

*The Yale Editions of  
the Private Papers of James Boswell*

RESEARCH EDITION  
Life of Johnson: Volume 1

JAMES BOSWELL'S  
*LIFE OF JOHNSON*

AN EDITION OF THE  
ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT  
IN FOUR VOLUMES

Edited by Marshall Waingrow



Volume 1: 1709–1765

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*Boswell's Life of Johnson, Volume 1*

*General Editor: Claude Rawson*

BOSWELL'S *LIFE* OF JOHNSON:  
AN EDITION OF THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

IN FOUR VOLUMES

VOLUME 1: 1709–1765

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# General Editorial Note

The research edition of the Private Papers of James Boswell will consist of three co-ordinated series: Boswell's journal in all its varieties, his correspondence, and the *Life of Johnson*. The undertaking is a co-operative one involving many scholars, and publication is proceeding in the order in which the volumes are completed for the press.

*Boswell's Life of Johnson: An Edition of the Original Manuscript*, to be published in four volumes, shows the method and progress of Boswell's composition. (With the completion of this first volume the editorship of the *Life* passes from Marshall Waingrow to Bruce Redford.) The correspondence is separated into three kinds of volumes: *subject* volumes of letters relatable to a topic or theme, *single-correspondence* volumes, and *miscellaneous-correspondence* volumes of the remaining letters in chronological sequence. The journal and its related notes and memoranda will also be presented in chronological sequence.

The parallel reading or 'trade' edition, the fourteen volumes of which were completed in 1989, consists of selected papers, primarily from the journals, that were considered likely to interest the general public. The annotation in that series was turned in towards the text to render it more accessible to the general reader.

Their value to literary scholars notwithstanding, many of the papers Boswell preserved are of value to a broad spectrum of eighteenth-century scholarship. The annotation of the research edition, therefore, turns out from the text and relates the documents to the areas of scholarship which they are capable of illuminating: history (literary, linguistic, legal, medical, political, social, local), biography, bibliography, and genealogy.

# Acknowledgements

In the early stages of the work on this volume I was awarded travel grants from the American Council of Learned Societies and the American Philosophical Society, and a fellowship from the Guggenheim Foundation, for which I am glad now to acknowledge my obligation.

As much of my work was carried on at a distance from the great resources of the Sterling Memorial Library, the Beinecke Library, and the editorial office of the Yale Editions of the Boswell Papers, I have had to rely to a considerable extent on others for basic research. Of particular help to me in this way were Susan Bianconi, Jessica Branch, Harriet Chidester, Margaret Conable, Andrew Elfenbein, Jeremy Goldring, Marcia Levinson, Rachel McClellan, Nancy Wright, and especially Mary Pat Martin, Barbara Desmond, and Marion Wells.

The accuracy that I aimed for in deciphering and reconstructing Boswell's manuscript has been enhanced by the scrutiny of three coadjutors: Gordon Turnbull and Mary Pat Martin, who read my transcription and textual notes against the original manuscript in the Beinecke, and Karen Andrews, who read them against photostats in Claremont. Karen Andrews also worked to insure the accuracy of my notes on changes made in the proof-sheets and in the printed editions.

For assistance in correcting the proofs of this volume I am indebted to Heather Barkley, the late David Fleeman, Elizabeth Geren, Marcia Levinson, Ruth Manley, Marion Wells, and William Zachs. Marcia Levinson is also mainly responsible for the index.

Others have provided me with material support, the particulars of which I will, for reasons of economy, refrain from specifying here. They are: John Abbott, James Caudle, William Coley, Thomas Crawford, Marlies Danziger, Ian Davidson, John Davidson, Elizabeth Dungan, Mary Hyde Eccles, David Evans, Ralph Franklin, Bennett Graff, Donald Greene, Benjamin Hoover, David Horne, Herman Liebert, Georges May, Stephen Parks, Alan Pooley, Bruce Redford, Rufus Reiberg, Alvaro Ribeiro SJ, Anthony Shippis, Margaret Smith, Catherine Tramz, Lars Troide, Gordon Williams, and Marjorie Wynne. Some acknowledgements for specific contributions will be found in the notes.

