CHAPTER V

LIONEL JOHNSON

How variously Pater's influence was felt in the period under study can be gauged from the picture of the man as presented in the writings of Lionel Johnson and the one created by Oscar Wilde. Pater was an unconventional, exotic figure in the eyes of Wilde, while Johnson's Pater is austere, almost to the extent of being an ascetic. That the same person should have inspired Wilde to become a decadent aesthete and upholder of the art-for-art's sake theory, but influence Johnson in a very different way shows that his ideas were reflected in different ways and some degree of distortion was inevitable.

It is more than evident that Johnson's life and work were deeply influenced by Pater. He was Pater's disciple at Oxford and a frequent visitor at his house even after his graduation. Pater according to Thomas Wright, gave him an autographed copy of each of his books.1 Perhaps no other writer ever got such special

treatment at Pater's hands. Johnson was obviously encouraged to model his writings as also his life on Pater's. The impact of the doctrines of the early Pater may well be discerned in some of the letters Johnson wrote in his younger days. But he matured with years and his fascination of Pater did not remain limited to the Pater of the Renaissance. He grew with Pater as few other disciples did and discovered a different Pater, perhaps the real Pater, in Marius and other later works. According to Johnson, Marius is "full of the most perfectly literary quality, and infinitely wise and true and beautiful." And again, Marius, he felt, was "the perfection of beautiful literature... a book to love and worship." And it is not just the expression of momentary youthful enthusiasm - he was in his eighteenth year when he wrote this-for it is on record that the book was largely responsible for Johnson's conversion to Roman Catholicism and that he endeavoured to model his life on that of Marius. His sensitive response to Pater's writings and teachings and the profound reverence for his master find expression in his essays on Pater. He was perhaps the first critic to point out, for the benefit of those who thought Pater to be merely a noble

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2. Lionel Johnson: Some Winchester Letters, p.130.
3. Ibid., p.183.
son of Epicurus, that he is "never more characteristically inspired than in writing of things hieratic, ascetic... almost monastic." And if these essays and the reviews of his books are not sufficient proof of Johnson's continued admiration for, and devotion to the master, then it may be mentioned too that the last poem Johnson wrote, just a few days before his own death, was in memory of Pater, a befitting tribute to his mentor and guide.

Johnson is not considered a great critic at the present time, but he was one of the leading critics in London papers in the 1890's and his criticism gives a clear impression of the fact that he was strongly opposed to the aesthetes and decadents and his mind rebelled against the spirit of the times. He did contribute to the Yellow Book, the Savoy and the Pageant, supposed to be representative of aestheticism and decadence; but his contributions were not like the contributions of many decadents. He had the courage to express in strong words his scant regard for aestheticism: "Now I heartily hate the cant of art for art's sake; I have spent years in trying to understand what is meant by that imbecile phrase." And yet a little later in the same essay he remarks that it is an uncritical dictation of the critics to tell a writer...
that he or she is no true poet because "he or she takes exceeding pains with his or her workmanship and art." He admired the writers who paid attention to form and style and believed that the poet had to pass through a long discipline of the strictest severity before he reached the high dignities of his profession. He is obviously a disciple of Pater in emphasizing that "all art implies discipline and austerity of taste, a constant progress towards an ideal perfection." What distinguishes Pater from others, asserts Johnson, is his sense of the value of words. Pater had found in Plato an artist in Language, who took great pains to note the minute proprieties of Plato's style because he himself wrote at random. Pater "is constantly checking our impatience or neglect of the written word, the word chosen with so deliberate an artistic reason." At the same time Johnson warns the critic and readers of Pater against believing that Pater's passion for precision makes him "a votarist of style for its own sake and not by reason of the reverent value that he set upon his matter, upon the humanities that were his reverent theme." He argues that Pater was a lover of words for

6. Ibid., p.166.
7. Ibid., p.171.
8. Ibid., p.10.
9. Ibid., p.12.
their soul's sake. The thought behind the words was quite an important thing for him and the devoted care that he took in the choice of words was due to his keenness to seek out an exact correspondence between the word and the thing. Like Flaubert he sought "the right word for the right thought, the exact presentation of the exact conception, matter and manner kissing each other in complete accord."10 Perfect correspondence between conception and expression was ever his aim and miraculously well he was wont to find it. Johnson does not consider the famous passage upon La Gioconda to be good enough and believes it to be quite uncharacteristic of Pater because of its being a bit too suggestive and not exact.

