SAMUEL JOHNSON AND AUGUSTANISM

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Abstract

One of the reasons why Samuel Johnson achieved his monumentality in literary history is that he was a comprehensive thinker whose treatment of social, political, and literary domains encompassed a wide range of concerns and was aimed at the entire reading public of his time. This paper contextualizes Johnson within Augustanism as a defining frame work of the age in which he lived and a movement of which he was a leading figure. Such contextualizing complicates our understanding of Johnson when we discover that there are inconsistencies in his relation to and application of Augustan principles. Investigating Johnson’s social, political, and literary views, we see that on the one hand, there is the image of Johnson the follower and advocate of Augustanism as defined through classical aesthetics and conservatism of thought. One the other hand, there is the image of the liberal Johnson who writes employing a progressive philosophy that does not entirely belong to the Augustan Age.
Samuel Johnson and Augustanism

To write the Life of him who excelled all mankind in writing the lives of others . . . may be reckoned in me a presumptuous task.

Boswell, *The life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*

1. Introduction

Throughout the history of English literature, it has been a consensus that Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) is one of the most influential figures of all times; like Shakespeare or Milton, he is one of the names that left a lasting fingerprint in literary history. The long 18th century, or the Augustan Age, during which Johnson lived, spans from 1660 (the English Restoration) to the end of the eighteenth century. To the Augustan Age, Johnson was an iconic figure; his presence was so powerful that some resources, like *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, propose 1785, one year after Johnson’s death, as the end of the Augustan Age (Neoclassic and Romantic). The significance of Johnson lies in the fact that not only his writings have survived the critical test of the passage of time but also the fact that almost two hundred and fifty years after his death, Johnson is still a fruitful subject of study, a window to the world of the British 18th century. It is conceivable, therefore, to argue that Johnson’s authorial outlook can be an angle from which one can try to understand the 18th century.

One of the distinctive characteristics of Johnson is that his canon includes almost every literary genre; he was a poet, a novelist, an essayist, a journalist, a lexicographer, and a critic. In addition, he was an influential social and political thinker. This polymathic thought earned Johnson the famous epitaph, “Primus Inter
Pares,” Latin for “the first among equals,” who was able to distinguish himself in an age pregnant with literary genius (Paku 111). One can go on and on trying to demonstrate the eminence of Johnson in literary history; yet, it might be hard to provide a more apropos tribute than that of Johnson’s friend, Sir Joshua Reynolds, who compactly describes Johnson’s influence when he says that “he qualified my mind to think justly” (qtd. in Gray 280). No author could expect or deserve a greater tribute than this.

Tracing Johnson’s authorial career, it can be deduced that he had a vision of a certain public scene that is discernable throughout his writings. This public scene is triadic, comprising the literary as well as the social and political domains. To be able to capture this envisioned world helps deepen our understanding of the 18th century. In doing so, it is important to note that Johnson’s views on the social, political, and literary domains of life are inextricably linked to Augustanism as the line of thought that is characteristic of the age in which Johnson lived. In piecing together Johnson’s social, political, and literary views which form that scene of life in the 18th century, Johnson complicates our understanding of Augustanism, and ultimately our understanding of the 18th century. Johnson can in fact be seen as an emblem of the Augustan Age, conforming to the Augustan social, political, and literary values, marked by classical conservatism. However, to say only this of Johnson threatens to reduce him to nothing more than a mere embodiment of Augustanism, for there is more to Johnson than being an Augustan figure. While On the one hand there is always “the Johnson who seems ready at hand when a journalist, interviewer, or editorial writer needs a quotable conservative to pillory,” on the other hand, there is
indeed that intellectually independent, liberal, and progressive Johnson (Parke 72).

While this paper is not intended to vindicate Johnson from conservatism, as it is part of the argument here to argue that he certainly was a conservative, it partly aims at highlighting the liberal and advanced side of Johnson

Before we proceed to investigating Johnson’s social, political, and literary views and discussing how they conform or deviate from Augustanism, it is necessary that Augustanism itself is clearly defined and contextualized. Moreover, linked to Johnson’s relation to Augustanism is the kind of audience to whom Johnson speaks in his writings – especially in the Rambler essays from which the bulk of Johnson’s views are derived in this paper – and the role that Johnson seems to assume when speaking to that audience. Therefore, wherever applicable, the discussion of Johnson and Augustanism will touch on the relation between Johnson and his audience, trying to achieve a better understanding of Johnson’s Augustanism.

2. Augustanism: Literary, Political, and Social Order

For the long 18th century, the era between 1660 and 1798, the Augustan Age is another name that has been used as early as 1712 to refer to this period. One of the most defining characteristics of this era is order; it was a period where political, social, and literary order had been restored, maintained, and advocated. If we are to coin a new name for that era, “The Age of Order” can be a successful candidate. A

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1 It is usually an elusive task to delineate a literary era and propose a definitive year for its beginning and end. 1798, the fall of the Bastille, is proposed as the end of the Augustan Age; some resources offer 1785, one year after Johnson’s death, as a possible year; and 1789 is another candidate (Neoclassic and Romantic). 1690 and 1700 have been suggested to signal the start of the Augustan Age; however, Augustanism as elaborated in this paper sees the Restoration as the very beginning of the Augustan Age since even though it is a political event, the Restoration marks the reinstatement of peace and order which reflected on the flourishing of arts and literature in England at that time (Simmons 1-2).
brief political, social, and literary contextualization of the period from 1660-1798 (the Augustan Age hereafter) reflects the prominence of order as a major theme of that period.

The first definition that the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives for the term “Augustan” is as an adjective that describes anything “Connected with the reign of Augustus Cesar, the palmy period of Latin literature” (“Augustan”). Elaborating on this definition, the term “Augustan” refers to the Roman emperor, Augustus, who ruled Rome from 27 B.C.-14 A.D. During his reign, emperor Augustus rescued Rome from the state of political and social disorder, and rebuilt it based on the concept of “Pax Romana,” Roman peace, stability, and order; his reign was an age of reform. His proud statement “Latericium Invenit, Marmoream Reliquit,” Latin for “I found Rome built of brick and left it made of marble” stands as a landmark testimony to the great achievements in his reign. The political and social stability during that time resulted in the flourishing of the Roman literature, manifested in the works of the great Roman poets such as Virgil, Horace, and Ovid.

During the Renaissance, roughly the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, Europe witnessed a cultural movement that sought the revival of literature based on the Classics, the Greek and Roman literature; this period is considered to be the first Classicism in English literature. This movement continued in Europe from the early period of the seventeenth century to the late decades of the eighteenth, and was known as the Neo-Classical Age. In Britain, the “Augustan Age” was coined as another name for this Neo-Classicism. The *OED* explains that the term “Augustan” is “applied to the period of highest purity and refinement of any national literature; and
generally of the correct standard in taste, classical.” Moreover, the term is “Also, applied specifically to 17th and 18th century English literature” (“Augustan”). At that time, in Britain, the Roman literature was intensively studied and translated, especially the poetry of the great poets who throve during the reign of Augustus such as Virgil, Horace, and Ovid. English literature was revived and reformed based on its Roman Augustan ancestor, hence the coinage of the name the “Augustan Age.” Therefore, one way we can see literary Augustanism, or Neo Classicism, is as the adaptation of the classical notions of literary order with the emphasis on standards and rules based on the Roman Augustan literary heritage. The influence of the Roman Augustan literature is evident in the way Johnson, for example, opens most, if not all, of his *Rambler* essays with verses of poetry mostly by the Roman Augustans like Virgil, Horace, and Ovid. Generally, we can see that with its focus on the classical rules of literature, literary Augustanism is to some extent synonymous to literary conservatism.

Before we move to contextualizing Augustanism on the political and social levels, the use of the term “Augustan Age” has to be delineated. It is important to note the chronology of the use of the term “Augustan Age” to clarify the time period to which it refers and how it spans over the time period in which Johnson lived. The *OED* indicates that the term “Augustan Age” has been used as early as 1712 to refer to the time period which started with the English Restoration in 1660. Some of the examples that the *OED* provides on the use of the term include Swift’s 1745 statement that “Charles the Second's reign is reckoned . . . our Augustan age”; Goldsmith’s 1759 essay entitled “An Account of the Augustan Age of England”; and
Walpole’s 1772 comment that “what a figure will this our Augustan age make” (“Augustan”). Clearly, therefore, the term “Augustan Age” has been used in the 18th century to signify the time period that starts with the English Restoration and ends around the death of Johnson, roughly the eighth decade of the 18th century.

Having established the time frame of the term “Augustan Age,” Augustanism as the framework of that age still needs further contextualization. Augustanism is not restricted only to the literary domain; it also defines the political and social aspects of the Augustan Age. An important question presents itself at this stage: what was it about the Roman Augustan heritage that inspired the English Augustans (the English figures of the Augustan Age) to embrace Augustanism as a movement of reform? In the 1640’s, England was torn by the Civil War between the Puritans led by Oliver Cromwell and the Royalists led by king Charles I, which culminated in the execution of Charles I, the banishment of his son, Charles II, and the replacement of English monarchy with the Commonwealth of England under the personal rule of Oliver Cromwell. Needless to say, that was a time of great instability and severe lack of political and social order. The celebrated Restoration of King Charles II to the throne of England, which signifies the beginning of the Augustan Age, marks the conservative political thought with its classical respect for monarchy and the absolute authority it implies.

The English Restoration has, beyond its political reference, strong social significance. After the chaos of the Civil War, the English Augustans strongly embraced the Roman Augustan concept of order. In the social scene, the English Augustans tried to emulate the Roman Augustan concept of “Pax Romana.”
Augustan Rome, a citizen would travel from one end of the empire to the other in complete safety; it has often been said that “all roads lead to Rome,” in an allusion to the proliferation of the Roman road systems that reflected the order and stability of Augustan Rome (“Roman Roads”). For such an order to be maintained, the English Augustans believed that every person must conform to their role in society and accept it. Samuel Johnson reflects this Augustan belief in his adherence to the idea of social order and ranks. Lynch argues that Johnson committed to the Augustan principle of social subordination and the authority this subordination implies. “Sir, I am a friend to subordination,” he once told James Boswell, “as most conducive to the happiness of society. There is a reciprocal pleasure in governing and being governed” (qtd. in Lynch). According to Johnson, then, every member in society should understand and comply with their position in the social ladder; social subordination, therefore, is contributive to a harmonious society where order prevails. It is true that sometimes individuals might face injustice, poverty, and suffering, but they must always endure and accept their lot in life, since by doing so, social order and stability are protected.

The above account of Augustanism as the framework of the Augustan Age is meant to establish Augustanism as the classical conservatism of social, political, and literary thought. In doing so, we establish the basic ground to the discussion of Johnson’s views and how they conform to or deviate from Augustanism, complicating our understanding of Johnson and his relation to Augustanism. Having done so, one element needs to be elaborated before moving to investigating Johnson’s Augustanism, and that is the kind of audience Johnson sought to reach, especially in his periodical writings, as well as the role he assumed in addressing this audience.
3. Johnson and His Audience

A useful approach to understanding the interplay of Johnson’s periodical writings, especially The Rambler, the role Johnson plays in those writings, and the audience targeted by Johnson is Habermas’s argument of the literary public sphere of the 18th century. According to Habermas, the literary public sphere develops in the eighteenth century of which literary journals and periodicals are key institutions. He traces the origin of this literary public sphere to the seventeenth century, saying, “As early as the last third of the seventeenth century journals were complemented by periodicals containing . . . pedagogical instruction and even criticism and reviews.”

