

Preface

As in the first two volumes of this Yale research edition, the genetic transcription of Boswell's manuscript for the present portion of the *Life of Johnson* (covering the years 1776–1780) continues to illuminate previously hidden aspects of the work's composition and typesetting. Following Boswell from his first drafts through multiple layers of revision and beyond—to last-minute printing-house decisions in both style and content—affords a uniquely intimate perspective on the emergence of the biography from concept to completion, yielding a sharper assessment of the methods and choices embodied in it, and a fuller recognition of the challenges faced in its creation.

Among the many highlights of this portion of the manuscript is the formation of the account, originating in the briefest of jotted notes, of what Boswell accurately termed 'one of the most curious incidents in Dr. Johnson's Life'—the dinner at Dilly's where Johnson met and sat beside John Wilkes (MSS 591–607). Another is the lengthy 'Ashbourne Journal', in effect an extended multi-week interview with Johnson that caused Boswell, in triumph, to marvel that 'Johnson seemed to be more uniformly social cheerful and alert than I had almost ever seen him' (AJ* 'BD' (580)), and prompted Sir William Forbes, upon reading it, to tell 'the Biographer of Johnson' that 'there is not a man in the world to whom he discloses his sentiments so freely as yourself' (AJ* 600). Most of the pages of this journal, intricately revised, were sent directly to the printer as copy for the *Life*. No document in the entire Boswell collection discloses so richly the transit of his record of Johnson's talk into the form that would fit it, thematically and psychologically, into the full biographical portrait.

Overall, these densely revised manuscripts reveal the full scale of the task Boswell had set himself. His marginal memoranda and queries are but the surviving traces of the daunting logistics involved first in gathering, and then in organizing, the masses of material needed to tell Johnson's story. An exhausting process, evident from a journal entry showing that he once had 'sorted till I was stupified' (22 June 1786), it also must have seemed never-ending: the drafting of a footnote on 'Mr. Ellis' could not be finished until he had conducted an interview with him—*after* the manuscript page in question had already been sent to the printer (MS 564). This particular errand may have been paradigmatic, in Boswell's mind, of his extraordinary efforts to ensure accuracy, giving rise to his now famous, and not unmerited, boast that he would run half way across London to ascertain a fact (p. 16 n. 5).

Not surprisingly, given the scope and complexity of his labours, we find that Boswell in fact sometimes lost track of an intention, or ran short of time to hunt down a source, or failed to secure a document he wanted to include. Not always having access to Johnson's works, for instance, he was defeated in narrating accurately the story of the publication of the first four volumes of *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets* in 1779, although he later revised some details after looking at a copy of *The Lives of the Poets*, the 1781 reprint of the *Prefaces* (MS 620). Similarly, when quoting from *Taxation No Tyranny* (AJ* 595), he evidently had no copy of the text, and the quotation had to be corrected

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during the printing. By contrast, Boswell never managed to verify a quotation from Swift's letters (MS 709), yet had enjoined himself from the very first to 'get the passage exactly transcribed' (p. 226 n. 2). In these ways, the manuscript reveals how much the processes of revision were not merely documentary, but part of the very fabric of Boswell's physical existence. A host of such loose ends required attention: searches for books, people, and documents complicated the demands of revising his first-draft narrative and composing additional passages to meet new needs. Inevitably, several intentions were left unfulfilled.

In one such lost intention, a jotting ('Coeval servant from Steele'; MS opp. 700) reveals that Boswell hoped to quote a passage from Steele's *The Englishman* to characterize the mastery of 'ordinary things' that made Francis Barber so useful to Johnson. He copied down the passage, but the paper on which he did so escaped timely retrieval (p. 217 n. 4). Other lost intentions include some that furthered a broader goal of Boswell's, promised in a 1785 advertisement, that the *Life* 'will be enriched with innumerable Anecdotes of Literature'. He left memoranda, for example, to quote or cite lines from an imitation of Horace by William Duncombe (in relation to the game of applying *loci classici* to living persons in the newspaper; p. 200 n. 4) and verses from the poem 'Knotting' by the Earl of Dorset (to accompany Johnson's admission that he had attempted to learn how to knit; p. 172 n. 6).

