CAXTONIAN

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Sam and Jamie:

No Theory Please, We're British

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Because the name of one is seldom mentioned without the name of the other, there has been much speculation about what the two were to each other. Looking at the volumes on my shelves – which reflect a virtually Talmudic and exhausting exegetical attack on the subject of the relationship between James Boswell and Samuel Johnson – I was, for a long while, discouraged about arriving at my own opinion. These books contain a vast range of words about Boswell and Johnson, many examining their lives, relationships and writings through an extraordinary range of filters: Marxist, Freudian, feminist, post-feminist, medical, political, religious, historical – to say nothing of literary. The list goes on, including the often fascinating, if sometimes eccentric, views of some very smart people. Recently, for example, the *Psychoanalytic Review* offered the observations of Dr. Harry Trosman of the University of Chicago, which concluded with this interpretation of the relationship between Boswell and Johnson:

> It suggests a more primitive form of object relationship characterized by self-object fusion and a tendency toward regressive merger, particularly during periods of separation. His vulnerability in the absence of inner resources made [Boswell] long for a figure who would protect and organize him as well as serve a benign superego function.

Dr. Trosman's analysis is obviously written in what I immediately recognized as my native tongue, American English, but, despite repeated re-reading, conveyed almost nothing of meaning, and discouraged me further.

Asked for my opinion* about this famous relationship, I found that not only was there likely little or nothing worthwhile I could say that would be new, but even the burden of reviewing everything that had already been said in order to present a useful executive summary would be overwhelming. The most recent biographies seem to me superficial one-note efforts – misguided at that – to find something old and dress it up so as to be controversial enough to persuade a publisher to bite.

Then it struck me: I am not an academic of any sort, and no pursuit of tenure or need to keep myself awake during the seventeenth year of teaching the same thing has ever driven me to find, or create, a new theory in order to stay interested in Boswell and Johnson. In fact, my own undergraduate education in the early 1960s was at the high-water mark of what was called the New Criticism, and at a place where that approach began with, and taught that, "close reading" of the text itself made the actual words of primary and principal significance. We heard about theory, but we did not get there much, because what the author actually said was what mattered. And so I resolved to consider the relationship between Boswell and Johnson by looking only at what they said

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Johnson and Boswell spent no more than 400 days together during the course of their friendship – 100 of them on their Hebrides tour. Their trip was memorialized in a famous set of prints by Richardson in 1786, illustrating passages for Boswell's newly published account.

*This paper is a revised version of a talk originally delivered at the Huntington Museum and Library in September of 2009 as part of the celebration of Johnson's tercentenary.

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themselves, to each other and to others. I did not consult anyone, not Jack Bate, not John Wain, not Fred Pottle, not anyone to see what someone else thought their words meant, or to find a lens through which I might view the two of them and what they were to each other.

One place to look for those words, of course, is Boswell's great *Life of Samuel Johnson, LLD,* but even there the reader must be careful, because that is a work of art by a very artful worker. What Boswell reports there is shaped by what he wants the world to see and think about both Johnson and himself. We can't ignore Boswell's own public analysis of the relationship, but we can't depend on it exclusively. This, of course, is reminiscent of Robert Frost's warning to trust his poetry, but don't trust what he said about himself. Johnson, on the other hand, did not write a *Life of James Boswell LLB,* and he burned, we believe, most of his own journals and diaries. But we do need to look at Boswell's journals, and at both of their letters, to each other and to others, where we have the best hope of finding their private thoughts, honestly expressed – or concealed, as the case may be.

Trying, as Dr. Johnson advised Boswell, to clear my head of cant, I began to read with the conscious caveat not to assume Boswell saw Johnson as a "father figure," nor that Johnson saw Boswell as the son he never had. I would not assume that their distinct and distinctly different family histories and places in society were important in their relationship. And I would not assume anything about some repressed sexual content in what passed between them. I also reminded myself that I was going to be reading words written in, and expressing the sensibilities of, the eighteenth century, not the twenty-first. Words and their usages understood by Sam and Jamie do not necessarily convey the same suggestions and meanings now that they did then. One final warning to myself: Sam and Jamie did not have an exclusive, monogamous relationship. They both moved in wide circles; Johnson had many younger friends, Boswell had many older ones, and, all in all, they probably spent only around 400 days in each other's company over the entire twenty-two years of their relationship.

To begin then: I find two things most helpful in thinking about what Johnson and Boswell meant to each other and what their relationship meant to each of them. The first is an entry of Boswell's written in his journal while on his Grand Tour of the continent after concluding his legal studies. He had by then met Johnson, but he wrote this while in the company of George Keith, the Earl Marischal of Scotland, advisor to Frederick the Great, a famous worldly man whom Boswell's father had asked to serve as a sort of chaperone on the first leg of his son's tour. Young Boswell wrote, to himself, "It is certain that I am not a great man, but I have an enthusiastic love of great men and I derive a certain kind of glory from it." On his trip he met and ingratiated himself with Rousseau, Voltaire and Pasqual Paoli, among others. It is worth keeping in mind then that, at least at first, and perhaps at the close, Johnson was but another "great man" for Boswell – perhaps first among many, but not alone, and perhaps first only because the opportunities to bask in Johnson's reflected glory were greater than those offered by others, because of Johnson's own circumstances and temperament. If this is simply a lay version of Dr. Trosman's "self-object fusion and regressive merger," well, at least I came by it honestly.

The second point I tried to keep in mind – on the Johnson side – is this: Johnson provided for many in his will. While the bulk of his estate went to his former houseboy Francis Barber, he made many smaller gifts – including gifts of books – to others. Nothing at all to Boswell, nor did he even mention him by name, let alone make him one of his literary executors. The fact is that Johnson had legions of friends and advisers and sycophants, many of them living in London, seeing him regularly, and caring for him in a variety of ways. And had he wanted surrogate children, he had that in Francis Barber, whom he housed and educated and on whose behalf he often intervened, and the children of his friends the Thrales, especially young "Queeney" Thrale, whom he addressed as "Sweetness," and to whom he wrote letters that can be read as imbued with a certain almost paternal warmth of expression and advice and flattery and encouragement, a tone altogether different from that found in his letters to Boswell. Thus we ought not forget that important though Boswell was to Johnson, he left him unmentioned in his will, and was surrounded, literally, by others.