He then traces the development of the literary public sphere into the eighteenth century whereby in the literary journals and periodicals, “the scholars were to inform the public of useful truths” (24-25). The significance of Habermas’s discussion of the literary public sphere to Johnson lies in the didacticism that the literary figures practiced in the literary journals and periodicals of the 18th century. Through journals and periodicals, the intellectual authorities of the 18th wanted to reach the public and educate it in the values and aesthetics they advocated. Such didacticism is a key element of Augustanism whereby authorial authorities assume the role of arbiters who inform the public of those “useful truths” that guide them through different areas of life.

There have been some scholarly attempts to project Habermas’ model of the literary public sphere on the periodicals of the eighteenth century. For example, Pollock argues that Addison and Steele’s The Spectator is a project “imagined to be that of ‘consciously educating a heterogeneous public into the universal forms of
reason, taste, and morality’” (Eagleton qtd. in Pollock 708). He expresses his conviction that “Habermasians would agree that Addison and Steele register the early eighteenth-century desire for a particular kind of ethical social order and that their texts reflect a confident effort at reform” (Pollock 708). The literary figures of the eighteenth century, like Addison and Steele, took upon them the responsibility of reforming and shaping the literary, social, and to some extent the political scenes through educating the public in how to read and respond to literature as well as how to maintain a certain kind of social and political order. The medium in which this intellectual exchange took place was the literary periodicals; Pollock argues that Addison and Steele’s *The Spectator* is an example of the Habermasian literary public sphere in play. Furthermore, Mackie argues that “the task of the papers is the reformation of manners and morals . . . *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* wanted to enter the lives of their readers and reshape them” (2-3). In the same way, as Roberts points out, Johnson, in *The Rambler*, was perceived first and foremost as a moralist and a social thinker. “It [*The Rambler*] was deliberately the work of a majestic teacher of moral…wisdom” (Chapter II). As will be demonstrated later, Johnson’s didacticism, in *The Rambler*, clearly stands out; he assumes the role of the arbiter on a wide range of social, political, and literary concerns. Johnson, in *The Rambler*, seems to be setting himself as an intellectual authority of the 18th century. This question of authority and its relation to those whom it outranks, in this case, Johnson’s readers, is an important element in understanding Johnson’s Augustanism.

However, if this argument that *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* are examples of the medium of the Habermasian literary public sphere, it follows that it is even
more valid to make such an argument concerning Johnson’s *The Rambler*, the work from which the bulk of evidence will be drawn to explain Johnson’s somewhat conflicting views in relation to Augustanism. Unlike Addison and Steele’s *The Tatler* 1709 and *The Spectator* 1711-1712, Johnson’s *The Rambler* 1750-1752 was the first periodical to break out of the London circle in terms of audience reach. Korshin explains that the improvement of the means of book distribution at midcentury, the efficient road systems, and the efficacy of the post office enabled *The Rambler* to reach Oxford or Cambridge, for instance, overnight, while it would take three days at most to reach as far as Scotland. Therefore, “Johnson [in *The Rambler*] intended to reach, and knew he was reaching, a public far beyond the capital, for he includes a number of essays about the country,” which can be rarely found in its predecessors (97). As is the case, perhaps, with any periodical essays, *The Rambler* had three types of readers: those who read the essays as they were published biweekly; readers who read *The Rambler* as a complete collection after 1752, and thirdly, those who read only the well-known, most-read essays. Korshin points out that the second type of readers is the most important. In the eighteenth century and up to 1800, there were more than three dozen editions, at least seven more reprintings of the complete essays as parts of Johnson’s collected works, and roughly an edition every year. *The Rambler*, Korshin argues, reached an even wider range of readers in the nineteenth century with three dozens of separate editions and more than twenty full reprintings in collections of Johnson’s works, bearing in mind the greater size and cheaper prices of the nineteenth century editions (97-99). It is clear, then, that *The Rambler* did achieve a penetrating presence in the literary scene of not only Johnson’s century but
also the following one. It also surpassed the other periodicals of the eighteenth century in overcoming the locality of London readers and reaching readers nationwide.

The above sketch of *The Rambler*’s influence as a literary periodical is intended to support the main argument of this paper, that is, the investigation of Johnson’s social, political, and literary views and how they paint two different pictures of Johnson when it comes to Augustanism. In discussing Johnson’s Augustanism, his relation to his audience and the role he assumes in addressing this audience helps illustrate how Johnson views complicate our understanding of Johnson as an Augustan figure.

**4. Johnson the Augustan**

The task in this section is to piece together those views of Johnson that paint the picture of Johnson as an Augustan figure. Here, we will see Johnson as a true representative of the Augustan Age: a follower of Augustanism in his advocacy of conservative and classical notions of social, political, and literary order.

**4.1 Social**

It is perhaps in social thought that Johnson’s Augustan conservatism is most evident. To Johnson, social order is delineated through social stratification whereby authorities are determined by class, and the submission of inferior classes to those that outrank them is of the essence to maintaining social order. In a conversation with Johnson, Boswell asks about the notion “that intrinsick merit *ought* to make the only distinction amongst mankind.” This idea that merit should be the criterion for distinguishing people Johnson opposes: “Why, Sir,” he tells Boswell, “mankind have
found that this cannot be.” The reason why merit cannot be the distinction between individuals, Johnson believes, is that the “proportion of intrinsick merit” cannot be determined, and if so, mankind will dispute and quarrel in determining the degree of personal virtue and achievement (Boswell 312). If this criterion of intrinsic merit is such a gray area, it cannot be used to establish the status of individuals in society. Johnson, therefore, reveals an Augustan principle in defining the relation between people as well as the status that people hold in society. Elaborating on this subject, he tells Boswell,

Sir, as subordination is very necessary for society, and contentions for superiority very dangerous, mankind, that is to say, all civilized nations, have settled it upon a plan invariable in principle. A man is born to hereditary rank; or his being appointed to certain offices, gives him a certain rank.

Subordination tends greatly to human happiness. Were we all upon an equality, we should have no other enjoyment than mere animal pleasure” (qtd. in Boswell 313).

In his explanation of how social authority is established, Johnson reveals clear Augustanism of thought. Authorities are determined first and foremost by hereditary standings, and in a transient standard, by holding public responsibilities. That is, hereditary standards are the true test of authority being more genuine and lasting than the authority that emanates from holding a public office which is dependent on staying in such office and expectedly ends with leaving this position. Not only does Johnson express his conviction of such social order, he argues that it is a fundamental feature of civilized societies to have hierarchy of classes. Being so, it follows,
Johnson believes, that power or authority is defined according to class, and that subordination should characterize the relation between different classes in a society. Not only is social subordination concomitant of hierarchical societies, it is absolutely essential to the well-being of such societies. To Boswell, he says,

Mankind are happier in a state of inequality and subordination. Were they to be in this pretty state of equality, they would soon degenerate into brutes . . . Sir, all would be losers, were all to work for all:—they would have no intellectual improvement; All intellectual improvement arises from leisure: all leisure arises from one working for another (qtd. in Boswell 514).

Johnson believes that the absence of social hierarchies threatens to demoralize societies, descending with them to barbarianism. He mirrors the classical conviction that inequality differences between people define their relation to each other, that those of inferior standings and capabilities should be of service to those above them. Such a dynamic is guaranteed to result in the prosperity and advancement of societies. If those of subordinate status in a society conform to their roles and perform the duties that are suited to their status, this will give the “leisure” to the elite in that society to indulge in intellectual concerns which ultimately reflects on the improvement of society as a whole. In the overall scheme, Johnson’s Augustanism as a social thinker is unmistakable: he believes that hierarchy of social classes and subordination among classes based on authority status are conducive to a happy, ordered society.

As a social thinker, Johnson was concerned with the issue of the public, or the “crowd,” to use Reinert’s term, where he offers his view on the relation between the
individual and the whole as an important factor in social order. Johnson, Reinert believes, raised the topic of the crowd usually to highlight the insignificance of the individual as opposed to society as a whole when he proclaims in *Rasselas*, that, “You are only one atom of the mass of humanity” (3). In the *Rambler 146*, he states that, “It is long before we are convinced of the small proportion which every man bears to the collective body of mankind” (Johnson 3: 15). The subordination of the individual in favor of society is characteristic of the Johnsonian social thought; it reflects Johnson’s classical authoritarianism in social thinking, his adherence to the classical notion of social order.

On another level, the idea of the public or the “crowd” and the relation between individuals and authority influence our understanding of how Johnson sees his readership in his writings, especially in his periodical essays. As was demonstrated earlier, Johnson, in *The Rambler*, wanted to reach the entire nation and was speaking to the whole reading public, that is, anyone able to obtain access to a copy of the essays and capable of reading. Therefore, in reaching the reading public nationwide, Johnson seems to set himself as an authority with the right to arbitrate in social concerns such as the relation between individuals and society. However, Gray points out that Johnson rarely reflects on himself as an authority. He provides an example of Johnson’s rare moments of self-reflection where Johnson appears to humbly aspire for achieving some kind of authority. In the conclusion to *Adventurer 137*, Johnson says,
For my part, I do not regret the hours which I have laid out on these little compositions. That the world has grown apparently better, since the publication of the Adventurer, I have not observed, but am willing to think that many have caught hints of truth, which is now their duty to pursue; and that those who have received no improvement, have the wanted not the opportunity but intention to improve (qtd. in Gray 274).

Even though Johnson here depicts himself as modestly reaching for authority, the type of social issues he treats and the implied audience to whom he speaks give us a different picture from the one that Johnson projects here. Johnson’s comprehensiveness of social concerns and readers’ reach tell us that Johnson saw himself as an authority of his age. If Johnson seems to act like an authority, then we can imagine that he saw his relation to his audience as that of the crowd to authority.

In Augustanism, the question of authority and its subjects is of the essence: if Johnson is an authority, submission and obedience is expected from his audience. This relation between the role that Johnson assumes in his writings and the implied audience he addresses is an important element in understanding Johnson’s Augustanism.

Continuing to examine Johnson’s social conservatism, the authoritarian social thinking is evident in Johnson’s treatment of the miseries and hardships that might befall the individual in a society. He dedicates the *Rambler* 32 to offer his opinion on this subject. He opens the essay by emphasizing the importance of this topic, maintaining that “one of the principal topics of moral instruction is the art of bearing calamities.” He then provides his rationale on this art, saying that “The cure for the greatest part of human miseries is not radical, but palliative”; he further contemplates
that “the armies of pain send their arrows against us on every side . . . [however] the strongest armour which reason can supply, will only blunt their points, but cannot repel them.” He finally provides the ideal solution in such a situation, whereby “the great remedy which heaven has put in our hands is patience, by which, though we cannot lessen the torments of the body, we can in a great measure preserve the peace of the mind” (Johnson 1: 147-176). Therefore, the fact that an individual is merely a small part of society entails, according to Johnson, that they endure what life inflicts upon them and have fortitude to face such inflictions. People are supposed to accept their lot in life and adhere to their roles in it, whereby society’s well-being is prioritized over individual miseries and social order, as Johnson perceives it, is preserved.