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If there is one person who deserves to be singled out in this catalogue of acknowledgements – and there is – it is Tulin Faulkner, who worked expertly and indefatigably to prepare this volume properly for the press and vigilantly to see it through to publication.

In the Advertisement to the First Edition of the *Life* Boswell wrote: 'It is painful to me to think that while I was carrying on this Work, several of those to whom it would have been most interesting have died. Such melancholy disappointments we know to be incident to humanity; but we do not feel them the less. Let me particularly lament ...' As I join in Boswell's sentiment, let me particularly lament Charles Bennett, Frank Brady, James Clifford, David Fleeman, Frederick Hilles, James Osborn, Frederick Pottle, Marion Pottle, and Lawrence Powell. In grateful memory of their exemplary scholarship I dedicate this volume to them.

The minute changes made in their compositions by eminent authors are always a matter of both curiosity & instruction to literary men, however trifling and unimportant they may appear to blockheads, one of whom in an impotent endeavour to ridicule all such notions, has had the impudence to assert that the only variations here noted were papers for paper & poppeys for poppy and others of a similar kind.

—Edmond Malone's note in his own  
copy of his edition of Dryden (1800)

In the case of these knots then, and of the several obstructions, which, may it please your reverences, such knots cast in our way in getting through life—  
——every hasty man can whip out his penknife and cut through them.—  
'Tis wrong. Believe me, Sirs, the most virtuous way, and which both reason and conscience dictate—is to take our teeth or our fingers to them.

—*Tristram Shandy*, Volume III, Chapter 10

That your book has been delayed I am glad, since you have gained an opportunity of being more exact.

—Johnson to Charles Burney, 1 November 1784

# Introduction

This manuscript edition of James Boswell's classic work owes its form and focus to a dramatic series of events in the first half of this century: the recovery at Malahide Castle in Ireland and Fettercairn House in Scotland of a great quantity of the author's journals, letters, manuscripts, and assorted other papers. The original manuscript of the *Life of Johnson* was discovered at Malahide in three unlikely places on three different occasions and in three disparate proportions. In 1927 sixteen leaves of the manuscript and a five-page supplementary paper of the kind Boswell designated 'Paper Apart' were found in an ebony cabinet, a family heirloom formerly housed at Auchinleck. Three years later a croquet box yielded 110 additional leaves. The more than nine hundred remaining leaves and the bulk of the Papers Apart were found in 1940 in a stable loft, where they had been stored from the time that the contents of the house at Auchinleck were removed to Malahide, more than two decades earlier.<sup>1</sup> The manuscript and its related papers (together with the previously recovered fragment of 'the first proof-sheets and

<sup>1</sup> Details of the history of the Boswell Papers and in particular of the discovery, acquisition, and disposition of the manuscript of the *Life* may be found in David Buchanan's *The Treasure of Auchinleck* (1974) and Frederick Pottle's *Pride and Negligence* (1982). The leaves of the manuscript recovered in the first find comprise pages 503-13, 529-30, 533, 538, and 553, all of which belong to Boswell's narrative for March 1776. Colonel Isham, who purchased the papers found in 1927, sold six of the sixteen leaves of the *Life* manuscript (pages 513, 529, 530, 533, 538, and 553) and the Papers Apart the following year to A. S. W. Rosenbach, the rare-book dealer. Two years later Isham acquired 110 additional leaves with his purchase of the second Malahide find. These leaves comprise pages 497-502, 514-28, 531-32, 534-37, 539-52, 554-607, 613, and 615-28, which cover (with gaps) the period 15-21 March 1776. In 1935 Isham sold these 110 leaves *in toto*, again to Rosenbach, who subsequently sold them to Arthur Houghton, Jr. (They are now in the Houghton Library at Harvard.) One wonders whether Isham, despite the fact that he was financially straitened, would have sold the six leaves in 1928 or his 110 leaves in 1935 had he even imagined that the rest of the manuscript might be found. In any case, he acquired the remaining leaves, which were recovered in 1940, not with his purchase in 1946 of the third find of Malahide papers but in a separate purchase in 1950, the object of which was to complete the collection that he sold to Yale the year before.