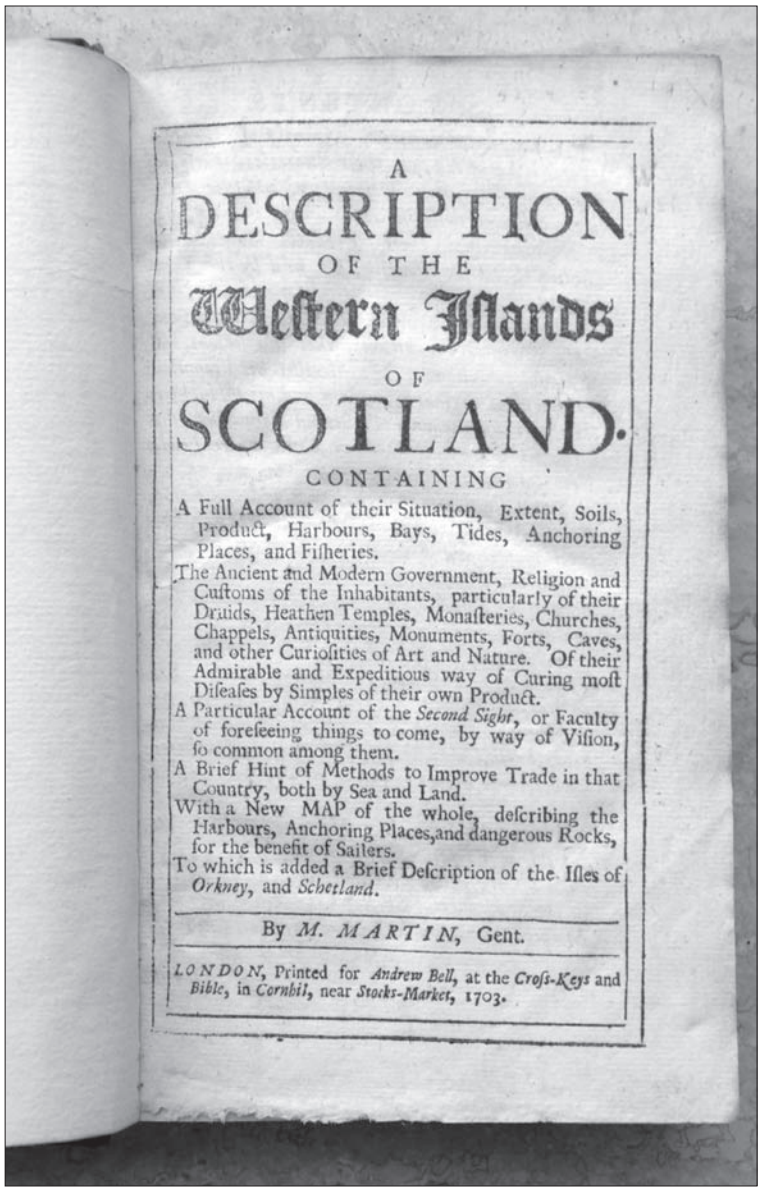
In fact, while we're on the subject of Johnson and children we might consider what he himself said about them. It is, of course, worth remembering that they met when Johnson was fifty-three and Boswell nearly twenty-two. Boswell was an adult, not a child, and Johnson, although old enough to be Boswell's father, had other friends of Boswell's generation, including Topham Beauclerk and Bennet Langton. Of such friends and friendships Johnson said this:

> Sir, I love the acquaintance of young people; because, in the first place, I don't like to think myself growing old. In the next place, young acquaintances last longer, if they do last; and then, Sir, young men have more virtue than old men; they have more generous sentiments in every respect. I love the young dogs of this age; they have more wit and humor and knowledge of life than we had; but then the dogs are not so good scholars.

No one, of course, ever accused Boswell or Beauclerk of being virtuous in the sense we primarily ascribe to it, an example of how we must be careful when reading Johnson's words through our own glasses. Another problem with failing to keep that in mind was identified by the great twentieth-century writer and editor, William Maxwell, who wrote, "In speaking of things that happened long ago, to be insensitive to the language of the period is to be, in effect, an unreliable witness."

While the sentiment Johnson expressed here about young people in general provides a clue to his relationship with Boswell, he also elsewhere tells us explicitly what he felt about children. Talking at dinner at the home of his friends and patrons the Thrales, with Boswell and others present, Johnson said:

> We may be excused for not caring much about other people's children, for there are many who care very little about their own children. It may be observed, that men, who from being engaged in business, or from their course of life – whatever way, seldom see their children, do not care much about them. I myself should not have had much fondness for a child of my own.... At least I never wished to have a child.



A
DESCRIPTION
OF THE
Western Iſlands
OF
SCOTLAND.
CONTAINING
A Full Account of their Situation, Extent, Soils, Product, Harbours, Bays, Tides, Anchoring Places, and Fiſheries.
The Ancient and Modern Government, Religion and Cuſtoms of the Inhabitants, particularly of their Druids, Heathen Temples, Monaſteries, Churches, Chappels, Antiquities, Monuments, Forts, Caves, and other Curioſities of Art and Nature. Of their Admirable and Expeditious way of Curing moſt Diſeaſes by Simples of their own Product.
A Particular Account of the *Second Sight*, or Faculty of foreſeeing things to come, by way of Viſion, ſo common among them.
A Brief Hint of Methods to Improve Trade in that Country, both by Sea and Land.
With a New MAP of the whole, deſcribing the Harbours, Anchoring Places, and dangerous Rocks, for the benefit of Sailers.
To which is added a Brief Deſcription of the Iſles of *Orkney*, and *Schetland*.
By *M. MARTIN*, Gent.
LONDON, Printed for *Andrew Bell*, at the *Croſs-Keys* and *Bible*, in *Cornhil*, near *Stocks-Market*, 1703.

The Hebrides tour was inspired in part by Johnson and Boswell's reading of an earlier account of such a journey by Martin, published in 1703.

Years before, in response to Boswell's inquiry "If Sir, you were shut up in a castle with a newborn child with you, what would you do?" Johnson had answered "Why, Sir, I should not much like my company... I should not be apt to teach it... I should not have a pleasure teaching it." Despite what Johnson himself said about children, Boswell tells us that "Johnson's love of little children... calling them 'pretty dears' and giving them sweet meats, was an undoubted proof of the real humanity and greatness of his disposition." And we all know the story of Johnson secretly putting pennies into the pockets of sleeping beggar children on the streets of London. But these brief moments of Boswell building his version of Johnson tell us nothing really about Johnson's view of having children of his own.

In Johnson's letters to his stepdaughter Lucy Porter, whom he also came to know first when she was no longer a child, we find more duty than affection, and no gifts of sweet meats. And in his letters to young Queeney Thrale we find a warmth and affection that while it seems to be paternalistic, is perhaps more precisely, avuncular. While it remains for us to examine how Johnson did think of, and speak and write to, Boswell, I think it is fair to say he never thought of him as his child, young or grown.

Boswell, of course, did have a father, a stern man, often now characterized as cold, about whom Boswell often complained, and complained often to Johnson. We ought again remember that the concept of fatherhood does not now mean what it meant then. When we look at that much criticized man Alexander Boswell, and what Boswell said and didn't say about him, what we find in fact is a pretty fair example of an eighteenth century upper class British father, except that this one was actually very involved in his son Jamie's life. He obviously cared and worried about him a great deal, and had been given, as Boswell never acknowledges, a great deal to worry about. Jamie Boswell was only reluctantly obedient, and he was difficult both as an adolescent and as a grown man. For example, when a young man he once ran away, "converting," temporarily, to Catholicism. While in school in Glasgow, he indulged in a love of the theater, causing his father to require him to move back to Edinburgh. These instances of rebellion occurred at a time and place where the Catholic church and the netherworld of the theater and actresses carried stigma we might now ascribe respectively, if political correctness allows stigmas at all, to a bizarre cult in the case of Catholicism, and the profession of sex worker in the case of actresses. In short, Boswell had a father, and was profoundly aware of him, and that father was indeed both protective and concerned. Yet, here is the kind of thing Jamie said about him. To his dear friend and confidant William Temple, Boswell wrote, in 1775 when he was 33, hardly a child:

> My father, whom I really both respect and affectionate (if that is a word; for it is a different feeling from that which is expressed by love...) is so different from me... that I am often hurt, when, I dare say, he means me no harm, and he has a method of treating me, which makes me feel myself like a timid boy.

