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Author(s): Andrew Varney

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JOHNSON'S JUVENALIAN SATIRE ON LONDON: A DIFFERENT EMPHASIS

By ANDREW VARNEY

BOSWELL records the enthusiasm with which Oxford greeted the publication of *London*, Johnson's imitation of Juvenal's third satire, in 1738: 'Every body was delighted with it; and there being no name to it, the first buz of literary circles was "here is an unknown poet, greater even than Pope."' ¹ Pope himself was impressed by the poem and made efforts to discover, and later to assist, its author; Boswell describes Pope's 'feelings and conduct' on the occasion of *London*'s appearance as 'candid and liberal'. ² Boswell himself calls *London* 'this justly celebrated poem', speaks of 'the general blaze of its excellence', and declares that 'it is, undoubtedly, one of the noblest productions in our language, both for sentiment and expression'. ³

The judgement of Oxford and of Pope was confirmed by the public. *London* was first published on 13 May 1738. A second edition appeared a week later and a third in mid-July. ⁴ Boswell notices the political ferment of the period, and how 'Accordingly, we find in Johnson's "London" the most spirited invectives against tyranny and oppression, the warmest predilection for his own country . . . not omitting his prejudices as a "true-born Englishman," not only against foreign countries, but against Ireland and Scotland'. ⁵ Commentary on *London* has strongly emphasized that it is a political poem, and has frequently found in this a key to its power and to what Johnson did with Juvenal's poem. In 1934 the Oxford editors described how 'what was pre-eminently a social satire . . . becomes in Johnson's hands largely a political satire' and argued that *London*'s 'rapid and steady sale . . . is not to be attributed solely to poetic merit' but to its political content as well. ⁶ This line, variously augmented and elaborated, has become not unreasonably an orthodoxy. John Butt pointed out how in imitating a classical satirist Johnson was turning to a genre that had

¹ Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. G. Birkbeck Hill, rev. L. F. Powell (Oxford, 1934), i. 127.

² Ibid. i. 128, 132-4.

³ Ibid. i. 129.

⁴ The poem was also printed in Scotland and Ireland in 1738. For details see Johnson's *Poems*, ed. D. Nichol Smith and E. L. McAdam, 2nd edn. (1974), 60-2. The text of *London* quoted here is from this edition.

⁵ Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, i. 131.

⁶ Johnson, *Poems*, 61.

been recently politicized, most conspicuously by Pope, three of whose later imitations of Horace came out in the twelve months before *London*. Johnson was showing himself as one who had recognized 'the very latest development in the attack [on the Walpole administration], the enlisting of a classical moralist in the political struggle. In the last few months Pope had enrolled Horace in the Tory party; Johnson now shows that Juvenal was a Tory champion as well.'⁷ In his popular biography of Johnson (1974) John Wain argues that as 'a calculated attempt to interest a London audience' *London* in its context 'was almost bound to be strongly political' and he iterates his conviction that Johnson himself saw the poem as 'a bold political satire'.⁸ J. P. Hardy in his critical study of Johnson speaks of the poem's 'trenchant political satire' and follows the Oxford editors in arguing that this accounted for its striking public success in 1738. And like them he believes that the new force Johnson brings to Juvenal is essentially political: far from following Juvenal slavishly 'Johnson transformed his source material, giving to many of his details a new poetic energy and life. His poem, unlike Juvenal's, has the breadth and scope of a political satire.'⁹ (Interestingly, looking at the poem in a rather different perspective, John H. Johnston sees *London* as a very limited 'city' poem, in comparison with, for instance, Gay's response to the city in *Trivia*, because it is so closely bound to Juvenal.¹⁰)

London certainly is a political poem. It reflected and contributed to the volatile political atmosphere of 1738 and its popularity was undoubtedly bolstered by its fiercely *engagé* content and tone; however, to give a special prominence to its political character may be limiting.