## INTRODUCTION

complete set of the revised proofs)<sup>2</sup> provided materials for a critical edition of the *Life*, but the Boswell papers taken together afforded an opportunity for more than a new and improved edition of the printed work. The private journals and notes Boswell habitually kept, while known from the *Life* itself to have been the source for large segments of the narrative, were now available for comparison. A significant portion of Boswell's correspondence was found to deal with the *Life*: of special interest were his assiduous efforts in soliciting letters, anecdotes, sayings, and particular information from Johnson's friends and acquaintances, which efforts yielded an abundance of material for the biography.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the recovered papers included a large and diverse collection of Johnsoniana – chronological lists of publications, anecdotes, memoranda, and items to be quoted – that Boswell had put together in preparation for writing the *Life*. With such a wealth and diversity of source materials accompanying the manuscripts, it was clear that the centre of interest for students of the *Life* would shift from the work as a product to the work as a process. The remaining question was only how to present that process to the reader.

### *The Hill-Powell Edition of the Life*

The text and commentary of the present edition and of the long-time standard Hill-Powell edition will inevitably coexist in a complementary relationship. G. B. Hill's edition of the *Life* (1887) was the first designed for scholars rather than for the general reader, and his full annotation of the text maintains its authority to this day. In L. F. Powell's revision of Hill (1934) this commentary (the 'chief glory of Dr. Hill's edition') was retained, as was the pagination, so as not to render out of date the well-established practice of citing Hill's edition by volume and page. However, Powell was not similarly respectful of Hill's text, which fell short of the standards of scholarship that prevailed when Powell began his work in 1922. While endorsing Hill's choice of the third edition of the *Life* on the proper ground that it contained Boswell's last revisions (though he did not live to complete them), Powell concluded from a systematic collation of the first three editions that the third edition was corrupt and that the first and second editions, for all their defects, contained occasional superior readings. The textual policy he followed anticipates in a reduced version the thoroughgoing critical editions of the present day. 'In establishing this text', Powell states in his Preface to the New Edition, 'my invariable practice has been in every place in which the reading of the third edition is, in my opinion, incorrect to restore the correct reading and to record the variants in a critical note: the critical notes, which are a new feature of this

<sup>2</sup> The proof-sheets are listed in the sale catalogue of the library of James Boswell, Jr. (*Bibliotheca Boswelliana*, 1825, Lot 3171). They were later acquired by R. B. Adam and are now in the Hyde Collection.

<sup>3</sup> See my *Correspondence and Other Papers of James Boswell Relating to the Making of the Life of Johnson* (1969), cited hereafter as *Corr.* 2. In the introduction to the volume I describe Boswell's editorial practices in dealing with second-hand materials and suggest a rationale for each of them.

edition, are inserted between the text and the commentary.' As it happened, Powell's immersion in the first three editions yielded more matter than was needed for the sole purpose of redeeming a corrupt text, and he accordingly planned to enlarge his textual apparatus: 'Boswell's own deliberate variants, the additions, alterations, and omissions, were too numerous and too extensive to be printed or recorded on the pages to which they relate, occupied as those pages are with a spacious commentary [largely Hill's]; I propose therefore to print them together in an Appendix to the sixth volume' (Hill-Powell i. vi-vii). Unfortunately for students of the *Life*, Powell failed to carry out his plan. Such an authoritative list of Boswell's 'deliberate variants' would surely have encouraged studies, beginning some sixty years ago, of the evolution of the *Life of Johnson* as a printed book. As fate would have it, however, such studies would have been in one sense premature; for the proper starting point would prove to be not Boswell's first edition but the manuscript he sent to the press.