Now in all these statements Johnson's primary aim is to interpret Pater rightly and to clear away some of the misconceptions prevalent about him, but they reveal a great deal about Johnson himself. He, for instance, clearly understood the relationship between matter and form, and how one could not be given precedence over the other, and how matter and expression must coalesce. Johnson does not hesitate to call W.H. Mallock's venture of presenting Lucretius in the metre of Omar Khayyam a failure though fascinating, for it is an "excellent illustration of the interdependence

10. Ibid., p.166.
of matter and form."\textsuperscript{11} The profound thought and genius of Lucretius's mind almost disappears when translated in the quatrains of Omar's Rubaiyat, whose "essential quality in point of form, is a swift brevity."\textsuperscript{12}

Johnson credits Pater with something of Browne's humanity and suggests that there runs in his writings a kind of curiosity about men and their world and that "Few books so move us to kindly thoughts of life, so wake in us the old charities and common pieties of our race, as the books of this writer whose name is sometimes taken in vain by lovers of an absolutely heartless art."\textsuperscript{13} We can safely infer from this that Johnson valued a work of art for the matter, the devotion to the human interests and not just the perfected form or style as the aesthetes did. And in this belief of Johnson we find an obvious reflection of Pater's ideas of great art as set forth in his essay "On Style". Johnson is not favourably inclined to the decadent theories of literature, or drawn to the morbid and the maudlin. Rather he holds that literature cannot be cut off from the forces that make life fine and noble, the elemental truth and great facts of life.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p.59.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p.59.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p.10.
Because he holds such a belief, he is attracted by and directs his attention to the high doctrines contained in Pater's *Marius* and *Plato and Platonism*. He is anxious to show that Pater was no decadent. The chief delight of *Marius the Epicurean* lies in its keeping close to life and telling of things "with an intense reality of phrase in their beautiful truths."\(^{14}\)
Pater takes great pains, says Johnson in "suggesting just where, and how the new power of consolation, the new spring of hope the new strength of consolation, would win welcome from the world of weariness and satiety."\(^{15}\)
He speaks of Marius as one possessing "so much wistful anger and hunger of heart, amorous of nothing else, unable to be at peace with less than the *Deus absconditus* of his desire,"\(^{16}\) as if the miracle of the sweetness and the greatness of Christianity that touched Marius, worked upon his own self too. Johnson is one of the very few critics of his time who wrote of *Marius* in this way. While many have found in Pater, through a misinterpretation of his philosophy, a follower of Epicurus, devoted to the arts in a spirit of sensuousness, Johnson was certain that Pater "held the power of recognising

\[14\] Ibid., p.25.
\[15\] Ibid., p.25.
\[16\] Ibid., p.26.
and loving beauty in the world to be a possession past praise and a passionate constancy of concern for it to be no mean state of mind, but assuredly in no ignoble way. "17 He felt it to be characteristic of Pater to write about the discipline and imperative morality of art, "things hieratic, ascetic appealed always to him,"18 according to Johnson, and he himself believed that dissolute and lawless art was not art indeed. Critics have often dismissed Marius's interest in Christian ritual and liturgy as nothing more than a sensuous aesthetic delight; but in Pater's mode of seeing things Johnson finds "a mysticism not unlike Swedenborg's doctrine of celestial correspondence, or that mystical interpretation of nature so necessary to Newman."19

The priestly and monastic note in Johnson's make-up found by many an observer could well have been a consequence of his worship and deep study of Marius. Pater had in fact intended to convey through this book that there is a religious phase possible for the modern mind and Johnson's sensitive response to this aspect of the book was correct and sound.