Boswell recognized the political animation of the poem (and felt it unjustified, praising Walpole as 'a wise and benevolent minister'¹¹), but the language he uses suggests that *London* won warm contemporary approbation for its literary rather than its political qualities. He commends, for instance, in addition to those attributes quoted above, the poem's 'manly force, bold spirit, and masterly versification'.¹² To give very great, or exclusive, weight to the poem's polemical features may be to risk missing the real sources of its distinction and originality. Discussing Johnson's verse in his Warton Lecture (1983), J. D. Fleeman introduces a train of thought very rare in discussion of

⁷ John Butt, 'Johnson's Practice in the Poetical Imitation', in *New Light on Dr Johnson*, ed. F. W. Hilles (New Haven, 1959), 21–2.

⁸ John Wain, *Samuel Johnson* (1974), 86, 87.

⁹ J. P. Hardy, *Samuel Johnson: A Critical Study* (1979), 51, 53.

¹⁰ John H. Johnston, *The Poet and the City* (Athens, Ga., 1984), 53.

¹¹ Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, i. 131.

¹² *Ibid.* i. 123.

Johnson's poetry: he quotes T. S. Eliot's remark in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* that a finished poem may be very remote from the experience that gave rise to it, and may indeed communicate what 'was not in existence before the poem was completed', and he finds in this a key to Johnson's use of language:

It is this feature of Johnson's poetry which projects its interest beyond the words which make it. It is projected into a dimension which is not backward from or anterior to those words, but which looks forward to something which is yet to arise from the words. The interest of his words is not so much in where they start but in where they lead.¹³

To speak of Johnson's writing in this way is a useful admonition: one feels at times that the gravitas of Johnson has oppressed commentary and dissuaded it from giving his writing, whether in verse or prose, the solicitously close attention readily yielded to other writers. In the case of *London* interest has centred on 'where the words start'—in Juvenal's third satire and in the political world of 1738—and has not followed 'where they lead'. *London* is, I shall argue, a great and profound poem not just because of the accuracy, mordancy, and poetic brilliance with which Johnson has suited Juvenal's satire on the public degeneracy and squalor of Rome to the social and political circumstances of Walpole's London, though these things are real enough, but because Johnson fuses with his public satire a deeply impassioned presentation of the mind in distress that is almost wholly absent from Juvenal and from his other translators and imitators. When, for instance, John H. Johnston describes *London* as 'an authoritative indictment of the age'¹⁴ he is evincing that kind of desensitizing that seems to rob Johnson of part of his greatness: it is very easy, because Johnson's manner invites it, to speak of his utterance as 'authoritative', as in a way it is; and it is a very characteristic Augustan voice, but if matters are left there, the strains of querulousness, alarm, unease, fear, and testiness that complicate and enrich the poetic texture of *London* may be missed.

Johnson's satire presents us with a society containing in itself the elements of its own destruction, an enemy within which will subvert and betray it. Human minds in this society are fractured, hypocritical, deluded, deceived, or otherwise divorced from their own better interests. Where Juvenal consistently presents an integrated observer, reacting to Rome with a fine *saeva indignatio*, Johnson's Thales is more shaken by the world he decries and may even have taken on

¹³ J. D. Fleeman, 'Johnson's Poetry', Warton Lecture on English Poetry, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 69 (1983), 366.

¹⁴ Johnston, *The Poet and the City*, 54.

something of its fated and self-destructive character. He is more a product of the world he lives in and less independent than Juvenal's Umbricius.

Juvenal's third satire is a vigorous and cutting indictment of specific ills and abuses in Roman life, articulated by one who is about to leave it for a rural retreat. Johnson's Thales, who is on the point of leaving London for Wales, similarly decries his own metropolis, and Johnson exploits and even intensifies the popular emotions of patriotism and xenophobia which form part of Juvenal's rhetorical arsenal. From the very beginning of *London*, however, we find something expressed through the antithetical manner of Johnson's verse which is not present in Juvenal's. Juvenal says that while he is disturbed ('confusus', line 1) by his friend's departure he none the less commends his going to take up residence in the deserted town of Cumae:

Quamvis digressu veteris confusus amici,
Laudo tamen vacuis quod sedem figere Cumis
Destinet,