In another letter to Temple, in 1780, Boswell wrote he was amused at a suggestion of Temple's for dealing with his father. "It would do admirably with some fathers," Boswell wrote, "But it would make mine much worse; for he cannot bear that his son should talk with him as a man." One way to read this, of course, is

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SAM AND JAMIE, *from page 3*

that Boswell's father treated his son as if he were, in fact, his son, his child. Far from being unnatural, this seems both a timeless and nearly universal aspect of many if not most such relationships, however much it is sometimes painful to adult children. I conclude though that Boswell was not seeking a "father figure" in his relationship with Johnson. Apart from the twentieth-century Freudian connotations of that concept, Boswell had a very powerful such figure. He looked to Johnson for something else.

What he tells us himself, what he told his friends, what he told himself as his journal discloses, as during his travels with the Earl Marischal of Scotland, was that he wanted to bask in the reflected glory of being with a great man. In his journal in 1778, for example, he wrote that Johnson's recognition of him in print as a companion in Johnson's version of their 1773 Hebrides jaunt gave him "…great satisfaction on finding myself eminent and amiable." This echoes a letter to Temple in 1763, reporting on Johnson's expression of affection for him, in which Boswell wrote "Now Temple can I help indulging vanity?" In the case of Johnson though – as opposed to the other "great men" in Boswell's life – there were three very particular forms of greatness that attracted Boswell. Expressed frequently in various forms in his letters and journals, and in the *Life* of Johnson, the formulation goes this way:

> I do not believe that a more perfect attachment ever existed in the history of Mankind. And it is a noble attachment; for the attractions are Genius, Learning and Piety.

"Genius, Learning and Piety." In his journal in 1778 Boswell reacted to his reading of one of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* by saying "It was a feast to me, and my powers of admiration in every view were excited. His knowledge, his judgment, his experience filled me with wonder and delight." Thus; Genius, Learning, Piety, knowledge, judgment, expression. These are the qualities Boswell finds central to his feelings for Johnson. To stray from the eighteenth century to our own time, for a moment, Boswell, at least at first, was a Johnson "groupie."

In fact from the beginning what Boswell sought in Johnson – in addition to a source of vicarious fame – was an intellectual hero, a teacher. Before he had even met Johnson, Boswell tells us "I had for several years read his works with delight and instruction, and had the highest reverence for their author, which had grown upon my fancy into a kind of mysterious veneration…." "Reverence" and "veneration": sounds like a hyper-educated groupie talking doesn't it? He wrote to Temple in 1763, shortly after meeting Johnson, of "…my great preceptor Mr. Johnson," and says "…I learn more from him than from any man I ever was with." When he wrote the *Life*, years later, he remembered those early feelings of:

> …writing to avail myself of the opportunity which I fortunately had of consulting a sage, to hear wisdom, I conceived in the ardor of youthful imagination, that men filled with a noble enthusiasm for intellectual improvement would gladly have resorted from distant lands.

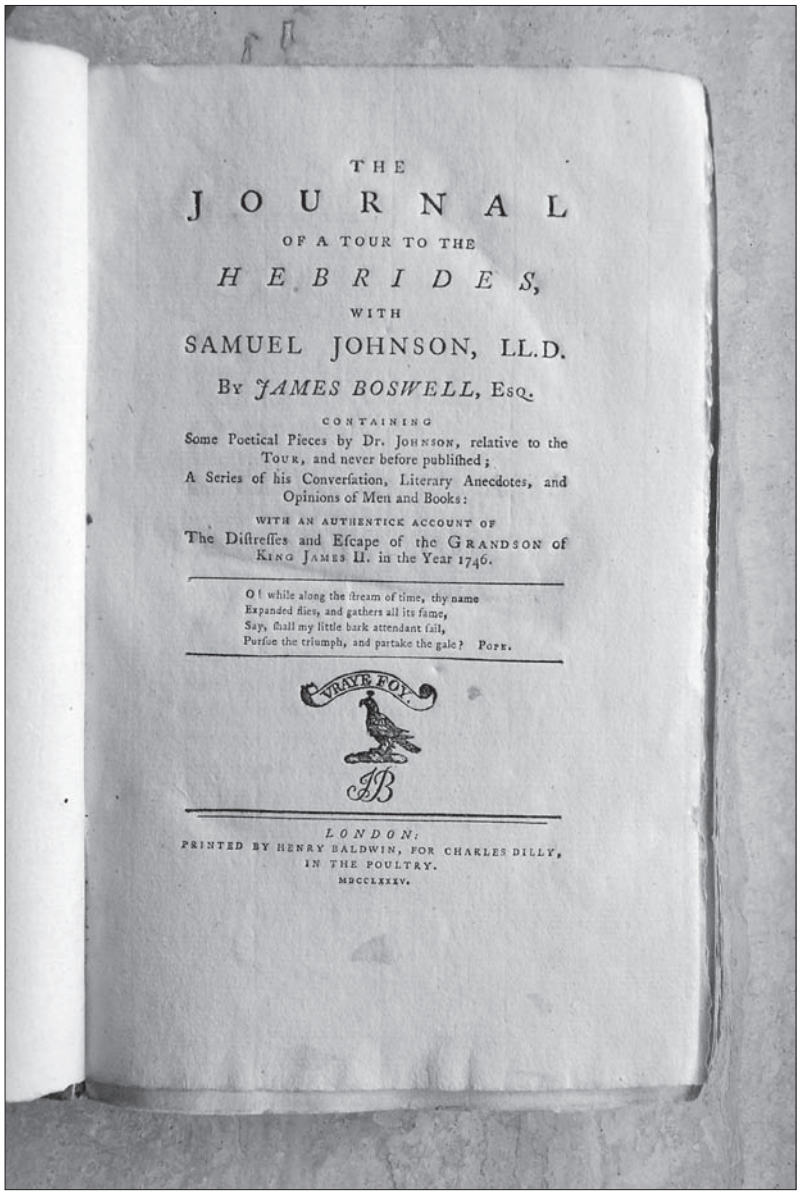
Nor did that feeling change over time. In 1778 reading a new installment of Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* moved Boswell to write in his journal "I really worshipped him, not… idolatrously, but with profound reverence, in the ancient… Jewish sense of the word." Whatever that means. After his Grand Tour, where he had met Rousseau, Vol"taire, Paoli and others, Boswell wrote about Johnson:

> I felt my veneration for him in no degree lessened by my having seen [many great men in many places]. On the contrary, by having it in my power to compare him with many of the most esteemed persons of other countries, my admiration of his extraordinary mind was increased and confirmed.

And we find him writing of the year 1775, thirteen years after their initial meeting, about sitting side-by-side:

> …in a serene undisturbed frame of mind, sometimes in silence, and sometimes conversing, as we felt ourselves inclined, or more properly speaking, as he was inclined; for during all the course of my long intimacy with him, my respectful attention never abated, and my wish to hear him was such, that I constantly watched every dawning communication from that great and illuminated mind.