Johnson's remarkable power of perception as

17. Ibid., p. 29.
18. Ibid., p. 29.
19. Ibid., p. 34.
critic and the anti-aesthetic standpoint are also revealed in his comments on Plato and Platonism. Pater had seen in Plato a philosopher who was instinctively like Augustine—"Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart hath no rest until it rest in Thee." Plato's problem was to find a law of unity and rest under the shifting, drifting, tides of change, ever becoming never being, for the fluidity, the flux, was ruinous and endangered all stable beauty and established truth. The conclusion that he reached was that all the infinite motion was nothing. It is not the Eternal one. We should shut our eyes to the vanishing world of sense and direct our gaze to what is. This doctrine, according to Johnson, colours and "breathes life into those realities of the soul, those absolute ideas, well nigh divine persons, before merging them into a divine unity." Now Pater had, in writing the conclusion to The Renaissance, given the impression that he believed in the transitory nature of this world and was interested in making the best of the passing moments, and had confined himself to the character and precincts of a palace of art. But Johnson quite rightly noticed that in Plato and Platonism his eyes were bent towards the Absolute, the unchanging permanent truth behind the veil of mystery. Art that was not soul inspiring,

20. Ibid., p.4.
a trumpet call to the forces of truth and righteousness was not art for him. Johnson seeks to clear the misunderstanding and confusion which Pater had led himself to in his earlier writings.

Perhaps the finest illustration of Johnson's anti-aesthetic stand-point and his following Pater's critical opinions is to be found in the Art of Thomas Hardy (1894). In the first chapter of this book, Critical Preliminaries, Johnson puts forward his views on literature and criticism which reveal his humanistic approach, a firm faith in the permanent truth of human passions, and the belief that the chief occupation and concern of literature is to "always have a supreme care for those original elements of human passion and of human sentiments which knowledge trains and experience educates, without changing their essential quality."²¹ What provokes the artist's mind to expression is his experience of life, of the passions and emotions of men. According to Johnson, "it is the office of good literature, the distinction of classical literature, to give form in every age to the age's human mind."²² Johnson expresses a special distaste for literature that lacks the animating spirit of "fair humanities" and for those writers who refine

21. The Art of Thomas Hardy, p.2.
22. Ibid., p.1.
upon pleasures in such a way that the refinement "confounds pleasure with pain and vice with virtue." He refers to the decadent literature of the times, its bias for the new and the perverse, with strong disapproval: "It is a sick and haggard literature, this literature of throbbing nerves and of subtile sensations; a literature in which clearness is lost in mists, that cloud the brain, and simplicity is exchanged for fantastic ingenuities." He prefers the study of Greek and Roman classical literature for their growth and maturity to the literature of the ages of decay for their curious fascination, because "Literature under such auspices, must lose half its beauty, by losing all its humanity." Johnson was conscious of the charm exercised by curious devices, distorted beauties and all kinds of silly audacities contained in many books of the day, but he was sure that such literature was ephemeral, and would never find a place with the classics. He understood fully well the delicate distinction between diversity and perversity; diversity he considers "admirable" and perversity "detestable". He professes his faith in no uncertain

23. Ibid., p.2.
24. Ibid., p.2.
25. Ibid., p.3.
terms when he says: "I wish to declare my loyalty to the broad and high traditions of literature, to those humanities, which inform with the breath of life the labours of the servants, and the achievements of the masters, in that fine art." 26

The intimate relationship between literature and life that Johnson favours here brings him close to the views expressed by Pater who held that the ideal aim of art "is to deal, indeed, with the deepest elements of man's nature and destiny." 27 Johnson condemns in unequivocal terms the craze for the novel and strange, the vulgar and sensational which is the hallmark of decadence, just as he does the lack of classical traits of clarity, grace and simplicity in the manner of expression. The followers of aestheticism sought the absolute independence of the artist, an unchartered freedom from all traditions and influences. But Johnson takes a different position. Not that he favoured imposing restrictions on the free and creative will of the artist; for him the truth lay somewhere between the two extremes of unfettered freedom of the artist and his bondage to tradition: "To contemplate the artist, the man of letters in his relation to past times and to

