

Literature Criticism  
from 1400 to 1800

LC

50

Volume 50

# Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800

Critical Discussion of the Works  
of Fifteenth-, Sixteenth-, Seventeenth-, and  
Eighteenth-Century Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,  
Philosophers, and Other Creative Writers

Marie Lazzar  
Editor

江苏工业学院图书馆  
藏书章

 GALE GROUP  
™  
Detroit  
San Francisco  
London  
Boston  
Woodbridge, CT



## STAFF

Marie Lazzari, *Editor*  
Jelena O. Krstović, *Contributing Editor*  
Pam Revitzer, *Associate Editor*  
Janet Witalec, *Managing Editor*

Maria Franklin, *Permissions Manager*  
Kimberly F. Smilay, *Permissions Specialist*  
Kelly A. Quin, *Permissions Associate*  
Sandra K. Gore, *Permissions Assistant*

Victoria B. Cariappa, *Research Manager*  
Patricia T. Ballard, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie A. Richardson,  
Corrine Stocker, Cheryl L. Warnock, *Research Associates*

Gary Leach, *Graphic Artist*  
Randy Bassett, *Image Database Supervisor*  
Mike Logusz, Robert Duncan, *Imaging Specialists*  
Pamela A. Reed, *Imaging Coordinator*

This book is printed on acid-free paper that meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—  
Permanence Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, The Gale Group neither guarantees the accuracy of the data contained herein nor assumes any responsibility for errors, omissions or discrepancies. Gale accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

This publication is a creative work fully protected by all applicable copyright laws, as well as by misappropriation, trade secret, unfair competition, and other applicable laws. The authors and editors of this work have added value to the underlying factual material herein through one or more of the following: unique and original selection, coordination, expression, arrangement, and classification of the information.

All rights to this publication will be vigorously defended.

Copyright © 1999 Gale Group, Inc.  
27500 Drake Rd.  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Gale Group and Design is a trademark used herein under license.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 94-29718  
ISBN 0-7876-3265-1  
ISSN 0740-2880  
Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## Preface

*L*iterature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC) presents critical discussion of world literature from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. The literature of this period is especially vital: the years 1400 to 1800 saw the rise of modern European drama, the birth of the novel and personal essay forms, the emergence of newspapers and periodicals, and major achievements in poetry and philosophy. LC provides valuable insight into the art, life, thought, and cultural transformations that took place during these centuries.

### Scope of the Series

LC provides an introduction to the great poets, dramatists, novelists, essayists, and philosophers of the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries, and to the most significant interpretations of these authors' works. Because criticism of this literature spans nearly six hundred years, an overwhelming amount of scholarship confronts the student. LC organizes this material concisely and logically. Every attempt is made to reprint the most noteworthy, relevant, and educationally valuable essays available.

A separate Gale reference series, *Shakespearean Criticism*, is devoted exclusively to Shakespearean studies. Although properly belonging to the period covered in LC, William Shakespeare has inspired such a tremendous and ever-growing body of secondary material that a separate series was deemed essential.

Each entry in LC presents a representative selection of critical response to an author, a literary topic, or to a single important work of literature. Early commentary is offered to indicate initial responses, later selections document changes in literary reputations, and retrospective analyses provide the reader with modern views. The size of each author entry is a relative reflection of the scope of criticism available in English. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the seminal essays on each author's work and to include recent commentary providing modern perspectives.

Volumes 1 through 12 of the series feature author entries arranged alphabetically by author. Volumes 13 through 47 of the series feature a thematic arrangement. Each volume includes an entry devoted to the general study of a specific literary or philosophical movement, writings surrounding important political and historical events, the philosophy and art associated with eras of cultural transformation, or the literature of specific social or ethnic groups. Each of these volumes also includes several author entries devoted to major representatives of the featured period, genre, or national literature. With Volume 48, the series returns to a standard author approach, with occasional entries devoted to a single important work of world literature. One volume annually is devoted wholly to literary topics.

### Organization of the Book

Each entry consists of a heading, an introduction, a list of principal works, annotated works of criticism, each preceded by a bibliographical citation, and a bibliography of recommended further reading. Many of the entries include illustrations.

- The **Author Heading** consists of the most commonly used form of the author's name, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Topic entries are preceded by a **Thematic Heading**, which simply states the subject of the entry. Single-work entries are preceded by the title of the work and its date of publication.

- The **Introduction** contains background information that concisely introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the title and date (if available) of the first English-language edition is given in brackets following the original title. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted text are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here.

## Cumulative Indexes

Each volume of *LC* includes a series-specific cumulative **Nationality Index** in which author names are arranged alphabetically by nationality. The volume or volumes of *LC* in which each author appears are also listed.

Each volume of *LC* includes a cumulative **Author Index** listing all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by The Gale Group, including *LC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

*LC* includes a cumulative **Topic Index** that lists the literary themes and topics treated in the series as well as in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, and the *Contemporary Literature Criticism Yearbook*.

Each volume of *LC* also includes a cumulative **Title Index**, an alphabetical listing of all the literary works discussed in the series. Each title listing includes the corresponding volume and page numbers where criticism may be located. Foreign-language titles that have been translated into English followed by the titles of the translation—for example, *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha* (*Don Quixote*). Page numbers following these translated titles refer to all pages on which any form of the titles, either foreign-language or translated, appear. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

## A Note to the Reader

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume in the Literary Criticism Series may use the following general format to footnote reprinted criticism. The first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books.

Eileen Reeves, "Daniel 5 and the *Assayer*: Galileo Reads the Handwriting on the Wall," *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Spring, 1991, pp. 1-27; reprinted in *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, Vol. 45, ed. Jelena O. Krstović and Marie Lazzari, Farmington Hills, Mich.: The Gale Group, 1999, pp. 297-310.

Margaret Anne Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 17-22, 132-35, excerpted and reprinted in *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, Vol. 46, ed. Jelena O. Krstović and Marie Lazzari, Farmington Hills, Mich.: The Gale Group, 1999, pp. 20-2.

## Suggestions Are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the editor:

Editor, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*  
The Gale Group  
27500 Drake Road  
Farmington Hills, MI 48133-3535  
1-800-347-4253  
fax: 248-699-8049

# Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the excerpted criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. We are also grateful to the staffs of the Detroit Public Library, the Library of Congress, the University of Detroit Mercy Library, Wayne State University Purdy/Kresge Library Complex, and the University of Michigan Libraries for making their resources available to us. Following is a list of the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reproduce material in this volume of *LC*. Every effort has been made to trace copyright, but if omissions have been made, please let us know.