“Patience and submission” are two elements that are characteristic of Johnson’s social thought (Johnson 1: 177). He embraced the Augustan notion of social submission evident in the undermining of the individual in favor of society or the state and the necessity for respecting authorities and rules that such undermining implies. Moreover, if individuals are merely parts in a whole, it ensues, according to Johnson, that patience, and never discontent and complaining, is their only natural provision in dealing with life’s calamities. This perhaps is one of the clearest points of disjunction between Augustan/conservative and liberal thought. Augustan in his thinking, Johnson perceives debating of established rules, traditions, and authorities as threatening to order and stability. According to Johnson’s classical notion of social order, members in a society should conform to their roles in society without questioning the rules, laws, or authorities, and if faced with hardships, patience is
their best remedy since “nothing more unsuitable to the nature of man in any calamity than rage and turbulence” (Johnson 1: 177). Johnson seems to believe that if the door is open to rebelling and turbulence out of personal dissatisfaction with fixed order, there would be no guarantee that things will not go out of control, leading to destructive anarchy. In the context of having the painful legacy of the English Civil War and the 1689 Revolution as well as witnessing the political turmoil of his time, Johnson’s repugnance for “rage and turbulence” against authorities is understood. One can imagine that if he had lived to witness the French Revolution and its horrible, bloody aftermath, Johnson would have used it to prove the validity of his Augustan social thought.

Johnson’s conservatism in social thinking permeates into his depiction of the domestic privacies of home and school. As with his treatment of the relation between individuals and higher authorities in society, submission is the key word in his treatment of children disciplining. In Boswell’s Life, we see Johnson giving an argument of why a child’s punishment must induce fear in the child. He provides a general principal in raising children when he states that “Correction, in itself, is not cruel; children, being not reasonable, can be governed only by fear.” He then explains that impressing this fear in the child is one of the most important duties of parents. To support the importance of this practice, he argues that “Locke, in his treatise of Education, mentions a mother, with applause, who whipped an infant eight times before she had subdued it; for had she stopped at the seventh act of correction, her daughter, says he, would have been ruined.” According to Johnson, child punishment, as severe as whipping, is necessary in bringing children to submission which
ultimately reflects on their well-being. This imposition of fear through punishment is also expected in the school system. Johnson explains that “A stubborn scholar must be corrected till he is subdued. The discipline of a school is military. There must be either unbounded licence or absolute authority. The master, who punishes . . . propagates obedience through the whole school; and establishes regularity by exemplary justice” (qtd. in Boswell 487). The treatment of children in school is not different from that at home. If the teacher or principal is the authority in school, then they have the responsibility of correcting and subduing children. It is clear that Johnson’s treatment of authority and those who are subsumed under it is characteristic of his social thinking. When it comes to authority, submission is of paramount importance. According to Johnson, authority, by necessity, implies submission, whether it is the submission of individuals to government or children to parents and teachers.

Johnson’s conservatism in social thought with its emphasis on the respect for authorities in society invites us to stop again and reflect on Johnson’s relation to his readers. As is illustrated in this section, Johnson covers a range of social concerns, from the relation between individuals and the state to the relation between parents and their children and educators and their students. Throughout his treatment of these issues, it is clear that respect and due submission for higher authorities is a characterizing element. In covering social issues as general as the individual’s relation to the state and as domestic as the parent’s or the schoolmaster’s relation to children, Johnson addresses a wide range of readers, from state men and social thinkers to parents and schoolmasters. As was demonstrated by *The Rambler’s*
nationwide reach, this comprehensiveness of social concerns and targeted readers implies that Johnson sees himself as an authority on such issues. If Johnson implicitly places himself in an authoritative position over his readers, we would expect the relation between him and his readers to be marked by submission and conformity to authority. It is clear that Johnson does not explicitly reflect this relation, but one cannot help but feel the authoritative air in most of Johnson’s writings.

4.2 Political

The discussion of Johnson’s political orientations is perhaps one of the most unsettled and convoluted areas of the scholarship on Johnson. For example, whether Johnson was a Jacobite and a Non-juror and whether he was a Jacobite at an early stage of his life then abandoned his support for the dynasty of the Stuart kings in a later stage is an area of much debate between the scholars of Johnson as is evident in Greene’s (1990) *The Politics of Samuel Johnson* and Clark’s (1996) “The Politics of Samuel Johnson.” However, one aspect of Johnson’s political inclinations, on which there is a consensus, and which is most essential to the purpose of this paper, is the fact that he was a devoted Tory. Boswell confirms this fact when he says, “We [him and Johnson] are both Tories; both convinced of the utility of monarchical power, and both lovers of that reverence and affection for a sovereign which constitute loyalty” (qtd. in Clark 33). This Toryism is one of the most telling elements of Johnson’s Augustan political conservatism. The term, Tory, denotes respect for monarchy, authority, and tradition. It also signifies political order in its traditional definition whereby the monarch’s right to rule is established through divine authority and the monarch is seen as God’s representative on earth.
The classical veneration for the figure of the monarch is a defining feature of Johnson’s political thought. Boswell records a conversation with Johnson that reflects this traditional perception; Johnson says,

Sir, you are to consider, that in our constitution, according to its true principles, the King is the head, he is supreme: he is above everything, and there is no power by which he can be tried. Therefore, it is, Sir, that we hold the King can do no wrong; that whatever may happen to be wrong in government may not be above our reach, by being ascribed to Majesty (qtd. in Boswell 300).

Johnson here presents a very classical, conservative perception of the figure of the monarch. First and foremost, the king occupies the top of the pyramid in a state; he is a quintessential figure whose ultimate status is never to be called into question. If the king holds such a supreme position, it follows, believes Johnson, that his status and conduct are unimpeachable. Johnson, in clear political Augustanism, views the king as the paragon of political existence in a country; such a view can be rightly described as conservative.

Being the kind of thinker who is marked by comprehensiveness in his treatment of any subject, there is more to the politics of Johnson than being a Tory and the views on monarchy. Johnson’s political thought extends to the other elements of the political equation of his time. He provides his Augustan outlook on the nature of government, the authority that government assumes, and the relation between government and its subjects. In one of his political essays, *Taxation No Tyranny* (1775), which he wrote as a reply to the 1774 Bill of Rights of the insurrecting
American colonies, he reflects on government and the kind of authority that should emanate from such a power. He states that

In sovereignty there are no gradations . . . there can be no limited government. There must, in every society, be some power or other, from which there is no appeal, which admits no restrictions, which pervades the whole mass of the community, regulates and adjusts all subordination, enacts laws or repeals them, erects or annuls judicatures, extends or contracts privileges, exempt itself from question or control, and bounded only by physical necessity (Johnson 423).

In a classical political conservatism, Johnson offers his syllogistic definition of government. He starts with the premise that sovereignty as a supreme power does not allow any variation of the degree of power: sovereignty unequivocally means absolute power. The second implicit premise is that the sovereignty of a state is embodied in government. If so, the natural conclusion will be that a government must assume complete, unlimited existence and power. Such power permeates into all aspects of a society, regulating and controlling every facet of life, and, like the monarch, this power is completely unassailable. In a sense, Johnson proposes a system of ruling that can be described as the autocracy of government as a whole.

Johnson’s definition of government and its authority correlates with a certain relation between government and its subjects, a relation that is in keeping with Johnson’s Augustanism in political, as well as social, thought. In the False Alarm (1770), in which Johnson comments on the numerous changes of government after the Seven Years’ War, he provides a principle that characterizes this relation; he
states that “All government supposes subjects; all authority implies obedience” (Johnson 325). In a series of correlations, Johnson establishes this relation: the very existence of government is contingent on the existence of people to be governed; if government is the embodiment of absolute authority, then no less than complete compliance and submission are expected from people towards their government. Furthermore, Johnson does not overlook the fact that the authority of government might be defied by its subjects, and in *Taxation No Tyranny* (1775), he provides a means to counteract any possible insubordination. He emphasizes that “Government is necessary to man, and where obedience is not compelled, there is no government. If the subject refuses to obey, it is the duty of authority to use compulsion” (Johnson 448). In a clear authoritarian tone, Johnson stresses submission as the defining relation between individuals and government. If such submission is not willfully practiced by people, it is the prerogative of government, as a supreme power, to force people into obedience. Johnson’s political orientations are in keeping with him being a follower of Augustanism and an advocate of its values. His perceptions of government as a political body, the authority that springs from government, and the relation between subjects and government are telling elements of classical political conservatism, or in other words, political Augustanism.

Exploring Johnson’s political writings, one finds more to Johnson’s political conservatism. If we are to follow the traditional point of view that sees patriotism as exclusive to conservatives, or at least one of their distinguishing traits, then Johnson is a true conservative. In *The Patriot* (1774), Johnson addresses the electors of Great Britain before the 1774 parliamentary elections. In this essay, he tries to enlighten the
voting public in the basis on which they should choose their representative in Westminster. According to Johnson, patriotism is the single most important quality that a member of the parliament must possess. He addresses the electors, saying, “It ought to be deeply impressed on the minds of all who have voices in this national deliberation, that no man can deserve a seat in parliament, who is not a patriot.”

Having established patriotism as the decisive criterion for choosing a member in the parliament, he gives the definition of a patriot. “A patriot,” he says, “is he whose publick conduct is regulated by one single motive, the love of his country; who, as a member in the parliament, has . . . neither hope nor fear, neither kindness nor resentment, but refers everything to the common interest” (Johnson 390). A member of the parliament, therefore, is patriotic in being motivated only by the love of his country, one who has no personal stakes in what he does and whose conduct as a representative of people is directed solely towards the best of his country. Clearly, this is the traditional definition of patriotism, a definition on which anyone, including liberals, would agree. However, what distinguishes Johnson’s patriotism, giving it its conservative air is the intersection between subordination and patriotism. He establishes this link saying,

To instigate the populace with rage beyond the provocation, is to suspend publick happiness, if not to destroy it. He is no lover of his country, that unnecessarily disturbs its peace. Few errors and few faults of government, can justify an appeal to the rabble; who ought not to judge of what they cannot understand, and whose opinions are not propagated by reason, but caught by contagion (Johnson 391).
According to Johnson, a crucial constituent of patriotism is the preservation of order in society. If submission should characterize the relation between people and their government, then it is an act of patriotism not to disturb this order. While some would perceive of protesting and standing up to the misconduct of government to be motivated by patriotism, Johnson believes the opposite. He considers the incitement of the public against the errors and faults of government is highly dangerous, for such an agitation will appeal to the mobs who are incapable of quiet reasoning about the conduct of government and are easily stirred into riot and insubordination. If submission and subordination of people in dealing with their government are conducive of a happy society, then it is necessarily patriotic to maintain such a dynamic of authority and subordination since doing otherwise threatens to suspend, if not destroy, the stability of society. Subordination and due submission is not expected only towards government; it characterizes the relation among classes. Talking to Boswell about the nature of government, Johnson states that no man is “more enemy to the publick peace, than he who fills weak heads with imaginary claims, and breaks the series of civil subordination, by inciting the lower classes of mankind to encroach upon the higher” (qtd. in Boswell 534). Johnson here emphasizes the idea that politicians should never attempt to disturb the hierarchy of social classes and the dynamic of subordination of the lower classes to those above them, for the happiness and tranquility of society is dependent on maintaining such dynamic.

