Wright, p. 42.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

procedural certainty of inductive and deductive analysis and admitting nothing that has not been analyzed by the premises of the inquiry.<sup>28</sup>

Johnson has applied the scientific method to the writing of Rasselas insofar as observation and description are concerned. Johnson takes his characters (dependent variables), manipulates the environment (independent variables), and observes and describes the response; he predicts what man can do to find a degree of happiness or stability in a world where happiness is elusive. His ability to observe and analyze human behavior, as well as his intense desire to experience and to become involved in the experience of life, enables him to speculate and evaluate the experiences all men have in common.

Sheldon Sacks has analyzed Rasselas as an analogue and comments that Johnson is totally aware of the manipulation of his characters.<sup>29</sup> Sacks is not suggesting a scientific approach, but is merely pointing out that Johnson structured each episode to lead consistently to the type of response he intended for each character. It does seem, however, that

<sup>28</sup> Wright, p. 44.

<sup>29</sup> Sheldon Sacks, Fiction and the Shape of Belief (Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1964), pp. 56-57.

Johnson, by the time of the writing of Rasselas, had formulated a theory of human behavior and had set about to describe it through careful structuring of events and the inevitable responses of the characters. The central theme of Rasselas, as formulated by Sacks, is that ". . . there is no earthly happiness, but the consequence is not unbearable human misery."<sup>30</sup> What Sacks seems to be implying is that Johnson's theme is that man's search for happiness is continually being met with obstacles which then create frustration, conflict, and anxiety, but man's way out of this dilemma is through making a choice—"a choice of life." For Johnson, this choice, made with reason and mature judgment, can provide man with a degree of pleasure and satisfaction. The dilemma of the never-ending search for happiness and the possible solutions is as relevant today as it was in the eighteenth century.

30

Sacks, p. 54.

## II. JOHNSON AND FREUD

In the twentieth century, great emphasis has been placed on self-awareness. Sigmund Freud discovered that in order to understand all men, one must understand himself. His own self-analysis was the basis for his life's work.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps Johnson's primary purpose in describing human behavior is a means by which to understand himself. Johnson had a need to understand his own behavior, his motivations, and his lack of motivation at times.<sup>32</sup> He was keenly aware of the necessity of self-analysis. Johnson was troubled by his "inherited melancholy"<sup>33</sup> and felt, much as modern psychologists do, that self-awareness is the first step to understanding all of human nature. This understanding might then be generalized to all men.

<sup>31</sup>Ernest Jones, The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud (New York: Basic Books, 1961), pp. 209-15.

<sup>32</sup>Bate, p. 9. "Often in trying to control his own state of mind, he would assert that most of man's mental and physical ills were within his own power to govern; that they resulted from idleness, luxury, or boredom; that 'labouring men who work hard, and live sparingly', are rarely inclined to such ailments."

<sup>33</sup>Bate, p. 7. Johnson possessed a "vile melancholy" which he thought he had inherited from his father, and which he claimed "made me mad all my life, at least not sober."

In order to understand Johnson's personality and his writings, one must examine some of his attitudes on cultural, social, and moral aspects of civilization. In any meaningful discussion or description of human behavior, the theorist must consider these aspects and how various attitudes determine the conduct and happiness of man. That Johnson in the eighteenth century and Freud in the twentieth century recognized this fact and incorporated into their theories of human nature all aspects of civilization indicates the powerful insight and intellect of the two moralists, one religious and the other irreligious, yet both recognizing the same needs of man. In fact, there are many similarities in the thoughts of Freud and Johnson as they relate to the conscious and the unconscious behavior of man.

During a period of transition in religious, psychological, and moral concepts, Johnson took a position between the extremes which rendered many contemporary theories ineffective as practical guides to conduct and the compromises he achieved were always dictated by his own profound knowledge of the nature of man.<sup>34</sup> Voitle has written that Johnson has constantly shifting attitudes, that he is not at all systematic, but that his moral thought is consistent when seen wholly and within the context of his times:<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Voitle, pp. 182-83.

<sup>35</sup> Voitle, p. ix.

As a practical moralist and a neoclassic author he is always aware of the occasion, of his purposes, and the nature of his audience. . . . There is the further complication that Johnson, or for that matter, any practical moralist, speaks primarily not to inform his audience, as the theoretician does, but to reform their actions. . . . He can select portions of the truth and stress them to whatever degree the occasion may demand.<sup>36</sup>

In examining Freud's attitudes and writing, Peter Madison finds that Freud's writings are not systematic statements of his theory, but are in the nature of notebooks by an explorer who is always changing one or another aspect of his complex set of concepts with every turn of the trail.<sup>37</sup> These constantly changing attitudes toward theories, and toward morals, do not seem to be contradictory attitudes of these men; instead, it seems that men working with the unconscious, dynamic motivation of humans are forced to be ever changing, expanding and reconstructing new ideas, new concepts, and new theories.

Philip Rieff has described Freud as a moralist without a moralizing message:

Freud's case histories are apologues that teach nothing; every case is different—or, what amounts to the same thing, could have been interpreted differently. It is exhilarating and yet terrifying to read Freud as a moralist, to see how compelling can be the judgment of a man who never preaches, leads us nowhere, assures us of nothing

<sup>36</sup>Voitle, pp. ix-x.

<sup>37</sup>Peter Madison, Freud's Concept of Repression and Defense, Its Theoretical and Observational Language (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), p. 6.

except perhaps that, having learned from him the burden of misery we must find strength to carry will be somewhat lighter. To be less vulnerable to the arrows of sickness that fortune inevitably shoots at us, and that we, by virtue of our particular constitution, invite—this is as much good health as any one of us educated by Freud can wish for.<sup>38</sup>

Reason, of course, is the foundation upon which all of Johnson's concepts are based, moral, social, political, and religious. For Johnson, Reason is the diametrical opposite of Imagination. It is the faculty in man which keeps him in contact with reality and it is that part of man which provides him with general estimates both of his limitations and of his capacities:

. . . In morals, Reason is the mainspring of right action, synonymous with virtue, for virtue is the exercise of reason. In politics, Reason is at the core of all enlightened and yet realistic and tradition-respecting policy. In aesthetics it is the source of the delight and instruction which are the necessary ingredients of real poetic worth. Reason manifests itself in art through the true portrayal of that which is constant and abiding in Nature and in Life, that which transcends time.<sup>39</sup>

Again, Johnson takes the moderate position in the Age of Reason. Aware that reason must predominate over imagination, he was wise enough to recognize that man cannot always be reasonable and that at times his passions will outweigh his reason. Johnson's recognition of the predominance of imagination over reason will be the subject of Chapters III and IV.

<sup>38</sup> Philip Reiff, The Mind of a Moralist (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1961), p. xxi.

<sup>39</sup> Arie Sachs, Passionate Intelligence (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. xiii.

Two centuries later, Freud recognizes that when man's needs become too great and delusional systems over-balance reason, then a state of confusion and irrationality exists. Reason was the basis of most of Freud's concepts:

Freud's one small hope, reason, is closely and properly linked to his mixed vision, half longing and half repugnance, of the force of death. Reason cannot save us, nothing can; but reason can mitigate the cruelty of living, or give sufficient reason for not living . . . Freud was not gulled by any of the false hopes or ego satisfactions in which all of us are educated; somehow he re-educated himself to avoid them and thereafter did not invent new hopes.<sup>40</sup>

Freud's understanding of reason and the need to re-educate himself to avoid self-delusion is the message of Imlac (Johnson) throughout Rasselas.

Freud felt a need to limit his imagination, much as Johnson did, to "compel his imagination to stay put." In his opinion, the absurdity of this world could not be balanced by absurd ideas:

Psychoanalysis does not cure; it merely reconciles. Therefore it works best for healthy men, who are willing to sacrifice their precious first sons of thought on the altar of reality. For those who seek, through analysis to avoid the sacrifice, therapy must inevitably fail. Psychoanalysis is a therapy for the healthy. . . .<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, the need to reconcile imagination with reason and thus approach reality is Johnson's clear message by the end of Rasselas, as he demonstrates

<sup>40</sup> Rieff, pp. xxii-xxiii. Rieff also notes ". . . it is the message of a very severe moralist. Western culture in the twentieth century has produced no other equally severe, equally able to forego ideal convictions and analytic simplicities in the quest for the ordered life."

<sup>41</sup> Rieff, p. xiii.



the absurdity of utopian states. Johnson's opinions on the absurdity of looking to the future for solutions to problems will be discussed later in this chapter.

In Rasselas, Johnson indicates man's instinctual pursuit of happiness; the pain when needs are not gratified; the means by which he must reduce or avoid the pain; and the inevitable longing for new pleasure when desires have been fulfilled:

"I fly from pleasure," said the prince, "because pleasure had ceased to please; I am lonely because I am miserable, and am unwilling to cloud with my presence the happiness of others. . . . That I want nothing," said the prince, "or that I know not what I want, is the cause of my complaint . . . but possessing all that I can want, I find one day and one hour exactly like another, except that the latter is still more tedious than the former . . . I have already enjoyed too much; give me something to desire." The prince's instructor replies ". . . Sir, if you had seen the miseries of the world, you would know how to value your present state." "Now," said the prince, "you have given me something to desire; I shall long to see the miseries of the world, since the sight of them is necessary to happiness."<sup>42</sup>

And, it is of particular interest to note in Rambler No. 6 Johnson's keen observation that man cannot attain happiness by changing the external environment, but in order to attain a degree of happiness he must change his own attitudes toward life:

. . . that the fountain of content must spring up in the mind; and that he, who has so little knowledge of human nature, as to seek

<sup>42</sup> Samuel Johnson, Johnson Prose and Poetry, "The History of Rasselas Prince of Abissinia," ed. Mona Wilson (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1950), p. 396.

happiness by changing any thing but his own dispositions, will waste his life in fruitless efforts, and multiply the griefs which he purposes to remove.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, underlying Freud's writings is the basic assumption that there is a fundamental purpose in the workings of the human psyche; the purpose is the pursuit of pleasurable excitement and the avoidance of pain. The human organism is automatically regulated by a "pleasure-principle."<sup>44</sup>

Freud's pleasure-reality principle is simply that the ego instincts at first strive for pleasure, but necessity soon teaches them to qualify the pleasure principle. The tasks of avoiding pain become as important as that of gaining pleasure. The ego learns that direct gratification is unavoidably withheld, that the pleasure must be postponed, and that always some pain must be borne and certain sources of pleasure entirely abandoned. While the ego still remains fundamentally addicted to the pursuit of pleasure, it learns to postpone pleasure and to take the facts of life, the requirements of existence, into account. In order to protect itself the ego denies the existence of unconscious strivings and represses them.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup>Johnson, Rambler No. 6, Yale Edition, III, 35.

<sup>44</sup>Sigmund Freud, "The Interpretation of Dreams," The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Standard Edition, ed. James Strachney (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1957-66). "Freud originally called the principle the "unpleasurable principle," Standard Edition, V, 598. See also Freud, Standard Edition, XIV, 311-15.

<sup>45</sup>Freud, Standard Edition, V, 598-603.

Johnson, in a sense, feels that certain pleasures must be postponed, and a degree of pain must be borne. Man must struggle continuously to live with reason, accept reality and to minimize his self-gratifications. For Johnson, Christianity is a means to discourage imaginative speculations concerning the moral structure of the universe, and the main value of religion is that it functions as a check upon the imagination's tendency to idealize the self.<sup>46</sup>

In religious subordination, Freud and Johnson agree but for entirely different reasons. Johnson feels man must ultimately accept reality, acquiesce to the laws and dispensations of God, and hope to find perfection with God after death. To Freud, although totally irreligious himself, religion is the one means of control which keeps the masses from killing each other. He is very pessimistic about the destructive tendencies of mankind, and he feels if the masses of common man ever stop believing in God, they will destroy each other.<sup>47</sup> Freud, a self-avowed atheist,<sup>48</sup> feels that the common man understands providence as

<sup>46</sup> Sachs, p. 114.