## **COPYRIGHTED EXCERPTS IN *LC*, VOLUME 50, WERE REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:**

*Australian Journal of French Studies*, v. XVI, May-August, 1979 for "Reason and Rhetoric in the Fables of La Fontaine" by June Moravcevic. Copyright © 1979 by *Australian Journal of French Studies*. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author. *College Literature*, n. 22-3, October, 1995. Copyright © 1995 by West Chester University. Reproduced by permission. *Dalhousie French Studies*, v. 36, Fall, 1996. Reproduced by permission. *Early American Literature*, v. 21, Fall, 1986; v. 31, 1996. Copyrighted © 1986, 1996 by the Department of English, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Both reproduced by permission of Duke University Press. *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, v. 27, Summer, 1994. © 1994 by The American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies. Reproduced by permission. *English Studies in Canada*, v. XII, June, 1986 for "Ideology and Self: A Theoretical Discussion of the 'Self' in Mary Wollstonecraft's Fiction" by S. D. Harasym. © Association of Canadian University Teachers of English 1986. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author. *Essays in Literature*, v. XIX, Spring, 1992. Reproduced by permission. *French Forum*, v. 16, January, 1991. Copyright © 1991 by French Forum Publishers, Inc. Reproduced by permission. *French Literature Series*, v. II, 1975. © Copyright 1975 by Phillip A. Crant. Reproduced by permission. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, v. 29, 1966 for "Moral Intention in the Fables of La Fontaine" by Margaret M. McGowan. Reproduced by permission of The Warburg Institute and the author. *L'Esprit Créateur*, v. XXVII, Winter, 1988. Copyright © 1988 by L'Esprit Créateur. Reproduced by permission. *MELUS: Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, v. 18, Fall, 1993. Copyright, MELUS, The Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States, 1993. Reproduced by permission. *Modern Language Quarterly*, v. 38, 1977. © 1977 University of Washington. Reproduced by permission of Duke University Press. *Neophilologus*, v. LXI, October, 1977 for "The Paradox of the Fable in Eighteenth-Century France" by Roseann Runte. © 1977 by H. D. Tjeenk Willink. Reproduced by permission of the author. *PMLA*, v. 84, May, 1969. Copyright © 1969 by the Modern Language Association of America. Reproduced by permission of the Modern Language Association of America. *Rice University Studies*, v. 57, Spring, 1971. Copyright 1971 by Rice University. Reproduced by permission. *Studies in Romanticism*, v. 32, Summer, 1993. Copyright © 1993 by the Trustees of Boston University. Reproduced by permission. *Style*, v. 27, Summer, 1993 for "Phillis Wheatley, Americanization, the Sublime, and the Romance of America" by Phillip M. Richards; v. 27, Summer, 1993 for "Snatching a Laurel, Wearing a Mask: Phillis Wheatley's Literary Nationalism and the Problem of Style" by Robert L. Kendrick. Copyright © Style, 1993. All rights reserved. Both reproduced by permission of the publisher and the respective authors. *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, v. 10, Spring, 1991. © 1991, The University of Tulsa. Reproduced by permission of the publisher. *University of Toronto Quarterly*, v. XXXVIII, January, 1969. © University of Toronto Press 1969. Reproduced by permission of University of Toronto Press Incorporated.

## **COPYRIGHTED EXCERPTS IN *LC*, VOLUME 50, WERE REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:**

Bannerji, Himani. From "Mary Wollstonecraft, Feminism, and Humanism: A Spectrum of Reading" in *Mary Wollstonecraft and 200 Years of Feminisms*. Edited by Eileen Janes Yeo. Rivers Oram Press, 1997. This edition copyright © Eileen Janes Yeo 1997. Copyright © 1997 by the author. Reproduced by permission. Barlowe, Jamie. From "Daring to Dialogue: Mary Wollstonecraft's Rhetoric of Feminist Dialogics" in *Reclaiming Rhetoric: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*. Edited by Andrea A. Lunsford. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995. Copyright © 1995,

University of Pittsburgh Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Brody, Miriam. From “The Vindication on the Writings of Women: Mary Wollstonecraft and Enlightenment Rhetoric” in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Edited by Maria J. Falco. The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996. Copyright © 1996 by The Pennsylvania State University. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—Daiches, David. From “Introduction: Boswell’s Ambiguities” in *New Light on Boswell: Critical and Historical Essays on the Occasion of the Bicentenary of “The Life of Johnson.”* Edited by Greg Clingham. Cambridge University Press, 1991. © Cambridge University Press 1991. Reproduced with the permission of Cambridge University Press and David Higham Associates Limited for the author.—Danner, Richard. From *Patterns of Irony in the “Fables” of La Fontaine*. Ohio University Press, 1985. © Copyright 1985 by Richard Danner. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Danziger, Marlies K. From “Boswell’s Travels through the German, Swiss, and French Enlightenment” in *Boswell: Citizen of the World, Man of Letters*. Edited by Irma S. Lustig. University Press of Kentucky, 1995. Copyright © 1995 by The University Press of Kentucky. Reproduced by permission.—Erkkila, Betsy. From “Phillis Wheatley and the Black American Revolution” in *A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America*. Edited by Frank Shuffelton. Oxford University Press, 1993. Copyright © 1993 by Frank Shuffelton. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.—Gates, Jr., Henry Louis. From *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the “Racial” Self*. Oxford University Press, 1989. Copyright © 1987 by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. All rights reserved. Originally appeared as “Phillis Wheatley and the African Muse” in *Critical Essays on Phillis Wheatley*. Edited by William H. Robinson. G. K. Hall, 1982. Copyright © 1982 by William H. Robinson. Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc. and Macmillan Library Reference.—Grimsted, David. From “Anglo-American Racism and Phillis Wheatley’s ‘Sable Veil,’ ‘Length’ned Chain,’ and ‘Knitted Heart’” in *Women in the Age of The American Revolution*. Edited by Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert. University Press of Virginia, 1989. Copyright © by the Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia. Reproduced by permission of the University Press of Virginia.—Guiton, Margaret. From *La Fontaine: Poet and Counterpoet*. Rutgers University Press, 1961. Copyright © 1961 by Rutgers, The State University. Reproduced by permission of Rutgers University Press.—Gunther-Canada, Wendy. From “Mary Wollstonecraft’s ‘Wild Wish’: Confounding Sex in the Discourse on Political Rights” in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Edited by Maria J. Falco. The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996. Copyright © 1996 by The Pennsylvania State University. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—Myers, Mitzi. From “Sensibility and the ‘Walk of Reason’: Mary Wollstonecraft’s Literary Reviews as Cultural Critique” in *Sensibility in Transformation: Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics; Essays in Honor of Jean H. Hagstrum*. Edited by Syndy McMillen Conger. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990. © 1990 by Associated University Presses, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Richmond, M. A. From *Bid the Vassal Soar: Interpretive Essays on the Life and Poetry of Phillis Wheatley (ca. 1753-1784) and George Moses Horton (ca. 1797-1883)*. Howard University Press, 1974. Copyright © 1974 by Merle A. Richmond. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Rubin, David Lee. From *A Pact with Silence: Art and Thought in the “Fables” of Jean de La Fontaine*. Ohio State University Press, 1991. Copyright © 1991 by the Ohio State University Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Shanley, Mary Lyndon. From “Mary Wollstonecraft on Sensibility, Women’s Rights, and Patriarchal Power” in *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition*. Edited by Hilda L. Smith. Cambridge University Press, 1998. © Cambridge University Press 1998. Reproduced with the permission of Cambridge University Press and the author.—Yarrow, William Paul. From “Casts a Kind of Glory Round It” in *Boswell: Citizen of the World, Man of Letters*. Edited by Irma S. Lustig. University Press of Kentucky, 1995. Copyright © 1995 by The University Press of Kentucky. Reproduced by permission.

#### PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS APPEARING IN LC, VOLUME 50, WERE RECEIVED FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES:

Boswell, James, engraving by E. Finden after a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Archive Photos, Inc. Reproduced by permission.—Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, illustration. Corbis Bettmann. Reproduced by permission.—Wheatley, Phillis, engraving. The Library of Congress.



# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

<b>James Boswell</b> .....	1
<b>Jean de la Fontaine</b> .....	45
<b>Phillis Wheatley (Peters)</b> .....	139
<b>Mary Wollstonecraft (Godwin)</b> .....	267

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 377

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 449

*LC* Cumulative Nationality Index 459

*LC* Cumulative Title Index 461

# James Boswell

1740-1795

Scottish biographer, diarist, essayist, poet, and critic.

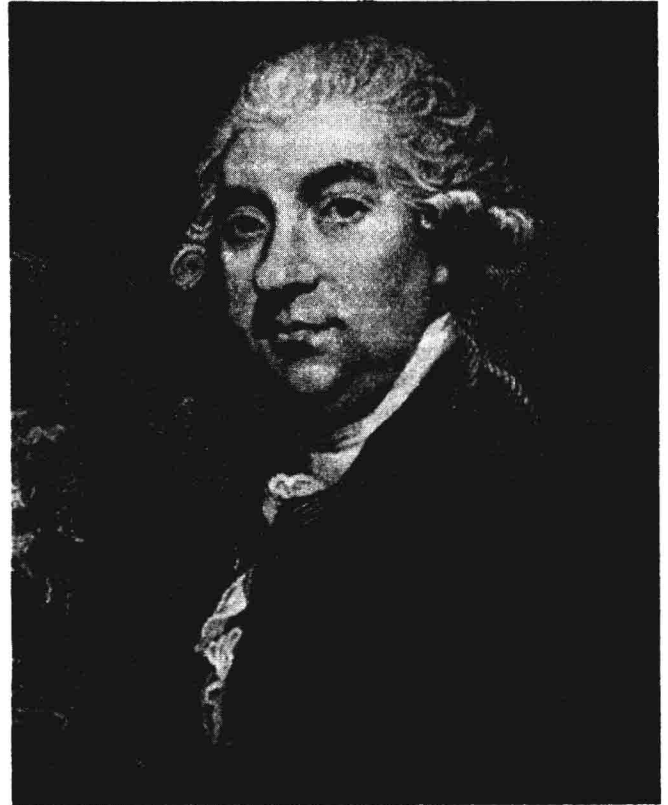
For additional information on Boswell's life and works, see *LC*, Volume 4.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most colorful figures in eighteenth-century English literature, Boswell is esteemed for his inimitable conversational style and pictorial documentation of life in such nonfiction works as *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) and for a masterpiece of English biography, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791). In this work Boswell firmly established biography as a leading literary form through a conscious attempt to recreate his subject by combining life history with anecdotes and dialogues. Its diversity reflects Boswell's several distinctive characteristics, which include an acute grasp of social setting and human nature, a rigid attention to realistic depiction, a responsive sensibility, and a willingness to engage in public self-analysis and self-exposure. In addition to the *Life*, Boswell's large collection of journals and letters heightens his reputation as an engagingly introspective writer, unique in vision and authorial voice.

## Biographical Information

Boswell was born into a prominent Edinburgh lawyer's family. His father eventually attained positions on the bench of Scotland's highest court and in the peerage; taking the title Lord Auchinleck, he assumed the lordship of a large estate. This privileged social environment greatly aided Boswell's own progression to literary and social prominence. Following a brief, early education in a private school, Boswell was trained in classical literature through a personal tutor who introduced him to Joseph Addison's and Richard Steele's *Spectator* essays, the elevated prose style, moralistic bent, and Augustan wit of which markedly influenced the tenor and style of Boswell's mature writings. In 1753 Boswell enrolled in the general curriculum at the University of Edinburgh. By the end of his four years there he was entertaining thoughts of becoming a man of letters, his hopes fueled by advice from several eminent Scots, including philosopher David Hume. However, Boswell's father wished him to continue studies in preparation for a legal career; for a while Boswell complied, matriculating at the University of Glasgow for nearly a year. During this period Boswell converted to the then-heavily strictured



Roman Catholic Church (and thereby relinquished his right to hold professional office). Eventually Boswell sought refuge with sympathetic Catholics in London in the spring of 1760.

Boswell, whose religious leanings were at this time still tenuous, indulged in a wide-ranging social life in London, mingling in both low and high social circles and making the acquaintance of such literary celebrities as Laurence Sterne and David Garrick and consorting frequently with prostitutes, causing long-term damage to his health. He subsequently requested of his father that he might remain in London and seek a commission with the Foot Guards, a privileged military patrol. Determined to see his son through law training, Auchinleck brought his son back to Scotland. Formore than a year Boswell remained in Scotland, spending much of his time completing law training under his father's tuition. During this time Boswell attended dramatic performances in Edinburgh, kept a journal, and published his first works: pamphlets of dramatic criticism, poetry, and light satire.