26. Ibid., p.4.
27. Greek Studies, p.221.
his own with something of a Positivist spirit tempered by a saving disbelief in Positivism."\textsuperscript{28}

Johnson's veneration of the classics and his use of them as touchstones may also be traced back to the influence of Pater who had a passion for the past and a strong attachment to the classical traditions, as is apparent in his essay on Coleridge. He was particularly drawn to the Hellenic world, not for its wild sort of enchantment, but for its being a delightful and rewarding source of wisdom. For him Greek art enshrines an ideal of enduring validity, "a standard of artistic orthodoxy" for all ages. Pater asserts; "... criticism must never for a moment forget that the artist is the child of his time. But besides these conditions of time and place, and independent of them, there is also an element of permanence, a standard of taste, which genius confesses."\textsuperscript{29} Pater says that the standard of taste was fixed in Greece at a definite period and this standard has been maintained by tradition. Johnson also affirms that "in Homer and in Virgil, in Milton and in Dante, virtue and truth shine clearly"\textsuperscript{30} and that the old, great masters can serve as a touchstone or test for the writers of modern age. He believes that great art is never out of date

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\item \textsuperscript{28} The Art of Thomas Hardy, p.4.
\item \textsuperscript{29} The Renaissance, p.199.
\item \textsuperscript{30} The Art of Thomas Hardy, p.6.
\end{enumerate}
nor obsolete. "A line of Virgil ... comes home to us, as though it were our very thought; upon each repetition, experience has made it more true and touching." 31 Johnson considers the study of classics to be important because the desire for novelty is likely to be corrupted into a disease. Johnson, therefore, counsels contact with wide range of knowledge. "A prolonged handling of the serene classics, until the beauty, the greatness, the goodness of them grow wonderful to us, and romantic, fresh and living." 32 The familiarity with the classics becomes dangerous only when delight in them results in a dislike of contemporary art of their love degenerates into an artificial habit of esteem.

The reverence for the classics does not blind Johnson to the artist's need for freedom from the bondage of the past. In certain circumstances the artist has to turn to his own conscience to discover beauty and strength. However, the ideal condition described by Johnson is similar to Pater's idea of a blending of the individual with the traditional. "It is the office of art to disengage from the conflict and the turmoil of life the interior virtue, the informing truth, which compose the fine spirit of its age, and to do this, with no pettiness of parochial pride

in the fashions and the achievements of its own age, but rather with an orderly power to connect what is, with what has been, looking out prophetically towards what will be."

In spite of his emphasis on the classics and tradition Johnson cannot be accused of a "backward tendency" in his appreciations or an over conservative spirit in his attempts in criticism. He recognised the fact that a change in the form and manner of literature would surely come about with an increase of knowledge and change and growth and novelty in the ways of men and things. But the change and development must be rational and not a mindless innovation for the sake of innovation, a mere revolt. The artist must show a proper apprehension of the lessons of the past as well as the needs of the present. The perfect humanist, Johnson claims, "reveres the past, he comprehends the present; he sees life steadily and sees it whole. The humanists in any liberal sense of that term, are the catholics of art; well balanced and well proportioned in mind, they exaggerate nothing, and they ignore nothing; but upon the facts of life, spiritual and material, they look with a discernment which tries to realise them at their true value." Johnson in his

criticism of Hardy shows him to be such a humanist. In him the old spirit and the spirit of the new times meet together without discord. Johnson has, to put it in his own words, "laid stress upon the strength and the stability of character ... upon his souls of a somewhat pagan severity, grand in endurance of dooms, upon their simplicity, resoluteness, and power." Yet he has spoken of Hardy as a novelist typical of modern literature in that "he loves the complexity of things, the clash of principles and of motives, the encounter of subtle emotions." He admires Hardy because his work shows no courting of popular tastes, no mutilation of thought or of invention, no pandering to prejudice or to preference of any kind. It is rather a courageous and conscientious expression of his own most honest thought and belief. He considers *Tess*, for instance, "among the books of most ardent sincerity, that I have read," even though he is somewhat critical of the attitude of revolt Hardy adopts towards God and the traditional norms of society. According to Johnson Hardy "belongs to a nobler company of artists than they who are simply clamouring for some