<sup>47</sup> Freud, "The Future of an Illusion," Standard Edition, XXI, 39.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Roazen, Freud, Political and Social Thought (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1968), p. 255. Also see Helen Walker Punder, Freud: His Life and His Mind (New York: Howell, Soskin, 1947), for discussion of Freud's religious views and conflicts. A major thesis of the book is his possible substitution of psychoanalysis for religion.

an exalted father who will watch over him in a future existence for any frustrations he suffers on earth. Basically, Freud sees a belief in religion as infantile.<sup>49</sup> But, since Freud sees most humans as infantile and helpless, exercising little or no reason and indicating little or no maturity, he sees that subordination to God and religion for the average man is necessary.

Whether prompted by a Christian faith such as Johnson's, or prompted by the knowledge that man's desires and needs are based on infantile helplessness, both Johnson and Freud seem to infer that man deludes himself, rationalizes his behavior, and rarely makes a reasonable choice which could alleviate his pain; therefore, he must look to a higher authority for guidance.

Johnson views society as an organic whole, and, within that whole, subordination means more than power on the one part and subjection on the other; it presupposes, among all ranks, duty and responsibility as well as rights and privileges.<sup>50</sup> The inequality of men is the natural state, according to Johnson, and social subordination is, therefore, necessary in order to attain a degree of social order and happiness for the greatest possible number:

<sup>49</sup> Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," Standard Edition, XXI, 74.

<sup>50</sup> Voitle, pp. 106-107.

He considers inequality axiomatic and he feels that individual happiness depends in the first place on fundamental, concrete pleasures and upon the absence of misery. If inequality is accepted as a fact, it follows in Johnson's way of thinking that the best way to secure this happiness is through some general scheme of subordination.<sup>51</sup>

Even though Johnson's own personal instincts were on the side of individual self-expression, he recognized the need of subordinating the individual's desires to the happiness of the whole of society. Johnson feared the ease with which the social organization can dissolve into anarchy and inevitably into despotism; therefore, he believed all reasonable measures must be taken to preserve the social organization.<sup>52</sup> Greene feels that Johnson was in advance of his contemporaries in political thinking and that his humanitarianism, rationalism, skepticism, and individualism combined to produce a crusading Johnson warning against political irresponsibility.<sup>53</sup> He rejected the metaphysical theories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—theories of divine right, natural rights, original compacts, and the organic state: ". . . in the general discredit of older political theory that now prevails, Johnson's rigorously empirical approach to the facts of political power as it actually exists, troubling his head very little about what

<sup>51</sup>Voitle, p. 113.

<sup>52</sup>Donald J. Greene, The Politics of Samuel Johnson (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), p. 242.

<sup>53</sup>Greene, p. 242.

theoretical justification can be devised for its existence, may have a certain appeal to the serious student of politics."<sup>54</sup> Greene's assertions concerning Johnson's political thinking concur with recent studies by Wright, Hagstrum, and Voitle indicating Johnson's empirical approach to all of his writings.

For Johnson, economic subordination is as essential as social and political subordination:

It must necessarily happen, that many will desire what few can possess, and consequently, that some will be fortunate by the disappointment, or defeat, of others, and, since no man suffers disappointment without pain, that one must become miserable by another's happiness. This is, however, the natural condition of human life.<sup>55</sup>

When Johnson speaks in social and economic contexts, he opposes the search for perfection or for ideal states, by happiness he means merely the achieving of certain minimal goods and the avoidance of pain.

As to subordination in nature, Johnson holds man in a middle position. Man's futile attempt to become greater than man ultimately is an offense against his human, rational dignity. His desire to be superhuman brings out the subhuman that is in him.<sup>56</sup> In Rasselas, Johnson states that every animal has his element assigned to him; the birds have the air, and

<sup>54</sup> Greene, pp. 256-57.

<sup>55</sup> Samuel Johnson, The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., 9 vols. (London: Talboys, Wheeler & W. Pickering, 1825), IX, Sermon No. 23, 497.

<sup>56</sup> Sachs, p. 27.

man and beasts have the earth. In order to become higher than man in the scale of existence, man must imitate the animals who are below man in that scale. Johnson's point seems to be that man's attempt to escape from himself either upwards or downwards comes to the same end. Johnson maintains that when man reflects calmly, he knows

. . . the world is neither eternal nor independent; that we neither were produced, nor are preserved by chance. But that heaven and earth, and the whole system of things, were created by an infinite and perfect Being, who still continues to superintend and govern them.<sup>57</sup>

Johnson's views on subordination to God and to religion are also evident in his sermons:

. . . The love of God will engage us to trust in his protection, to acquiesce in his dispensations, to keep his laws, to mediate on his perfection, and to declare our confidence and submission, by profound frequent adoration . . .<sup>58</sup>

Johnson sees subordination to God, the supreme authority, as a means by which to achieve happiness for the greatest number. He indicates the development of social conscience in subordination to religion:

. . . The duties of governing can be the lot of few, but all of us have the duties of subjects to perform; and every man ought to in-cite in himself, and in his neighbour, that obedience to the laws and that respect to the chief magistrate, which may secure and promote

<sup>57</sup> Maurice J. Quinlan, Samuel Johnson, A Layman's Religion (Madison: The Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1964), pp. 44-45.

<sup>58</sup> Johnson, Works (1825) IX, Sermon 13, 404.

concord and quiet. Of this, as of all other virtues, the true basis is religion. The laws will be easily obeyed by him who adds to human sanctions the obligations of conscience; and he will not easily be disposed to censure his superiors, whom religion has made acquainted with his own failings.<sup>59</sup>

For Johnson, subordination in government, in society, and in religion plays the most important role in the development of civilization and in promoting social order and a degree of happiness.

Ironically, Freud's ideas on social subordination are quite similar to those of Johnson. Freud sees the society as a whole and recognizes the responsibility of the individual. Much as Johnson expressed the desire for individuality, but yet knew the need for subordination for the good of the whole, Freud similarly feels civilization must be built on renunciation of instincts and self-gratifications:

One has . . . to reckon with the fact that there are present in all men destructive, and therefore anti-social and anticultural, trends and that in a great number of people these are strong enough to determine that behavior in human society. . . . It is just as impossible to do without control of the mass by a minority as it is to dispense with coercion in the work of civilization. . . . It is only through the influence of individuals who can set an example and whom masses recognize as their leaders that they can be induced to perform the work and undergo the renunciations on which the existence of civilization depends.<sup>60</sup>

Freud recognized the necessity of subordination in all aspects of civilization

<sup>59</sup>Johnson, Works (1825) IX, Sermon 24, 516.

<sup>60</sup>Freud, "The Future of an Illusion," Standard Edition, XXI, 7.



as well as the need for individual fulfillment. The conflicting claims of moral values and the necessity of social coercion were recurring themes throughout Freud's social writings.<sup>61</sup> The same views expressed by Johnson on society as a whole are expressed by Freud: "Human life in common is only made possible when a majority comes together which is stronger than any separate individual and which remains untied against all separate individuals. . . ."<sup>62</sup>

A Johnsonian theme which is evident throughout Rasselas is the absurdity of utopian states. For Johnson, utopian projects involve the basic human desire to be deluded or the necessity of illusion to happiness, and he sees such illusions as fixations upon impossible future events which are transformed by imagination to appear as the solutions to all ills.<sup>63</sup> Johnson sees the idea of utopia connected with pride<sup>64</sup> and the human tendency to achieve perfection. As Johnson points out in Rasselas, most utopian states are headed by the dreamer. Rasselas's perfect kingdom is inevitably headed by himself. According to Sachs, Rasselas, dreaming of

<sup>61</sup>Roazen, p. 255.

<sup>62</sup>Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," Standard Edition, XXI, 95.

<sup>63</sup>Sachs, p. 96.

<sup>64</sup>Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language, 2 vols. (London: W. Strahan, 1755), n. pag. Johnson defines pride as an inordinate and unreasonable self-esteem.

his perfect commonwealth, epitomizes human pride:

His utopian impulse does represent Pride, in its most generic sense, the sense in which man—good, bad or indifferent, simply by virtue of his humanity—madly expects in some way to become more than a man . . . the idea of utopia presupposes a commonwealth of perfect beings, living in complete harmony with one another . . . the notion of a perfect earthly state makes nonsense of the Heavenly City, and therefore is seen by Johnson as at root 'dangerous' to both religion and morality.

Modern egoistic man is similar to this eighteenth-century idea of pride.

Egoism is at the base of man's desire to rule, to head up the tribe, and in Freudian terms, to replace the father. Pride, or egoism, is the basis for the oedipus complex.<sup>66</sup> Throughout Rasselas, the prince dreams of replacing his father as a ruler.

A recurring theme in Johnson's writings is that man gives himself unnecessary pain by concentrating on some past or future possessions or desires:

We represent to ourselves the pleasures of some future possession, and suffer our thoughts to dwell attentively upon it, till it has wholly engrossed the imagination, and permits us not to conceive any happiness but its attainment, or any misery but its loss. . .<sup>67</sup>

Further, Johnson always sees the absurdity in man looking to the future

<sup>65</sup>Sachs, p. 93.

<sup>66</sup>Freud, "Totem and Taboo," Standard Edition, XIII, 86. All obsessional neurotics are superstitious and have "omnipotence of thought." See pp. 140-61 for father/son relationships and the desire to replace father.

<sup>67</sup>Johnson, Rambler No. 17, Yale Edition, III, 93.

and refusing immediate ease for distant pleasures. For Johnson the past and the future are merely means by which man can escape his present.<sup>68</sup>

Just as Johnson is always concerned with the immediate present, Freud, too, places emphasis on the present, considering any abnormal attachment to the past as neurotic.<sup>69</sup> He sees projections into the future as fantasy and delusion:

Smashing up the past, denying any meaningful future and yet leaving that question reasonably open, Freud concentrated entirely on the present. Posterity will revere him as the first prophet of a time that is simply each man's own, the first visionary to look neither forward nor backward except to stare down projections and to penetrate fixations.<sup>70</sup>

Both Johnson and Freud, though two centuries apart, seem to agree that man's search for happiness creates anxiety and pain; that utopian dreams, both past and future, are absurd; and that civilization by necessity invokes such rigid demands that no man can find perfection on earth.

After looking at a few of the recurrent themes in the writings of Johnson and Freud, it seems obvious that there are many similarities in

<sup>68</sup> Johnson, Rambler No. 2, III, 9-13.

<sup>69</sup> Freud, "Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis," Standard Edition, XI, 17. "Not only do they remember painful experiences of the remote past, but they still cling to them emotionally; they cannot get free of the past and for its sake they neglect what is real and immediate. This fixation of mental life to pathogenic traumas is one of the most significant and practically important characteristics of neurosis."

<sup>70</sup> Reiff, xxi.

their thoughts. One of the themes on which they agree, even though expressed in different language, is their ultimate fear of death. Johnson was preoccupied with the inevitability of death:

A frequent and attentive prospect of that moment, which must put a period to all our schemes, and deprive us of all our acquisitions, is, indeed, of the utmost efficacy to the just and rational regulation of our lives; nor would ever any thing wicked, or often any thing absurd, be undertaken or prosecuted by him who should begin each day with a serious reflection, that he is born to die.<sup>71</sup>

Freud, too, sees life as an acceptance of the reality that man is born to die: "To tolerate life remains, after all the first duty of all living beings. . . . If you want to endure life, prepare yourself for death."<sup>72</sup> Freud's death instinct incorporates the idea that there is a tendency innate in living organic matter which impels it toward the reinstatement of an earlier condition, and this regressive tendency may be expressed by saying the goal of all life is death.<sup>73</sup> Both Johnson and Freud accepted the reality of death, but remained preoccupied with the fear of it all of their lives.

<sup>71</sup>Johnson, Rambler No. 17, Yale Edition, III, 92.

<sup>72</sup>Freud, Standard Edition, XIV, 299-300.