Before we leave the discussion of Johnson’s political views, there are some implications about Johnson’s audience that are noteworthy. In some of his views presented above, Johnson speaks of “the rabble,” “the weak minds,” and “the lower
classes” as that sector of society with the potentiality of being aroused to disobedience and insubordination since they lack sound judgment and reason. Johnson seems to think that it is the responsibility of intellectual authorities, of which he implicitly considers himself one, to tell these masses of people how to behave in a manner that maintains order and stability. On another level, Johnson’s targeted audience in those instances is mainly the more elevated classes than the crowds of common people. When he discusses issues like monarchy, the nature of government, and the relation between individuals and the state, one expects that Johnson speaks mainly to the politicians of the 18th century England, those in political decision-making positions. Furthermore, when he addresses the voters of the 1774 parliamentary elections, he is not speaking to the low masses of people. Knowing that “the right to vote [in 18th century England] was in the hands of a tiny group of affluent subjects that historians estimate included only about 5 per cent of the adult male population,” we see that Johnson speaks to the high and powerful classes of people at the time (“Georgian Elections”). In all cases, however, Johnson addresses his implied audience with a voice of authority that has the power to judge in various political concerns. This also implies that Johnson assumes the role of an even higher authority than those whom he addresses. This dynamic of authority and its relation to inferior subjects is a recurrent theme when investigating Johnson’s views.

It becomes obvious after this brief review of some of Johnson’s political opinions that Johnson as a political thinker was an outspoken conservative. His Toryism, his views on the nature of government and its authority, his description of
the relation between the public and the government, and his perception of patriotism all amount to a picture of the classical, conservative political thinker.

4.3 Literary

Apart from the political and social elements of the equation, the late seventeenth century was thought to be a time of literary disorder. At that time, there was a lot of confusion as to how poetry (the dominant literary genre at that time) should be written. Some poets still wrote Shakespearean sonnets, others wrote Petrarchan sonnets, and some followed the French or Italian schools. There was great indeterminacy as to what schools to follow, what meter to use, and ultimately how poetry should be composed. Therefore, the Augustan Age took upon it the responsibility of regulating that confusion and standardizing literature.

4.3.1 Reaction to Metaphysical Poetry

One angle through which the Augustan Age can be seen is that it was a literary reaction to the Metaphysical poetry stage of the late seventeenth century. The very name “Metaphysical” was an Augustan term coined by Dryden as a pejorative name for what was thought to be an abstruse poetry that contradicts reason and common sense in the same way metaphysics stereotypically does. In addition, the Augustans deemed the Metaphysical poetry as “chamber poetry,” poetry that is written for and exchanged by a certain coterie, filled with obscure conceits understandable only by the members of that group. Johnson defines this poetry as a “kind of discordia concors; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike” in which truths are distorted by the “unexpected and surprising” (qtd. in Mousley). In Metaphysical poetry, clarity is lost,
and reality is mutilated, whereby “the most heterogeneous ideas”, says Johnson, are “yoked by violence together” (qtd in Mousley). According to Johnson’s Augustan literary framework, order is maintained in literature through many characteristics, some of which are adherence to the standards of clarity, reasonability, and truthfulness. The fact that Metaphysical poetry deviates from these fundamental criteria jeopardizes the Augustan concept of order and the Augustan assumption that art should imitate given truths, of a general nature, about humankind.

Apart from the reaction to the aesthetics of Metaphysical poetry, the way in which this poetry is produced is another aspect which Johnson would oppose. Metaphysical poetry lacks two important elements that Johnson, as an Augustan figure, emphasizes in a literary work: universality and authority. That is, the fact that Metaphysical poetry is chamber poetry, accessible only by a limited group of acquaintances, strips this poetry of the universality of topics and consequently, from the comprehensiveness of reader’s reach. We saw earlier how Johnson, in The Rambler, gives a practical example of the universality of a literary work: he reaches the whole reading public nationwide and covers a variety of topics that concern different kinds of readers. Also, the Metaphysical poetry being chamber poetry lacks the literary authority to which any literary work should be anchored. Gray points out to Johnson’s emphasis on authority in securing an author’s work, whereby an author “is . . . to a large extent dependent upon those who have another kind of authority – [in Johnson’s words,] ‘authority to propagate their opinion’” (274). The lack of such authority in the Metaphysical poetry robs an important pillar of worthy literature as defined by Johnson. Generally speaking, the reaction to the Metaphysical poetry
provides us with a window to understanding literary Augustanism in its emphasis on the clarity, universality, and authority of literature.

4.3.2 Criticism

Another area that helps us understand Johnson’s literary Augustanism is his views on criticism and his practices as a critic. Even though the Johnsonian canon includes almost every literary genre, the role of the critic is a recurrent one in Johnson’s literary career. In understanding Johnson’s Augustanism, his views on criticism, his critical comments, and his critical practices are of paramount importance. An overview of Johnson’s perception of criticism as a literary process informs us of Johnson’s Augustanism as a literary figure. In the Dictionary, Johnson defines a critic as “a man skilled in the art of judging of literature; a man able to distinguish the faults and the beauties of writing” (“critic”). A critic, therefore, is a person who is endowed with penetrating skills and solid literary grounds that enable him to be a judge of literature who decides what is worthy and what is not. “Criticism as it was instituted by Aristotle” Johnson says in the Dictionary “was meant a standard for judging well [my emphasis]” (“criticism”). Criticism, then, should be a very systematic and standardized process, one that reflects the classic inclination towards order as manifested through the necessity of rules and criteria that must govern the process of criticism.

However, there is much more to what Johnson thinks of criticism and critics than what lexicography has to offer. In the Rambler 93, he reflects on the purpose of criticism, stating that “the duty of criticism is neither to depreciate, nor dignify by partial representations, but to hold out the light of reason, whatever it may uncover;
and to promulgate the determinations of truth, whatever she shall dictate” (2: 134). The purpose of criticism, according to Johnson, is not the mere detection of faults and beauties; the true purpose is to highlight these faults and beauties in light of whether they conform to reason and truth as they are among the criteria for worthy literature.

Johnson’s critical reviews of poets and poetry are another area that tells us of his literary Augustanism. In *The Rambler 139* on Milton’s *Samson Agonites*, Johnson begins the discussion by appealing to the Aristotelian rules of tragedy and asks whether “a performance . . . is composed according to the indispensable laws of Aristotelian criticism, and . . . whether it exhibits a beginning, a middle, and an end.” He further asserts that “whoever purposes, as it is expressed by Milton, ‘to build the lofty rhyme’ must acquaint himself with this law of poetical architecture.” Johnson concludes his discussion saying that *Samson Agonites* “has a beginning and an end which Aristotle himself could not have disapproved; but it must be allowed to want a middle, since nothing passes between the first act and the last, that either hastens or delays the death of Sampson” (Johnson 2: 371-372). In his commentary on Milton’s tragedy, Johnson applies a classical rule in the composition of poetry, and literature in general, a rule where order is reflected in its most classical definitions, that is, sequential order. A literary work, then, has to reflect the classical logic of sequential order: it has to have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Furthermore, a literary work is never haphazard; Johnson equates a poem to an architectural form. Such a form is undoubtedly characterized by order; it must be governed by clear rules and principles that give it a logical form. Apart from the unsettled debate of the politics of Johnson’s
criticism of Milton, it is in this criticism that Johnson’s Augustanism as a critic is clearly evident.

In addition to the emphasis on standards and rules, Johnson believed in the necessity of the didacticism of criticism. In the *Life of Dryden* he approvingly says: the criticism of Dryden is the criticism of a poet; not a dull collection of theorems, nor a rude detection of faults, which perhaps the censorer was not able to have committed; but a gay and vigorous dissertation, where delight is mingled with instruction [my emphasis], and where the author proves his right of judgment by his power of performance (“Achievement and Reputation”).

A very important role of criticism is to provide delight that is mixed with instructiveness. A critic’s aim should be to unveil the beauties of literature as well as to draw the attention to the weaknesses in a way that instructs and educates the audience. April London points out that Johnson, in the *Life of Addison* highlights the fall from favor of Addison’s criticism which is generated by “taste” and its replacement by a criticism decided on “scientifick . . . principles” (Johnson qtd. in London 96). Through criticism, readers should be taught and trained how to become judges of literature. In order for this instructiveness to be achieved, criticism cannot be based on the caprices and fickleness of taste; rather, it should be decided by clear and methodical principles. Criticism, for Johnson, is a purposeful process that transcends the monotony of theorizing and mere detection of faults and that is built on scientific grounds. This inclination towards didacticism and order, reflected in the use of rules and principles, is one of the salient features of literary Augustanism.
Johnson, in the *Idler 20*, presents a general principle about human nature that can be linked to criticism: people are always more willing to accept what agrees with them than that, which while may be true, does not appeal to them. He states that “Men are willing to credit what they wish, and encourage rather those who gratify them with pleasure, than those that instruct them with fidelity” (Johnson 62). Therefore, even if the veracity and intentions of a certain conduct are guaranteed, opposition is most likely to be encountered if such conduct does not strike a happy chord with people. This observation about human nature Johnson extends to criticism where he anticipates that the role of a critic has consequences to be suffered. In the *Rambler 140*, he opens the discussion with a reflection on this aspect of the role of the critic; he states that:

> Every member of society feels the necessity of detecting crimes, yet scarce any degree of virtue or reputation is able to secure an informer from public hatred. The learned world has always admitted the usefulness of critical disquisitions, yet he that attempts to show, however modestly, the failures of a celebrated writer, shall surely irritate his admirers, and incur the imputation of envy, captiousness, and malignity (2: 377).

An inevitable part of being a critic, Johnson believes, is running the risk of becoming the scabby sheep of the flock, especially when a critic attempts to subject a writer with pre-established reputation to critical standards. The role of a critic is most likely to incur envy and attack where the “informer” himself, in this case, the critic, risks becoming the criminal. This aspect is aggravated whenever a critic opposes the mainstream ideas of the greatness of a writer. A true critic, however, should work
based on uncompromising critical principles and be ready to suffer the ramifications that are part of his role, since, after all, pleasing everyone is an unattainable end.

Johnson’s realization of the consequences that a critic is likely to suffer when opposing the mainstream views of an admired writer is evident in the Rambler 140. The Rambler 140 appeared four days after the Rambler 139 in which Johnson defies the established veneration for Milton’s Samson Agonistes. Johnson seemed to have anticipated the reaction to his critical commentaries on Milton, and consequently, he dedicated the Rambler 140 to establish and defend his critical perspective on Milton verbalized in the Rambler 139. He realized that his criticism of Milton challenges the prevailing notions of Milton’s greatness, and that the stereotypical allegiance to the value of Milton’s writings stigmatizes any new critical treatment of these writings. Fix contends that Johnson’s defensiveness and edginess which were mirrored in his style in the Life of Milton “must result partly from his perception of how unfashionable he will seem in objecting to aspects of the poetry . . . of such an admired writer” (113). While Johnson’s treatment of Milton can be seen as anti-Augustan/conservative – which will be discussed in the next section – what matters here is how Johnson perceives literary criticism. According to Johnson’s Augustan literary framework, criticism is a process that is to be characterized by order and disciplined by standardized rules, principles, and precepts. If Milton deviates from any classical standards, like the necessity of having a beginning, a middle, and an end for a literary work, then his defect must be called into question. To Johnson, criticism is a discriminating and dispassionate process where even a literary giant like Milton is not secure from being its subject just because he has been long admired by people.
4.3.3 Johnson’s Dictionary

A brief preview of Johnson’s major works secures a deeper understanding of his Augustanism. In the Dictionary, a glimpse of the Johnsonian order presents itself. Johnson’s role as a keeper of order is evident in the “Preface” to his Dictionary where he explains the reason for which he undertook writing a dictionary of English. Upon the first survey to write the Dictionary, he says:

I found our speech copious without order, and energetic without rules:
wherever I turned my view, there was perplexity to be disentangled, and
confusion to be regulated; choice was to be made . . . without any established
principle of selection; adulterations were to be detected without a settled test
of purity; and modes of expression to be rejected without the suffrage of any
writers of classical reputation [my emphases] (Johnson 4).