Johnson also found Pater's aesthetics intimately related to ethics and it shows his own faith in the doctrine that art cannot be separated from morality. There is continuity of Pater's thought, in the view of Johnson. Johnson unlike many readers of Pater in his own age, refuses to draw a line between an early Pater, devoted to pure aestheticism and a later Pater who tries to bring his aesthetic views close to ethics. Greater emphasis on ethics in his later writings is definitely there but the moral concerns are implicit in his earlier position also. He selects two passages from Pater, one from the earliest of his essays and the other from the last essay of his last book, that is Plato and Platonism, an interval of twenty-five years between the two passages, to drive home his point. That for Johnson aesthetics is ever in close relation with ethics is also borne out by his statement in the Art of Thomas Hardy - "an artist is forbidden by the facts of his natural structure to dissociate his ethics from his aesthetics." His disapproval of Hardy's opinions about God and the kind of perverse morality he seems to support in the actions of Tess, a pure woman, is born out of this belief. Similarly

38. Ibid., p.250.
while reviewing Marie Bashkirtseff's Journals, the strong disgust that it evokes in him, can be traced to the same belief. Johnson avails himself of the opportunity to castigate the sorry taste of those who feed on such "silly petulance, ill-bred ostentation, unfathomable conceits, offensive vulgarity and no trace of affection in thought." To those who love the natural duty of the natural mind these pages must seem false and wretched, according to Johnson. His judgement of Byron is also guided by the same doctrine. "Despicable" is the term he uses for Byron and says: "And to me Byron with all his pretensions and fame seems a very two penny poet and a farthing man." He considers him a man of malignant dishonour and declamatory affectation who advertised his silly obscenities. He mentions how Landor once exhorted him to amend his morals and his style but he did neither and his style remained even more detestable than his morals.

On the question of impersonality of art too, we can discern a definite likeness of views between Johnson and Pater in that they recognised the importance of the subjective element in art however objective an artist endeavoured to be. In other words there has to be reconciliation between the personality of the artist and

40. Post Liminium, p.246.
41. Ibid., p.194.
the impersonality required by his art. Art, according to Johnson is independent of time and place. The great elemental human passions vary little from age to age in their essentials and we expect and find too, the common humanity in works of art. But we also want to find, says he, "the artist displaying his human sympathies and knowledge and insight in a special proper, personal way of his own." 42 All talk about the impersonality of art is very true, according to Johnson, but take two of the most impersonal artists in the world, "any great pair of Flauberts and you will find them dealing with the same thing, the same scenes, characters and situations, with infinitely various results." 43 A work of art that reveals a man with a definite sense of things, an apprehension of his own, is what appeals to Johnson. In emphasizing the sincerity of the artist to his own vision of things he obviously echoes Pater. Johnson speaks in glowing terms of Charlotte Bronte's entire sincerity of mind and spirit, of imagination and thought, in her novels and letters. She exemplifies Pushkin's saying that genius consists not in originality but rather in genuineness, "in that supreme conviction of the artist that his work must be done in this and no other way, in the feeling

42. Ibid., p.108.
43. Ibid., p.108.
that faithfully and fearlessly to execute his own conception is to obey a divine command, the will of eternal beauty and truth."\(^{44}\) Infinitely characteristic, as Johnson states, is the last page of Bronte's masterpiece *Villette*. Her father pleaded for a happy ending for he could not endure the thought of M. Paul Emmanuel's death. But to meet her father's touching desire half way, Miss Bronte affected to leave it an open question. For definitely to bring the proud lover safe home from sea to his beloved and marriage she would not, for "that was an artistic outrage, a falsehood to fact.\(^{45}\)

The success of R. L. Stevenson in his various books and essays, affirms Johnson, lies in the fact that he had to "suppress and limit many fancies, desires and impulses\(^{46}\) and yet had a wide freedom in his compositions; that is, he is able to bring into harmony his own personality with the impersonality demanded by art.