(ll. 1-3)

Juvenal's statement is quite simple, but Johnson carefully examines his divided feelings on his friend's departure:

Tho' Grief and Fondness in my Breast rebel,
When injur'd THALES bids the Town farewell,
Yet still my calmer Thoughts his Choice commend,
I praise the Hermit, but regret the Friend,

(ll. 1-4)

In one half of this oyster of antithesis we have the pressure of personal emotion, 'Grief and Fondness', and in the other the more ruly and judicious 'calmer Thoughts'. The co-existence of these opposed things in one mind gives rise to the antithesis in line 4 where Johnson's public sense leads him to 'praise the Hermit' while his private feelings make him 'regret the Friend'. The lines are comparatively unimportant to the satirical strategy of *London* as a whole, but they are significant in two other ways. First, they mark a new tone and a new theme: neither Juvenal nor any of the major translators and adaptors preceding Johnson (Boileau, Oldham, Dryden) began by stressing any division in the mind. Secondly, Johnson has introduced an image whose implications will give the poem much of its intensity. This is contained in the relationship which Johnson sees subsisting between his emotion and his calmer thought: 'Grief and Fondness in my Breast *rebel*'. The image of 'rebellion' within is apparently used casually, but not so in fact. The image chosen is rebellion, internecine strife, not

international warfare, and it is particularly apt to a poem which will present London as vitiated by its own corruption and by the influence of foreigners (particularly the French) who have come to live in it and on it. The full force of the image as its implications are developed in the poem is to mobilize all those common fears so readily fostered, even in a non-paranoid consciousness, of an enemy within. Even in that first line the rebellious grief and fondness are 'in my Breast'. In its co-operation with the themes of patriotism and xenophobia already mentioned, and with that of the perils daily faced by the individual living in the city, the motif of an enemy within affords one of the strongest emotional threads in the poem.

This enemy within originates with Juvenal, where immigrant Greeks in Rome and imported Greek mores sap Rome's vital strength, and it is used in all other versions of the satire, but only in Johnson does it gain its full intensity and pervade the whole poem. The subversive enemy within is protean. It may appear in the venality of Members of Parliament:

Here let those reign, whom Pensions can incite
To vote a Patriot black, a Courtier white;
Explain their Country's dear-bought Rights away;
And plead for Pirates in the Face of Day;
With slavish Tenets taint our poison'd Youth,
And lend a Lye the confidence of Truth.

(ll. 51-6)

This is one of the passages frequently adduced in witness to the political nature of *London*. This is quite right, but attention should also be drawn to the intensity of the language here, to the passion that informs the satire, and to the intimation of a radical disorder from which Johnson has such revulsion: what is the future of a people when its youth is not merely misled but tainted, poisoned, and enslaved, and what is to become of a world where those fundamental perceptions vital to the security of the mind are perverted, where black becomes white and a lie can successfully masquerade as, and take on all the assurance of, truth? Johnson leaves us in no doubt that men such as he describes do hold sway, and in order to indicate their relationship with the sounder element in the commonwealth he again deploys the image of civil discord:

Behold rebellious Virtue quite o'erthrown,
Behold our Fame, our Wealth, our Lives your own.

(ll. 63-4)

That it is virtue which is 'rebellious' here is a potent inversion of expected usage as it signifies not merely that the enemy is within the

gates but that it has usurped the citadel. As readers of Johnson we would not expect from him any facile optimism about the ultimate invincibility of virtue in this world, but it is worth remembering that the first readers of *London* were not as familiar with Johnson as we are. They had never heard this voice before and, as the poem was published anonymously, had no name to put to it. One might add that in crystallizing his vision of what was happening in his world of London in the image of civil war, Johnson was touching a spring that notoriously triggered alarm in the English sensibility through much of the eighteenth century.