The manuscript reveals significant details about another intention, delayed rather than lost altogether, concerning Johnson's legal brief on the case of the former slave Joseph Knight. Requested by Boswell, and dictated to him by Johnson, the document was at Auchinleck amidst a 'multiplicity of papers' when it was needed in London; Boswell planted a footnote to account for its absence from the first edition in 1791, promising to publish the brief for his readers when he ultimately retrieved it. He did so in 1793, after the relevant pages in the second edition had been printed, as docketed on the manuscript: 'Argument on the Negro Cause in Scotland referred p. 591 Vol. II. and of the Cause an account is given [on>] page 600 of the same volume.' Having already retained, on p. 591, the footnote explaining his inability to find the brief, Boswell announced its rediscovery in the front matter to the second edition, where he included it in the 'Additions to Dr. Johnson's Life recollected, and received after the second edition was printed' (as well as in a publication for purchasers of the first edition, *The Principal Corrections and Additions to the First Edition of Mr. Boswell's Life of Dr. Johnson*). On the brief itself he began drafting his 'Protest against [Johnson's] general doctrine with respect to the Slave Trade', working around the docket, but ran out of space and finished it on 'Paper S:T' (untraced; pp. 146 n. 6, 147 n. 3). For Boswell both to produce the document and allow his earlier apologetic footnote to stand undeleted affords a clear illustration of F. A. Pottle's contention that the second edition, as evident from the 'chaotic state' of its text, was sent to press 'with too little preparation' (*Lit. Car.*, p. 168).

At other moments, Boswell registered his conscientious grappling with questions of tact and tone. In one marginal query he worried that some 'little remarks' by Ramsay quoted in dialogue might prove dissonant with 'Johnson's praise of his conversation' (MS 777; p. 281 n. 3). In another memorandum, we discover Boswell in such a state of self-doubt about a paragraph of confessional reflection that he resolved to seek a second opinion, an instance in miniature of

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the sort of validation he sought in showing his Ashbourne Journal to Forbes: 'Try some good man with this passage', he advised himself in the margin, wondering whether to keep the passage after crossing it out in revision (MSS 623–24; p. 159 n. 5). Elsewhere we encounter him feeling ill at ease about a pejorative comment on an anonymous 'Nobleman' made by Johnson (p. 29 n. 5); admonishing himself, after deleting a paragraph of malicious critical sport, to 'Try to speak more softly' (p. 233 n. 1); and putting himself on guard against a degrading self-representation relative to his visiting Chatsworth, his reception by Lord John Cavendish, and the likelihood of a dinner invitation (pp. 134 n. 9, 150 n. 5).

Explicit in marginalia like these, Boswell's authorial deliberations emerge also from his revisions to the text where the material became unwieldy, perplexing, or sensitive. Describing how Johnson parodied the 'odd mode' of Thomas Warton's poetry, Boswell administered such a tangle of revisions to the anecdote that, unable to fashion it into a smooth narrative, he relegated a block of it to a footnote, offering it as a glimpse into his working 'Notes' (pp. 104–05). Strain is also evident in Boswell's 'flemish picture' of Johnson where limning certain features tested his candour or his technical control. Occasionally, trying with an uncertain hand to apply finishing touches, he struggled to shade something unpleasant—as when characterizing Johnson's vicious outbursts against the American colonists (MS 692)—or to regulate his grammar and syntax—as when grasping for language to explain Johnson's psychological gloom (MSS 616–17; the passage ultimately had to be recast in the revises by Edmond Malone). Discomfort and indecision are apparent where Boswell verged on disclosing that he had secretly read a portion of Johnson's diary; an abortive paragraph drafted between changes to the manuscript catchwords show that he initially bypassed the episode, then chose to introduce it, but finally shied away from the revelation (p. 140 n. 5).