<sup>73</sup>Freud, Standard Edition, XVIII, 60-61.

### III. PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFENSE MECHANISMS

#### IN RASSELAS

The central theme of Rasselas, that of man's search for elusive happiness, leads to anxiety. The defense to reduce the anxiety then leads man to delude himself with fantasies, dreams, rationalization, repression, sublimation, and denial of reality. Johnson feels that in accepting reality, in becoming involved in the experience of life, and by working to avoid idleness—because in idleness one's imagination tends to dominate his reason—one may find a degree of happiness. Johnson's understanding of the unconscious defenses by which man deludes himself and escapes reality becomes evident in an analysis of Rasselas.

Johnson possessed a profound interest in both the normal and abnormal processes of the human mind. For Johnson, fancy, or imagination,<sup>74</sup> is the mind's obsessive tendency to limit itself to a particular earthly goal, and this tendency is associated with madness. Earthly expectation is the product of imagination, that part in man which is out of touch with reality, and

<sup>74</sup>Johnson, Dictionary, I, n. pag. Fancy is defined as "Imagination; the power to which the mind forms to itself images and representations of things, persons, or scenes of being; an opinion bred rather by the imagination than by the reason." Imagination is defined as "Fancy - the power of forming ideal pictures; the power of representing things absent to one's self or others."

that part of the mind which is incessantly craving to be filled with pleasurable objects.<sup>75</sup> As Johnson implies, life itself is universal madness:

Perhaps if we speak with rigorous exactness, no human mind is in its right state. There is no man whose imagination does not, sometimes, predominate over reason . . . No man will be found, in whose mind airy notions do not, sometimes tyrannize, and force him to hope or fear beyond the limits of probability. All of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity.<sup>76</sup>

For Johnson, excessive earthly hope is a case of imagination predominating over reason. This abnormal state of the human mind ultimately ends in madness. No man, he writes, is able to maintain a balance of reason over imagination at all times; consequently, man must submit to a degree of madness or abnormality under certain conditions. Johnson's idea of the normalcy of man, then, is quite similar to the position held by modern psychologists.<sup>77</sup>

Man's approach to life and his capacity to handle these moments of "insanity" lead him toward or away from "normalcy." The basic themes

<sup>75</sup>Sachs, p. 9.

<sup>76</sup>Johnson, Rasselas, pp. 468-69. All subsequent references to Rasselas in this paper will be shown by chapter and page number in the text.

<sup>77</sup>Freud, Standard Editions, XI, 50: "The neuroses have no psychical [sic] content that is peculiar to them and that might not equally be found in healthy people. Or, as Jung has expressed it, neurotics fall ill of the same complexes against which we healthy people struggle as well. Whether that struggle ends in health, in neurosis, or in a countervailing superiority of achievement, depends on quantitative considerations, on the relative strength of the conflicting forces."

of Rasselas, man's inability to face reality, his constant need for new and varied pleasures, and his never-ceasing compulsion to delude himself are analogous to the ways in which man in the "age of anxiety" approaches life and finds means by which he may reduce his anxiety. In modern psychology, these varied means of anxiety or tension reduction are called defense mechanisms. They operate on relatively unconscious levels and are not subject to conscious evaluation by the individual. When these mechanisms do become conscious to the individual, they lose their effectiveness as defenses to protect the ego.

In Rasselas, Johnson illustrates an example of a mechanism which modern psychologists call denial of reality, or retreat from reality, a defense mechanism defined as the substitution of imaginary satisfactions for those that involve facing facts. Rationalization and day dreams fall into this category.<sup>78</sup> Rasselas spends many hours denying to himself the reality of his solitude and idleness in the happy valley:

Thus passed twenty months of the life of Rasselas. He busied himself so intensely in visionary bustle, that he forgot his real solitude; and, amidst hourly preparations for the various incidents of human affairs, neglected to consider by what means he should mingle with mankind. (IV, 397).

<sup>78</sup> Definitions of psychological terms will be taken from Horace B. English and Ava Champney English, A Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychological and Psychoanalytical Terms (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958) and from J. C. Colman, Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life (Chicago: Scott, Foreman and Company, 1956). A glossary is attached.

Returning to reality, Rasselas chastises himself for the time which he has spent musing and dreaming instead of working toward the means of escape from the valley of happiness:

This, said he, is the fatal obstacle that hinders at once the enjoyment of pleasure, and the exercise of virtue. How long is it that my hopes and wishes have flown beyond this boundary of my life, which yet I never have attempted to surmount! (IV, 398).

Through the defense mechanisms of day-dreaming and rationalization and by the denial of unpleasant reality, Rasselas relieves himself of the stressful experience of searching for a reasonable means of escape.

In psychoanalytic terms, Fantasy is distinguished by the fact that, if it represents reality at all, it is whimsical or visionary, not primarily either constructive or reproductive; yet, it is not delusive or pathological. In Chapter IV, Johnson illustrates Rasselas's visionary representations, as well as the deceptive value of fantasy:

His [Rasselas] chief amusement was to picture to himself that world which he had never seen; to place himself in various conditions; to be entangled in imaginary difficulties, and to be engaged in wild adventures; but his benevolence always terminated his projects in the relief of distress, the detection of fraud, the defeat of oppression, and the diffusion of happiness (IV, 397).

Similar to the "denial of reality," fantasy allows the person to while away his time instead of involving himself in life:

One day, as he was sitting on a bank, he feigned to himself an orphan virgin robbed of her little portion by a treacherous lover, and crying after him for restitution and redress. So strongly was the image impressed upon his mind, that he started up in the maid's defence, and ran forward to seize the plunderer with all the eagerness of real pursuit . . . (IV, 397-8).



In reality, Rasselas has become antisocial in the happy valley, ignoring his old friends because he feels himself superior to them with his knowledge of and desire to reach the world outside of the happy valley. Though unconscious of the need for social intercourse, Rasselas spends many hours imagining (fantasy) himself in situations involving others.

Searching for a "choice of life" which will bring him happiness, Rasselas, in a delusional state, convinces himself that all men are happy:

For some time he thought choice needless, because all appeared to him equally happy. Wherever he went he met gayety and kindness, and heard the song of joy, or the laugh of carelessness. He began to believe that the world overflowed with universal plenty, and that nothing was withheld either from want or merit; that every hand showed liberality, and every heart melted with benevolence: 'and who then,' says he, 'will be suffered to be wretched?' (XVI, 422).

Imlac allows Rasselas to indulge in these delusions and is unwilling to crush the enthusiasm and hope of inexperience, but Rasselas becomes aware of his own delusional state in Chapter XX: "My condition has indeed the appearance of happiness, but appearances are delusive" (XX, 428). Rasselas continues to show insight into his unhappy state: "I live in the crowds of jollity, not so much to enjoy company as to shun myself, and am loud and merry to conceal my sadness" (XVI, 422). Freud has characterized humor and jocularitas as a defensive process as well as a liberating element. To Freud, humor is not resigned; it is rebellious. It takes its place as one of the great methods devised by the mind of man to evade

the compulsion to suffer.<sup>79</sup> Rasselas is obviously using humor and a feigned merriment to avoid facing reality and his unhappy state.

In preparing for his escape, Rasselas relies on Imlac, the man of knowledge, to guide him, hopefully, through the outside world. In the history of Imlac's previous knowledge of the outside world, Johnson acutely describes the conflict between child and parent. The parent desires goals for the child, which the child is not interested in pursuing, and, subsequently, guilt and frustration follow. This mechanism on the part of the parent is compensation. The parent tries to overcome a feeling of inadequacy of his own by compensating through the child—the child will succeed; therefore, vicariously, the parent will succeed. Imlac speaks of the father:

. . . he sent me to school; but when I had once found the delight of knowledge, and felt the pleasure of intelligence and the pride of invention, I began silently to despise riches, and determined to disappoint the purpose of my father, whose grossness of conception raised my pity. . . . At length my father resolved to initiate me in commerce. . . . This, young man, said he, is the stock with which you must negotiate [sic]. I began with less than the fifth part, and you see how diligence and parsimony have increased it. . . . If you squander it by negligence or caprice, you must wait for my death before you will be rich: if, in four years, you double your stock, we will thenceforward let subordination cease, and live

79

Sigmund Freud, Collected Papers, V (London: The Hogarth Press, Ltd., and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1950), 215-21.

together as friends and partners; for he shall always be equal with me, who is equally skilled in the art of growing rich (VIII , 405-406).

With keen insight into the parent-child relationships, Johnson describes the competitive conflict which often results. Freudian psychologists would find in these quoted passages from Rasselas adequate material for describing the basic oedipal conflict.

In Rasselas, Johnson describes the conflicts which exist between parents and children. He shows the jealousies between children for the attention of the parents and indicates the competition of the children for attention from the parent of the opposite sex:

In families, where there is or is not poverty, there is commonly discord: if a kingdom be, as Imlac tells, a great family, a family likewise is a little kingdom, torn with factions and exposed to revolutions. An unpractised observer expects the love of parents and children to be constant and equal; but this kindness seldom continues beyond the years of infancy: in a short time the children become rivals to their parents. Benefits are allayed by reproaches, and gratitude debased by envy. . . . Thus, parents and children, for the greatest part, live on to love less and less: and, if those whom nature has thus closely united are the torments of each other, where shall we look for tenderness and consolation? (XXVI, 436-7).

Although Johnson places no labels on these family conflicts, he seems to be aware of the oedipal and the electra complexes. He aptly describes the sibling rivalry between children and indicates the beginnings of repression as the child blots out of conscious awareness the knowledge of a part of his sexual aims. Freudian psychologists recognize that the oedipal complex may expand and become a family complex and the boy may take his

sister as his love object, replacing the mother, or the sister may take an older brother as a substitute for the father. It is significant within this context that Rasselas and his sister Nekayah together leave the valley and their family and proceed to explore the outside world. It is equally significant that Johnson allows Rasselas and Nekayah to debate the issue of marriage through four chapters. There is an obvious conflict between Rasselas and Nekayah. Rasselas feels that it would be dangerous to connect his interest with another in marriage, "lest I should be unhappy by my partner's fault," while Nekayah reflects that "marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures" (XXVI, 437). Rasselas and Nekayah continue their arguments over the advantages and disadvantages of marriage. In the twentieth-century the same arguments exist, those of early marriage as opposed to late marriage, and if there is a need for the institution of marriage:

We are employed in a search, of which both are equally to enjoy the success, or suffer by the miscarriage. It is therefore fit that we assist each other. You surely conclude too hastily from the infelicity of marriage against its institution; will not the misery of life prove equally that life cannot be the gift of heaven? The world must be peopled by marriage, or peopled without it (XXVIII, 441).

In their "choice of life" as to whether marriage might bring happiness, Rasselas and Nekayah reach no conclusion.

Throughout Rasselas, there are examples of frustration and conflict, and Johnson has aptly shown man's ability to protect himself from the anxiety which is aroused from these conflicts and confusion. Projection is

one of the means by which man may lessen his pain. It is the defense whereby a person attributes his own traits, attitudes, or subjective processes to others. It is also the process of perceiving objective stimuli in line with personal interests, desires, fears, or expectations:

"Pride," said Imlac, "is seldom delicate, it will please itself with very mean advantages; and envy feels not its own happiness, but when it may be compared with the misery of others. They were my enemies because they grieved to think me rich, and my oppressors because they delight to find me weak." "Proceed," said the Prince, "I doubt not of the facts which you relate, but imagine that you impute them to mistaken motives" (IX, 408).

Imlac's projection of his own personal attitudes and fears onto others enables him in a sense to thrust upon others blame for his failure to succeed in business ventures. He convinced himself that his companions were going to cheat him and then rejoice in the superiority of their own knowledge. The Prince, incisively and reasonably, conjectures that the knowledge which the companions had was the knowledge that Imlac wanted, and with great wisdom he advises Imlac that the facts which he relates are imputed to mistaken motives.