The passage which embodies the motif of the enemy within most intensely runs from line 91 to line 157 of *London*. This important passage, which has attracted comparatively little detailed commentary, possibly as its open xenophobia may have been felt to be a coarse embarrassment, decries the conduct and influence of the French immigrants in London. A glance at it will reveal not only with what passionate disgust Johnson treats the theme but also the peculiar intensifying slant which he gives it.

Describing the sycophantic Greek's excessive willingness to serve his master, Juvenal writes,

. . . omnia novit
Graeculus esuriens; in caelum iusseris ibit.
(ll. 77–8)

(Your hungry little Greek knows how to do everything; just tell him to go and he's off to the other world for you.)

Oldham's version dilutes the point of the second half of line 78, but Dryden in his translation remains faithful:

All things the hungry *Greek* exactly knows:
And bid him go to Heav'n, to Heav'n he goes.
(*The Third Satyr of Juvenal*, ll. 140–1)

Johnson takes the hint from Dryden about how to render 'in caelum iusseris ibit', but he gives it a simple twist:

All Sciences a fasting Monsieur knows,
And bid him go to Hell, to Hell he goes.
(ll. 115–16)

The substitution of Hell for Heaven does not just make the satire sound more deadly. It also stresses the self-destructive perversion of a mind which will cast itself into damnation merely to ingratiate. Going off to Heaven, in Dryden's rendering, does no violence to the soul.

Comparison with Dryden is always an instructive pointer to the distinctive qualities of *London*. Dryden's translation is superbly elegant and accomplished (and 191 lines longer than the original) but it does not offer the mordancy of Johnson, or of Juvenal for that matter. The behaviour of the foreign parasites in slavishly following the whims of their masters is described by Dryden in an easy and amusing manner:

Call for a Fire, their Winter Cloaths they take:
Begin but you to shiver, and they shake:
In Frost and Snow, if you complain of Heat,
They rub th'unsweating Brow, and Swear they Sweat.

(ll. 175–8)

By contrast the compression and verbal energy of Johnson's account of the same phenomenon disturbs, communicating as it does the violent betrayal of nature generated in unhealthy minds. The foreigners are eager to comply with every 'wild Absurdity',

And as their Patron hints the Cold or Heat,
To shake in Dog-days, in *December* sweat.

(ll. 142–3)

In their pretence of compliance Dryden's Greeks are laughable. Johnson's 'Gauls' shivering in summer and sweating in December wilfully invade the autonomy of their own bodies, which should be governed only by the natural laws of their own physiology: they subjugate what is involuntary and natural to a perverse unnatural will.

It is, however, in the culminating paragraph of this section of the poem that the special qualities of Johnson's rendering are most marked. Juvenal explains how the sycophants get to know their masters' domestic secrets in order to have power over them:

. . . scire volunt secreta domus atque inde timere.

(l. 113)

Both Oldham and Dryden offer versions of this line, but Johnson dwells on it and expands it. Dryden reads,

They search the Secrets of the House, and so
Are worshipp'd there, and fear'd for what they know.

(ll. 194–5)

In Johnson the social subversion which Juvenal suggests becomes dramatized through a superbly managed series of couplets as a threat not just to the social structure but to the individual man's spiritual vitals. The movement of rhetorical intensification in his paragraph is

accompanied by a movement from the outer social world of 'the Table' to the inner world of the spirit, 'the Heart':

For Arts like these preferr'd, admir'd, carest,
They first invade your Table, then your Breast;
Explore your Secrets with insidious Art,
Watch the weak Hour, and ransack all the Heart;
Then soon your ill-plac'd Confidence repay,
Commence your Lords, and govern or betray.

(ll. 152–7)

When the heart is ransacked and confidence is repayed with betrayal it is not just society which has fallen victim to the enemy within but individual human personality itself.

London goes on to describe other evils of life in the city, not all attributable to pernicious foreign influence, and rises to a climax in the presentation of what we would call the law and order issue. The citizen who goes out at night is exposed to the insults and random violence of the 'fiery Fop' and 'frolick Drunkard', and even when he returns home his house is not secure from the burglar or murderous housebreaker. It is in treating this last threat, to the citizen in his home, that Johnson clinches the theme of the enemy who comes within with an imaginative intensity altogether absent from the original poem and other versions of it.