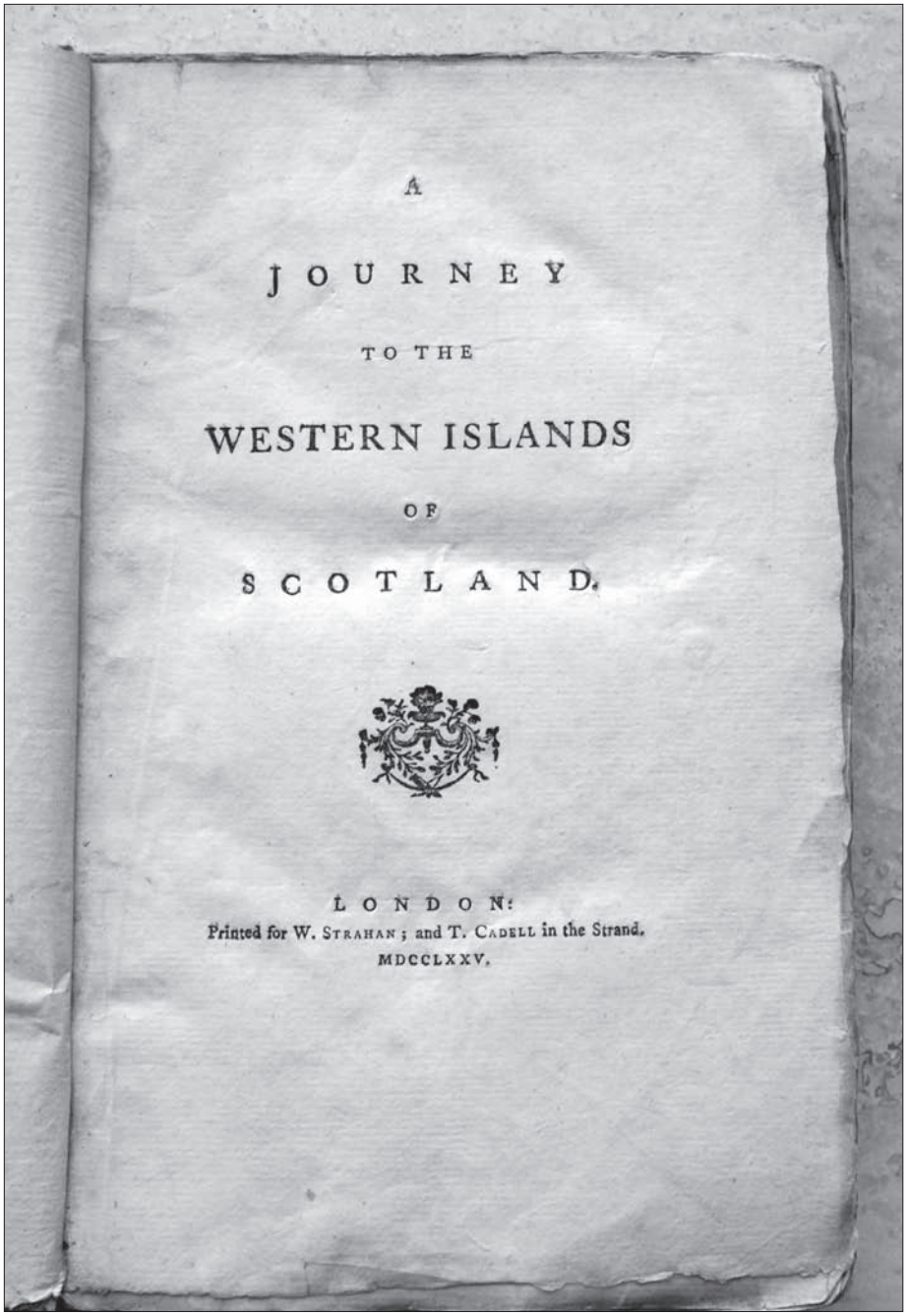
However much Boswell's earliest devotion to Johnson was based on an unsustainable hero worship, his need for Johnson as instructor or preceptor never diminished. Although he tells us that by 1778 he "…was


THE
JOURNAL
OF A TOUR TO THE
HEBRIDES,
WITH
SAMUEL JOHNSON, LL.D.
By *JAMES BOSWELL*, Esq.
CONTAINING
Some Poetical Pieces by Dr. JOHNSON, relative to the Tour, and never before published;
A Series of his Converſation, Literary Anecdotes, and Opinions of Men and Books:
WITH AN AUTHENTICK ACCOUNT OF
The Diſtreſſes and Eſcape of the GRANDSON of KING JAMES II. in the Year 1746.
O! while along the ſtream of time, thy name
Expanded flies, and gathers all its fame,
Say, ſhall my little bark attendant ſail,
Purſue the triumph, and partake the gale? POPE.
VRAYE FOY.
JB
LONDON:
PRINTED BY HENRY BALDWIN, FOR CHARLES DILLY,
IN THE POULTRY.
MDCCLXXXV.

Boswell's Hebrides journal.

quite easy, quite as his companion…. I felt a sort of regret that I was so easy. I missed the awful reverence with which I used to contemplate Mr. SAMUEL JOHNSON, in the complex magnitude of his literary, moral and religious character." Even as the awe diminished, the regard for Johnson's "literary, moral and religious" virtues remained. Within six months of recognizing his diminished "awe," we find Boswell writing that he is "…conscious of a generous attachment to Dr. Johnson, as my preceptor and friend…. My reverence and affection for him were in full glow." Yet this reverence and affection has taken on another dimension as well. The relationship itself has become useful to Boswell, both as what he (and Johnson) recognize as the basis for the biography Boswell will write, and for the glory it reflects on Boswell.

Thus, we find him reminding himself:


A

JOURNEY

TO THE

WESTERN ISLANDS

OF

SCOTLAND.

LONDON:
Printed for W. STRAHAN; and T. CADELL in the Strand.
MDCCLXXV.

Oddly, the first edition of Johnson's Hebrides book does not name him as author on any page.

> Oh! Let me cultivate with respectful and affectionate assiduity the friendship of this great and good man with whom I enjoy an intimacy to which I could not have hoped to obtain. But I have obtained.

Indeed Boswell admits to this practical advantage of his relationship with Johnson at the beginning of his own 1785 book about the tour of the Hebrides he and Johnson shared in 1773, telling us "He loved praise when it was brought to him; but was too proud to seek it. He was somewhat susceptible of flattery." Boswell frequently put his understanding of this aspect of Johnson's personality to good use. And he manipulated other aspects of Johnson's personality, as in the famous episode from the *Life* where Boswell brags about how he managed to bring Johnson to a dinner with his arch-opposite John Wilkes, by playing to what he knew of Johnson's weaknesses, thus providing additional material for the book that was to come. In 1779 Boswell, at home at his estate in Scotland, intentionally did not write to Johnson for a period of time, in order to test his preceptor's affection and level of concern. When he gets the desired response of concern, Boswell, of course, delights in it. And from beginning to end, he relished soliciting other people's reports of how fond Johnson was of him, as in the 1785 letter from the Scots scholar and writer Hugh Blair, after Johnson's death, reporting "…[he] particularly spoke much of his happiness in having you for a companion; and said, that the longer he knew you, he loved and esteemed you the more." This is hardly different from his reporting to Temple, twenty-two years earlier, that Johnson "… took me by the hand and cordially said, 'My dear Boswell! I love you very much.' Now Temple, can I help indulging my vanity."

Before turning again to what Johnson got out of all this, it is worth spending a little more time on another aspect of Boswell's needs. And he was what we would now call a very needy man, starved for respect, admiration, attention and affection, demanding it from those who gave it freely – his mother, his wife, his children, his many friends, as well as from those who didn't, or couldn't, or wouldn't – his father, his acquaintances in politics and law and in the broader world. But he made repeated demands on Johnson for reassurance of his affection and regard. He was of course mostly absent from Johnson, and so it is in the correspondence that we get the real sense of this, and it is in Johnson's response to Boswell's "neediness" that Johnson's letters to Boswell differ most from his letters to his other correspondents, Hester Thrale, Bennet Langton, or Tom Davies, or David Garrick. All deal in some measure with business matters, all get Johnson's advice about literary and personal matters, his observations about the goings-on of the world and the people and ideas in it. Most express Johnson's ongoing concern and affection. But only Boswell demands, and gets, Johnson's constant and sometimes even exasperated reassurances of his affection and regard.