### Geoffrey Scott's *The Making of the Life of Johnson*

The pioneering study of Boswell's editing of his own manuscripts for the *Life* is Geoffrey Scott's *The Making of the Life of Johnson ... A Study of Boswell's Biographical Method Marking the Successive Steps in the Composition* (1929).<sup>4</sup> Of particular relevance to the present work is his edition in miniature of pages from Boswell's Ashbourne journal (1777) showing the changes he made on those pages in 1790 as he was preparing to compose his narrative for the year 1777 in the *Life*. Of still greater relevance is the editorial method Scott employed for displaying pages from the small fragment of the *Life* manuscript that had then been recovered. In the last section of the volume, entitled 'The Manuscript of "The Life"', he presents a 'Collation of the MS' that resembles modern parallel-text editions. The elements of the collation, juxtaposed in four columns of text, are from left to right: Scott's transcription of recovered journal pages happily corresponding to pages in the *Life* manuscript fragment, his reconstructed text of the first draft of the corresponding *Life* manuscript, his text of what he labels 'The Revision of the Draft', and itemized verbal variants in the first edition. The text of 'The Revision of the Draft', while it records a few deletions, is essentially the text of the manuscript after all of the revisions were made. Missing in the collation are the many changes made *between* Scott's reconstructed first draft and the final text. This omission is explained as follows: 'More than one later stage of revision can be traced upon the draft. Many of Boswell's insertions have been further added to or corrected with a different quill. But it would be an affectation to pretend to determine how often Boswell returned to his task, and the final draft as he left it must be held to constitute his revision.' To be sure, one cannot hope to calculate the number of bouts of revision that took place altogether, but as Scott acknowl-

<sup>4</sup> The sixth volume of *The Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle in the Collection of Lt.-Colonel Ralph Heyward Isham* (1928-34; cited hereafter as BP), of which Scott was the first editor. After his untimely death in August 1929 the editorship passed to Frederick Pottle.

## INTRODUCTION

edges, in any given passage separate stages of revision may indeed be traced; and in failing to record these intermediate changes, Scott fails to carry out fully the program announced in his subtitle of 'marking the successive steps in the composition'. It is clear that he was not prepared to deal with elements of the manuscript that cannot be distinguished or reconstructed as constituting an integral text and therefore cannot be contained in a parallel-text format. However, as such elements are of critical importance in representing the evolution of Boswell's composition, editorial methods have been devised to include them in the present edition.

### *The Manuscript of the Life of Johnson*

The manuscript of the *Life*, broadly defined, consists of a main manuscript of more than a thousand leaves and a comparably large quantity of separate materials which Boswell at marked points in the main manuscript directed his compositor to 'Take in'.<sup>5</sup> The separate materials, or 'Papers Apart', included books and magazines from which passages were to be reprinted, original letters and copies, Johnsoniana from contributors, portions of Boswell's journal, drafts of texts composed in advance of the composition of the *Life*, articles on special subjects composed when the *Life* was in progress, and various additions and revisions written on separate sheets where there was no space for them on the pages of the main manuscript. That this manuscript – despite the forbidding look of many of its pages – was in fact the printer's copy is established by the presence of press signatures and marginal queries by both the compositor and the corrector.

In his account of Johnson's work on the *Dictionary* Boswell recalls 'his telling me that a large portion of it having by mistake been written upon both sides of the paper so as to be inconvenient for the Compositor, it cost him twenty pounds to have it transcribed upon one side only' (*post* p. 139). Whether Boswell learned from Johnson's mistake or knew better himself, he wrote what he calls his 'rough draught' on one side of the paper, numbered that side, and left the other side blank for additions and revisions that he was unable or did not choose to make on the numbered page. These additions and revisions were written on the blank verso of the *preceding* page, and thus did he serve the convenience of his compositor, who could set the text of a page and all of its additions and revisions without turning a leaf. The basic draft was evidently written rapidly, though probably with greater deliberation than is implied by the epithet 'rough'. Boswell was plainly averse to spending his time copying texts into the main manuscript, preferring to utilize whatever written and printed texts that were available and delegating to others (including his wife and children) the necessary tasks of transcription. He left blanks in the manuscript for the names, dates, quotations, titles, and page references that he could not immediately supply; some of these blanks were filled in at a later stage of composition, others not until the correcting of the proof-

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed description of the papers making up the *Life* manuscript, see the *Catalogue of the Papers of James Boswell at Yale University* (1993; cited hereafter as *Catalogue*), M 144 and M 145.