In the continuation of the history of his life, Imlac describes his retreat into what he pictures as a utopian situation, the happy valley. After his experiences of rejection, he is wrought with bitterness and cynicism: "Wearied at least with solicitation and repulses, I resolved to hide myself forever from the world, and depend no longer on the opinion or caprice of

others" (XII, 415). Displaying an attitude of "sour grapes,"<sup>80</sup> Imlac continues his analysis of the reactions of his fellow inhabitants in the happy valley:

The invitations, by which they allure others to a state which they feel to be wretched, proceed from the natural malignity of hopeless misery. They are weary of themselves and of each other, and expect to find relief in new companions. They envy the liberty which their folly has forfeited, and would gladly see all mankind imprisoned like themselves (XII, 416).

Imlac, using the defense mechanism of projection, accuses those who reject him of another mechanism labelled reaction formation. Imlac in his bitterness and rejection has reversed the motives of the crowd and has suggested that they are attempting to lure others into their supposedly happy situation when, in reality, their condition is wretched because they have denied themselves the freedom which others enjoy.

When an individual protects himself from dangerous desires by repressing them and by developing conscious attitudes which are the opposite, he prevents these desires from being carried out in overt behavior. This is a reaction formation. Crusaders against vice are often fighting their own repressed impulses as well as condemning the outcome of such impulses

<sup>80</sup> Coleman, p. 91. "In protecting ourselves from the disappointment of unattainable goals, we often resort to two additional types of rationalization—the so-called "sour grapes" and the "sweet lemon" mechanisms. The "sour grapes" mechanism is based upon the fable of the fox who, unable to reach clusters of luscious grapes, decided that they were sour and not worth having anyway. . . ."

in others. Self-appointed protectors of public morals who devote their lives to investigating vice are partially satisfying their repressed desires in the same directions. Reaction formation has an adjustive value in helping to maintain socially approved behavior and by avoiding unacceptable desires. As with all ego defense mechanisms, reaction formation can be self-deceptive and can result in rigid fears and in intolerance for the desires and needs of others.<sup>81</sup> Still embittered by rejection, Imlac becomes a "self-appointed protector of public morals" and is in actuality demonstrating the mechanism of reaction formation: "No man can say that he is wretched by my persuasion. I look with pity on the crowds who are annually soliciting admission to captivity, and wish that it were lawful for me to warn them of their danger" (XII, 416).

Throughout Johnson's writings, he emphasizes the devastating effects of man in solitude—man withdrawn from society. In Rasselas, Johnson illustrates the unrealistic reasoning of the hermit who has forsaken society because he cannot cope with the temptations of "dangerous" desires, much as Imlac has removed himself from society because of the bitterness of rejection. The hermit in Chapter XXI is an accurate example of emotional insulation, and once again Johnson shows astute insight into human behavior

<sup>81</sup> Coleman, p. 93.

when he writes the following advice:

To him that lives well, answered the hermit, every form of life is good; nor can I give any other rule for choice, than to remove from all apparent evil. . . . I was resolved to close my life in peace, having found the world full of snares, discord and misery (XXI, 429).

The hermit's "choice of life" removes him from the temptation of evil and the realization of pain, but he remains discontent:

My fancy riots in scenes of folly, and I lament that I have lost so much, and have gained so little. In solitude, if I escape the example of bad men, I want likewise the counsel and conversation of the good. I have been long comparing the evils with the advantages of society, and resolved to return into the world tomorrow (XXI, 430).

Johnson describes the man who supposed he could remove himself from the emotions and cares of the world, but, as the hermit discovers, without the diversions offered by society it all grows "tasteless and irksome." Isolation is a defensive misuse of the normal ego processes, and the pathological use of isolation involves repression of emotional components of perceptions, thoughts, or actions so that they seem colorless and cannot arouse a person's anxiety.<sup>82</sup>

Johnson, always concerned with man's self-awareness, illustrated the importance of identification processes. Identification is an important mechanism by which man may integrate himself into society and accept the

<sup>82</sup> Norman Cameron, Personality Development and Psychopathology: A Dynamic Approach (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1963), pp. 241-242.



opinions of others. Identification is a process by which one accepts as his own the purposes and values of another person, or group, merging or submerging his own purposes or values with another. As an illustration of identification and empathy, Imlac says, "Every man may, by examining his own mind, guess what passes in the minds of others" (XVI, 422).

Johnson shows clear insight into the devastating effects of generalized fear. Fear is the most innate of all emotions. It is the modern consensus that fear is the only emotion with which a child is born; all others are learned through experience and environmental conditions. In its extreme and irrational state, fear becomes phobic. Phobias can act as defenses by protecting the individual from situations in which his dangerous impulses might be carried into action. In Chapter II, Rasselas, contemplating the differences between himself and the goats, reacts to his imagined unhappy situation:

I have many distresses from which ye are free; I fear pain when I do not feel it; I sometimes shrink at evils recollected, and sometimes start at evils anticipated: surely the equity of providence has balanced peculiar sufferings with peculiar enjoyments (II, 395).

Rasselas fears his own desires to escape the valley; he feels "pained with want." He does not understand his desire for change and his need to escape, and this lack of understanding leads to a generalized anxiety and fear of life. In a phobic reaction to conflict and fears, Rasselas withdraws from the social activities of the palace.

Pekuah also demonstrates a phobic reaction through her irrational fear of the narrow, cavity entrance to the pyramid:

Pekuah, said the princess, of what art thou afraid? Of the narrow entrance, answered the lady, and of the dreadful gloom. I dare not enter a place which must surely be inhabited by unquiet souls. The original possessors of these dreadful values will start up before us, and, perhaps, shut us in for ever (XXXI, 447).

Pekuah protects herself from what she feels is a dangerous situation and avoids possible confrontation with her irrational impulses by refusing to accompany the others through the pyramid.

Even though Johnson insists that reason predominate over passion, throughout Rasselas he illustrates the impossibility of man trying to live by reason alone. He concludes that it cannot be done and as suggested by Imlac, ". . . the teachers of morality: they discourse like angels, but they live like men" (XVIII, 426). To live without passion is to live the life of a stoic. Johnson feels that stoicism is inconsistent with human behavior. Stoicism is a product of the imagination that leads man to behave and think as if he were something more than a mere mortal. Johnson's distrust of stoicism once again leads to the theme in Rasselas that man should not entertain the earthly hope of perfection. Johnson is offended by stoicism, for it represents to him a declaration of absolute self-sufficiency.<sup>83</sup> The stoic in Chapter XVIII of Rasselas has lost faith

<sup>83</sup>Sachs, p. 30.

in his own philosophy and is experiencing what is currently referred to as a form of separation anxiety. Rasselas tries to comfort the bereaved man with the wisdom he has recently learned from him: ". . . mortality is an event by which a wise man can never be surprised . . . ," but the poor stoic rebuffs him with the accusation that he speaks "like one who never felt the pangs of separation" (XVIII, 426). Rasselas learns from this encounter that reality and appearances are not the same, and that all the stoic's talk of truth and reason are of no consequence when he is faced with the reality that his daughter cannot be restored to him. Rasselas goes away disillusioned and ". . . convinced of the emptiness of rhetorical sound, and the inefficacy of polished periods and studied sentences" (XVIII, 426).

Johnson aptly describes man in conflict and illustrates situations of conflicts for which there are labels, such as, approach-avoidance conflicts, double-approach conflicts, and double-avoidance conflicts. These conflicts are important sources of stress and lead to inner tension. Conflict is a major part of Rasselas. In fact, the theme "a choice of life," may be seen as an approach-avoidance conflict:

To judge rightly of the present, we must oppose it to the past; for all judgment is comparative, and of the future nothing can be known. The truth is, that no mind is much employed upon the present: recollection and anticipation fill up almost all our moments. Our passions are joy and grief, love and hatred, hope and fear. Of joy and grief the past is the object, and the future of hope and fear; even love and hatred respect the past, for the cause must have been before the effect (XXX, 445).

Here man disregards the pleasures of the present and dwells on memories of the past or looks hopefully to the future. For Johnson, this is absurdity. Man brings on his own conflicts by opposing the past with the future. Also, Johnson has described the ambivalence present in the emotions of most men: joy and grief, love and hate, hope and fear. The more ambivalence man creates for himself, the more stressful the situation becomes. Social and cultural environmental stress is evident when Imlac tells us, "Very few live by choice. Every man is placed in his present condition by causes which act without his foresight, and with which he did not always willingly cooperate; and therefore you will rarely meet one who does not think the lot of his neighbour better than his own" (XVI, 423). Imlac has discovered that man is always envious of his neighbor's condition and his neighbor's "choice of life." For Johnson, it is significant that while man is searching for his "choice of life," he neglects to live (XXX, 445).

Through the episode of the kidnapping of Pekuah, Johnson demonstrates his awareness that abnormal grief and depression usually have their basis in guilt. Nekayah blames herself for the kidnapping of Pekuah. She reproaches herself with the easy compliance by which she permitted Pekuah to stay behind (XXXIV, 451). Imlac tries to comfort Nekayah, "How comfortless is the sorrow of him who feels at once the pangs of guilt, and the vexation of calamity which guilt has brought upon him?" (XXXIV, 452). He tries to explain to her that she had no control over the situation and

should therefore feel no guilt. But, in hopeless dejection, Nekayah sees no remedy for her guilt feelings and begins to contemplate death:

My search after happiness is now at an end. I am resolved to retire from the world with all its flatteries and deceits, and will hide myself in solitude, without any other care than to compose my thoughts, and regulate my hours by a constant succession of innocent occupations, till, with a mind purified from all earthly desires, I shall enter in that state, to which all are hastening, and in which I hope again to enjoy the friendship of Pekuah (XXXV, 453).

On the part of Nekayah, this is a form of self-punishment and martyrdom, but soon with the passage of time she returns to common cares and common pleasures: "She rejoiced without her own consent at the suspension of her sorrows, and sometimes caught herself with indignation in the act of turning away her mind from the remembrance of her, whom yet she resolved never to forget" (XXXVI, 455). Johnson demonstrates the psychic value of forgetfulness or repression. Repression is a defensive reaction by means of which painful or dangerous thoughts and desires are excluded from consciousness without the individual's awareness. It has been referred to as selective forgetting, but is more in the nature of selective remembering. Although the material is denied admission to consciousness, it is not really forgotten. Johnson has built an elaborate system for the "art of forgetfulness," and Ariele Sachs writes that "In the seventy-second Idler Johnson elaborates the idea that 'it would add much to human happiness, if an art could be taught of forgetting all of which the remembrance is at once useless and afflictive,' but, . . . the art of forgetfulness is the true

art of memory in a more basic sense," and, further, that ". . . imaginative memory, the mind's leap from the present moment into the seemingly satisfying past may occur throughout life whenever we are 'offended by the bitterness of truth'."<sup>84</sup> In an analysis of Johnson's concept and use of the word "repress," Kathleen Grange discovered that he was one of the first writers to use the word in a psychological context:

Prior to the eighteenth century, the verb 'repress' had been used almost exclusively to connote the physical suppression of lawless persons. It is significant that Johnson was among the first writers to "repress" in the psychological manner new to his century. It is additionally significant, as a witness to the penetrating insight of a literary man, that he also described repression as both a useful and a dangerous mental mechanism.<sup>85</sup>

The concept of repression is central in all depth psychology, and the term carries many implications; it is a defense mechanism against anxiety and guilt and a form of censorship performed by the unconscious.

Referring to the kidnapping episode, Sheldon Sacks asserts that Johnson has created a structurally perfect analogue. Johnson planned the events and the responses of all characters to indicate precise human behavior and to exemplify the controlling theme. Any preparation or suspense would have made meaningless the impact of the guilt and grief

<sup>84</sup> Sachs, p. 50.

<sup>85</sup> Grange, "Certain Psychoanalytic Concepts," p. 93.

felt by Nekayah.<sup>86</sup> As stated earlier, this is not to indicate that Sacks suggests a scientific method on the part of Johnson, even though he does suggest that Johnson planned the probability of events to elicit the exact response, which would indicate that Johnson did have foreknowledge of human response to certain stimuli and could predict the behavior of humans under certain conditions.