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SAM AND JAMIE, *from page 5*

For example, in 1772 Boswell wrote to complain that "It is hard that I cannot prevail on you to write me oftener. But I am convinced it is vain to expect from you… any regularity. I must therefore, look upon you as a fountain of wisdom… which must be approached at its source." This draws a reassuring response from Johnson, saying "whether to love you be right or wrong, I have many on my side: Mrs. Thrale loves you, and Mrs. Williams loves you, and… you are a great favorite of Dr. Beattie." Here we might pause for a moment and focus on the word "love," and Johnson's use of it in writing to Boswell and his other correspondents. Although readers of Boswell and Johnson using various gay theory lenses make much of it, the notion that Johnson's use of the word "love" carries some romantic or sexual connotation is belied by the letter just cited. If Johnson says he "loves" Boswell, he says it in the same letter that reports so did Mrs. Thrale, and Mrs. Williams and Dr. Beattie, giving his "love" an equivalence that drains it of any possible romantic or sexual component. Indeed Johnson writes of his "love" not only in his letters to Mrs. Thrale (references which have been the subject of wild speculation), and to Queeney, but also, for example, to Bennet Langton at the very beginning of their friendship "…for I have known you enough to love you, and sincerely to wish a further knowledge," and, later, again to Langton, "…I love dear sir, to think on you." Remembering again that we are reading eighteenth-century words, it is worth noting Johnson's own definitions of "love" in his great dictionary. The first is "To love with passionate affection, as that of one sex to the other." But the second is "To regard with the affection of a friend."

It is only Boswell, who from the beginning, demands more than Johnson's other correspondents. Worried that his Grand Tour, after the beginning of their friendship, will end it by separation, he elicits this response from Johnson, in 1766:

> You will return to an unaltered, and, I hope, unalterable friend…. The longer we live, and the more we think, the higher value we learn to put on the friendship and tenderness of… friends… [h]e promises himself too much, who enters life with the expectation of finding many friends.

Never satisfied, before their trip to the Hebrides is about to begin, Boswell writes:

> I again wrote to him… expressing, perhaps in too extravagant terms, my admiration of him, and my expectations of pleasure from our intended tour.

But Johnson writes back, a little fed up,

> If anything could repress my ardour, it would be such a letter as yours. To disappoint a friend is unpleasing; and he that forms expectations like yours must be disappointed. Think only when you see me, that you see a man who loves you, and is proud and glad that you love him.

In fact Johnson, when asked, sometimes reminds Boswell not only of his enduring friendship and affection, but also of his hopes that Boswell will grow up a little in both his expectations and his conduct. For example, in 1777 Johnson writes to respond to Boswell's expressed worry over a lapse in their correspondence:

> I set a very high value on our friendship and count your kindness as one of the felicities of my life. Do not fancy that an intermission of writing is a decay of kindness. No man is always in a disposition to write; nor has any man at all times something to say.

Johnson does not hesitate to advise Boswell on all manner of things, including his filial obligations, his marriage, the management of his time and property and his legal practice. He also continues to remind him of the need to improve his conduct. Thus Johnson, admired by Boswell as "preceptor" for both his wisdom and his piety, offers both wisdom and piety in Boswell's service. In 1769, for example, in a single letter, he wishes him well on his marriage, critically evaluates Boswell's *Corsica* book, which had brought him great fame at the age of twenty-eight, and responds to a letter from Boswell complaining of neglect this way:

> …I have always loved and valued you and shall love you and value you still more as you become more regular and useful….

Similarly, six years later, still hoping both to reassure Boswell and remind him of his need to reform, Johnson writes:

> Never, my dear Sir, do you take it into your head to think that I do not love you; you may settle yourself in full confidence both of my love and my esteem. I love you as a kind man, I value you as a worthy man, and hope in time to reverence you as a man of exemplary piety.

This has been an exploration of a relationship drawing on only a few of the words of the parties themselves that could justifiably be brought to bear on it. Their holiday jaunt through the Scottish islands, during which they were together without interruption for 100 days, produced two books in which they each necessarily reflect on the other, and how they pass the time and view the scene together. Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, it has often been observed, seems sometimes as much about Boswell's life as about Johnson's, and certainly tells us much about the character and quality of the time they spent together. Their letters to and from each other and others also have much to contribute to an understanding of their relationship. This discussion, of course, barely scratched the surface of the volume of all those words. Surely I could have selected different ones, and just as surely I could have came to different conclusions, as you can. But since I was asked to comment, briefly about the relationship between Boswell and Johnson, and since I chose to do so based only on their own words, without resorting to theoretical interpretations of those words, it seems fair to end by offering what I conclude from them.

First, as I hope has been clear, I reject any notion, however often and by whomever expressed, that their relationship was about Boswell's need for a father figure and Johnson's need for a son. I also reject the notion, sometimes expressed by critics of a certain bent, that the fact Boswell was from an ancient and honorable and respectable and relatively wealthy and prominent line, and Johnson from a simple, unsophisticated and relatively poor one, means the relationship was somehow about either overcoming or accommodating class distinctions in a time and place where class and rank were of great importance. Boswell was always very conscious of his "place" in society, and proud of his role as "laird" and descendant from royalty, and he and Johnson, a great respecter of rank and order in society, often exchange views on these matters. Yet I find little in their own words that supports the notion that either thought the class differences between them mattered, or even provoked conscious analysis.

And of course I reject the notion that there was some homoerotic facet of the relationship, on either side. Although I haven't touched on their many conversations about sex and sexual conduct and misconduct, it is clear that Boswell, who had sex on his mind most of the time, and indulged in it with every sort of person available as long as she was a she, was no more exclusively heterosexual than Johnson himself. Johnson also, from what we can obtain from his own words and conduct,

had a healthy libido, but one which he disciplined far better than Boswell. Although Johnson's taste, unlike Boswell's, did not include whores on the Westminster Bridge, it did very much focus on women. For example, the partly exposed bosoms of actresses so aroused him that he stopped going to the theater – or at least, stopped sitting up close or in the green-room.

So if the relationship was not about surrogate parenthood, or class, or sex, what was it? The relationship, like many, was, I think, not the same for each of them. It was of far more significance to Boswell than to Johnson. Johnson was indeed fond of Boswell, as he was fond of many. But there was much about Boswell which Johnson heartily disapproved, and although he told him "There are few people to whom I take so much as to you," and "Boswell, I think, I am easier with you than with almost anybody," there were indeed many others with whom Johnson was at least as comfortable, with whom he spent more time, over a longer period of his life. Johnson liked Boswell, found him entertaining, compliant, respectful and even worshipful. He was flattered by Boswell, who was as good a flatterer, when he chose to ingratiate himself, as anyone who ever lived. But I think he saw Boswell as one of those "young dogs" he described, witty, fun, a breath of youth for a man all too aware of his mortality. In one of his *Rambler* essays Johnson wrote that:

> Friendship is seldom lasting but between Equals, or where the Superiority on one side is reduced by some equivalent advantage on the other.

and he further observed:

> That Friendship may be at once fond and lasting, there must not only be equal Virtue on each Part, but Virtue of the same kind…. We are often, by superficial Accomplishments and accidental Endowments, induced to love those whom we cannot esteem; we are sometimes by great Abilities and incontestable Evidences of Virtue, compelled to esteem those whom we cannot love. But Friendship compounded by Esteem and Love, derives from one its Tenderness, and its Permanence from the other….