## INTRODUCTION

sheets. Similar to the blanks in respect of their disposition are Boswell's numerous alternative words and phrases and optional words and phrases, the former written one above the other, the latter set off by virgules; most of these were resolved in revision, but a good many not until the printing. These belated remedies, especially the resolution of the alternatives and the optional words and phrases which Boswell could hardly have expected the compositor to set, provide strong evidence that he never subjected his manuscript to a word-by-word reading from beginning to end before sending it to the press, a matter to which I shall return. Finally, in this brief survey of features of Boswell's original drafts that looked forward to his revision, there are the frequent marginal queries and memoranda in which he asks himself whether or where to bring in certain subjects and tells himself to clear up others.

Boswell's method of revision was to write between the lines of his draft, in the margins, or on the (originally) blank verso of the preceding page, depending on the nature or extent of the revision and the space then available for it. Proportionately few verso pages have remained blank; many contain more than one revision, and those usually written at different times; some are completely filled; and a few overflow on to Papers Apart. A system of connecting signs was employed to guide the compositor across the terrain (and through the occasional thickets) to the final text. The *process* of Boswell's revisions, however, is more obscure. Many revisions were made in the act of writing the basic draft itself, and for that matter in the writing of subsequent additions. The first retrospective revision that can be documented by external evidence occurred as early as 7 November 1786, when Boswell had been writing but a few months: '[Malone] encourages me to go on with Johnson's life. One morning we revised a part of it, which he thought well of, and dispelled my vapourish diffidence' (Journal). Internal evidence of this joint revisal is found in the frequent appearance of Malone's handwriting in the early pages. The one *systematic* revision that can be documented was begun, again with Malone's assistance, in the fall of 1789. It is anticipated in Boswell's journal for 10 January of that year: 'I am now very near the conclusion of my rough draught of Johnson's Life.... Whenever I have completed the rough draught, by which I mean the Work without nice correction, Malone and I are to prepare one half perfectly, and then it goes to press.' Boswell's description of this revisal in the Advertisement to the first edition explains why Malone's hand appears only sporadically after the early pages: Boswell *read to him* 'almost the whole of my manuscript, and [he] made such remarks as were greatly for the advantage of the Work'. As a consequence, any attempt to trace this process of 'nice correction' through the manuscript in the hope of identifying a discrete stage of revision would be futile. However, judging from the actual occurrences of Malone's hand, both in the manuscript and in the proof-sheets, the revisions that may be attributable to his remarks will not easily be confused with the kinds of revision that Boswell alone could have made.

That Boswell's own revisions were made in *ad hoc* fashion, as his materials, his recollections, or his reflections prompted, is clear enough from both external and internal evidence. His correspondence reveals that he acquired additional materials for parts of the narrative already composed; such materials appear in the

## INTRODUCTION

manuscript as later additions or revisions. We know also that he continued revising after the book was at the press: 'I was as far as Mr. Sewel's in Cornhill to get some little information for Johnson's *Life*. Hundreds of such pieces of trouble have I been obliged to take, in the course of the printing' (Journal, 8 June 1790).<sup>6</sup> Had we no such external evidence, the multi-layered revision of many passages would compel the conclusion that Boswell revisited them individually in the course of the back and forth movements incident to deliberate composition rather than in the course of systematic revisions.<sup>7</sup>

The process of revision continued in conjunction with the printing process. Journal references show that Boswell was in regular attendance at the printing-house.<sup>8</sup> The manuscript itself affords evidence that he did a good deal of revising – and editing – there. Between the printer's copy and the surviving fragment of first proofs are found numerous verbal variants. In addition there are forty-five instances of unresolved alternatives and a few unresolved optional expressions in the part of the manuscript transcribed for this first volume, all of which were resolved in the printing. As neither kind of departure from the manuscript can without difficulty be ascribed to the compositor, we may conclude that Boswell was responsible for them and that in these instances he worked from first proofs that were replaced by revises. In the correction of the proof-sheets Boswell was again assisted by Malone, but only part of the way, as Malone left for a visit in Ireland in November 1790 and did not return until after the *Life* was published. In the Advertisement to the first edition Boswell expresses his regret that he was deprived of Malone's revision when no more than half the book had been printed. The joint reading of the proofs appears to have been conducted differently from the joint reading of the manuscript. Boswell read the manuscript aloud with Malone at his side, as I have said, and usually wrote the changes himself. They evidently read at least some of the proofs separately: Malone's hand is found with greater frequency in the proof-sheets than in the manuscript and there are queries in his hand meant for Boswell and queries by Boswell meant for him.