Whether consciously aware of the defensive mechanisms he was describing or merely describing behavior as he observed it, Johnson recognized man's need to protect himself against the stress of common environmental conflict. Although all human beings use defense mechanisms to some degree, in the face of frustration and conflict which the individual feels inadequate to cope with, he uses such defensive measures as rationalization, projection, emotional insulation, fantasy, and denial, to an extreme degree. These mechanisms, necessary as they are, have certain drawbacks. They involve a high degree of self-deception and reality distortion and usually are not adaptive in the sense of realistically coping with the adjustment problem.<sup>87</sup> Faulty responses and reactions to frustration and conflict sometimes lead to psychotic reactions. Johnson's awareness of the disintegrated personality and the

<sup>86</sup>Sacks, pp. 56-57.

<sup>87</sup>Coleman, p. 276.

recurring obsessive-compulsive patterns of behavior shown by the individual's faulty response to frustration, fear, and conflict will be illustrated in Chapter IV.



#### IV. PSYCHOPATHOLOGY IN RASSELAS

The symptoms and ritualistic patterns of behavior evident in the disintegrated personality are described in Rasselas. Johnson illustrates reactions of schizophrenia, paranoia, mania, manic-depressive, old-age psychosis, as well as infantile sexuality. He was probably not consciously aware of the contributing factors leading to these personality disorders, nor had he intended to write a book on mental disorders, but the detailed manner in which he described the actions of the characters does indicate his keen ability to observe and to evaluate the motives behind behavioral disorders.

The basic conflicts in Rasselas, the obsession with discovering "the choice of life" which would offer maximum happiness and the constructive and destructive impulses displayed by the characters in search of this happiness, are analogous to the "death instincts" and the "Eros." One set of instincts is that which leads the organism to death and manifests itself in destructive or aggressive impulses identified as the death instinct. The other set of instincts is that sexual or life instinct under the label of Eros; its purpose is to form living substance into greater unities and has the function of sustaining and enhancing life processes. Death would mean for the individual

the victory of the destructive instincts, but reproduction would mean the victory of Eros. Both classes of instincts have been in operation and working against each other from first origin of life.<sup>88</sup>

Repression, as already mentioned, is a means by which the individual may inhibit and control his conflicting impulses. Repression consists in preventing the ideational presentation of an instinct from becoming conscious. The function of repression is to exclude painful and unpleasant material from consciousness and from expression; it arises from a conflict of opposing wishes and desires.<sup>89</sup> By and large, its purpose is the avoidance of pain. Johnson's formulation of repression regarding death is that in man's desire to delay his approaching end, he excludes the unwelcome thoughts from his mind.<sup>90</sup> He understands that some degree of repression is healthy:

All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity; but while this power is such as can control and repress, it is not visible to others nor considered as any deprivation of the mental faculties (XLIV, 469).

Johnson recognized that repression as a necessary and normal defense process was a valuable check on delusions as well as on painful and

<sup>88</sup> Freud, Collected Papers, V, 135.

<sup>89</sup> Freud, Collected Papers, IV, 86.

<sup>90</sup> Johnson, Idler No. 103, Yale Edition, II, 315.

obsessive memories.<sup>91</sup> His extraordinary conception of the advantages and disadvantages of repression is significant since the theory of repression is the foundation on which the whole structure of psychoanalysis is based. Repression underlies and is basic to neurotic and psychotic behaviors. Johnson's understanding of this concept alone makes his writings a valuable contribution to modern psychiatry.

Similarly, Johnson understood and aptly illustrated the obsessive-compulsive tendencies of neurotic and psychotic behavior. Ritualistic, repetitive actions are evident in the reactions of many psychotics. Johnson writes frequently of the obsessive quality of the mind to limit itself to a particular train of thought or attention. This obsessive-compulsive tendency is a function of "fancy" or "imagination" for Johnson and

All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity; but while this power is such as we can control and repress, it is not visible to others, and considered as any depravation of the mental faculties: it is not pronounced madness but when it becomes ungovernable, and apparently influences speech and action (XLIV, 469).

Johnson's further comprehension of the obsessive-compulsive tendency related to psychosis, or "madness," is indicated in his description of schizophrenic illness.

91

Grange, "Certain Psychoanalytical Concepts," p. 91. See also: Grange, "Schizophrenic Illness," p. 163. "Most interesting of Johnson's words is his use of the word 'repress' to describe a mental process. In his day neither the concept of repression nor the usage of the word in a psychological context were common."

Johnson's case-history of a schizophrenic illness, that of the astronomer (Chapters XL-XLVII), has been analyzed adequately by

Kathleen Grange:

. . . it would be hard to discover a physician before Johnson who described with such detail and accuracy the whole course of a schizophrenic illness from start to finish. The onset of schizophrenic tendencies were correctly diagnosed not only by Imlac but also by the astronomer, Rasselas, and the two women, in an interesting retrospective self-analysis. In addition, there is a complete account of the causes, contributing factors, the symptoms characteristic of the slow growth, peak and decline, and the gradual cure. There is no doubt that Johnson, though not a physician, was basing his portrait on a schizophrenic whom he had actually observed.<sup>92</sup>

There is, however, an aspect to the astronomer's personality which has not been touched on. That aspect is his complete absence of love or communication with women:

. . . the philosopher had never received any visits from women, though he lived in a city that had in it many Europeans who followed the manners of their own countries, and many from other parts of the world that lived there with European liberty (XLVI, 473).

Nekayah and Pekuah, curious and in awe of the astronomer's strange behavior, were determined to meet him and to discuss his unusual powers. They proposed several schemes by which to introduce themselves to him, but Rasselas strongly objected to any misrepresentation:

All imposture weakens confidence and chills benevolence. When the sage finds that you are not what you seemed, he will feel the

resentment natural to a man who, conscious of great abilities, discovers that he has been tricked by understandings meaner than his own, and, perhaps, the distrust, which he can never afterwards wholly lay aside, may stop the voice of counsel, and close the hand of charity; and where will you find the power of restoring his benefactions to mankind, or his peace to himself! (XLVI, 473).

Pekuah soon discovered a legitimate reason for visiting the astronomer and solicited permission to continue her studies with him. In Freud's biography of Leonardo Da Vinci, he explains how Da Vinci neither loved nor hated, and how man may convert his passion into thirst for knowledge:

A conversion of psychical [sic] instinctual force into various forms of activity can perhaps no more be achieved without loss than a conversion of physical forces. . . . The postponement of loving until full knowledge is acquired ends in a substitution of the latter for the former. A man who has won his way to a state of knowledge cannot properly be said to love and hate; he remains beyond love and hatred. He has investigated instead of loving. . . .<sup>93</sup>

After spending many pleasant hours with Nekayah and Pekuah, Johnson's astronomer recognizes this conversion in himself:

. . . I am not able to instruct you. I can only tell that I have chosen wrong. I have passed my time in study without experience; in the attainment of sciences which can, for the most part, be but remotely useful to mankind. I have purchased knowledge at the expense of all the common comforts of life; I have missed the endearing elegance of female friendship, and the happy commerce of domestick tenderness . . . I am always tempted to think that my enquiries have ended in error, and that I have suffered much, and suffered it in vain (XLVI, 475).

Through the astronomer, Johnson has illustrated his general condemnation of solitude and the dangers of man in solitude. Johnson felt that in soli-

<sup>93</sup>Freud, Standard Edition, XI, 75.

tude man becomes a dreamer and allows his imagination to overtake his reason; thus, for Johnson, solitude and idleness threaten sanity.

When Imlac, Rasselas, and the girls, still searching for a choice of life, weigh the pleasures with the discontents of monastic life, they acknowledge another example of schizophrenic behavior. Imlac describes the monks of St. Anthony in a way that equates with the behavior often seen in simple schizophrenic reactions:

. . . every one is not able to stem the temptations of public life; and, if he cannot conquer, he may properly retreat. Some have little power to do good, and have likewise little strength to resist evil. Many are weary of their conflicts with adversity, and are willing to eject those passions which have long busied them in vain. . . . In monasteries the weak and timorous may be happily sheltered, the weary may repose, and the penitent may meditate. . . . (XLVII, 478).

The simple schizophrenic withdraws from the struggle to gain social status and esteem, then becomes disinterested and emotionally apathetic.<sup>94</sup> Imlac also described the rigid and rather systematic life of the monks, which again is analogous to the highly structured environment in which a schizophrenic personality feels more secure:

Their time is regularly distributed; one duty succeeds another, so that they are not left open to the distraction of unguided choice, nor lost in the shades of listless inactivity. There is a certain task to be performed at an appropriated hour; . . . (XLVII, 477).

The conversations between Rasselas, Nekayah, and Imlac indicate Johnson's

<sup>94</sup>  
Coleman, p. 285.

clear understanding of the needs and motivation behind monastic life. Psychologists have indicated the pathological needs of some persons to cloister themselves from social intercourse and reality. In a series of lectures on psychoanalysis, Freud, in discussing rebellion against the real world, came to the conclusion that "to-day neurosis takes the place of the monasteries which used to be the refuge of all whom life had disappointed or who felt too weak to face it."<sup>95</sup> Nekayah, suffering from guilt over the loss of Pekuah, had contemplated cloistering herself in a convent meditating upon her guilt and hiding herself in solitude, "without any other care than to compose my thoughts, and regulate my hours by a constant succession of innocent occupations, till, with a mind purified from all earthly desires . . ."(XXXV, 453), indicating Johnson's recognition that religion may be used as a means of escape from reality. An idea prevalent in the eighteenth century is that man's duty to himself and God is to become involved in life.<sup>96</sup> Johnson illustrates this idea in Rasselas: ". . . do not suffer life to stagnate; it will grow muddy for want of motion: commit yourself again to the current of the world. . . ." (XXXV, 454). To remove oneself from society to meditate on the goodness of

<sup>95</sup>Freud, Standard Edition, XI, 20.

<sup>96</sup>John Stoughton, Religion in England under Queen Anne and the Georges, 2 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1878), pp. 379-80. "The soul that has truly experienced the love of God will not stay meanly inquiring how much he shall do, and thus limit his service, but will be

God', would be to discredit him by living a life of idleness and morbidity.

In Chapter XLIV, "The dangerous prevalence of imagination," Imlac answers Rasselas's inquiry on the maladies of the mind. His speech contains a description of manic behavior, exhibiting "flight of ideas": "The mind dances from scene to scene, unites all pleasures in all combinations, and riots in delight which nature and fortune, with all their bounty cannot bestow" (p. 469). A combination of flight of ideas, self-gratification, and the obsessive-compulsive reaction which underlies most psychotic behavior and are the particular symptoms of mania, are expressed by Imlac:

In time some particular train of ideas fixes the attention, all other intellectual gratifications are rejected, the mind, in weariness or leisure, recurs constantly to the favourite conception, and feasts on the luscious falsehood whenever she is offended by the bitterness of truth. By degrees the reign of fancy is confirmed; she grows first imperious, and in time despotick. Then fictions begin to operate as realities, false opinions fasten upon the mind, and life passes in dreams of rapture or of anguish (XLIV, 469).

Imlac describes manic behavior—repressing the painful thoughts and escaping into ritualistic patterns to avoid facing reality. In manic reactions, the individual exhibits varying degrees of elation and psychomotor overactivity. He becomes increasingly boastful, dictatorial, and overbearing.

earnestly seeking more and more to know the will of the heavenly Father, that he may be enabled to do it." Also in Rasselas, Imlac remarks that the question of the monastic life has long divided the wise and perplexed the good: "I am afraid to decide on either part. He that lives well in the world is better than he that lives well in a monastery" (XLVII, 478).