The essential nature of Johnson's criticism, we find, is interpretative, and in this too he follows the example of his master. Johnson seems to have

realized, for instance, that the writers and critics of the nineties who were influenced by Pater had in fact seized upon such elements in his writing as presented a wrong image of the man. It is chiefly to correct the focus, and give a correct interpretation of the man and his work that Johnson wrote several essays. He takes note of and analyses certain characteristics, interests and propensities displayed in Pater's writings and seems to tell the reader that Pater, to quote his own words, "whom you know in the vague, a magnificent name appears to me, meditating his work and his influence, to have been a man of this nature, of this sort—see you can trace surely a love of this, dislike of that in these passages; here he has some what of an ascetic there of a passionate spirit." 47 And we can say with quite a degree of certainty that Johnson has convincingly proved that the imaginary portraits of Pater as a follower of Epicurus, a decadent aesthete, a votarist of style for its own sake, are all wrong. On the contrary he is, as Johnson asserts, "a humanist, a humanitarian in the most gracious meaning of the term," 48 jealously vigilant on behalf of artistic purity, and ever aiming

47. Ibid., p.8.
48. Ibid., p.10.
at "perfect correspondence between conception and expression." 49 There can be little doubt that there is a substance of truth in Johnson's observations. Pater indeed "took criticism and from his effective hands, it issued with the charm of profoundly imaginative thought, clothed in language of a triumphant nicety." 50 Most critical opinions in the nineties were uncrystallized, uncertain, and undefined. It was the virtue of the criticism, he held, "to purge away the cloudiness of sight which makes us apprehend things in twilight or a mist; to discern them in their true proportions and values, not in the confused obscurity of a general impression." 51

Not only in essays about Pater, but in all the writings of Johnson, we perceive the same characteristic interest in interpretation. Whether it be thoughts on Bacon or Blake, or Thomas Hardy, the object is the same, to explain, to interpret the chief elements present in their work and to present a correct picture of the man.

Johnson is not a great critic, although during the Nineties he was rated a major critic, and a minor poet. It may not be difficult to find fault with some of his findings and judgements. It is possible, for.

49. Ibid., p.17.
50. Ibid., p.21.
51. Ibid., p.22.
instance, to find a lack of connection in the various statements he makes about Pater; perhaps he sentimentalizes Pater a bit here and a bit there out of his deep devotion to the man. His insistence on Pater's humour has been taken exception to, for few readers can "catch the wise laughter rippling so pleasantly beneath the studied phrases ... the quiet smile which lies as a charm upon the ordered utterances,"52 that Johnson mentions, and few are prepared to lend support to his belief that Pater "was instinct with veritable fun and wrote with quiet mirth."53 The reason obviously is that they are acquainted with the fabled Pater of a strict solemnity, Pater "ceaselessly, as it were pontificating stiff and stately in his jewelled vestments, moving with serious and slow exactitude through the ritual of his style."54 Johnson seeks to show how false and foolish a travesty of fact it is and his projecting an image of Pater as an humourist can in no way be considered ridiculous if the meaning that he gives to the word humour is properly comprehended. Johnson distinguishes Paterian humour from the popular pranksome humour and describes it as "Humour that is gentle in its strength, humour rooted in

52. Ibid., p.11.
53. Ibid., p.12.
54. Ibid., p.12.
philosophy, humour gravely glad and gleaming...” 55
something like the divine humour, the appreciation of
things in themselves to quote Kant, of "things as they
are, to quote Kipling." 56 If we can understand that
truth involves delight and Pater was solicitous for
the expression of truth, if we can understand that
there can be in the reader "a joy which laughs at the
perfect capture of a truth" 57 then we can understand too,
that there is humour in Pater, profliuent abundance of
it, as Johnson insists.