Appeasing his father, Boswell passed the Civil Law examination in 1762 and was allowed to return to London and pursue his ambition to join the Foot Guards. Yet, despite considerable inquiry, enlistment of support, and repeated requests of several high contacts, Boswell never obtained the post. While pursuing this ambition, however, Boswell popularized himself as a bright new force on the literary scene, making numerous social calls and acquiring several influential acquaintances. In 1763 he published his first work under his own name, *Letters between the Honorable Andrew Erskine, and James Boswell, Esq.*, a collection of actual correspondences between Boswell and a friend, both of whom hoped to impress the literati by dint of the extensive literary discussions found in their letters. This work received favorable reviews and sales.

From this point on, Boswell's aims became decidedly literary. For some time he had been endeavoring to meet one of his idols, Samuel Johnson, the renowned author of *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749) and *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). After several failed attempts, Boswell met the aging scholar by accident in a bookseller's shop. Although their initial conversation was brief and marred both by Johnson's gruff manner and by some inappropriate and ludicrous remarks from Boswell, the two soon became close and lasting friends. While set on a literary career, Boswell had reconsidered law as a field which would afford him added respectability. He spent a period of several months studying civil law in Utrecht, Holland. There, while maintaining a rigorous schedule of study, Boswell refined his journal-keeping techniques and produced a staggering amount of material. Boswell left Utrecht in 1764 and embarked on a two-year tour of Europe, corresponding with his London and Edinburgh acquaintances while recording in a journal his experiences, changing surroundings, and successful attempts to meet and intellectually engage such luminaries as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire, and Pasquale Paoli.

Returning to Edinburgh in 1766, Boswell gained admission to the Scottish bar and began a law practice. For the remainder of his life he often traveled on extended visits from Edinburgh to London, spending much of his time there in the company of Johnson and his literary coterie, The Club. Boswell's habit of recording Johnson's conversations on the spot became well known, as did his relentless, occasionally annoying, efforts to extract from Johnson opinions on virtually every imaginable topic. Boswell had become obsessed with accurately recording for posterity the Johnson he came to know so well; and Johnson, greatly valuing Boswell's friendship and vivacity, and also greatly aware of his own abilities as a conversationalist, allowed the unusual arrangement to continue. In 1768 Boswell's first major work appeared, *An Account of Corsica, The Journal of a Tour to that Island; and the Memoirs of Pascal Paoli*. Well received throughout

Britain, it won especial praise from Johnson, who advised Boswell to continue exercising his talents in writing such works, for memoirs and biography, Johnson believed, were fields in which Boswell could excel. Boswell, in turn, concerned himself with Johnson's literary career, fearing that the older writer would grow infirm before publishing all that he was capable of writing. Partly for this reason he planned a tour with Johnson in 1773 to the western islands of Scotland, the Hebrides, hoping that Johnson might publish an account of his trip there. This Johnson did, and it was Boswell's misfortune that his own account, in order not to compete with Johnson's, remained unpublished for over a decade.

With the death of Johnson in 1784, Boswell's life grew decidedly dismal. Saddened and depressed by the loss of this friend who had grown to be a father-figure to him, and plagued by recurrent bouts with gonorrhea, Boswell came to a single resolve: to complete *The Life of Samuel Johnson* before his death. Although his chief competitors, Hester Thrale and Sir John Hawkins, preceded him by several years in publishing their accounts, Boswell's completed *Life*, over which he labored with the aid of editor Edmund Malone, immediately superseded all such accounts in scope and compelling narration when it appeared in 1791. A corrected and expanded edition of the *Life*, overseen by Boswell and Malone, was published in 1793. Boswell died two years later.

### Major Works

Boswell first attracted the widespread attention of his contemporaries with *An Account of Corsica*, which describes the movement of national liberation in Corsica that Boswell witnessed during his tour of Europe, a history of Corsica culled from a number of sources, and a brief sketch of his meetings and conversations with Paoli, revolutionary leader of the Corsicans in their fight against the Genoese and the French for independence. Boswell followed this with his *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, which recounts the trip he had taken with Johnson through Scotland. The book enlarged the dimensions of travel literature significantly, but it also—most importantly for the study of Boswell—portrays the figure of Samuel Johnson for the first time and in a manner that would typify the style of his most well-known work.

The work that has most forcefully established Boswell's literary reputation through the twentieth century is his *Life of Samuel Johnson*. In his preface to the *Life* Boswell wrote that his biography was intended to be an expansion of the procedure employed by William Mason in his "Memoirs" (1775) of Thomas Gray. In this work Mason narrated his subject's life largely through quotation from Gray's letters. Improving upon this, Boswell employed, in addition, liberal use of first-

hand accounts by Johnson's friends and of Johnson's own conversation, along with an introspective narrative voice, and a fiction-like structure consisting of vivid scenes linked by such universal concerns as love, fear, morality, and contemplation of the afterlife. Perceived as scrupulously accurate in detail and comprehensiveness, and considered incomparably lively in portraiture, style, and narration, the *Life* was hailed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century as the highest achievement in English biography. Because of Boswell's use of personal confession, half-invented dialogue, and Johnson's letters, however, many critics are still uncertain how best to categorize and examine it; it has been studied not only as biography but as drama, tragi-romantic narrative, and psychological autobiography.

Despite the critical praise that has met the *Life* since its initial publication, Boswell's most striking achievement may have been the private journals that he kept during most of his adult life. Through the discovery of these papers at Malahide Castle, Ireland, and Fettercairn House, Scotland, and the gradual publication thereof, Boswell's reputation as a journal writer continues to rise. The journals have become of central interest to Boswell scholars, and many consider them to be the greatest diaries ever written in English. Frederick A. Pottle has written of Boswell: "All his significant books—*The Journal of A Tour to Corsica*, *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, and the *Life of Johnson*—were quarried out of his journal. Though the *Life* will probably always be considered his greatest artistic achievement, critics and historians will come to see that his central, his unique performance lies in the private record of which he published only samples. It is a rare kind of journal in that it is consistently dramatic." In these private papers Boswell's complex personality—idolseeking, spiritually searching, hypersexual, hypochondriac, exuberant—fully emerges, narrated with a sure conception of scene, character, and motive.