Once Juvenal has mentioned the danger to the citizen at home he moves quickly on to other matters, and both Oldham and Dryden follow him in this. Only Boileau, whose version of the third satire was distributed between his own first and sixth satires when published, amplifies the point at all:

Car, sitôt que du soir les ombres pacifiques
D'un double cadenas font fermer les boutiques;
Que, retiré chez lui, le paisible marchand
Va revoir ses billets et compter son argent;
Que dans le Marché-Neuf tout est calme et tranquille,
Les voleurs à l'instant s'emparent de la ville.¹⁵

The bourgeois detail here is a nice and quite proper embellishment of Juvenal's four lines, but there is no increase in emotional pressure. Johnson on the other hand gives a terrifying enactment of the scene:

¹⁵ Boileau, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. A. Ch. Gidel (Paris, 1870), i. 117–18.

In vain, these Dangers past, your Doors you close,
 And hope the balmy Blessings of Repose:
 Cruel with Guilt, and daring with Despair,
 The midnight Murd'rer bursts the faithless Bar;
 Invades the sacred Hour of silent Rest,
 And leaves, unseen, a Dagger in your Breast.

(ll. 236–41)

This nightmare of the imagination is Johnson's culminating vision of the enemy within: it is rendered with great poetical intensity and it brings to a superb climax the passionate presentation of the theme of danger that exists within in *London*. The paragraph is shaped overall to give maximum emphasis to the terrible irony whereby home, the last retreat and blessed sanctuary of the weary citizen, is the very place where the last, killing blow is struck. (It is interesting that J. P. Hardy, looking at *London* as primarily a political poem, finds this passage 'contrived and macabre'.¹⁶) It is not just in its close focus on the threat that comes into the house that the passage goes beyond Juvenal, however. It is in its detail that it is most telling. The midnight murderer is 'Cruel with Guilt, and daring with Despair'. The psychology is at once apocalyptic and accurate, and it is of a piece with the vision of minds distorted and subverted that has filled the whole of the poem. The very 'Bar' which the murderer breaks, though morally neutral in Juvenal and in any case inanimate, becomes in Johnson another manifestation and instrument of the all-pervading treachery of London: it is 'faithless'. After the violence of the murderer's entrance the scene of the murder itself is presented, by a beautiful and chilling transition, in a sinister dumb-show. The murderer

Invades the sacred Hour of silent Rest,
 And leaves, unseen, a Dagger in your Breast.

The word 'unseen', finely poised in the line, gives us the full intensity of Johnson's vision here. The murderer who goes unseen goes also undetected. The enemy within escapes justice. (Johnson worked carefully on the deadly concluding line of this passage. In the existing draft the line reads 'And plants his Dagger in your slumb'ring Breast'.¹⁷ The four revisions in the line as published all intensify its disturbing qualities: 'slumb'ring' was redundant after 'silent Rest', and it could go with the more advantage as it might suggest that the victim would be unconscious of the evil done; the introduction of 'unseen' brings with it the notion of the murderer evading justice; changing 'his Dagger' to 'a Dagger' implies that this was just one of any number of daggers that might be used by now depersonalized

¹⁶ Hardy, *Samuel Johnson*, 57.

¹⁷ Johnson, *Poems*, 414.

assassins; lastly, the substitution of 'leaves' for 'plants' concentrates attention on the helpless corpse of the murdered citizen rather than on the act of violence itself.)

The damage being done to London is registered in Johnson's poem as damage to human integrity. The city has been subverted, and affording no economic or physical security for its native citizens it affords no mental security either. It is very easy to overstate the robustness of the speaker's viewpoint in *London*. Margaret Doody in her reconsideration of Augustan poetry discusses the standing of Juvenal in the eighteenth century; she notes how he was seen by some as superior to Horace as being more appetitive and vigorous, and goes on to argue that

Juvenal could seem the more British of the two poets as well as the more sublime. He was praised as the superior moralist, politically independent of corrupt courts whereas Horace the flatterer of Augustus was, as Dryden puts it, 'often afraid of laughing in the right place.' The honest satirist must, it was thought, have something of Juvenal in his composition.¹⁸

I think it not unlikely that a sense of what Juvenal is like as indicated by Professor Doody has tended to influence our feeling about what *London* is like: the crucial thing to bear in mind, however, is that Johnson is not Juvenal, and that Satire III is the starting-point of Johnson's poem and not its destination.