The page proofs and revises reveal, furthermore, that the printing house itself could become a factor in such deliberations, prompting Boswell to reconsider his text. In the margin of the revises, below a footnote reporting that some lines in Johnson's letter of 1 May 1780 to Mrs. Thrale had been left out because they were 'partly too insignificant, and partly too indelicate for the publick eye', Boswell was warned by the printer to delete the note, 'for it should not be supposed Dr. Johnson wrote any thing indelicate to a Lady'. He did not delete it, but heeded the criticism, as demonstrated by his revisions to the note (p. 302 n. 7). Comparison between the manuscript and the revises reveals a fine shading of portraiture with respect to Johnson's expression of disgust over Pope's friendship with 'such infamous Lords as Burlington and Cobham and Bolingbroke'. Boswell was tentative about the word 'infamous': he drafted it provisionally, opted in revision to keep it, but deleted it in proof after all, as betrayed by the excessive spacing between words on that line in the revises (MS 753; p. 386).

But the transcription discloses more than just Boswell's care and scrupulousness, doubts and vacillations, decisions and revisions. As in the first two volumes of this edition, errors—compositorial and otherwise—have been uncovered which have stood in all editions of the *Life* to date. The annotations in these volumes suggest corrections with which, when the four-volume transcription series is complete, all future editions of the *Life* will need to engage. For instance, an iconic image of Johnson in his library can now be corrected, for before heading to the dinner at

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Dilly's with Wilkes, Boswell found Johnson at home not 'buffeting his books', as has always been printed, but 'battling with' or (in revision) 'bustling among' them (MS 595). The image conjured by the compositor's misreading—a plausible one, by virtue of its having made sense to the compositor and then by having escaped alteration in proof—must yield to the successive metaphors actually drafted by Boswell. In another, larger instance, an entire paragraph was overlooked by the printer, and its omission went unnoticed by Boswell and the corrector of the press. It records the provocative idea, put forward by General Paoli, that Sir Joshua Reynolds might better have exercised his genius 'in Statuary by which it would have been much longer perpetuated'. 'True Sir', Johnson agreed, but countered that 'portrait painting gets him present money' (MS opp. 589).

Small oversights too resulted in losses and errors. One difficulty for the compositor in reading Boswell's copy—which in places, after several revisions, could become a maze—was figuring out where to place quotation marks, since the manuscript was inconsistent in showing where quotations began and ended. Alertness and intuition served the compositor well in this regard, yet inevitably now and again he made mistakes. In a particularly confusing passage, made more puzzling by an unusual sequence of revisions (AJ 82–83, AJ* 568), the compositor took words out of Johnson's mouth by ending a quotation prematurely, turning the close of his speech into Boswell's commentary. This error, though rectified in the second edition, curiously reappeared in the third edition and has persisted in editions of the *Life* until now.

In a few cases where quotation marks were overlooked, allusions that were meant to stand out receded more or less imperceptibly into the text. By this means a biblical allusion lost its emphasis in Johnson's solemn farewell letter to the capitally condemned clergyman forger, Dr. William Dodd (p. 96 and n. 3), and a richly pointed verse from Milton's *Comus*, undetected until now, was robbed of its resonance (MS 607; p. 65 and n. 5). Another quotation, though punctuated as such, has eluded editors of the *Life* because of its truncation: the complete version, 'the full flow of London talk' (MS 664), restored to notice now from underneath Boswell's deletion, enables us to appreciate the phrase 'flow of talk' when Boswell revisits the concept later (MS 742).

The illustrations offered here comprise the merest sampling of what this volume contains. The manuscript transcription discloses Boswell's careful honing of expression—and thus the care and deliberation he brought to the task, once dismissed as mere stenography, of fashioning his complex vision of his subject—at all points of composition. Along the way, it also wins recognition for the compositors' routinely heroic feats of typesetting which, despite some important lapses, produced surprisingly few misreadings of Boswell's often tortuous copy.

Given that the volumes in the Yale manuscript edition are designed as a research supplement to the four-volume Hill-Powell edition of the *Life*, the running headers incorporate references to the corresponding pages in that edition. For a detailed explanation of the method Marshall Waingrow devised for transcribing Boswell's manuscript, the reader should consult the 'Introduction' to Volume 1 of this edition. For the sake of proximity, however, the editorial sigla used most frequently are summarized on the following page.

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