### Critical Reception

Publication of the *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* and *The Life of Samuel Johnson* brought Boswell's writings into serious critical debate. While the latter was highly popular with the reading public, many critics disparaged Boswell for his flouting of established biographical practice both by candidly portraying Johnson's shortcomings and by depicting Boswell's own opinions on matters of literary and social importance, which (they claimed) took up too much space in a purported biography. Critics have also debated the historical accuracy of Boswell's portrayal, questioning whether Boswell had the biographical distance necessary to accurately portray Johnson's life. From the perspective of modern biographical theory, however, Boswell's writings on Johnson are considered ground-

breaking achievements, not only for their readability, but for their candid approach to their subject and Boswell's self-awareness of his presence in the narrative. Many contemporary critics weigh the ideal of complete biographical accuracy against the literary merits of the work; while many critics focus on whether Boswell did in fact produce a true-to-life resource for the study of Johnson, Boswell has been lauded by others for his fictional techniques, and his reputation has been increasingly enhanced by examinations of his style, dramatic sensibility, and other aspects of his presentation.

The publication of Boswell's journals enhanced the critical estimation of his contribution to Western literature. These writings have provided critics with the means to compare the versions of events in the *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* and in the *Life* with what was originally entered in his journals, as well as a means to explore the literary devices Boswell employed in transforming the events into their published accounts. The journals have also been studied for their own sake, and many critics consider them, collectively, to constitute the greatest diary ever written. While Boswell's critical fate has fluctuated, twentieth-century critics agree that he will undoubtedly be remembered for *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, his private journals, and *The Life of Samuel Johnson*. Although written of the journals, John N. Morris's statement of Boswell's unique artistry may be applied to all three works: "Boswell's is a book of moments—millions of them. It is impossible to speak intelligibly of the form of such a work. It has no form, and yet, again almost paradoxically, this deficiency itself has one of the effects that we have been taught to admire in the willed order of the shapeliest productions of art; here if anywhere, manner and matter are one."

---

### PRINCIPAL WORKS

*Observations, Good or Bad, Stupid or Clever, Serious or Jocund on Squire Foote's Dramatic Entertainment, entitled, The Minor. By a Genius* (criticism) 1760

*A View of the Edinburgh Theatre during the Summer Season, 1759, by a Society of Gentleman* (criticism) 1760

*Letters between The Honourable Andrew Erskine, and James Boswell, Esq.* (letters) 1763

*Dorando, A Spanish Tale* (prose allegory) 1767

*An Account of Corsica, The Journal of a Tour to that Island; and the Memoirs of Pascal Paoli* (journal



and biography) 1768

*Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (journal) 1785

*The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. Comprehending an Account of His Studies and Numerous Works in Chronological Order . . . the Whole Exhibiting a View of Literature and Literary Men in Great Britain for Near Half a Century during Which He Flourished.* 2 vols. (journal and biography) 1791; also published as *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, 1848 [*Boswell's Johnson* (abridged edition), 1903]

*No Abolition of Slavery; or, The Universal Empire of Love* (poetry) 1791

*Letters of James Boswell.* 2 vols. (letters) 1924

*The Hypochondriack.* 2 vols. (essays) 1928

\**The Yale Editions of the Private Papers of James Boswell* (journals) 1950-

*Boswell's Book of Bad Verse (A Verse Self-Portrait); or, "Love Poems and Other Verses by James Boswell"* (poetry) 1974

\*This is an ongoing, multivolume series. *Boswell's London Journal, 1762-1763* is the first and most critically prominent volume.

## CRITICISM

Paul K. Alkon (essay date 1969)

SOURCE: "Boswell's Control of Aesthetic Distance," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 2, January, 1969, pp. 174-91.

[In the following essay, Alkon discusses devices Boswell uses in the *Life of Johnson* in order to control the aesthetic distance between author and subject and author and reader.]

### I

Proper control of aesthetic distance was so highly regarded by Johnson that he was sometimes inclined to undervalue biography. Thus in the *Idler*, No. 84, he argues that autobiography is more useful because "he that recounts the life of another, commonly dwells most upon conspicuous events, lessens the familiarity of his tale to increase its dignity, shews his favourite at a distance decorated and magnified like the ancient ac-

tors in their tragick dress, and endeavours to hide the man that he may produce a hero."<sup>1</sup> Hence the failure of most biographers. They keep their heroes too far away from us while, paradoxically, making them seem larger than life-size. Johnson's ideal for life-writing is clear: the less distance between reader and subject the better. Equally clear is Boswell's conscious adherence to that ideal.

Indeed Boswell's fame as an instigator of modern biography rests largely on his thorough rejection of the "doctrine of dignified distance."<sup>2</sup> Using a variety of devices which are well recognized by critics, Boswell succeeded in bringing his readers close, often uncomfortably close, to Johnson. Early in the *Life of Johnson* and only four paragraphs after referring to the argument in the *Idler*, No. 84, Boswell explains his decision to let as little as possible, especially of the narrator, stand between readers and Johnson: "Instead of melting down my materials into one mass, and constantly speaking in my own person, by which I might have appeared to have more merit in the execution of the work, I . . . produce, wherever it is in my power, his own minutes, letters, or conversation, being convinced that this mode is more lively."<sup>3</sup> Neither Boswell nor his critics, however, have pointed out the crucial devices employed throughout the *Life* to increase and, in general, vary aesthetic distance in order to solve some of the literary problems confronting the biographer.

A major problem is hinted at by Boswell's equation of liveliness with "minutes, letters, or conversation." The reader's interest must somehow be sustained through a very long work. One method of doing so, Boswell implies, is to minimize distance by allowing his audience to remain in close touch with Johnson's own statements rather than with those statements seen at one remove through the filtering and perhaps distracting or tedious consciousness of an omnipresent narrator. Yet if Boswell faithfully kept to his promise of not *constantly* speaking in his own person, he was nevertheless uneasily aware of the fact that he did choose to remain what critics would now characterize as a highly intrusive, dramatized, self-conscious narrator-agent in his account of Johnson's life.<sup>4</sup> Shortly before the conclusion, in somewhat ironic counterpoint to his initial statement of method, Boswell apologetically calls attention to his role as narrator: "I now relieve the readers of this Work from any farther personal notice of its authour, who if he should be thought to have obtruded himself too much upon their attention, requests them to consider the peculiar plan of his biographical undertaking." (IV, 380)