As an Augustan figure, who is faced with haphazardness and lack of rules and order of the English language, Johnson takes upon him the responsibility to “regulate confusion” and discipline the language. The lack of systematicity of English and the absence of classical authority in dealing with it prompts Johnson to assume, as Reinert puts it, the role of a “legislator” who surveys chaos and undertakes to enforce order so that English maybe built on standardized and clear principles (Reinert 8).

4.3.4 The Preface to Shakespeare

In general criticism on the “faults” of Shakespeare in his “Preface to Shakespeare” of 1765, Johnson writes of “justice,” that is, poetical justice, as a high purpose of poetry. His exact words are these: “His [Shakespeare’s] first defect is that
to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose” (qtd. in Smallwood 119). Johnson, Smallwood comments, acknowledges that this defect of moral purposelessness in Shakespeare’s writings is characteristic of his age; however, Johnson believes that this “cannot extenuate” Shakespeare’s defect (Smallwood 119). Working from a solid and uncompromising Augustan intellect, Johnson has no problem criticizing Shakespeare, seen then as the greatest literary figure in English history, for this defect. In the “Preface,” Johnson announces that “it is always a writer’s duty to make the world better” (qtd. in Smallwood 112). Therefore, the absence of moral didacticism and instruction in Shakespeare’s writings contradicts the overall purpose that Johnson ascribed to literature. It is through literature, Johnson believes, that a society is morally educated and order is ultimately achieved.

4.3.5 The Lives and the Role of Biography as a Literary Genre

A careful mapping of Johnson’s biographical work, starting with the Life of Sarpi (1738), his Life of Savage (1744), the Rambler 60 (1750-1752), and ending with his most celebrated biographical effort Live of the Poets (1777-1781) reveals his definition of the purpose of biography as a genre. The inclination towards disciplining and order is evident in the Rambler 60 where Johnson states that “No species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, since . . . none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistible interest, or more widely diffuse instruction [my emphasis] to every diversity of condition” (Johnson 1: 319). Apart from the idea
of “enchaining the heart,” which is interestingly more indicative of sensibility than of literary Augustanism, it is the instructional role of biography that calls for attention here. To Johnson, the vitality of biography lies in its “moral and didactic [my emphasis] potentialities” (Stuprich 154). Johnson, therefore, believes the worthiness of writing biographies to lie in its instructional role, whereby the reader is educated and instructed by providing behavioral examples: “By pronouncing corrective approval or disapproval on poets, poems, and details of poetry, Johnson seeks to adjust the public's responses to the particulars of English literature, and so to bring to bear the educative power of the good, and the bad, example of literary practice” (Booth 505). The high moral didacticism that Johnson characteristically assigned to literature in general and to biography in particular reflects the Augustan conviction of the purposefulness of literature, the condition that through literature, intellectual order is maintained.

In the same essay, *Rambler* 60, Johnson presents an ideal role for the biographer, that is, “to pass slightly over those performances and incidents, which produce vulgar greatness to lead the thoughts into domestick privacies . . . where men excel each other only by prudence and virtue” (1: 321). Johnson continues to emphasize the instructional purpose of the biographer whereby the mind is educated and led into those intricacies of human life, virtue, and morality.

In addition to this emphasis on the didactic potentiality of biographies, an important dimension of Augustanism can be discerned. As a movement of thought, Augustanism addressed the question of the kind of intellectual inquiries that are considered worthy of pursuit. One of the reasons why Johnson held biographies to be
a lofty genre is that because they have man, humankind, as their center. Johnson here mirrors the Augustan conviction that one of the most valid intellectual pursuits is that of studying man, where the insight into the “privacies” of men is of high importance in understanding the essence of human life. He further draws on this idea when he says, “I have often thought that there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful” (1: 320). In both statements, Johnson echoes an established Augustan belief in the worthiness of the study of mankind. One cannot help but see the analogy between Johnson and another Augustan giant, Alexander Pope, in his Essay on Man. Pope presents a maxim of human study when he says that “The proper study of Mankind is Man” (1. 2).

To wrap up the discussion in this section, we can see that Johnson made such landmark contributions to a national literary culture through The Rambler, the Dictionary, his Shakespeare edition, and The Lives of the Poets. Through these achievements, Johnson made a leading contribution to the very concept of the Augustan Age, and on a larger scale, of England as a whole. The Rambler was, perhaps, the first periodical to overcome locality and readers’ limitedness and achieve national presence. Johnson’s Dictionary was proudly received as a national achievement, single-handedly, in almost eight years, rivaling the achievement that took the entire French academy forty-two years. His Shakespeare edition helped strengthen and secure the reputation of Shakespeare based on scientific, critical grounds, and the Lives gave “intellectual substance to his remark in the preface to the Dictionary that authors are ‘chief glory’ of every people” (Hawes 39). If we look at the big picture, then, Johnson’s literary contributions and views on how literature
should be written, what effect literature should have on readers, and the relation between literature and society reflect unmistakable literary Augustanism. The image of Johnson as a reflection of Augustanism and an aegis of its conservative values is one with which Johnson can certainly be associated.

5. The Other Side of the Coin

Having woven a picture of an Augustan Johnson where he appears as a champion of Augustanism, a conservative thinker committed to the classical notions of order, it is time to acknowledge the other side of the coin. While on the one hand, Johnson can certainly be seen as a dedicated follower of Augustanism, on the other hand, he also gives us the image of a liberal and a progressivist thinker, an image of a great intellectual independence from Augustanism that renders him more than just a representative and a follower of Augustanism.

As was discussed earlier, Johnson’s perception of political and social authority is clearly Augustan, marked by respect for political and social authorities that are established through classical hereditary standards, stressing the necessity of submission to these authorities. While Johnson’s perception of political and social authority is evidently Augustan, a look at some of his practices, opinions, and at him as a literary authority in the 18th century reveals a deviation from Augustan order. This deviation sheds light on the other side of Johnson where we see an “un-Augustan” image of him.

Johnson’s views on literary authority or, in a broader sense, authorial authority and what elements establish a writer as an authorial authority are pivotal in understanding the deviation from Augustanism in its strict sense. In investigating
such views, Johnson’s treatment of Dryden’s authorial authority can be a useful starting point. James Gray argues that Johnson, in the *Life of Dryden*, establishes Dryden as an authorial authority based on three reasons: Dryden’s mastery of poetry, the way he broadened his thought by perpetual and growing experience, and his sharp mind stored with principles and observation. Dryden’s authority, Gray maintains, was “a developing asset rather than a static or categorical absoluteness or rightness of judgment” (Gray 271). According to Johnson, therefore, an author becomes an authority only through his intellectual labor and performance; an authorial authority is never bestowed on a writer or born with him. Johnson, in the *Rambler 154*, asserts that “he that wishes to be counted among the benefactors of posterity, [an essential constituent of authority] must add *by his own toil* to the acquisitions of his ancestors, and secure his memory from neglect by some valuable improvement [my emphasis]” (qtd. in Gray 272). This means it is only through an author’s long and strenuous work, significant addition to the works of precedent authorities, and immortalizing contributions in his field that such an author may aspire to be an authority. Johnson believes that authorial authority is first and foremost an achievement of the individual, attained only “by his own toil.” Such a definition of authority is quite different from Johnson’s Augustan definition of political and social authority: in becoming an authorial authority, mainly the individual’s intellectual achievement counts.

Another angle through which Johnson can be seen deviating from Augustan ideals is his treatment of literary authorities. Key elements in Johnson’s own perception of authorities, highlighted in the previous sections, are respect and
submission to established authorities. However, Johnson does not hesitate to disagree with some Augustan authorities, and he bravely subjects them to his critical scalpel. In the *Rambler* 93, he states:

> The bigotry with which editors regard the authors whom they illustrate or correct, has been generally remarked. Dryden was known to have written most of his critical dissertations only to recommend the work upon which he then happened to be employed; and Addison is suspected to have denied the expediency of poetical justice, because his own Cato was condemned to perish in a good cause (Johnson 3: 133).

Even though Johnson himself acknowledges Dryden to be an authority, he does not believe the fact that Dryden is an authority secures him from being criticized. He boldly goes as far as accusing Dryden of critical bias since his criticism was mostly intended to promote works that he was asked to recommend as opposed to genuine criticism, that is, “to hold out the light of reason, whatever it may uncover; and to promulgate the determinations of truth, whatever she shall dictates.” Furthermore, Addison, another Augustan giant, does not escape Johnson’s critical judgment. He explains that Addison’s refusal to acknowledge the efficacy of poetic justice – moral purposefulness and didacticism as Johnson defines it in his criticism of Shakespeare – is due to its lack in his own poetry.

To further complicate the discussion of Johnson and authorial authority, Johnson himself as an authority in the 18th century calls for some reflection. If Johnson believes that “A man is born to hereditary rank; or his being appointed to certain offices, gives him a certain rank, [i.e., establishes him as an authority]” we can
infer that Johnson, according to his own standards, should not have necessarily been an authority. Nothing about Johnson becoming an authority has to do with having aristocratic rank or occupying public office. Interestingly, Johnson as a model of success seems more liberal than conservative. Highlighting the changes that were starting to form the middle class in England, Hudson refers to “the developments that were advancing self-sufficient but untitled [my emphasis] people to the front of English cultural life,” whereby “the success of this bookseller’s son [Johnson] is far from accidental” (33). Johnson’s rise to authorial authority was completely an individual achievement. He had neither patrician standings nor patronage of any sort; he had nothing except his classical schooling and the sharpness of his mind, or in other words, all he had is his “intrinsick merit.” However, to revisit the conversation between Johnson and Boswell about whether “intrinsick merit” ought to be the distinction between mankind, Johnson complicates matters for us when he opposes this distinction of intrinsic merit and favors hereditary rank instead. Moreover, Boswell in the Life further complicates our understanding of Johnson when he says that “though of no high extraction himself, he had much respect for birth and family. He said, ‘adventitious accomplishments may be possessed by all ranks; but one may easily distinguish the born gentlemen’” (446). One can easily touch the contradiction between what Johnson thinks and what his career as a model of success really was. According to his own standards, Johnson lacks birth and family which is an essential criterion in the distinction of men. For someone who is known to have emphasized heredity, aristocracy, and rank as constituents of authority, Johnson possessed none of them. Reflecting on Johnson’s career, one sees the image of the self-made man, that
who depends only on himself in creating his success. Clearly, such an image is characteristic of the then rising bourgeois, i.e., liberal culture and not of the Augustan Age, of which Johnson is supposedly a loyal follower.