Irritability is apparent, and the individual's mood may change rapidly from gaily to anger.<sup>97</sup>

Also evident in the chapter on "dangerous imagination" is Rasselas's insight into his own immaturity:

I will confess, said the prince, an indulgence of fantastic delight more dangerous than yours. I have frequently endeavoured to image the possibility of a perfect government, by which all wrong should be restrained, all vice reformed, and all the subjects preserved in tranquility and innocence. . . . This has been the sport and sometimes the labour of my solitude; and I start, when I think with how little anguish I once supposed the death of my father and my brothers (XLIV, 470).

There is a stage of immaturity which psychologists label "magic stage," or omnipotence of thought, which is a period during child development when merely imagining an object seems equivalent to having created it. Rasselas's immaturity and "magic stage" were evidenced by his desire for a utopian state where there might be magical solutions to all conflicts and, as stated in Chapter II, where he would be the leader. As already indicated, the ambivalence the child feels toward father-figures and siblings activates his hostile and destructive impulses.<sup>98</sup> Rasselas's

<sup>97</sup>Coleman, p. 302.

<sup>98</sup>Freud, Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex (New York: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Co., 1920), p. 23. Also see Freud, New Introductory Lectures (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1933), p. 137. The boy's ambivalence for the father or the father-figure manifests both tender and hostile, aggressive tendencies, which later exist permanently in his unconscious.

recognition of his "dangerous desires" indicates that he has successfully passed through this stage and has developed a conscience which will control the impulses should they recur.<sup>99</sup> Even though Johnson was not aware of theories of psychosexual development, he displays knowledge of the development of a superego and conscience.<sup>100</sup>

The flying episode in Rasselas is again indicative of Johnson's understanding of obsessive-compulsive behavior. The artist-inventor of Chapter VI, totally involved with the desire to fly "would see the earth, and all its inhabitants rolling beneath him . . . how must it amuse the pendent spectator to see the moving scene of land and ocean, cities and deserts! (VI, 401-02). The inventor concentrated all activities in the period of one year upon the development of wings for himself and Rasselas.

<sup>99</sup> Melanie Klein, "The Early Development of Conscience in the Child," Heirs to Freud, Essays in Freudian Psychology, ed. Hendrick M. Ruitenbeek (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1966), p. 264. According to Klein's theory, when the excessive severity of the superego has become somewhat lessened, its visitations upon the ego, because of imaginary attacks, induce feelings of guilt which arouse strong tendencies in the child to make good the imaginary damage it has done to its objects. As the child begins to show stronger constructive tendencies in its play and in its sublimations, building behavior rather than destructive behavior appears. It also exhibits changes in its relation to its father or mother, or to its brothers and sisters, and these changes make the beginning of an improved object relationship in general, and a growth of social feeling.

<sup>100</sup> Grange, "Certain Psychoanalytic Concepts," p. 93. "Although not based on any wide clinical experience, his [Johnson] accounts of repression, frustration, and of a psychic structure which included a superego and an unconscious were quite remarkable."

Even though Johnson was not aware of the dynamics behind the desire to fly, he nevertheless shares the modern idea that dreams of flying are repressed infantile sexual wish-fulfillments.<sup>101</sup> As far as the central theme of Rasselas is concerned, the dissertation on flying seems to be irrelevant. There is no way of knowing if Johnson recognized infantile sexuality in the unconscious processes of man, but at least he was unconsciously aware of these strivings in man. He had obviously recognized the ambivalence of feelings directed toward the father-figure and the conflicts of subordination on the part of the child; therefore it seems possible that Johnson did recognize the feeling of sexual, as well as authoritarian, inadequacy that the child feels when faced with the inevitable reality that adults may do things which are denied him. "I am afraid," said Rasselas to the inventor, "that your imagination prevails over your skill, and that you now tell me rather what you wish than what you know" (VI, 401).

The description of the flight as told by the inventor is wrought with sexual symbolism familiar to Freudian psychologists:

The labour of rising from the ground, said the artist, will be great, as we see in the heavier domestick fowls, but, as we mount higher, the earth's attraction, and the body's gravity, will be gradually diminished, till we shall arrive at a region where the man will float in the air without any tendency to fall: no care will then be necessary, but to move forwards, which the gentlest impulse will effect (VI, 401).

<sup>101</sup> Freud, Standard Edition, XI, 125-26.

Rasselas replies to the description of the desirable flight:

All this, said the prince, is much to be desired, but I am afraid that no man will be able to breathe in these regions of speculation and tranquility. I have been told, that respiration is difficult upon lofty mountains, yet from these precipices, though so high as to produce great tenuity of the air, it is very easy to fall: therefore I suspect, that from any height, where life can be supported, there may be danger of too quick descent (VI, 402).

Freud's formulation that the latent dream content of dreams of flying is usually a sexual one has received confirmation by other analysts. <sup>102</sup>

Paul Federn has presented the interpretation of Mourly Vold which supports Freud's ideas:

. . . if (a) tactile sensibility is inoperative, (b) a light and pleasant breath is exhaled, and, at times, (c) muscular contractions are present, then a slight sexual vibration of the muscles of the torso—or perhaps of the whole body—releases sentimental sensations of motion and ideas which . . . assume the form of dreams of floating. . . . the force acting from the torso itself is clearly of a sexual nature. <sup>103</sup>

<sup>102</sup>Freud, Standard Edition, V, 392-94. Dreams of flying, floating in air, falling, or swimming are usually sexual in content. See Freud, Standard Edition, XI, 125-26. To fly or to be a bird is only a disguise for another wish. Inquisitive children are told that they are brought by a large bird, such as a stork; the ancients represented the phallus as having wings; the commonest expression in German for male sexual activity is 'vogeln' ['to bird']; the male organ is actually called 'l'uccelo' [the bird]—"all of these are only small fragments from a whole mass of connected ideas from which we learn that the dream of the wish to be able to fly is to be understood as nothing else than a longing to be capable of sexual performance. See Paul Federn, "On Dreams of Flying," Heirs to Freud, Essays in Freudian Psychology, ed. Hendrick M. Ruitenbeek (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1966), pp. 121-27.

<sup>103</sup>Federn, p. 124, quoting von Mourly Vold, "Über den Traum," Experimental psychologische Untersuchungen (Leipzig, 1912).

Federn adds to this interpretation the idea that "a great many dreams of flying are dreams of erection, since the remarkable phenomenon of erection, which constantly occupies the human fantasy, cannot fail to be impressive as an apparent suspension of the laws of gravity (cf. the winged phalli of the ancients)."<sup>104</sup>

The basic significance of dreams of flying is sexual, but there appear also to be non-sexual motives in the desire to fly, although still closely related to the sexual motives. One cannot fundamentally separate exhibitionism, vanity, and ambition. One can find as the dream source, the wish to surpass, a wish to disregard certain persons, the wish to deprecate them. The significance of the wish to travel, is on the one hand, closely related to the sexual significance of traveling, especially to the erotic wanderlust of adolescence, and, on the other, to death wishes, as stated by Freud. These dream sources combine to constitute a multiple determinant of the dream of flying.<sup>105</sup> Johnson was obviously aware of the implications of man's desire to fly, to soar above the earth, and to survey humankind:

You, Sir, whose curiosity is so extensive, will easily conceive with what pleasure a philosopher, furnished with wings, and hovering in the sky, would see the earth, and all its inhabitants,

<sup>104</sup> Federn, p. 125.

<sup>105</sup> Freud, Standard Editions, V, 385-88, 392-94.

rolling beneath him and presenting to him successively, by its diurnal motion, all the countries within the same parallel. How must it amuse the pendent spectator to see the moving scene of land and ocean, cities, and deserts! To survey with equal security the marts of trade, and the fields of battle; mountains infested by barbarians, and fruitful regions gladdened by plenty, and lulled by peace; How easily shall we then trace the Nile through all his passage; pass over to distant regions, and examine the face of nature from one extremity of the earth to the other! (VI, 402).

Here, one may see the desire for power and for omniscient knowledge attributed to dreams of flying, as well as delusions of grandeur which are, at times, indicative of paranoia.<sup>106</sup> Other indications of paranoia evident in the inventor-artist are his desire for secrecy and his distrust of others:

. . . Upon this model I shall begin my task tomorrow and in a year expect to tower into the air beyond the malice of pursuit [sic] of man. But I will work only on this condition, that the art shall not be divulged, and that you shall not require me to make wings for any but ourselves. . . . If men were all virtuous. . . . I should with great alacrity teach them all to fly. But what would be the security of the good, if the bad could at pleasure invade them from the sky . . . a flight of northern savages might hover in the wind, and light at once with irresistible violence upon the capital of a fruitful region. . . . Even this valley, the retreat of princes, the abode of happiness, might be violated by the sudden descent of some of the naked nations that swarm on the coast of the southern sea (VI, 402).

The delusional system of the paranoiac generally centers around one major theme, such as an invention. The individual is suspicious, and usually

<sup>106</sup>

Cameron, p. 497. "Complex secondary process thinking appears in the grandiose delusions of paranoid 'inventors,' 'scientists' and 'mathematicians.' . . . some are conceived on a huge scale, involving schemes for saving or destroying the world, and for manipulating planetary systems."

feels that others are jealous of his ability and efficiency. The paranoiac may appear perfectly normal in terms of conversation, emotionality, and conduct, but in the area of the delusion, it is difficult for him to distinguish between fact and suspicion.<sup>107</sup> Johnson has aptly described a paranoid reaction in the behavior of the inventor of a flying device.

The hopes of the youth and the depression of the aged are recurring themes in Johnson's writings. In Rambler No. 196, he writes of the expectations of youth:

With hopes like these, he sallies jocund into life; to little purpose is he told, that the condition of humanity admits no pure and unmingled happiness; that the exuberant gaiety of youth ends in poverty or disease . . . "such is the condition of life, that something is always wanting in happiness. In youth we have warm hopes, which are soon blasted by rashness and negligence, and great designs which are defeated by inexperience. In age we have knowledge and prudence without spirit to exert, or motives to prompt them; we are able to plan schemes and regulate measures, but have not time remaining to bring them to completion.<sup>108</sup>

Johnson recognized the extreme melancholia and old-age psychoses which accompany the physical changes typical of old people. Along with the physical changes come mental changes, a senility which can take various forms. Anxiety states, obsessive-compulsive reactions, and hypochondriacal reactions are the most prevalent psychoneurotic patterns among older people. Also typical of old-age psychoses are depression and the conflict

<sup>107</sup> Coleman, pp. 289-91.

<sup>108</sup> Johnson, Rambler No. 196, Yale Edition, V, 260.

between the fear of dependence and the fear of isolation.<sup>109</sup> Rasselas, Imlac, and the girls, while walking along the Nile, meet an old man. Rasselas, in momentary dejection, decides to inquire of the old man "whether youth alone is to struggle with vexation, and whether any better hope remains for the latter part of life" (XLV, 470). In a depressed state, the old sage indicates that the world has lost its novelty:

I look around, and see what I remember to have seen in happier days. I rest against a tree, and consider, that in the same shade I once disputed upon the annual overflow of the Nile with a friend who is now silent in the grave. I cast my eyes upwards, fix them on the changing moon, and think with pain on the vicissitudes of life. I have ceased to take much delight in physical truth; for what have I to do with those things which I am soon to leave? (XLV, 471).

He admits that life has lost its meaning and that he has neither mother, nor friend, nor wife with whom to enjoy the pleasures of life. He has outlived his friends and rivals:

Nothing is now of much importance; for I cannot extend my interest beyond myself. . . . who am now declining to decrepitude. . . . Riches would now be useless, and high employment would be pain. My retrospect of life recalls to my view many opportunities of good neglected, much time squandered upon trifles, and more lost in idleness and vacancy (XLV, 471).

Rasselas and the girls discuss the old man's attitude and become disillusioned with the hope of long life. The princess suspected that age was "querulous and malignant," but Pekuah was willing to impute the old man's

<sup>109</sup>  
Coleman, p. 479.



complaints to "delirious dejection." It is interesting to note that discussions of senility and of old-age psychoses indicate the feelings of rejections in old people, their querulous nature, and there is even a type of paranoid reaction in old people referred to as the "delirious and confused" type.<sup>110</sup> Again, Johnson's understanding of the mental changes that take place in the aging process and his description of the attitude of the old man are astoundingly accurate when they are compared to descriptions of present-day melancholia and old-age disorders.