Johnson's London is a city on or already over the brink of a collective madness. In its narrowly focused ambition and greed for the squalid and material it has yielded to imagination, in that sense of a preoccupation with the images of things. Arie Sachs, writing of the roles of imagination and reason in Johnson's work, defines imagination as Johnson conceives it as 'the mind's obsessive tendency to limit itself to some particular earthly goal or object'.¹⁹ Imagination for Johnson was much the same as fancy: Robert DeMaria notes how 'In the illustrative quotations in the *Dictionary* there is rarely any distinction between the imagination and the fancy'.²⁰ A world that has submitted to imagination or fancy is no longer subject to rational governance, and as Imlac tells Rasselas, 'All power of fancy over reason is a degree of insanity' (*Rasselas*, ch. 44). There are few themes more familiar in Johnson than that of the insecure tenure man has on the management of his own mind. It pervades all his writings as a source of anxiety and

¹⁸ Margaret Doody, *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (Cambridge, 1985), 95.

¹⁹ Arie Sachs, *Passionate Intelligence: Imagination and Reason in the Work of Samuel Johnson* (Baltimore, 1967), 9.

²⁰ Robert DeMaria, jun., *Johnson's Dictionary and the Language of Learning* (Oxford, 1986), 101.

often as a spring of compassion, and it was deep in the grain of his understanding of the human condition. It influenced how he selected sources to define mental processes in the *Dictionary*: writing of these DeMaria concludes: 'Although he steadily inculcates the need for the proper mental government, Johnson is never thoroughly optimistic . . . about the chances of achieving it. . . . All of the *Dictionary*'s advice on controlling the mind . . . is played out against a general recognition of its near impossibility.'²¹

In the poem Johnson's speaker is not a rational observer. He inveighs against the city in a mood of impassioned distress. At one point, particularly inflamed by the way London has become 'The Common Shore [drain or sewer] of *Paris* and of *Rome*' (line 94), he senses that he is getting carried away and pulls himself up with an exclamation of impotent peevishness:

Forgive my Transports on a Theme like this,
I cannot bear a *French* metropolis.

(ll. 97–8)

Thales of course is speaking no less than the truth: he *cannot* bear it and is on the very point of departure. In this Thales is in the minority: the majority of London's citizens are staying put. Thales may have started to do what Imlac sees as a manifestation of an unhealthy 'power of fancy over reason', that is to 'fear beyond the limits of sober probability' (*Rasselas*, ch. 44). I do not want to press the implications of this very far, because *London* needs to be understood as an exercise in a number of different modes rather than as an absolute *cri de cœur*, but it certainly adds to the unsettling quality of the piece that it tends to leave us nowhere to turn for an assurance of stability. (The voice of the narrator, which occupies the first 34 lines of the poem, is not sufficiently developed or distinguished to fulfil this role.) It is worth noting that the reference to Thales's 'dissipated Wealth' in line 20 may call into question the motives of his philippic against the city: perhaps he should be scrutinizing his own improvidence. How much of what he says is sour grapes? The reference does not of course necessarily impugn Thales's prudence as it may have been the inevitable expense of city life which has eroded his fortune. In Johnson's *London* the worlds inside and outside the head have been undermined. The clarity, security, and confidence of the past (evoked in allusions to a time when England was 'The Land of Heroes and of Saints' (line 100)) have been lost, and before the poet's eyes the social and mental fabric of the city is falling apart.

²¹ DeMaria, *Johnson's Dictionary*, 104.