We might first remember how Johnson defined the verb "to esteem" in his dictionary. The first definition is "To set a value whether high or low," the second is "To compare," and the third is "To prize." The noun "esteem," on the other hand, he tells us means "High value." Johnson told Boswell in his letters he "loves" him, but it is clear that he did not "esteem" (although as you have read he did use that word in a letter once to reassure Boswell) him for his "incontestable Evidences of Virtue," because, despite Johnson's urging, Boswell never developed much virtue at all, let alone incontestable virtue of that sort. When Johnson writes of love and esteem to Boswell or others, his own definitions tell us that whatever his feelings for Boswell, they fell somewhat short of that idealized relationship called "Friendship" he described in the *Rambler.* That was something he no doubt found with others – Mrs. Thrale, Garrick, Joshua Reynolds, and Langton among them. For Johnson, Boswell was an occasional warm interlude, more than an amusement certainly, perhaps often a "project," absolutely a friend, but not, I think, a Friend.

For Boswell though, it was all something else, something much more. Boswell began as an admirer. He was smitten by Johnson's intellect, his morality, his reputation, his output, all things Boswell aspired to for himself. Over time he came to see the great man as a man, never less than great, but a man with whom he allowed himself to feel on intimate, sometimes even equal, terms. Hero worship became, in Boswell's view, friendship, and then became something else. The relationship became the foundation of Boswell's own sense of accomplishment, bragging about it to his friends as early as 1763 in letters to Temple and his friend John Johnston of Grange, and as late as 1791 in his biography of Johnson. "Corsica Boswell," as he was known in his later 20's and 30's, became "Johnsonian Boswell," as he consciously exploited their relationship, mining it for the materials that would assure his own fame, and perhaps even immortality. This is not to say that Boswell's affection for Johnson was shallow or insincere. It was in fact both deep and heartfelt. But Johnson was both more and less than a friend from Boswell's perspective. He depended on him for emotional support, for guidance in all things, but he exploited him too, and took advantage of the man who was, he said "an acquaintance which I shall ever esteem as one of the most fortunate circumstances of my life."

Judging a twenty-two year relationship that existed over two hundred years ago between two people we do not know is a speculative and tricky business indeed. It is tempting to rely on modern theories of everything or anything to help us feel we have achieved some clarity, some truth about its nature. But that temptation is one particularly to be resisted here. Apart from the risk of simplifying something very complex, it removes us, at least in this instance, from the primary evidence, the words of the two participants. As William Maxwell said, it makes us unreliable witnesses. Only words, you say? Yes. But these were two of the greatest men of words who have ever lived, and they lived by words. They were masters of words, and used them carefully. If we pay attention, these words can reveal a world to us, their own world, as they experienced it. And we can experience it with them.

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Photographs are of items in the author's collection, taken by Robert McCamant.

CAXTONIANS COLLECT, *from page 11*

And as if that were not enough, he also writes articles whenever he gets the chance, previously in the *AB Bookman's Weekly* and subsequently in *Fine Books and Collections*, which has just announced its return to print as a quarterly magazine. "It's enjoyable to write for these more trade-oriented publications in addition to academic journals," he explains. "When you write an article for these publications, you're able to write less formally and also to reach a broad audience of collectors, booksellers, and librarians. You also get feedback from readers much more quickly than you would in a typical academic journal."

He sometimes writes items for the Lilly Library blog, as well. It's a good way to stay in touch with what's happening at the Library. (Find it at http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/blog/).

Silver lives in Bloomington with his wife Judith, and in addition to books, he enjoys listening to Renaissance and early Baroque music. Indiana University has a very large and active School of Music, and the frequent concerts presented by students and faculty help to make Bloomington a culturally interesting place in which to live.

Since he collects for his library, and the Library's collecting mission is so broad, Silver does not attempt to do much personal collecting himself. His main interest, which was sparked by reading A. Edward Newton's 1918 *The Amenities of Book Collecting and Kindred Affections*, is books about book collecting. "I enjoy reading about the lives of collectors and the history of book collecting, and since the Lilly's collection in this area is quite extensive, and my own collection is so small, there's little danger of any conflict of interest," he says.

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Helen Sclair, Caxtonian and 'Advocate of the Dead'

Photograph by Robert McCamant

> "They had scarcely prepared me for the dreamlike figure who emerged from the porter's lodge. "Helen Sklar," she announced in a mezzo-profundo of great gravity, "advocate of the dead." She was, inevitably, attired in black from head to foot, with a black devore cloak; she carried a black cane; and the eyebrows that so forcefully surmounted her handsome face were deepest black, in contrast to her magnificent swept-back grey hair. The general impression was of a recently retired Valkyrie".—Simon Callow, "Santa in Chicwargo", *Times* of London, Dec. 1, 2002

Dan Crawford

There was bound to be too little time for Helen. She always had another question and another project waiting. When she died, on Beethoven's birthday, 2009, she was planning her next book, her next investigation, and the next touch to her collection of material related to what she called "the Death Care Industry." And she had an eye out for what she was going to do once she finished THOSE.

Her collection and her knowledge were sought out by many from around the globe: there'd be visitors from Ames, Iowa this week and guests from the Czech Republic the following week. Both her brain and her 30,000-piece collection were available to anybody with a question or a problem…and the wit to appreciate what they were learning. (But even the slow learners could come again; Helen welcomed a challenge.) A tour with Helen of cemeteries or of historic points of interest along the streets of Chicago was remembered by everyone lucky enough to take one.

Woe betide a cemetery owner, a reporter, or an elected official who had no respect for their responsibilities. Mistreated graves, mistold stories, and other assorted miscreants could count on a phone call, a visit, or a pointed question from the audience. A sense of duty and a taste for truth and justice pushed her into many a fray.

It's a surprise, then, that the literary character with whom she most identified was Ferdinand the Bull. She seemed genuinely to see herself as a peaceable soul whose ideal life involved sitting quietly and smelling the flowers. There was always so much that had to be DONE, though: so many mistakes to correct, so many public officials to instruct, so many things to find out, and, once she found out, so many people to be told. Living in Bohemian National Cemetery involved extra duties: when the management office was closed, someone had to give guidance to the lost and comfort to the grieving. She took to sleeping in a house dress, so that she could come to the door whenever a confused visitor might drop by.

We took forever to get Helen to join the Caxton Club. She ridiculed the very idea that she would be acceptable to so staid and respectable a group. Once she did fill out a membership form, she set it aside for a year to think it over. She wasn't ashamed of studying how humans deal with death – "It's something we all do" – she just couldn't feel a group like the Caxton Club would have space for

Photograph by John Chalmers

Opposite, at her home; above, at the Leaf Book opening with Dan Crawford, and left, in a pensive moment.

someone so unorthodox. This in spite of the fact that there was nearly a wrestling match for who could write her nomination letter first.

When she did attend meetings, she admitted to a certain awe for the company, but that wore off. Caxtonians seemed to be people, after all, and not just people who discussed first edition points. They were what Helen valued almost on the same level with Truth and Justice: People with stories to tell.

These were the flowers to her Ferdinand. A name on a tombstone, particularly a quaint and battered tombstone in some forgotten corner of Chicago, was just a name to some, a pretty bit of history to others. To Helen that name was a person with a story, a story to be found in the stone itself, in a death record, or on a map. There were unique stories, she discovered, in how and where a person was laid to rest, and nobody else seemed to see these. She drew them out of the silent cemeteries and brought them to our attention.

Though she was glad to be a conduit for the stories the dead could tell, she had no prejudice against the stories of the living (beyond the fact that the living talked back). She couldn't take a cab ride without picking up the driver's story.

"Where are you from?" she'd say.

"Africa," the driver might mumble, keeping his eyes on the road.