Accepting this invitation to consider his "peculiar plan" does in fact lead to a better understanding of Boswell's artistic problems and his manipulation of aesthetic distance to cope with them. The peculiarity of his *Life*

obviously does not consist in the mere presence of a narrator speaking in the first person to recount incidents and analyze character; nor is the chronological organization any novelty. What is distinctive, rather, is Boswell's announced effort to bring us close to Johnson by "interweaving what he privately wrote, and said, and thought: by which mankind are enabled as it were to see him live, and to 'live o'er each scene' with him." (I, 30) And the *Life*'s singularity is not only in taking readers strikingly close to Johnson's private self; perhaps an even more radical departure from traditional biography is Boswell's determination to present in so far as possible *each scene*—no matter how seemingly trivial—of Johnson's life. In principle, nothing was to be excluded. Everything recoverable was to be put on record. The work's peculiarity lies as much in its sheer quantity of close views as in their quality. This peculiarity too Boswell saw clearly and frequently explained apologetically. After describing how Johnson removed "branches of trees and other rubbish" from Taylor's waterfall, for example, Boswell adds: "This may be laughed at as too trifling to record; but it is a small characteristick trait in the Flemish picture which I give of my friend, and in which, therefore, I mark the most minute particulars." (III, 191)<sup>5</sup> The scenes must not only focus on Johnson rather than on the potentially distracting narrator, but they must at their most trifling suggest what is characteristic of the subject.

Otherwise the *Life*, even when most closely attending to Johnson, will seem digressive. In the need to avoid this danger resides another major problem: that of creating and maintaining a coherent though necessarily complicated picture of Johnson to which all "minute particulars" will appear related. Without such coherency the biographical forest petrifies into dead wood. Corollary to this problem are the problems of maintaining faith in the reliability of the narrator and in the accuracy as well as the completeness of his "Flemish picture." Readers must be induced to trust the skill of a painter whose canvas is at once so large and so foreign to English practice. Moreover, as in all friendly biographies but especially in one whose peculiar plan entails unprecedentedly extensive close-up views, warts and all, there is the problem of maintaining the reader's love and respect for the subject. Finally, as the minute particulars pile up, through hundreds of pages, there is the problem of preventing readers kept this closely in Johnson's company from becoming so used to him that they forget what a remarkably *rara avis* Boswell is keeping in his biographical cage. Wayne Booth has correctly observed that "a prolonged intimate view of a character works against our capacity for judgment."<sup>6</sup> Any judgement, he might have added, whether of merit or merely of singularity. There is thus considerable danger that our very familiarity with Johnson, induced by such close acquaintance with "what he privately wrote and said, and thought," may

induce us to lose track of his astonishing uniqueness. Yet for the *Life* to succeed readers must at the conclusion still be able to feel the force of Hamilton's moving farewell to his friend: "He has made a chasm, which not only nothing can fill up, but which nothing has a tendency to fill up.—Johnson is dead.—Let us go to the next best:—there is nobody;—no man can be said to put you in mind of Johnson." (IV, 420-21)

## II

Not all of Boswell's artistic problems in writing the *Life* were dealt with entirely or even partly through control of aesthetic distance, to be sure. Most notably, his success in maintaining a coherent image of Johnson's character as a unifying principle of the *Life* was achieved by other means and therefore lies outside the scope of my discussion.<sup>7</sup> Nor are the remaining problems I have listed resolved equally through the device of varying aesthetic distance. Boswell resorts most conspicuously to this technique, for example, in his effort to sustain interest in one man throughout a book which, though it cannot hope to compare in variety, rivals in bulk such works as Hume's *History of Great Britain*. If we tire of Alfred there is always William. If the feudal period bores us there is always the Elizabethan age. But what if the reader wearies of Johnson half-way through?

Since Boswell's professed and peculiar goal is to make readers "live o'er each scene" with Johnson, the *Life* is committed to the methods of drama. And to describe a performance as "dramatic" was then as it still is a way of saying that it is interesting. Going beyond the metaphor, however, critics are now in agreement on how, in general, the *Life* succeeds in aspiring to the condition of drama. There are stage directions: "Johnson (smiling), Sir. . . ." There is dialogue. There are even some conspicuous episodes such as the Wilkes dinner which are given the beginning-middle-and-end structure of a well constructed play.<sup>8</sup> In many of the more dramatic episodes, moreover, Boswell as narrator-dramatist is appropriately out of sight behind the scenes: having set the stage, he minimizes the distance between audience and events by cutting down references to himself ("I kept myself snug and silent") so that attention is focussed on the other actors surrounding his hero.<sup>9</sup> And because the essence of drama is talk, it is tempting to add to our growing list of critical commonplaces about Boswell's dramatic technique the fact that his commitment to dramatic method dictated a simple principle of decorum by which relevancy could be separated from tedious digression: commenting on his decision to exclude some "pleasant conversation" that Johnson had one day enjoyed hearing but in which he had not taken part, Boswell asserts that Johnson's "conversation alone, or what led to it, or was interwoven with it, is the business of this work." (II, 241-42)

But this plausible-sounding assertion will hardly do as an accurate or sufficient account of Boswell's method even at its most dramatic. In fact, the *Life*'s ability to sustain interest is due largely to Boswell's willingness to violate every aspect of the principle of decorum he so sweepingly enunciates here. He often includes material that is not part of Johnson's conversation or his life, that did not occasion Johnson's remarks, and that was in no direct sense "interwoven" with them. But this is not to say that such material is unrelated to Boswell's subject. Rather, it is to suggest that the relationship is far different from that which Boswell claims in his explicit statement of what may properly find a place in his book. That remark more accurately describes the effect than the methods of his artistry: where the *Life* is successfully dramatic we are often only made to feel that Boswell has given us exclusively Johnson's talk, its causes, and what "was"—at the time the scene took place—"interwoven" with it. Sometimes we are indeed given these things. Often, however, the feeling is dramatic illusion. We have been induced to willing suspension of distinctions between past and present, as well as to suspension of our awareness of the difference between action on-stage and action off-stage.