The most important disclosure of the proof-sheets is that neither Boswell nor Malone read them against the manuscript.<sup>9</sup> Even when they recognized a doubtful reading in the printed text they made shift to improvise a correction rather than

<sup>6</sup> For a chronology of Boswell's progress on the *Life* see *Corr.* 2 pp. li-lxxviii.

<sup>7</sup> I have nevertheless inquired into the possibility of determining through manuscript ink analysis whether any two or more widely separated revisions in fact belong to the same writing. While the latest technological advances in this field offer the prospect of some success in making such fine discriminations in a manuscript such as Boswell's, I was persuaded that the necessary operations would be logistically difficult, inordinately time-consuming, and prohibitively expensive.

<sup>8</sup> The proof-sheets also document Boswell's attendance during the printing process and furnish particulars of his interventions. For example, he wrote in the margin of volume 2, page 25 of the revises, 'Mr. Boswell will bring more copy tomorrow 30 Sept [1790]'; again, in volume 2, page 345 he exhorts his compositor, 'N.B. P. 346 must not be laid on till I come & adjust the page where Mr. Nichols is mentioned.'

<sup>9</sup> R. W. Chapman deduced this fact from a single piece of evidence. See his *Letters of Johnson* (1952) iii. 306-07.



go back to the manuscript. Collating the proof-sheets with the final text embedded in the manuscript may have appeared to Boswell to be too daunting a task (we recall that he did not even review the final text before going to press), but by shirking it he incurred a host of printer's errors, many of which went undetected because the compositor contrived to make as much sense of his misreadings as he did of the text when accurately set. Only it was *his* sense, not Boswell's. On the other hand there were misreadings that produced linguistic anomalies which might well have aroused suspicion but did not. The fact that these have not been questioned by editors of the *Life* further testifies to the heuristic value of the manuscript. I count some seventy misreadings by the compositor in the part of the manuscript transcribed for this first volume. The restoration of a significant number of authorial readings in the *Life* is thus an important by-product of this edition. The compositor's misreadings are also of interest as constituting no less definitive evidence than the aforementioned signs of press work that the surviving manuscript was printer's copy, for they are by and large comprehensible only as originating in its peculiarities.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Transcription*

The problem posed in transcribing Boswell's manuscript is created by its composite structure. Geoffrey Scott, in his specimen 'First Draft', took cognizance of the fact that some of the revisions Boswell made belonged to his basic draft; but whereas it is relatively easy to reconstruct the first version of any given segment of the basic narrative, taking into account changes made in the same writing, any attempt to distinguish an overall first draft in Boswell's manuscript inevitably exposes an ambiguity in the very concept. As I have observed, the process of *ad hoc* revision began and continued while the basic draft was still in progress; and when Boswell and Malone commenced their revision to prepare the first half of the book for the press, Boswell had not yet written the last part of his narrative. Some of the revisions (especially additions) would surely have had some effect on segments of the original draft written later. Strictly speaking, there is no 'first draft' distinguishable in the manuscript as a text separate and distinct from all other elements in the process of composition. There is instead a succession of first drafts of the basic narrative together with revisions and additions, themselves composed in one or more drafts. Only one discrete text is contained in the manuscript and that is the final text or printer's copy. At first glance that text may recommend itself as a copy-text for the present edition as well, since it is both clear and complete. However, to adopt Boswell's final text as the text for

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the corrector of the press, who made his own collation and marked in the manuscript those places where omissions occurred in the printing, also passed over the compositor's misreadings. Presumably he would have had as much difficulty as the compositor in making out these particular manuscript readings; and if his collation proceeded from the proof-sheets to the manuscript, he might well have been lulled by the printed word into relaxing his scrutiny of the manuscript text. It is also possible that the corrector's primary focus was on such printing accidents as the omission of parts of the text.