"Young man," she would inform him, "Africa is a continent, not a country. Where are you FROM?"

And the cab driver, amazed to find someone who knew something about Africa, would soon be telling about his family across the sea and, of course, the funerals he had attended there. Helen had learned enough from other stories to ask the right questions, keeping the story moving. (She received proposals of marriage from at least two cabbies over the years.) Besides people who drove cabs, there was always a waiter who should have been a model, or a child who had shown wisdom beyond his years, or an elderly woman whose grandson was doing the most amazing work, or….

Helen asked more than once how it was that so many interesting people found her. I claimed it was a rare skill, and paraphrased Emerson, saying "To find interesting people, you must be prepared to find people interesting." The answer did not please: she never would believe it was the result of any effort on her part. The world was simply filled with stories, and she was lucky that so many came to her.

She did her very best to pay back in kind, telling stories to instruct and/or entertain. Costume was an intrinsic part of her lesson plan. Simon Callow wouldn't have noticed, but she probably considered for some time how she would dress to meet him and take him to the (then) unmarked grave of Charles Dickens's scapegrace brother. Helen chose her clothing to fit the stories she wanted to tell: red on the anniversary of Dillinger's death, or of the Chicago Fire, the infamous arrow through the head if she was discussing the Fort Dearborn Massacre. When she took up her post at the Newberry Library Book Fair, she had put as much thought into her headdress as some of the rest of us did in positioning the tables. It would be: a spider veil one day, a tasteful assortment of City of Chicago flags – miniature ones – another. All of this was meant to draw in a potential customer, student, or teller of tales. "Young Man, what is your interest in Chicago?" No one walked out without a story to tell.

Chicago's Cemetery Lady studied death, but, in fact, Helen was about life.

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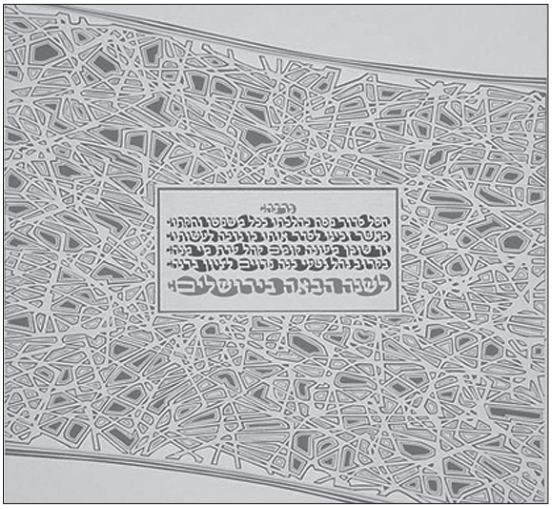
A memorial service for Helen Sclair will be held at the Newberry Library on Sunday, March 28, at 2:30 pm. A program in Ruggles Hall will be followed by refreshments in the lobby.

Book and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

Compiled by Bernice E. Gallagher
(Note: on occasion an exhibit may be delayed or extended; it is always wise to call in advance of a visit.)

Art Institute of Chicago, 111 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-443-3600: "The Books of Mikhail Karasik" (works by one of Russia's leading contemporary figures in the Artists' Book movement), Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, through April 12; "Heart and Soul: Art from Coretta Scott King Award Books, 2006-2009" (picture books by African-American authors and illustrators), Ryan Education Center and Gallery 10, through April 18.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: "The Orchid Album" (written by Robert Warner, illustrated by John Nugent Fitch, with more than 500 stunning chromolithographic plates in eleven volumes), through May 9.



Papercut Haggadah, at Loyola University
BY CHICAGOAN ARCHIE GRANOT

Chicago Public Library, Carter G. Woodson Regional Library, 9525 S. Halsted Street, Chicago, 312-747-6900: "Chicago Alliance of African-American Photographers Presents a Ten Year Retrospective" (work by Pulitzer Prize winning photographers Ovie Carter, Milbert Brown, Jr., and John H. White), through January 7, 2011.

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-642-4600: "Abraham Lincoln Transformed" (over 150 artifacts and manuscripts, reflecting how the President's views were tested and ultimately transformed), Benjamin B. Green-Field Gallery and The Mazza Foundation Gallery, through April 12.

Columbia College, Center for Book and Paper Arts, 1104 S. Wabash Avenue, 2nd Floor, Chicago, 312-369-6630: "Among Tender Roots: Laura Anderson Barbata" (books, handmade paper, printworks, video and photographs, documenting how the artist collaborated with diverse communities and cultures), through April 9.

Loyola University Museum of Art, 820 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-915-7600: "The Papercut Haggadah" (artist Archie Granot's fifty-five page Haggadah, using geometric and abstract shapes to tell the traditional story of Passover), through May 9.

Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: "The Play's the Thing: 400 Years of Shakespeare on Stage" (highlights from the Library's extensive collection of manuscripts and archival materials), Spotlight Exhibition Series, through May 1; "Poetry on the Page: Anglophone Couplets and Historical Practices of 'Silent' Reading" (a History of the Book Lecture by University of Virginia Professor J. Paul Hunter, examining how 17th and 18th-century page conventions can help us discover a voice we can "hear" in verse), 2 p.m. on Friday March 26, advance registration required at 312-255-3514.

Northern Illinois University, NIU Art Museum, 116 Altgeld Hall, Dekalb, 815-753-1936: Spring 2010 Pop Culture Suite, featuring the following exhibitions: "Heroes, Villains and the American Zeitgeist: Comic Books from Rare Books and Special Collections" (a chronological examination, beginning with early superheroes like Captain America, continuing through characters like Spiderman, and ending with the today's Independent Comics and Graphic Novels); "Midwestern BLAB! 2" (showcasing the art, graphic design, illustration, painting and printmaking of five artists); "ROOT HOG, OR DIE!" (Mike Houston and Martin Mazorra of Cannonball Press show large scale woodcut prints and print sculptures), through March 5.

Northwestern University, Charles Deering Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-491-7658: "Radical Woman in a Classic Town: Frances Willard of Evanston" (photographs, documents and artifacts illustrating Willard's life, from student days to her success as an orator, writer, and leader of women), through March 19; "Publications from Africa Related to Barack Obama" (Obama ephemera and realia from Africa), Herskovits Library of African Studies, through March 19; "Only Connect—Bloomsbury Families and Friends" (items from the Bloomsbury group as well as their siblings, parents, children and lovers, many from the recently acquired Garnett Family Archive), through April 30; "Burnham at Northwestern" (items related to Daniel Burnham's 1905 "Plans of Northwestern," a redesign of the University's Evanston campus), Special Collections and Archives, ongoing.

Northwestern University, Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, 40 Arts Circle Drive, Evanston, 847-491-4000: "A Room of Their Own: The Bloomsbury Artists in American Collections" (books, drawings, decorative objects and designs, organized by Cornell's Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art in connection with the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke), Main Gallery and Alsdorf Gallery, through March 14.

Oriental Institute of Chicago, University of Chicago, 1155 E. 58th Street, Chicago, 773-702-9514: "Pioneers to the Past: American Archaeologists in the Middle East, 1919-20" (never before exhibited photos, artifacts, letters and archival documents highlighting the daring travels of James Henry Breasted, noted Egyptologist and founder of the Oriental Institute), through August 29.

Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 5500 S. Greenwood Avenue, Chicago, 773-702-0200: "The Darker Side of Light: Arts of Privacy, 1850-1900" (prints, drawings, illustrated books and small sculptures from private collectors, many unsuitable for public display and stored away in cabinets, including works by Kathe Kollwitz, Max Klinger, James McNeill Whistler, and others), Richard and Mary L. Gray Gallery, through June 13.