Disillusioned by the dejection of the old man and with their own indecision for a "choice of life," the young people realize that there is no pure happiness and that one's own condition is the human condition. But Johnson does not leave man entirely without hope. Throughout Rasselas, he suggests ways to improve one's condition of life, and he offers considerable advice for rehabilitation and improvement of mental attitudes. This therapeutic advice will be discussed in Chapter V.

<sup>110</sup> Coleman, p. 479.

## V. CONCLUSION

Johnson's benevolent attitude toward the mentally ill is well in advance of his contemporaries. At the beginning of Rasselas, Johnson protests against those who delude themselves with hopes and dreams:

Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and persue [sic] with eagerness the phantoms of hopes; who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow; attend to the history of Rasselas prince of Abissinia (I, 391).

From this invitation, Johnson proceeds to describe the delusional behavior of man, interjecting at points his understanding and empathy for weaknesses they possess. Imlac's speech on "the dangerous prevalence of imagination" marked an important advance in the eighteenth-century understanding of insanity and is a plea for a more humanitarian attitude toward mental illness:<sup>111</sup>

Disorders of intellect, answered Imlac, happen much more often than superficial observers will easily believe. Perhaps if we speak with rigorous exactness, no human mind is in its right state. There is no man whose imagination does not sometimes predominate over his reason, who can regulate his attention wholly by his will, and whose ideas will come and go at his command. No man will be found in whose mind airy notions do not sometimes tyrannize, and force him to hope or fear beyond the limits of sober

<sup>111</sup> Grange, "Schizophrenic Illness," pp. 163-64.

probability. All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity; but while this power is such as we can controul and repress, it is not visible to others, nor considered as any depravation of the mental faculties; it is not pronounced madness but when it becomes ungovernable, and apparently influences speech or action.

To indulge the power of fiction, and send imagination out upon the wing, is often the sport of those who delight too much in silent speculation. When we are alone we are not always busy; the labour of excogitation is too violent to last long; the ardour of inquiry will sometimes give way to idleness or satiety. He who has nothing external that can divert him, must find pleasure in his own thoughts, and must conceive himself what he is not; for who is pleased with what he is? He then expatiates in boundless futurity, and culls from all imaginable conditions that which for the present moment he should most desire, amuses his desires with impossible enjoyments, and confers upon his pride unattainable dominion. The mind dances from scene to scene, unites all pleasures in all combinations, and riots in delights, which nature and fortune, with all their bounty, cannot bestow.

In time; some particular train of ideas fixes the attention, all other intellectual gratifications are rejected, the mind, in weariness or leisure, recurs constantly to the favourite conception, and feasts on the luscious falsehood, whenever she is offended with the bitterness of truth. By degrees the reign of fancy is confirmed; she grows first imperious, and in time despotick. Then fictions begin to operate as realities, false opinions fasten upon the mind, and life passes in dreams of rapture or of anguish.

This, Sir, is one of the dangers of solitude, which the hermit has confessed not always to promote goodness, and the astronomer's misery has proved to be not always propitious to wisdom (XLIV, 468-69).

Johnson accurately describes a schizophrenic disorder in Imlac's speech, and through the whole episode of the astronomer (XLV-XLVII) he presents the causes, the contributing factors, the symptoms characteristic of the slow growth, peak and decline, and the gradual cure (XLV-XLVII). Johnson has illustrated the typical, universal reactions to insanity:

There is the ordinary well-informed layman, Prince Rasselas, who is inexperienced in observing mental illness either in himself or in others; there is the point of view of Imlac, who represents enlightened medical authority; finally, there is the uninformed and, at first, unsympathetic reaction of the two women. Curiously, once the women have learned through Imlac to be sympathetic and sensitive to mental disorder, it is they rather than Imlac who were responsible for the cure. From this we may assume that Johnson realized that to fulfill, though unselfconsciously, the sick man's needs—desire for friendship, usefulness, and ego-satisfaction—was a more important therapy than rational explanation of his condition. <sup>112</sup>

Pekuah, Nekayah, and Rasselas gain insight into their own behavior as they help the astronomer return to reality. Social communication with the recognition and understanding of one's own symptoms is a necessary requirement in effecting a cure. Each one must at least attempt to establish some degree of self-awareness and self-analysis. Through the interaction of the characters, Johnson demonstrates the importance of mutual trust in order to effect any degree of rehabilitation:

I now see how fatally I betrayed my quiet, by suffering chimeras to prey upon me in secret; but melancholy shrinks from communication and I never found a man before, to whom I could impart my troubles, though I had been certain of relief. I rejoice to find my own sentiments confirmed by yours, who are not easily deceived, and can have no motive or purpose to deceive (XLVII, 476-77).

All psychotherapeutic techniques depend upon a certain rapport between patient and therapist. The therapist typically maintains a friendly and accepting attitude conducive to the establishment of confidence on the part of the patient which will lead to a feeling of security and the desire to relate the important problems to the therapist.<sup>115</sup>

In a modern therapeutic trend, Johnson has discovered the need for self-actualization:

To indulge the power of diction, and send imagination out upon the wing is often the sport of those who delight too much in silent speculation. When we are alone we are not always busy; the labour of excogitation is too violent to last long; the ardour of enquiry will sometimes give way to idleness or satiety. He who has nothing external that can divert him must find pleasure in his own thoughts and must conceive himself what he is not, who is pleased with what he is? (XLIV, 469).

To the individual who has not discovered a means to self-realization, or a purpose, life can seem meaningless and incomplete; he will become frustrated and dissatisfied, for as Johnson notes "who is pleased with what he is?" Psychotherapy aims toward personality growth in the direction of maturity, competence, and self-actualization."<sup>114</sup> Johnson

<sup>113</sup> Coleman, p. 542.

<sup>114</sup> A. H. Maslow, Motivation and Personality (New York: Harper & Co., 1954), p. 340. Self-actualization is the process of developing one's capacities and talents, of understanding and accepting oneself, of harmonizing or integrating one's motives, or the state resulting from these processes. See Coleman, pp. 68-75, for homeostatic tendencies involved in self-actualization processes.

advises man to remove himself from solitude, face reality, develop self-acceptance, and enjoy life, or at least learn "better to endure it."<sup>115</sup> In the belief that human happiness can be increased by discovery of the cause and effect of man's discontentment with himself, Johnson, the poet, may be seen as Johnson, the psychotherapist.<sup>116</sup> The ability to observe, to describe, to teach, and to please are all tasks of the poet. Imlac describes the task of a poet in all places and in all times. He finds that the "province of poetry is to describe Nature and Passion, which are always the same . . ." (IX, 409). In Chapter X of Rasselas, Johnson describes the poet in terms which could apply equally to the behavioral psychologist:

But the knowledge of nature is only half the task of a poet; he must be acquainted likewise with all the modes of life. His character requires that he estimate the happiness and misery of every condition; observe the power of all the passions in all their combinations, and trace the changes of the human mind as they

<sup>115</sup> Donald Greene, Samuel Johnson (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 219. In discussing the modernity of Samuel Johnson, Greene states "The end of linguistic communication Johnson never lost sight of—to increase the sum total of human happiness; 'The only end of writing is to enable the readers better to enjoy life, or better to endure it,' as he told Soame Jenyns.

<sup>116</sup> Greene, Samuel Johnson, p. 220. "Accepting one's imperfect state without useless repining, one can, by the willingness to learn from observation and experience, find ways of making it somewhat less imperfect . . . thus, biography, of which Johnson was perhaps the first "modern" practitioner is important . . . and Johnson as his account of the cause and cure of schizophrenia in the astronomer of Rasselas testifies, was no mean psychotherapist."

are modified by various institutions and accidental influences of climate or custom, from the spriteliness of infancy to the despondence of decrepitude. He must divest himself of the prejudices of his age and country; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same. He must therefore content himself with the slow progress of his name; condemn the applause of his own time, and commit his claims to the justice of posterity . . . presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as a being superior to time and place. . . . His labour is not yet at an end; he must know many languages and many sciences; and, that his style may be worthy of his thoughts, must by incessant practice, familiarize to himself every delicacy of speech and grace of harmony (X, 410-11).

Johnson recognizes the labor, the studies, and the sacrifice that a poet (scientist) must endure, and he recognizes the natural perceptual abilities that each must possess. He must be content with slow progress and "condemn the applause of his own time, and commit his claims to the justice of posterity." He must represent life and general truths for all men. In the Preface to Shakespeare, Johnson praises Shakespeare for his abilities to complete the numerous tasks of the ideal poet:

. . . the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. . . . They are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply and observation will always find. His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion. <sup>117</sup>

This same praise is true also for Johnson in Rasselas. His astute and

<sup>117</sup> Johnson, Preface to Shakespeare, VII, 62.

perceptive insight into the motivations of human behaviorism is as relevant today as it was in the eighteenth century. This, of course, may be an explanation for why Johnson titled the final chapter of Rasselas "The conclusion, in which nothing is concluded." Man continues to move from one set of circumstances to another, lives in continual frustration, never resolves his conflicts, passes them on to posterity, and perhaps in a diabolical sense gains immortality and nothing is concluded.

In recapitulation of Johnson's scientific attitude, recent critics have demonstrated his use of a scientific analysis and descriptive approach to the writing of literary criticism, biographies, and political tracts. As a result of the present study, it now becomes apparent that Johnson's observation, analysis, and descriptive techniques were incorporated into the writing of the novel, Rasselas. In the past, critics have described Rasselas in various ways, the most impressive being that of Sheldon Sacks and the assertion that Rasselas meets all the requirements of an apologue.<sup>118</sup> Rasselas does meet all the special requirements of an apologue as presented by Sacks, but it offers much more to the reader than an exemplification of the major theme. From the orderly sequence

<sup>118</sup>Sacks, pp. 49-60. An apologue consists of a series of seemingly unrelated episodes, but ordered and organized to exemplify the major themes. In an apologue a writer is called upon to proclaim his formulated, long-range commitments rather than to reveal a pattern of intuitive judgments.



of events, and the thorough description of human behavior, it becomes apparent that Rasselas is not a series of unrelated episodes, but, in reality, is a psychological study indicating the complexity of human nature and the human condition. Even the simple, organized life in the happy valley becomes complicated when Rasselas begins to desire what he does not have. From that point on, Rasselas becomes restless and obsessed with a desire to discover an ideal life situation. All other conditions of his life seem better than his own. Johnson continually entreats man to face his problems in the present instead of allowing his thoughts to remain in the past or looking to the future for solutions. His comprehension of both the conscious and unconscious motivations underlying man's behavior and the tendencies of man to delude himself indicate a humanistic view of neuroses and psychoses which was a relatively new attitude in the eighteenth century.

"In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the touchstone was reason and its right use. Reason provided the norm; any divergence from the norm was irrational."<sup>119</sup> As I demonstrated in Chapter III, Johnson, in anticipation of the twentieth-century views on "normal" behavior wisely realized that man cannot always guide himself by reason

<sup>119</sup> George Rosen, Madness in Society (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 164.

and that the "norm" is actually a balance of the two. Until the end of the eighteenth century individuals were being placed in institutions for any type of irrational behavior or action, for irrationality was equated with immorality and with madness. It was not until the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century that reformers began to alter and improve the situation of the mentally ill, and their actions derived from ideas and attitudes that were different from those prevailing at the beginning of the century.<sup>120</sup> In the late eighteenth century, Philippe Pinel, physician and follower of Lockean and Condillacean philosophies, made an attempt to educate the public to a better understanding and more humane treatment of the insane. His actions and writings were extremely important in the development and establishment of better institutions and psychological methods of cure for the mentally ill patient.<sup>121</sup> Johnson, however, prior to Pinel, had indicated the intolerance and unsympathetic attitude of the general public in their acceptance of insanity. The Age of Enlightenment was marked by great changes in ideas. Probably the most important was the rise of modern science.<sup>122</sup> Johnson's ideas and

<sup>120</sup>Rosen, p. 170.