Johnson’s mode of publishing his works is yet another area that complicates our perception of him as an Augustan figure. Erin Mackie points out that “By the early eighteenth century, the writing and printing of books and periodicals were a well-established business. The older system of literary patronage, in which aristocratic supporters provided authors with financial and social backing, was giving way to a more purely commercial mode of operation” (Mackie 15). As it is known, Johnson published his works in this new commercial mode of publication, working directly with booksellers without any involvement of classical patronage. Paradoxically, Johnson’s works in which he champions Augustan order were published in a purely commercial mode; in other words, in a more liberal fashion than Augustan. Moreover, Johnson’s deviation from the classical mode of publication, i.e., working under aristocratic patronage, can be seen to emerge out of his concern for intellectual independence. He is famous for having been very reluctant to accept a pension from George III because he feared that such a patronage would jeopardize his authorial and intellectual independence. Boswell comments on this incidence and points out that after Johnson had been notified of the King’s intention to grant him a pension for literary merit, “he wished to consult his friends as to the propriety of his accepting this mark of royal favour, after the definitions which he had given in his Dictionary of pension and pensioners” (265). Johnson had reflected a negative attitude towards taking pensions in his definition of the word “pension” in the
Dictionary. He defines it as “An allowance made to any one without an equivalent. In England it is generally understood to mean pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country” (“pension”). Johnson here explains that a pension is an amount of money given to someone who has done nothing to deserve it. The implication here is that whoever receives a pension will be at the disposal of the giver and will have to act according to the giver’s will to repay that which he got for no return. Johnson even goes as far as defining “pension” as the price of treason.

Moving on to unveil those areas where Johnson’s views reveal that different image of him, his patriotism should be revisited. If patriotism was used earlier as an evidence of Johnson’s classical conservatism, then some of Johnson’s views against enthusiastic patriotism and blind nationalism can be seen to present a different image from that of the Augustan Johnson. For example, it is known that Johnson in his criticism of Milton incurred the acrimony of many of his contemporaries. It is conceivable that to the other critics at that time, Johnson’s criticism of Milton might have been received as unpatriotic or ‘un-English.’ However, Johnson has always expressed his opposition to enthusiastic excess which obstructs reasonable thinking, even if this enthusiasm was for England itself, much less for an English icon like Milton. In a correspondence with Jonas Hanway, Johnson writes, “The love of our country, when it rises to enthusiasm, is an ambiguous and uncertain virtue, when a man is enthusiastic he ceases to be reasonable,” and for this reason, Hawes argues, Johnson “positions himself outside the mainstream of cultural nationalism. By withholding ‘superstitious veneration’ for Shakespeare, for instance, [Johnson enumerates] his faults in a sobering disquisition” (Hawes 41). Johnson refuses,
therefore, to shroud Milton or any literary figure with a so-called sacred aura that makes it impossible to subject him to patient and reasonable criticism, even if this figure is Shakespeare.

Continuing to highlight the unconservative side of Johnson, his views against blind nationalism in the *Idler* 20 are worth pondering. In the *Idler* 20, he questions the veracity of the accounts of the British triumph at Louisbourg, and whether it really merits as much pride as the British feel over it. He states that “every historian discovers his country, and it is impossible to read the different accounts of any great event, without a wish that truth had more power over partiality” (Johnson 62). Johnson points out that patriotic excess led the British historians to provide a magnified image of the British victory over the French in Louisbourg. Such false reportage of what happened in that battle is to be called into question even if it was motivated by patriotism.

Johnson’s views against blind nationalism intersect with those on the colonies in America. In a tone that can be described as liberal/progressive, or at least unconservative, Johnson, in *An Introduction to the Political State of Great Britain* (1756), which he writes as a commentary on the commencement of the Seven Years’ War, examines the European colonial endeavors in South and North America. In an age where colonial expansion was a norm, if not a source of national pride, he describes the three colonial powers in the New World, the Spanish, the French, and the British as "European usurpers" (Johnson 148). Needless to say, seeing the colonial ambitions at that time as an act of usurpation is clearly liberal, especially from
someone who is famous for patriotism and political conservatism. Moreover, towards the end of his essay, Johnson reflects on how amity between nations can be achieved only through civility and kindness. He argues that “It is ridiculous to imagine, that the friendship of nations, whether civil or barbarous, can be gained and kept but by kind treatment.” This being so, Johnson expects from any colonial power to take this principle into consideration. He continues, “and surly they who intrude, uncalled, upon the country of distant people, ought to consider the natives as worthy of common kindness, and content themselves to rob without insulting them” (Johnson 150). In a comment pregnant with condemnation for colonialism, Johnson points out that if usurping other peoples’ land is an inescapable evil, the least that the colonial powers can do while unrightfully plundering other nations from their fortunes is to maintain some level of civility and humanity in dealing with these nations.

At the end of An Introduction to the Political State of Great Britain (1756), Johnson offers a comparison between the political conduct and the treatment which the American Indians received from French and British colonists, and in a tone that one does not expect from the patriotic and conservative Johnson, he finds the British treatment severely lacking. Commenting on the wise strategy of the French in dealing with the natives in the American colonies, he states that “The French . . . admit the Indians, by intermarriage, to an equality with themselves, and those nations, with which they have no such near intercourse, they gain to their interest by honesty in their dealings.” On the contrary, Johnson sees the British treatment of the Indians as unwise, a treatment motivated solely by materialistic gain, marked by trickery and deception, as well as devoid of humanity and civility. “Our factors and traders,” says
Johnson, “having no other purpose in view than immediate profit, use all the arts of European counting-house, to defraud the simple hunter of his furs.” In a rhetoric free from blind nationalism and marked by sensitivity towards the native Indians, Johnson censures the British colonial conduct in North America, emphasizing at the end of his essay that "No people can be great who have ceased to be virtuous" (Johnson 150).

Furthermore, in Johnson’s comparison between the French and English treatment of the Indians, the idea of civility between nations clearly stands out as liberal ideology. In his discussion of the American colonies, Johnson’s argument against blind nationalism and the emphasis on civil treatment of other nations culminate in painting a picture of a liberal thinker, rather than a chauvinistic conservative one.

Closely related to Johnson’s views against blind nationalism are those views on war. If we follow the traditional point of view that sees conservatives as hawks of war and liberals as doves of peace, then the views of the supposedly conservative Johnson on war complicate matters for us. In two of his essays, Johnson articulates clear antiwar feelings and presents a disposition towards peace and refusal of unnecessary war.

When the disputed question of the sovereignty over the Falkland Islands stirred a crisis in the late 1770 and early 1771 between France and Spain, on the one hand, and Britain on the other, Johnson wrote a pamphlet on the issue that includes a clear argument against war. Johnson starts his *Thoughts on Falkland’s Islands* (1771) by reminding the readers of the benison of the peace that was established after the Seven Years’ War between France and Britain. He states that “not many years have
passed since the cruelties of war were filling the world with terror and with sorrow; rage was at last appeased . . . and peace was restored, with its pleasures and its benefits” (Johnson 349). Emphasizing the necessity of peace to all nations, Johnson points out that war must always be the last resort in settling any conflict. If war is sometimes an inescapable evil, it cannot be waged for something so trivial as “a few spots of earth, which if they had not happened to make a sea-mark, had perhaps never had a name,” some islands that have no use “but of a station for contraband, a nursery of fraud, and a receptacle of theft” (Johnson 350, 354). After he provides an examination of the crisis of the Falkland Islands, Johnson concludes his pamphlet with advice for the British government not to be steered by the blind and “plebeian patriotism” that can lead Britain to the abyss of war (Johnson 385). He stresses the vitality of peace for a country exhausted by war so that “After all our broils,” he says, “foreign and domestick, we may hope to remain awhile in quiet, amused with the view of our own success” (Johnson 386). Johnson’s pamphlet on the issue of the Falkland Islands is a testimony to his antiwar disposition and his opposition for blind and pugnacious patriotism.

Johnson continues to reflect an antiwar position in The Vulture, originally published as the Idler 22 before Johnson withdrew it from the series. In this essay, Johnson creates a tale of a shepherd who has the capability of listening to birds. Overhearing a conversation of a mother vulture with her broods, the shepherd narrates their story. The mother vulture, instructing her broods on the best strategies of hunting, tells them that the human flesh is the most delicious food they can have. The young, however, ask how they can hunt humans who are too big to be prey for
them. The mother, then, gives the young the best way to seize human flesh. She instructs them that

The vultures would seldom feed upon his [man’s] flesh, had not nature, that devoted him to our uses, infused into him a strange ferocity . . . Two herds of men will often meet and shake the earth with noise, and fill the air with fire. When you hear noise and see fire, with flashes along the ground, hasten to the place with your swiftest wing, for men are surely destroying one another; you will then find the ground smoking with blood and covered with carcasses; of which many are dismembered and mangled for the convenience of the vulture (Johnson).

The mother vulture explains to her broods that these fighting herds of men are usually led by one who gives them orders and steers their motion. The mother, then, reflects that through this leader’s eagerness for killing and slaughtering other men, “he is more than any of the others, a friend to the vultures” (Johnson). Through the allegory of the mother vulture, Johnson implies that war is conducted solely for vultures. Johnson here portrays war as an animal act of slaughter, of which vultures are the biggest winners as they feed on the carcasses left by war. It is important to note that Johnson’s description of war in The Vulture does not apply to a specific war; rather, it is indicative of Johnson’s perception of war in general as a cruel and pointless act of slaughter.

Having touched on Johnson’s antiwar views, his outlook on slavery is definitely indicative of liberalism and progressivism of thought. In an age where
slavery was considered a vital practice for the economy of the imperial powers, one would expect the patriotic Johnson to conform to the mainstream view of justifying, or at least, accepting slavery as an appropriate form of subordination. Unlike many around him, however, Johnson was antislavery. In a ringing condemnation of the American colonists, he closed his pamphlet, *Taxation No Tyranny* (1775), with the sly question “How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?” (Johnson 454). While it is conceivable that Johnson’s comment here can be seen as an attack against the insurrecting Americans who refused to pay taxes to Britain, much earlier, in 1757, Johnson attacks the British involvement in slavery. In the *Idler* 87, he writes, “Of black men the numbers are too great who are now repining under English cruelty” (Johnson 271). Moreover, Boswell tells us about an incident whereby Johnson, dining with “some very grave men,” proposed the toast, "Here's to the next insurrection of the negroes in the West Indies” (qtd. in Boswell 284). Johnson’s sensitivity towards the suffering of black men under the institution of slavery is telling of his humane and liberal treatment of this issue, just as his censure of the “English cruelty” against black men is evidence against conservative patriotism.