Consider, for example, the following paragraph, complete in itself, and taken from a part of the record for 1776 where Boswell says that "to avoid a tedious minuteness" he will "group together what I have preserved of his conversation during this period . . . without specifying each scene where it passed" since "where the place or the persons do not contribute to the zest of the conversation, it is unnecessary to encumber my page with mentioning them." (III, 52) The dramatic method has been modified to the extent of dropping stage directions and the list of dramatis personae involved, but only in order—Boswell claims—to render the conversation, still his professed subject, as vigorously as possible:

"There is much talk of the misery which we cause to the brute creation; but they are recompensed by existence. If they were not useful to man, and therefore protected by him, they would not be nearly so numerous." This argument is to be found in the able and benignant Hutchinson's 'Moral Philosophy.' But the question is, whether the animals who endure such sufferings of various kinds, for the service and entertainment of man, would accept of existence upon the terms on which they have it. Madam Sévigné, who, though she had many enjoyments, felt with delicate sensibility the prevalence of misery, complains of the task of existence having been imposed upon her without her consent. (III, 53)

What Johnson actually said occupies only the first two sentences, less than half of the passage. His opinion is followed by the seemingly degressive and gratuitous

information that Johnson's opinion was also held by the Scot, Hutcheson. Conspicuously omitted is any claim that Johnson was influenced by *Moral Philosophy*. Indeed so far as Boswell knew, or at least so far as he reports in the *Life*, Johnson had not even read Hutcheson's book. Instead of urging any relationship other than coincidence of opinion between the two moralists, Boswell chooses to praise *Hutcheson's* ability and benevolence. Boswell as narrator then moves to the front of the stage where he proceeds in the next sentence to soliloquize on what the question is: whether animals would choose to be—that is the question. Finally, the passage moves far away from Johnson, his time, and his island to what was written on the continent in the preceding century by a French lady. One may properly ask whether Boswell has in constructing his paragraph contributed "to the zest of the conversation" or whether he has drifted away from conversation altogether and, like an unscrupulous performer, simply upstaged the great star. Is Boswell's dramatic method sometimes that of the ham actor?

Not in this case, certainly, for despite our initial doubts, it is clear that everything Boswell has done here conspires to produce the illusion—*effect* is a better term—of a lively, interesting, four-way dialogue between Johnson, Hutcheson, Boswell, and Madame de Sévigné. That the dialogue not only never took place, but that it never could have since two of the "speakers" were dead in 1776, only reminds us that Boswell's imagination was not turned off by his determination to remain faithful to the truth, to *invent* nothing. There are other effects, too: finding him in agreement with the praiseworthy author of *Moral Philosophy* should raise or maintain our esteem for Johnson. Boswell, by his willingness to praise the moral and intellectual qualities of Hutcheson even while going on to indicate a deficiency in his (and Johnson's) statement of the question, has minimized the moral distance between the narrator, Hutcheson and Johnson: all are worthy men who can respect one another without falling into dull identity of viewpoint on an issue. By the same token, moral distance between Hutcheson, Johnson, and the reader is minimized. Identifying with the biographer in the absence of any reason here for feeling unlike him, the reader will adopt the narrator's moral kinship with men who are explicitly singled out for praise or implicitly praised by association. Madame de Sévigné, too, is made to seem morally close to all concerned: Boswell carefully characterizes her as a person who "felt with delicate sensibility the prevalence of misery." Along one axis, therefore, aesthetic distance has been sharply reduced.

Along another axis, however, distance is simultaneously increased. As the passage moves from Johnson's sentences to the viewpoints of Hutcheson, Boswell and Madame de Sévigné, the reader is taken further away intellectually from Johnson. His statement of the ques-



tion is said to be inadequate, the topic is broadened from the misery of animals to the misery of people, and the lady is allowed to have the last word. There is no crushing retort from Johnson—"Madame (frowning)"—to bring readers back under the sway of his position and settle the matter. Nor does Boswell settle it. We are left only with the implication created by his restatement of the question, i.e., that Madame de Sévigné is more nearly right than Johnson.

But it is *we* who must finally decide. Boswell has in effect collapsed the distinction between actor and audience, between action on-stage and action off-stage. His drama—here as elsewhere throughout the *Life* primarily a play of ideas—becomes supremely interesting because he has put into it the most interesting of all possible characters: ourselves. It is a strikingly "modern" piece of dramaturgy. But as Professor Pottle has actually pointed out, the current popularity of Boswell's journals is no accident due simply to their spicy night-scenes: "Boswell writes like one of us. His style raises few feelings of strangeness in the minds of readers whose taste has been fixed by Maugham, Hemingway, Joyce, Faulkner, Salinger."<sup>10</sup> We are at home with Boswell's style for many reasons, but partly because he can so adroitly manipulate different aspects of aesthetic distance, as in the passage under discussion, to implicate us in his drama by keeping us morally (or emotionally) close to his cast of characters while nevertheless compelling us to stand back intellectually and pass judgement on the argument. Such manipulation does not occur in every scene of the *Life* any more than eloquent soliloquies occur in every act of Shakespeare's plays, but the occurrence is sufficiently frequent to warrant notice as a striking felicity of style. Of course one could read the Ten Commandments and then disagree with them. Any reader is always free to dispute any point. But some works do not *encourage* dissent as Boswell does in passages similar to the one I am discussing. His very deftness in sustaining interest by involving readers in the Johnsonian dialectic accounts for the dearth of critical comment on this aspect of his style. His art elegantly conceals itself, for it is only rarely that he makes his invitation as crudely explicit as for example he does when after describing one heated argument he says: "My readers will decide upon this dispute." (III, 350)

Even that comparatively crude invitation, however, serves to make the reader move away intellectually from Johnson, who otherwise would have had the last word in that argument when he silenced Boswell by growling "Nay, if you are to bring in gabble, I'll talk no more. I will not, upon my honour." (III, 350) In many scenes Boswell relies on another device for implicating readers and simulating conversation at that point in the narration where it is made clear that everyone has been reduced to silence by Johnson, all real conversation thereby ceasing. Consider, for example,

the evening in 1775 at Cambridge's villa when Johnson, after giving his views on the harmlessness of *The Beggar's Opera*, brought the discussion to an abrupt halt by "collecting himself, as it were, to give a heavy stroke," and saying "There is in it such a *labefaction* of all principles, as may be injurious to morality." (II, 367) Johnson's remark is followed by two paragraphs, the second giving information on the stage history of *The Beggar's Opera* and the first providing the following information:

While he pronounced this response, we sat in a comical sort of restraint, smothering a laugh, which we were afraid might burst out. In his *Life of Gay*, he has been still more decisive as to the inefficiency of 'The Beggar's Opera' in corrupting society. But I have ever thought somewhat differently; for, indeed, not only are the gaiety and heroism of a highwayman very captivating to a youthful imagination, but the arguments for adventurous depredation are so plausible, the allusions so lively, and the contrasts with the ordinary and more painful modes of acquiring property are so artfully displayed, that it requires a cool and strong judgement to resist so imposing an aggregate: yet, I own, I should be very sorry to have 'The Beggar's Opera' suppressed; for there is in it so much of real London life, so much brilliant wit, and such a variety of airs, which, from early association of ideas, engage, soothe, and enliven the mind, that no performance which the theatre exhibits, delights me more. (II, 367)

Here only the first two sentences are obviously relevant inasmuch as they finish describing the scene and then relate Johnson's conversation to his writing. Moreover, the first sentence increases our emotional distance from Johnson by showing that even the other actors in the scene found his remark funny. As the butt of ridicule, even silent ridicule, he is moved away from us.<sup>11</sup> This comic distancing also reminds us of Johnson's uniqueness, for who but he could ever silence intelligent men by referring to *labefaction*?