University of Illinois at Chicago, Richard J. Daley Library, Special Collections and Archives, MC 234, 801 S. Morgan Street, Chicago, 312-996-2742: "An Architect's Library: Books from the Burnham and Hammond Collection" (selections from the 700-volume working library of the firm of Daniel Burnham, Jr., Hubert Burnham, and C. Herrick Hammond, architects of famous structures like the Carbide and Carbon Building), through May 31.

Bernice Gallagher will be happy to receive your listings at either 847-234-5255 or gallagher@lakeforest.edu.

Caxtonians Collect: Joel Silver

Sixty-third in a series of interviews with members

Interviewd by Robert McCamant

Joel Silver first became involved with the Caxton Club in the course of his work on the Leaf Book Exhibition. Kim Coventry had asked him to curate the exhibition and to write the book descriptions for the exhibition catalog. Silver was a natural choice for the project since so many of the books were available in the collection of the Lilly Library at Indiana University, where Silver is Curator of Books. In this process he got to know many Caxtonians, and Michael Thompson (then President) urged him to join, which he did in 2004.

"I was pleased to have the opportunity to join the Caxton Club," Silver explained. "Other librarians at the Lilly, including our previous director, William R. Cagle, had been members, and Mr. Cagle often spoke about the collectors and booksellers that he met when he traveled to Chicago for events."

Leaf books had interested Silver for some time. The Lilly had a copy of the 1921 *A Noble Fragment: being a leaf of the Gutenberg Bible, with a bibliographical essay by A. Edward Newton*, the most often cited example of the genre, among many other famous examples. "Leaf books are interesting because of the way they can expand the horizons of people who are seeing an original and important book for the first time," Silver says, "and if the essay that accompanies the leaf is worthwhile, it makes a very useful teaching package, especially for smaller libraries which would be unlikely ever to own some of these landmark books."

Flash forward to today. 2010 is actually a big year at the Lilly: its building was dedicated in 1960, so it is now the library's official 50th anniversary. There are to be three blockbuster exhibitions in the main gallery: currently (through May 10) it is "Treasures of the Lilly Library," featuring celebrated items such as Shakespeare's First Folio, Washington's letter accepting the presidency, Dürer's *Apocalypse*, and the first printed edition of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Then in summer they will have "unexpected" treasures, things that you might be surprised to find at the Lilly Library. In the fall the exhibition will be entitled "Gilding the Lilly," and it will include 100 of the most interesting and important medieval and renaissance manuscripts, selected and described by Christopher de Hamel (who was, coincidentally, also involved in the Caxton Leaf Book project).

Joel Silver (left) with Ed Hirschland at the Leaf Book opening in 2005

Photograph by Robert McCamant

Silver moved to Bloomington, home of Indiana University, in the early 1980s because he was attracted to the University and to the town. He'd been working for a bookseller in Los Angeles, and came to visit a friend who had moved to Bloomington to continue his book business there. Silver stayed, working in a bookstore at first, and then eventually taking library science courses, while working part-time, and then full-time, at the Lilly Library. He received his M.L.S. degree in 1986, and he became Head of Reader Services at the Lilly Library a few months later. He was named to his present position as Curator of Books in 1995.

I asked him about the status of the Lilly Library within IU. "We're a part of the Indiana University Libraries," he explained. "Most of our acquisitions are funded from various endowment accounts, but our operations are funded by the University as part of the IU Libraries system. We work hard to be a part of the teaching and research missions of the University. Our collections are used by thousands of readers each year, and we give presentations about our holdings to more than 150 class and other groups annually."

The Lilly also uses digitization of their collection as a means of outreach. Like other special collections librarians, he reports that putting up digital copies of holdings actually increases interest in people coming in to look at the actual books. One of the projects currently being worked on is the digitization of the Lilly Library's copy of the Gutenberg New Testament, which should be available online in the near future. (The IU Libraries are participating in the Google Books project, but so far that does not involve rare books.)

Not only is Silver a full-time curator, but he also teaches courses in the School of Library and Information Science at IU. Courses he teaches, including "Rare Book Libraries and Librarianship," "Descriptive Bibliography," and "Reference Sources for Rare Books," make it possible to earn a library science degree at IU with a specialization in rare books and manuscripts.

See **CAXTONIANS COLLECT,** *page 7*

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Bookmarks...

Note: the March dinner is on a Tuesday!

Luncheon Program
Friday, March 12, 2010, Union League Club
Book Arts Show and Tell by Members

The many kinds of handmade books will be represented at the luncheon on Friday, March 12. Caxtonians who collect them will each show four books from their collections, talking a bit about each and then allowing time for everyone present to take a closer look.

Handmade books go by many names: "private press books" tend to be idiosyncratic creations of people who want to make only books they are interested in; "fine press book" is a slightly more catholic term, referring generally to letterpress productions, often with illustration; "artists' books" tend to put more emphasis on the art and have little or no text; "livres d'artiste" allow for a formal relationship between text and art. Private and fine press books are generally done in editions of up to several hundred, while the other two are often single copies or a handful. Confirmed participants at press time include Susan Hanes, Bill Hesterberg, Muriel Underwood, and Steve Woodal. Audience members are invited to bring along one or two handmade books from their own collections for display.

Dinner Program
Tuesday, March 16, 2010, Cliff Dwellers
Michael Russem
"Postage Stamps by Type Designers"

Although it is a field that is often overlooked, several of the most important contributors to twentieth century book and letter arts have also designed postage stamps. Eric Gill, Jan Van Krimpen, Wim Crouwel, Gerard Unger, and Hermann Zapf are just a few of the type designers who have considered the specific concerns of philatelic design. Eric Gill, although only responsible for one design, had (as one might expect) pointed opinions about stamp design and carried out a lengthy public debate on the matter in the pages of the *Times*. Jan van Krimpen designed hundreds of stamps for the Netherlands and her colonies. These, and the hundreds of examples by type designers from the US, Europe, and China, are an unexplored resource of lettering and calligraphy which also provide insight into how these designers worked and solved problems. It's a fast-paced, colorful, and fun survey of 85 years of graphic design.

Michael Russem is a book designer and letterpress printer with offices in Cambridge and Florence, Massachusetts.

*The March luncheon will take place at the Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Boulevard. Luncheon buffet (in the main dining room on six) opens at 11:30 am; program (in a different room, to be announced) 12:30-1:30. Luncheon is $30. Details of the (**Tuesday!**) March dinner: it will take place at the Cliff Dwellers Club, 200 S. Michigan, 22nd floor. Timing: spirits at 5:00, dinner at 6:00, program at 7:30. Dinner is $48, drinks are $5 to $9. For reservations call 312-255-3710 or email caxtonclub@newberry.org;* ***reservations are needed by noon Tuesday for the Friday luncheon, and by noon Friday for the Tuesday dinner.***

Beyond March...

APRIL LUNCHEON
The luncheon will be Friday April 9 at the Union League Club, with a speaker to be announced.

APRIL DINNER
On Wednesday, April 21, Joan Houston Hall, editor of the Dictionary of American Regional English, will speak at the Union League Club on "American English Dialects are Alive and Well."

MAY LUNCHEON
On May 14, the Friday luncheon meeting will take place at the Union League Club. Speaker to be announced.

MAY DINNER
Wednesday, May 19, Thomas Hahn of the University of Rochester will talk (at the Union League Club) about the Americanization of Robin Hood through Howard Pyle's 1883 classic book.