It is instructive to compare with Johnson's poem one of the most famous, or notorious, utterances of the high Tory sensibility in the early eighteenth century. In his important and inflammatory sermon *The Perils of False Brethren, Both in Church and State* delivered on 5 November 1709 Dr Henry Sacheverell addressed the dangers which he saw as confronting the nation from an enemy within, the enemy in this case being religious Nonconformity and the toleration of it. This is a representative passage:

Our constitution both in Church and State has been so admirably contriv'd, with that wisdom, weight and sagacity, and the temper, and genius of each, so exactly suited and modell'd to the mutual support, and assistance of one another, that 'tis hard to say, whether the doctrins of the Church of England contribute more to authorize, and enforce our civil laws, or our laws to maintain, and defend the doctrins of our Church. . . . whosoever presumes to innovate, alter, or misrepresent any point in the articles of the faith of our Church ought to be arraign'd as a traytor to our state; heterodoxy in the doctrins of one, naturally producing, and almost necessarily inferring rebellion, and high-treason in the other, and consequently a crime that concerns the civil magistrate, as much to punish, and restrain, as the ecclesiastical . . .²²

The differences of tone are immediately noticeable. Sacheverell is strong and confident, where Johnson is disturbed and restive. Sacheverell confesses danger, but shows how to deal with it. Johnson describes defeat. Sacheverell, though writing of religion which concerns man's inner state more than anything else can do, writes in public terms. Johnson, describing social and public phenomena, finds some of his most forceful strokes in the threat to man's inner condition. The fundamental difference between the two is not between the bullish optimism of Sacheverell and the pessimism of Johnson but between the image of the culture each entertains. Sacheverell, crudely, asserts unity, integrity, and balance and directs his rhetoric to the reinforcement of what is already solid; Johnson images the state and the mind as divided against themselves, beginning with the simple contrast of 'grief and fondness' with 'calmer thoughts' and proceeding to violent destruction.

The poet's despair is made only the more poignant by the fact that he adopts Juvenal's fiction that the indictment of the city comes from the lips of one about to leave it. In this fiction Johnson's friend Thales can solve the problem of London by putting hundreds of miles between himself and the enemy or enemies within. But of course Thales is enacting a fantasy which it is denied to the poet to realize for

²² Text from *Politics and Literature in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. T. Dickinson (1974), 11–12.

himself: when Thales glides off on his wherry the poet will remain on the strand at Greenwich, with no choice but to turn back and face the enemy within the squalid metropolis he both inhabits and imagines.

Some play is made in critical commentary of the fact that Johnson took a far less negative view of the city than *London* suggests. John H. Johnston ascribes the poem's failure to reflect Johnson's awareness of the city 'as a place of almost infinite material and cultural possibilities' to the fact that the author is constrained by his Juvenalian model and by 'his inflexible moralizing purpose'.²³ By contrast John Wain, making a similar point, detects in the mode of the poem an affirmative subtext: 'on another level the poem welcomes London. In tone, in strategy, in the nature of its art, it is metropolitan. It signals an acceptance of the values of eighteenth-century civilization at their most urbane and sophisticated.' He argues that while Johnson always saw London as a heartless city 'he always accepted it at the level of intellect and art'.²⁴ As a corollary of the apparent failure of *London* to articulate all Johnson felt about the city, notice is commonly drawn to the fact that while Juvenal is rather sardonic about the appeal of an austere rural life as an alternative to life in the city Johnson idealizes it. Points of this kind have a validity, but not one that bears much on the poem *London* as we have it. What delighted the literary circles of Oxford and impressed Pope was not just a poem ingeniously adapting Juvenal's scathing satire to the political and social conditions of London in 1738. *London* was a great new poem because it brought to Juvenal a new tone and a new theme, and sought to reinforce its presentation of social catastrophe by revealing and exploiting the dangers to the private mind in a world subverted by an insidious enemy from which there was no escape because it (in all its multitude of forms) was entrenched within.

²³ Johnston, *The Poet and the City*, 52, 53.

²⁴ Wain, *Samuel Johnson*, 86.