In Johnson’s criticism an element of pose, self
consciousness and even perhaps insincerity has been
noticed. His review of the 1893 edition of Blake by
Yeats and Ellis, may be cited as an example, wherein
he obviously sets out to praise Blake and his editors,
but ends up by creating a none too flattering picture of
them all. Perhaps he wrote such critical pieces merely
out of sentiment and an assumption that language in
itself was sufficient and no other equipment was
necessary for the judgement of a book. It is quite true
that most of Johnson’s essays were contributed to
magazines and newspapers, and may be, some of them were

55. Ibid., p.11.
56. Ibid., p.12.
57. Ibid., p.13.
written in haste. He confesses for instance in William Blake, "I do not claim to have mastered them (Blake's books) that demands some years of patient study" or again "they disclosed to me one persistent purpose in Blake's books. True, I cannot presume to say in a few words what that is;" and yet again, "I can but say that Ellis and Mr. Yeats seem to me, one out of many readers, to have proved their point, the rational consistency of Blake's conceptions." Indeed there is here a pose of certitude where there is none, and an impression of insincerity in an otherwise remarkably gifted writer. But such examples are exceptions. For even in the same essay Johnson gives evidence of a fine sensitiveness and perception when he eludidates how the poet's imagination supplies to nature its interpretative symbols. According to Johnson:

Blake delighted in the doctrine of correspondences foolishly attributed to Swedenborg as a discovery, but the most ancient wisdom of the world. It may flippantly be termed saying one thing when you mean another; more truly it means seeing that one thing is the sign and symbol of another. . . . Assurdely here is the essence of poetry, the perception of spiritual resemblances."

There is a definite dissimilarity between Johnson's life and his work. It is sometimes believed that

58. Ibid., p.84.
59. Ibid., p.84.
60. Ibid., p.84.
61. Ibid., p.87.
this division hindered his developing into a great critic. Now it is true "he drank a great deal too much" as Yeats affirms in Autobiographies and his doctrines after a certain number of glasses would become more ascetic. It is true too, that he lived in isolation, led a rather unconventional life, "breakfasting when others dined," and held long sessions of drinking late into the night, whereas his public posture was that of a gentleman, a scholar, an orthodox traditionalist. It is quite possible that there was a constant struggle within him and Yeats could see that "Johnson himself in some half conscious part of him, desired the world he had renounced." But the difference between a writer's life and his work should not be a reason for denying the artist the merit of his art. Johnson may well be pleading his own case in the essay on Boswell when he refers to Samuel Johnson's wise conviction accepted by all experts in human nature that "there may be good principles without good practice - if that be true in religion, the converse is true in art." Johnson further says, Addison, with his pure and lucid prose was an "habitual tippler"; Lamb that master of fine graces, "was a sorry drunkard playing the fool." And

63. Post Liminimum, p.139.
as a man may sincerely hold good principles yet be unable to practise them, so "a fine writer may show in his writings a thousand virtues of proportion, sobriety, tact, good sense, utterly lacking in his conduct." Indeed, Johnson, despite his decadent way of life, and despicable death, was no mean critic.

He was a brilliant young critic, combining sensitive expression with sound judgements. We respect Johnson in Ezra Pound's opinion "in part for his hardness in part for his hatred of amateurishness ... and his sense of criticism evident in his prose." "His every utterance is remarkable for its individual native balance," asserts Thomas Whittomore. In his review of Johnson's the Art of Thomas Hardy E.K. Chambers thought it deserved "to stand on our shelves beside the golden volumes of Arnold and Pater." It is not perhaps proper to claim a place for Johnson as high as that of Pater or Arnold. However it would not be unjust to emphasize that he was the rare writer of the Nineties who did justice to the critical opinions of Pater. His revolt against the

64. Ibid., p.139-40.
67. Quoted by Brijraj Singh; The Development of a Critical Tradition, (Delhi, 1978) p.56.
decadents, the distorted aesthetic principles supposed to be an inheritance from Pater, his stress upon the correspondence between form and matter, the inseparability of ethics from aesthetics, the need for harmony between the personality of the artist and the impersonality required by art, have not only cleared the confusion in the interpretation of the tenets of Paterian criticism, but also set forth clear critical values and imparted a sense of certitude in an age where, to quote Johnson, "literature abounds with sick and morbid beauty, every where men are drifting from one philosophy of doubt to another aware of their own futility." 69