The rest of the paragraph moves us away from Johnson intellectually as Boswell now occupies the stage alone, again soliloquizing: "I have ever thought somewhat differently. . . ." Though the effect is of discussion continued through more pros and cons (since Boswell proceeds to tell us what he has always thought on both sides of the issue), in fact the description of the scene has ended. We are not even given what Boswell thought *at the time* but was perhaps too intimidated to speak aloud; instead we merely have his life-long ambivalent response to *The Beggar's Opera*. The question is, or is intended to be, complicated by Boswell's ruminations, and the reader is thereby presented with a dialectic whereas in fact during the scene described—that evening's conversation at Cambridge's villa—there was only a comical *ipse dixit*.



Boswell has deftly added to the comic interlude an intellectual pleasure. After laughing, the reader must think about whose argument is most convincing. Very often more serious moments are also protracted in the same manner to make readers disengage themselves from Johnson's dicta and assess them. Having reported a conversation during which Johnson gave his views on marital infidelity, for example, Boswell adds a paragraph of disagreement beginning "Here it may be questioned, whether Johnson was entirely in the right." (III, 406) It is we who are left to settle the question. Again, after reporting Johnson's dismissal of *Elfrida* with the concession that it contains "now and then some good imitations of Milton's bad manner," Boswell registers dissent in a paragraph beginning "I often wondered at his low estimation of the writings of Gray and Mason." (II, 335) Having reported Johnson's refusal to concede that the "question concerning the legality of general warrants" was important, Boswell attributes the refusal to Johnson's characteristic "laxity of talking" and then adds that "surely, while the power of granting general warrants was supposed to be legal . . . we did not possess that security of freedom, congenial to our happy constitution, and which, by the intrepid exertions of Mr. Wilkes, has been happily established." (II, 73) By casting his opposition to Johnson in the form of praise for Wilkes, Boswell wrenches us intellectual miles if not light-years away from Johnson. We are of course always free to return. But simply by adding a sentence, Boswell has insured that agreement with Johnson on this issue will not be easy or thoughtless. Any siding with Johnson here that is not mere bias will only occur after the reader has mentally thrashed through the complicated question of Wilkes and liberty.

The list of similar examples could easily be lengthened. More significant than their mere presence as devices for engaging readers as "participants" in the Johnsonian intellectual drama, however, is the high degree of success Boswell has achieved. It has always been difficult for critics to remain indifferent to his Johnson. It is Boswell's skill as much as Johnson's personality that has created so many partisans and so many detractors. Even those who in Macaulay's vein disparage Boswell are in their way testifying to his effectiveness in forcing commitment, because it has usually been impossible merely to register dislike of the biographer without also inclining to preference for his subject. Even in a recent, sympathetic, and utterly unMacaulaian account of "the self-portrait of James Boswell which emerges from the conversations, letters, and editorial comments of the *Life of Johnson*," Irma S. Lustig was moved to deplore Boswell's "arrogant posthumous refutations of Johnson's views" on slavery.<sup>12</sup> The corollary of her reaction is increased respect for the victim of Boswell's arrogance. And whatever in this fashion sustains or creates admiration for Johnson works towards an important goal of the

*Life*. Boswell has created a rhetorical dilemma from which it is hard if not impossible to escape: agree with him and your opinion of Johnson, always finally admired by Boswell, goes up; disagree with or dislike him, and Johnson, by contrast, looks good.

Without so many Boswellian intrusions after the fact, the dilemma could not be posed in such acute form. Nor could it always function so effectively without Boswell's adroit blurring of the distinctions between past and present and between thought and word. In the above examples it has mostly been clear that Boswell is dissenting from Johnson at a safe distance in time: narrator and reader move away from the reported scene to its recollection in tranquillity. "Here it may be questioned whether Johnson was entirely in the right." Here in the book and now that he is gone. But not then and there. Often, however, the line between past and present is not so sharply drawn. After quoting Johnson's opinion of Rousseau, for example, Boswell has the last word by adding: "This violence seemed very strange to me, who had read many of Rousseau's animated writings with great pleasure, and even edification; had been much pleased with his society, and was just come from the Continent, where he was very generally admired. Nor can I yet allow that he deserves the very severe censure which Johnson pronounced upon him." (II, 12) In this case Boswell carefully distinguishes between his present opinion as he writes the biography and what he thought when he heard Johnson censure Rousseau. Yet the effect of so closely juxtaposing two consistently dissenting Boswellian opinions is to collapse the temporal distance between then and now. What seemed strange at the time still does. Nothing has shaken Boswell's admiration of Rousseau, which therefore gains at least some weight in our mental scales as it is balanced against Johnson's view. By the same juxtaposition, written word (what Boswell cannot yet allow as he writes the biography) coalesces with thought (what Boswell thought then about the strangeness of Johnson's violence). Similarly, Boswell's reported thought has for readers almost the same effect as disagreement spoken aloud. We see two sides of a "dialogue" whereas a witness of the scene itself (or a tape recording) would have noted only Johnson's remark and Boswell's silence.

Elsewhere Boswell more thoroughly collapses the distance between past and present. After quoting verbatim, for example, Johnson's remarks on Churchill's poetry—remarks incited, Boswell vaguely reports, by his having "ventured to hint that [Johnson] was not quite a fair judge"—the biographer adds: "In this depreciation of Churchill's poetry I could not agree with him. It is very true that the greatest part of it is upon the topicks of the day. . . . But Churchill had extraordinary vigour. . . . Let me add, that there are in his works many passages which. . . ." (I, 419-20) The paragraph from which these extracts are taken moves