<sup>121</sup>Walter Reise, The Legacy of Philippe Pinel (New York: Springer Pub. Co., 1969),

<sup>122</sup>Alfred Cobban, In Search of Humanity (London: Jonathan Cape, 1960), p. 29.

opinions suggest a man whose scientific approach is applied to his writings and to his humanitarian posits. Through this scientific approach and through his appeal to humanity to acquire knowledge of observable phenomena, Johnson has dispelled and ridiculed medieval superstitious ideas. He finds that the superstitious are melancholy and that superstitious ceremonies are not controlled by reason (XLVIII, 479). Man must not disturb his mind "with other hopes or fears than reason may suggest . . . if you are pleased with prognostics of good, you will be terrified likewise with tokens of evil, and your whole life will be a prey to superstition" (XIII, 418). For Johnson, then, the superstitious are controlled by "fancy" or "imagination," and engaging in superstitious rituals borders on madness. He feels there are no "good omens," but that all success stems from man's own perseverance.

Johnson places great emphasis upon the immediate present, the experience of the "here and now," and the verifiable consequence. The "presentness" of experience combined with the current information pertaining to his empirical nature indicates a tendency toward realism and naturalism in his writings. The materials he elects to describe are the common, the average, and the everyday, and he explores the unconscious motivations behind man's actions. In Idler No. 24, written prior to Rasselas, Johnson had already formulated views on the unconscious

workings of the mind:

It is reasonable to believe that thought, like every thing else, has its causes and effects; that it must proceed from something known, done, or suffered; and must produce some action or event.<sup>123</sup>

His general theory of inquiry, as stated in Chapter I, consists of rejecting metaphysical, intuitive certainty for the procedural certainty of inductive and deductive analysis and admitting nothing that has not been analyzed by the premises of the inquiry. His ability to observe and mirror accurately and with integrity the facts about a subject; his adherence to scientific rules for critical writing and evaluation; his theories on pleasure and pain and the normalcy of man, as well as his insistence upon the "presentness" of life, all place Johnson well in advance of many of the eighteenth and nineteenth century writers and into the current twentieth century psychologies,<sup>124</sup> indicating that he has been misjudged when placed in a rigidly fixed position in the neo-classical period.

Johnson's views on human nature and the human condition cannot

<sup>123</sup>Johnson, Idler No. 24, Yale Edition, II, 75.

<sup>124</sup>Living for the "present" and realizing all human potential is an important concept in "The Third Force" psychology; it proposes a new philosophy of man, an optimistic human awareness that sets man free to be man, to create and grow, to control his choices and goals. See Frank Goble, The Third Force: The Psychology of Abraham Maslow (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1970).

be labelled pessimistic. In Rasselas, he demonstrates that man can control his own behavior and make an adequate choice of life if he becomes totally involved in living and in experiencing all that the world has to offer. He has taken life in The Happy Valley and has generalized the condition to all men. The perfect happiness of the valley and the lack of novelty grow stale for Rasselas. He leaves the valley, and Johnson has shown him as a young man, restless and frustrated, moving through various experiences to a degree of maturity which will lead him at least to a better choice and should allow him to find a degree of contentment even if he returns to the valley. Through his similar experience with life, Imlac developed the wisdom which enabled him to return to endure the monotonous perfection of the happy valley, knowing that life at any other location or station would be the same. A happy life does not consist of material goods, travel, and power, but consists of a state of mind—a state of mind in which the individual understands himself and his motivations and has learned to adjust adequately to his own condition whatever it may be:

. . . I shall speak the truth: I know not one of all your attendants who does not lament the hour when he entered this retreat. I am less unhappy than the rest, because I have a mind replete with images, which I can vary and combine at pleasure. I can amuse my solitude by the renovation of the knowledge which begins to fade from my memory, and by recollection of the incidents of my past life (XII, 415) . . . . Knowledge is certainly one of the means of pleasure, as is confessed by the natural desire which

every mind feels of increasing its ideas. Ignorance is mere privation by which nothing can be produced: it is a vacuity in which the soul sits motionless and torpid for want of attraction; and, without knowing why, we always rejoice when we learn, and grieve when we forget. I am therefore inclined to conclude, that, if nothing counteracts the natural consequence of learning, we grow more happy as our minds take a wider range (XI, 413).

Imlac, having experienced the conditions of others, was then able to return to his original state and live in peace. Not to gain this knowledge would leave man always desiring new pleasures and new experiences, as Rasselas, ignorant and naive, was in need of education at the beginning of the novel: "I shall long to see the miseries of the world, since the sight of them is necessary to happiness" (III, 396). This view cannot be pessimistic—it is optimistic, optimistic in that man is capable of rational thinking and of choosing his condition of life after gaining knowledge through his own insights and experiences. Johnson's view of human nature is optimistic:

Johnson clearly believed that a great many things were susceptible of improvement, from textual editing to the writing of poetry, from the censorship of the London stage to Britain's international relations, and was highly active in trying to improve them. If he spoke out against perfectibilism, it was because of a well-founded suspicion that perfectibilism is the enemy of meliorism, and that there were few areas of human existence where Johnson did not display himself actively as a meliorist.<sup>125</sup>

Even though man has limitations on earth, he must accept authority and subordinate himself to certain rules for the good of the whole, but

<sup>125</sup> Greene, Samuel Johnson, p. 223.

Johnson gives man hope through the knowledge that he can control his own behavior, particularly if he understands himself and his own actions (i.e., the astronomer's eventual "cure" and the insight into his own problems and realization that he could control his own life and not be controlled by circumstances). Through this self-analysis and the ability to choose reasonably and rationally, man can make an adequate choice of life. Perhaps the message at the beginning and end of Rasselas is that after acquiring knowledge and maturity man realizes that this, his own condition, is the human condition and that he must ensure his own happiness.

## GLOSSARY

Approach-Avoidance Conflict: a situation in which the stimulus to approach and the stimulus to avoid are in approximately the same locality—literally in space, or psychologically in the life space.<sup>1</sup>

Behavioral Science: any science that studies the behavior of man and the lower animals in the physical and social environment by experimental and observational methods similar to those of other natural sciences. The recognized behavioral sciences include psychology, sociology, social anthropology, and those parts of other social sciences similar to those in outlook and method.

Compensation: behavior that aims to make amends for some lack or loss in personal characteristics or status; or action that achieves partial satisfaction when direct satisfaction is blocked.

Conflict: the simultaneous functioning of opposing or mutually exclusive impulses, desires, or tendencies; or the state of a person when opposed impulses or response tendencies have been activated.

Delusion: belief held in the face of evidence normally sufficient to destroy the belief. A delusion must be considered a definitely abnormal phenomenon, even though a normal individual may hold it.

Delusions of Grandeur: exaggerated belief that one is of exalted station or accomplishment.

Denial of Reality: ego defense mechanism by means of which the individual protects himself from unpleasant aspects of reality by refusing to perceive them.

Depression: a state of inaccessibility to stimulation or to particular kinds of stimulation, of lowered initiative, of gloomy thoughts. Depression may be a symptom in many mental disorders. For the normal case, Dejection is usually a preferred synonym.

Egoism: the view that in the final analysis—interest is—should be—the basis of motivation and of morality; or the behavior of one who acts accordingly.



Electra Complex: the repressed desire of a female for incestuous relations with her father. It is held by Freudians to be nearly universal.

Environmentalism: a point of view that stresses the role of the environment in determining behavior in contrast with the influence of heredity.

Environmental-Stress Theory: the view that neurotic behavior is merely an exaggeration or accentuation, resulting from environmental pressures, of behaviors common to all human beings. It includes distortion of a whole pattern of behavior by exaggeration of one component.

Fantasy: imagining a complex object or event in concrete symbols or whether or not the object or event exists; or the symbols or images themselves: e.g., a daydream. Originally synonymous with imagination, it is now distinguished by the fact that, if it represents reality at all, it is whimsical or visionary, not primarily either constructive or reproductive. Yet it is not necessarily delusive or pathological.

Fear: the emotion of violent agitation or fright in the presence (actual or anticipated) of danger or pain. It is marked by extensive organic changes and behaviors of flight or concealment. Phobia—which refers to persistent and irrational specific fears.

Flight of Ideas: rapid succession of ideas, or of their overt verbal expression, which manifest only superficial relation to each other; failure to keep to any topic for more than a very brief time.

Homeostasis: the maintenance of constancy of relations of equilibrium in the bodily processes. Any departure from the equilibrium sets in motion activities that tend to restore it.

Identification: the process of recognizing that a given individual or specimen is in some important respect really the same as another; the perception of identity; the recognition in an individual of the attributed by which he or it can be classified or assigned to a place, role, or function; the recognition of the unique pattern of a person; the recognition of the continuing identity of the self despite changes; the typing of a person in terms of a group or a cause with which he is strongly affiliated.

Insulation: an ego defense mechanism in which the individual reduces the tensions of need and anxiety by withdrawing into a shell of passivity.

Mania: popularly, any sort of violent abnormal conduct; technically, but now infrequently, impulsive behavior characterized by violent and uncontrollable motor activity—uncontrollable impulse to perform a certain kind of act.

Melancholia: pathological state in which the individual is depressed, inaccessible to most stimuli, and seems said without apparent or adequate cause. Involuntary melancholia: a psychotic-depressive reaction characterized by depression, agitation, and apprehension.

Obsessive-Compulsive Reaction: a psychoneurotic behavior in which anxiety is associated with preoccupation with unwanted ideas (obsession) and with persistent impulses to repeat certain acts over and over (compulsion).

Oedipus Complex: the repressed desire of a person for sex relations with the parent of the opposite sex. The Oedipus complex specifically refers to the desire of the boy for his mother. The Oedipus complex is held by psychoanalysts to be practically universal.

Paranoia: psychosis characterized by systematized delusions with little or no dementia. Delusions of grandeur and of persecution, one or both, are most typical and are defended by the patient with much appearance of logic and reason.

Projection: the process of unwittingly attributing one's own traits, attitudes or subjective processes to others, e.g., the child's naive assumption that adults feel as he does.

Reaction Formation: establishment of a trait or a regular pattern of behavior that is directly opposed to a strong unconscious trend; or the pattern itself. An ego defense mechanism in which dangerous desires and impulses are prevented from entering consciousness of being carried out in action by the fostering of opposed types of behavior and attitudes.

Repression: the exclusion of specific psychological activities or contents from conscious awareness by a process of which the individual is not directly aware. Since the concept is central in all depth psychology, the term as commonly used carries many other implications: that repression is a defense mechanism against anxiety or guilt; that it is performed by the censorship; that repressed activities, though excluded from consciousness, carry on in the unconscious and project various symbolic representations of themselves in consciousness.

Schizophrenia: a group of psychotic reactions characterized by fundamental disturbances in reality relationships, by a conceptual world determined excessively by feeling (autism) and by marked affective, intellectual, and overt behavioral disturbances.

Separation Anxiety: the infant's fear of losing the mother object. For Freud, this is based not merely on the birth trauma, but on many incidents of the infant's early experience. Insecurity and anxiety involved in separation from a loved one.

### VARIABLES:

Dependent Variable: a variable whose changes are treated as being consequent upon changes in one or more other variables called collectively the independent variable. In psychology, the measured dependent value is always the response.

Independent Variable: the variable whose changes are regarded as not dependent upon changes in another specified variable; the variable which is manipulated or treated in an experiment to see what effect changes in that variable bring about in the variables regarded as dependent upon it.

<sup>1</sup>J. C. Coleman, Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life (Chicago: Scott, Foreman & Co., 1956); Horace B. English and Ava Champney English, A Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychological and Psychoanalytical Terms (New York: Logmans, Green & Co.), 1958.

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