Proceeding to another national concern, Johnson has some interesting views on the British penal code. In the *Rambler* 114, Johnson examines the inequity of the death sentence as a punishment for robbery and argues for what can well be described as the liberalization of the penal code. He reflects on the British legal system in general, saying that “A slight perusal of the measures of vindictive and coercive justice are established, will discover so many disproportions between crimes and
punishments” (Johnson 2: 242). He then reflects on the severity of the capital punishment and laments the infliction of death upon those who commit theft, asking “who can congratulate him upon a life passed without some act more mischievous to the peace or prosperity of others, than the theft of a piece of money” (Johnson 2: 243). Explaining why he thinks death should not be equated with theft, he argues that “To equal robbery with murder is to reduce murder to robbery, to confound in common minds the gradations of iniquity, and incite the commission of a greater crime to prevent the detection of a less.” With indisputable logic, Johnson explains that the equality of murder to robbery has dangerous repercussions. If both robbery and murder are punishable by death, then this will prompt thieves to commit murder to cover their theft. If the punishment is death for both offenses, then someone committing theft might as well murder those whom he is robbing so that his robbery, which will be punished by death if discovered, remains undetected. Johnson, then, urges that the death sentence for robbery be mitigated since “it will not be useless to consider what consequences might arise from relaxations of the law, and a more equitable adaptation of penalties to offenses.” He finally concludes that “This terror [death] should . . . be reserved as the last resort of authority” (Johnson 2: 244).

Johnson’s liberalistic review of the British penal system can also be seen in the *Idler* 22 where he questions the fairness of the imprisonment of debtors and feels compelled “to remember the poor debtors” (Johnson 69). He argues that imprisoning everyone who fails to meet a payment at the will of his creditor does more bad than good. If “the prosperity of a people is proportionate to the number of hands and minds usefully employed, . . . the confinement, therefore, of any man in the sloth and
darkness of a prison, is a loss to the nation, and no gain to the creditor” (Johnson 69-70). Johnson argues that debtors should not be imprisoned for their failure to meet payment, for this imprisonment will only perpetuate their inability to pay back their debts. As an enlightened solution to the problem, he offers the suggestion that debtors are employed by the government in some way that enables them to gain money to pay their debts as well as benefit their nation by being employed to its benefit. Johnson’s liberalism is certainly evident in his treatment of the capital punishment for robbery and imprisonment for failure to pay debt. Here, and not only here, Johnson’s opinions are clearly in advance of his time.

Moving to another area where one can see a different image of Johnson as a liberal and progressive, Johnson’s feminist views are a place where one has to stop and reflect. Before proceeding to investigating these views, it has to be acknowledged that some of Johnson remarks about women do reflect a conservative outlook. For example, he is famous for that quip with Boswell about a woman preacher where he says, "Sir, a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all" (qtd. in Boswell 327). However, such a remark is not indisputable: one can argue that Johnson was merely making a joke, and while we read into jokes and look for a meaning in them, it might have not been the case in the 18th century. Even if one is to accept the argument that Johnson’s remark on women’s preaching does reflect a conservative perception of women, it actually validates the overall argument of this paper that Johnson has a conservative side that conforms to the 18th century traditional outlook that belittles women’s intellectual capabilities; however, there is indeed evidence to the contrary. Most of
Johnson’s views on women are articulated in his periodical writings, a clearly graver medium than that of a joke. Moreover, as Marcus points out, “Too much is made of Dr. Johnson on women preachers” and not enough of his support of women (qtd. in Parke 71). Therefore, it is the focus of the following section to highlight those views of Johnson that reflect a liberalistic attitude towards women.

In the discussion of Johnson’s liberal views on women, two aspects can be highlighted: Johnson’s views on marriage and on females’ education. In the *Rambler* 39, Johnson focuses on the miseries women sometimes face in marriage. In a sensitive and understanding tone, he commiserates with women for the hardships they face in general, saying that “It were to be wished that . . . beings whose beauty we cannot behold without admiration, and whose delicacy we cannot contemplate without tenderness, might be suffered to enjoy every alleviation of their sorrows.” Not only does he express sympathy for women’s miseries in society, he thinks that these miseries are not the work of nature, but are inflicted upon women by society, that “however it has happened, the custom of the world seems to have been formed in a kind of conspiracy against them” (Johnson 1: 211). Moving to marriage, Johnson points out that marriage as an institution at that time is one of the agents that epitomizes the inequality towards women. Johnson believes that “Marriage, though a certain security from the reproach and solitude of antiquated virginity, has yet, as it is usually conducted, many disadvantages” (Johnson 1: 212). Johnson in this remark refers to marriage “as it usually conducted” at that time, that is, forced marriage to which he refers as a “crime which parents . . . frequently commit” against their daughters. The evil of forced marriage, Johnson thinks, is that women, as well as men
sometimes, are robbed of the choice of their partner, which leads to a marriage free from compatibility and a life devoid of “domestick and personal felicity.” To emphasize his censure of the traditional marriages at that time, he quotes the general advice for fathers that they should “marry their daughters lest they should marry themselves.” He then assertively attacks this principle, stating that, “who was the author of this maxim, or with what intention it was originally uttered, I have not yet discovered; but imagine that however solemnly it may be transmitted, or however implicitly received, it can confer no authority which nature has denied” (Johnson 213-14). Johnson’s thinks that a woman’s right to choose her husband is a right that nature has bestowed upon her, and to take that right away from her is nothing short of a crime.

Parke points out to those marriage views of Johnson that are explicitly “congenial to current notions of politically correct attitudes toward gender” (73). Some of the examples she gives are Johnson’s remarks in Boswell’s Life that “I had often wondered why young women should marry, as they have so much more freedom, and so much more attention paid to them while unmarried, than when married” and "Men know that women are an over-match for them, and therefore they choose the weakest or most ignorant. If they did not think so, they never could be afraid of women knowing as much as themselves” (qtd in Parke 73-74). In the mid 18th century, we expect such an open-minded and women-empowering point of view to come from a progressively liberal and an advocate of women rights, one who, in opposition to the mainstream views of the patriarchal society, believes that “The
miseries, indeed, which many ladies suffer under conjugal vexations, are to be considered with great pity” (Johnson 1: 213).

The other area in which Johnson’s views on women are clearly liberal and in advance of his time, or at least are not in keeping with his traditional conservatism, is the views on females’ education. In the middle of the 18th century, the prevailing notion of women’s role in society saw the domain of women to be restricted in the domestic sphere. A woman was expected to learn some needlework, take care of her looks, learn how to dance so that in a social gathering, she is able to secure a good suitor, and after marriage, become a housewife. One would rightly expect the conservative Johnson to mirror this point of view. However, Johnson has a completely different perspective on this issue. We will let the tale that Johnson creates in the Ramblers 130 and 133, inform us of his opinion.

Johnson tells the tale of a daughter named Victoria, who has been trained all her life to focus only on her beauty, and who never develops herself through other types of education. In the Rambler 130, Johnson uses the first person to narrate the story of that daughter who tells the readers at the beginning that she was born with supreme beauty and charm and that her mother saw this beauty as the daughter’s only and most important quality. The daughter says of her mother, “She expected no happiness nor advantage but from beauty, she thought nothing but beauty worthy of her care” (Johnson 2: 327). The mother, obsessed only with her daughter’s beauty, the daughter tells us, “took care that I should want none of the accomplishments included in female education, or considered necessary in fashionable life” (Johnson 2:328). As
the years passed and Victoria was becoming a stunningly beautiful young lady, it was time that she makes her debut into the social scene. Fervently dressed and readied by her mother, Victoria made her first appearance at a ball, and as expected, all the men were enchanted by her charm, and the pursuits to court her were coming from everywhere. Advised by her mother to aim high and choose only the highest in rank and the most celebrated of men, she finally settled on a lover. However, it was after this encounter that Victoria starts to feel the effect of her upbringing. She says,

I proceeded in my measures by the rules of art; yet when the ardour of the first visits was spent, generally found a sudden declension of my influence; I felt in myself the want of some power to diversify the amusement and enliven conversation, and could not but suspect that my mind failed in performing the promise of my face (Johnson 2: 329-30).

Perplexed by her newfound realization of her intellectual limitations, Victoria turns to her mother for advice. The mother, with stubborn vanity, insists that there was nothing wrong with the way Victoria was raised. “She told me,” Victoria says, “that nothing so much hindered the advancement of women as literature and wit, which generally frightened away those that could make the best settlements, and drew about them a needy tribe of poets and philosophers” (Johnson 2: 330). After this, when Victoria becomes nineteen years old and is in her prime, the worst happens; she falls to a severe illness that robs her of her beauty and charm.

Before proceeding to see how Johnson completes the story of Victoria, there are some interesting implications about Johnson’s views quoted above that need to be
highlighted. Johnson refers to Victoria’s realization of the need for “some power to diversify the amusement and enliven conversation.” Johnson here expresses an implicit conviction that the power of the intellect is one of the key values that a person must possess: a value that, based on Victoria’s experience, proves to be more important that materialistic or physical advantages. More deeply, in his tacit condemnation of the mother’s warning for Victoria not to indulge in “literature and wit” as they will attract “a needy tribe of poets and philosophers,” there are important implications concerning Johnson’s own authority. Johnson clearly identifies with those “needy tribe of poets and philosophers,” implying that intellectual merit should preside over the other criteria at that time like wealth, and, one can add, heredity. This implication validates the argument made earlier that Johnson established his authority through his intellectual power rather than through the traditional means of classical patronage and aristocratic background or affiliation. Ultimately, this reading of Johnson’s views here corroborates the overall argument that there is more to Johnson than the mere following of Augustan values.

Returning to Victoria’s story, Johnson in the *Rambler* 133 continues what he started in the previous essay. After Victoria’s fall from grace, the mother obsessively tries to restore her daughter to her previous form; however, all her attempts turn out to be in vain. Having failed in her endeavors, the mother finally gives up and abandons the daughter to her fate. Treated like a futile and worthless object at home, the daughter departs from home, wallowing in depression and melancholy. She ventures into those assemblies in which she used to be the cynosure of all eyes just to discover the magnitude of her deterioration and, as she describes it, “the insolence of my own
sex” (Johnson 2: 343). She hears nothing from the people who used to shower her with adulation but pitiful condolences or petty cosmetic advice on how she might be able to salvage some of her lost beauty. She reaches a state where she feels that the world is of no light anymore; she says, “Idleness exposed me to melancholy, and life began to languish in motionless indifference” (Johnson 2: 344). In the midst of her sadness, she meets an old friend whom Johnson uses to distill the morale of the story. Reflecting on Victoria’s loss of her beauty, the friend tells her, “you have lost that which may indeed sometimes contribute to happiness, but to which happiness is by no means inseparably annexed.” Finally, she refers Victoria to the true and worthy provision that a female should possess. “Consider yourself, my Victoria, as being born to know, to reason, and to act; rise at once from your melancholy to wisdom and piety; you will find that there are other charms than beauty, and other joys than the praise of fools” (Johnson 2: 345).

The above narrative speaks unequivocally of Johnson’s pro-female views. Johnson advises women at that time, and women in general, to break out of the stereotypical image of women as mere objects of physical beauty, the image that reduces them to nothing more than pieces of ornamentation in social gatherings. “In writing . . . about education and the getting of that greater wisdom . . . , Johnson minimized passion and hence sexual difference in order to emphasize his firmly held belief that education is synonymous with freedom and that it knows no gender bounds” (Parke 78). He prompts a woman to establish herself first and foremost as a person, who is like a man, capable of intellectual indulgence which elevates her to the status of a person and an equal, rather than an object of physical admiration.
Johnson’s rhetoric in the *Rambler 130* and *133* is clearly reminiscent of the feminist, or, if the term feminist was not realized at that time, women writers who sought to change the traditional perception of women and their role in society. Parke argues that “the late twentieth-century Johnson criticism depicts a man who was, at the very least, in general benign and rather enlightened” (75). Such views are not only liberal and in advance of Johnson’s age, they are still, to some extent, the argument of liberals and feminists in the 21st century.

Johnson’s liberalistic views on women can be further traced in other works. His treatment of the female figure in *Rasselas* is noteworthy: Princess Nekayah argues with her brother, Rasselas, as an equal. Brooks argues that “in *Rasselas*, Johnson empowers . . . [women] to achieve intellectual equality,” and “in empowering his two female travelers [Nekayah and Pakuah], Johnson participates in an early form of feminism.” Such feminism is evident in the observation that “Each of Johnson’s women [in *Rasselas*] is primarily an intellectual construction whose language reveals their liberated status” (53-54). Brooks proceeds to highlight what can be described as the rhetoric of the equality of sexes, or more specifically, intellectual equality, as one of the themes in *Rasselas*. He presents instances of Johnson’s depiction of Nekayah as an intellectual peer to her brother, Rasselas. For example, he points out that one of the chapters of *Rasselas* is significantly titled “The Prince and His Sister Divide Between Them the Work of Observation.” At this stage of the story, Johnson depicts Rasselas as starting to open his mind to his sister’s equal intellectual capabilities (58). This realization is evident when Rasselas reminds his sister, “We are employed in a search, of which both are equally [a term used
frequently by Johnson to describe the relation between Nekayah and her brother] to enjoy the success, or suffer by the miscarriage” (Johnson qtd. in Brooks 59). The significance here is that one would expect Johnson, the conservative thinker, to reflect the 18th century social convention that sees a sister to be subordinate to an older brother; yet, the rhetoric in Rasselas places Nekayah on an equal footing with her brother. Brooks argues that by ‘deEnglishizing’ the setting of Rasselas, Nekayah and her brother are “creations composed of Johnsonian ideologies, among which is the recurrent theme of intellectual equality” (60). Johnson in Rasselas, therefore, reflects a profound conviction of females’ intellectual equality that is evidently different from and in advance of the 18th century mainstream perception of females.

Johnson’s views in favor of the advancement of female in society are not limited to what has been presented above. A brief mentioning of some of the essays that touch on women status in society validates this observation. In the Idler 13, Johnson continues to deal with daughters who suffer due to the lack of education. In The Rambler 170 and 171, Johnson tells the tale of Misella, a girl who, missing out on education and proper rearing, degenerates into becoming a prostitute, and he perceives “prostitution as a socio-economic ill rather than as a female moral failure” (O'Donnell and Livingston qtd. in Parke 75). These feminine views of Johnson certainly shed new light on someone who has sometimes been depicted not only as a chauvinistic but as far as a misogynist.

Johnson’s liberal views extend the public sphere of politics and society into the domestic sphere of the home. In a very insightful and compassionate discussion, Johnson in the Rambler 148, calls parental tyranny into question. He declares his
abhorrence of parental mistreatment against children, saying, “detestable are the cruelties often exercised in private families, under the venerable sanction of parental authority” (Johnson 3: 23). After this, he gives a scathing argument against parental, especially fatherly, cruelty against sons and daughters, emphasizing that there is absolutely no justification for such “barbarities.” Appalled by the idea, he wonders that if children are such vulnerable beings that nature assigned to the caring of their parents, then “what can a parent hope from the oppression of those who were born to his protection, of those who can disturb him with no competition?” According to Johnson, the mistreatment of children is one of the lowest crimes anyone can commit, especially since it is committed against those whom never to be feared; Johnson wonders “for what reason not more infamous than cowardice can a man delight in oppression who has nothing to fear” (Johnson 3: 25). Finally, he pronounces his judgment: “the harsh parent is less to be vindicated than any other criminal” (Johnson 3: 26). To Johnson, then, not only is children’s mistreatment nothing less than a crime, but those who commit such a heinous crime cannot be excused under any circumstances. To read Johnson railing against parental cruelty against children, one can easily equate him to a 21st century social worker, dedicated to the well-being of children in society.

Johnson’s views on cruelty to animals are yet another area that is indicative of liberal thought. In the Idler 17, Johnson discusses the pointlessness and cruelty of animal vivisection ad rebukes this practice in a very graphic and awe-provoking description. He says,
Among the inferior professors of medical knowledge is a race of wretches, whose lives are only varied by varieties of cruelty; whose favorite amusement is to nail dogs to tables and open them alive; to try how long life may be continued in various degrees of mutilation, or with the excision or laceration of the vital parts; to examine whether burning irons are felt more acutely by the bone or tendon; and whether the more lasting agonies are produced by poison forced into the mouth or injected into the veins (Johnson 55).

Johnson here provides a very vivid image of the atrocities of dissecting animals alive. It is clear that he tries to provoke sympathy for dissected animals and censure of the inhumane practice of vivisection. Moreover, Johnson does not fail to acknowledge that those who practice vivisection defend it as a tool of medical research. He argues, however, that no significant knowledge has been attained; “I know not,” he says, “that by living dissection any discovery has been made by which a single malady is more easily cured.” If so, such cruelty is completely pointless and unjustified. As usual, he concludes with his judgment on the action that should be taken in dealing with this issue. “It is time that universal resentment should arise against these horrid operations, which tend to harden the heart [and] extinguish those sensations which give man confidence in man” (Johnson 56). Here, Johnson addresses all humanity, calling for strong reprimand of vivisection as a practice that is so brutal that it threatens the essence of people, their humanity. Looking at his views, one cannot help but be amazed by Johnson, for such views are not only liberal and advanced for Johnson’s age, they are in today’s world the views of animal rights organizations.
One can very well see Johnson in the *Idler* 17 as a zealous spokesman for one of such organizations.

As was discussed earlier, Johnson, in his examination of the calamities that may befall individuals in a society, believes in the classical notion of submission and patience. That is, individuals are supposed to conform to their roles in society, submit to the inferiority of their status as individuals in a more important whole, and, if faced with any sort of hardships, the best they can do is to exercise patient without complaining or repining. From someone who has such a classical conservative outlook, one would expect Johnson to express a somewhat indifferent attitude towards the poor and poverty as a typical misery that faces individuals in society: simply, nothing can be done for the poor but to encourage them to be patient against their infliction. However, this is not the case with Johnson and the poor as he was famous for his sensitivity towards them. He frequently gave beggars in the streets, and he once told Boswell, “Where a great proportion of the people are suffered to languish in helpless misery, that country must be ill policed, and wretchedly governed: a decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilization” (qtd. in Boswell 446). In the *Rambler* 166, Johnson focuses on the biases against the poor. He warns against the evil of poverty as it “continues to produce contempt, and . . . obstructs the claims of kindred and of virtue” (Johnson 3: 116). The danger of poverty is that it threatens of loosening the ties of unity among members of society and stirs indignation and envy of the poor against those with wealth. Johnson condemns the biases against the poor since among them, “it is common to find those whom a very little assistance would enable to support themselves with decency, and
who yet cannot obtain from near relations what they see hourly lavished in
ostentation, luxury, and frolick” (Johnson 3: 117). If Johnson believes in the classical
hierarchy of societies, it follows that he accepts the differences of wealth that such
hierarchy entails; however, Johnson here seems to implicitly criticize the hierarchical
social system since it creates poverty, or at least, neglects the poor and fails to
maintain some degree of balance of fortune among classes.

6. Conclusion

In an attempt to achieve an understanding of Samuel Johnson in relation to the
time period in which he lived, this paper is intended to locate Johnson in the context
of Augustanism as the framework of the age of which Johnson is a prominent figure.
The attempt to contextualize Johnson within Augustanism, however, complicates our
understanding of Johnson as a representative of the Augustan Age. If Augustanism, as
elaborated in this paper, is an umbrella term that means social, political, and literary
conservatism, then Johnson is indeed a reflection of Augustanism in his conservative
social, political and literary views. However, one cannot help but acknowledge that
there is another side to Johnson than that of the follower of Augustanism, the image
of the liberal and progressive Johnson: the Johnson who while is writing in the
Augustan Age, is at the same time looking into the future. By having this side of
Johnson as a major focus of this paper, it is hoped that it contributes to freeing
Johnson from the 19th century caricatured image and responds to “the late twentieth-
century Johnson criticism that depicts a man who was, at the very least, in general
benign and rather enlightened” (Parke75).
In the larger scheme of this paper, there are some implications of the argument for the scholarship on Johnson, and perhaps for 18th century studies. This paper highlights the two sides of Johnson as a conservative Augustan and a progressive liberal; however, there can be more to this two-sidedness of Johnson’s thought. When examining the changes that were forming the bourgeois culture at the end of the 18th century, Habermas argues that “the bourgeois writers made use of their reason . . . and soon they were to think their own thoughts, directed against the authorities” (25). While it is certainly not one of the premises of this paper to argue that Johnson was a bourgeois writer, one can find an echo of what Habermas argues in that image of the liberal Johnson. To place Johnson in the context of the Augustan Age’s sunset, taking place concurrently with Johnson’s death, allows us to see that Johnson might have been influenced by the rising liberal culture at the end of the 18th century.

While this paper focuses on investigating the inconsistency of Johnson’s thought, it does not explore the development of this inconsistency. The argument in this paper is based mainly on Johnson’s periodical essays which lie roughly in the middle of his career. This paper, therefore, can be a departure point for an inquiry into whether the shift between conservatism and liberalism occurred in an evolutionary fashion or whether it was characteristic of Johnson’s thought throughout his career. That is, the question would be whether Johnson started as a conservative and then gradually shifted to liberalism, influenced by the rising liberal culture at the end of the 18th century, or whether he was consistently inconsistent in his thinking. Such a study would require a chronological investigation of Johnson’s works, starting with
his contributions to the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1773) and ending with his last major work, *The Lives of the Poets* (1779-81).

Another implication of the argument in this paper is the question of the model of Johnson’s authorial authority. In exploring Johnson’s relation to Augustanism, Johnson’s authority is one of the elements that helps understand the deviation from Augustan ideals. However, the question of how Johnson established his authorial authority and achieved monumentality in the print culture of his age is an area that can benefit from further investigation. On another level, the question of how authorial authority is attained can be extended to authorship in the 18th century in general. In examining the print culture of the 18th century, an area worthy of scholarly pursuit is the study of the ways in which concepts of authorship and celebrity, which emanates from authorship, developed in the 18th century. Such a pursuit would also take into consideration the ways writers attempted to shape the image of their authorship and the ways such images were received by the reading public in their time as well as how they are still received in current literary studies.

In the current critical approaches to literary historicism, there is a growing emphasis on the idea that “The age of ‘the age of’ is over.” That is, a new way of literary historicizing has “begun to displace the mode of periodization that subsumes an age under the aegis of one figure” (Griffin 377). Even if in current critical studies of literary history we tend to reject looking at the 18th century, more specifically, the second half of it, as The Age of Johnson, Johnson is indeed still a fruitful window to understanding the world of the 18th century. Such significance of Johnson is
corroborated by the fact that almost two hundred and twenty-five years after his
death, we still have scholarly journals dedicated to Johnsonian studies. In keeping
with this ongoing interest in Johnson, it is hoped that this paper is a humble
contribution to the myriad of literature on the monument that is Dr. Samuel Johnson.
Works Cited


Paku, Gillian. “The Age of Anon: Johnson Rewrites the Name of the Author.”  


