Université de Montréal

The Boswellian Ego: Melancholia and Hypochondria in the Journals and Letters of James Boswell

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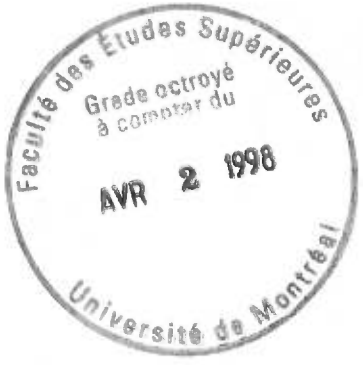
Mémoire présenté à la Faculté des études supérieures
en vue de l'optention du grade de

Maître ès arts (M.A.)
En études anglaises

Octobre, 1997



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Ce mémoire intitulé:

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présenté par

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a été evalué par un jury composé des personnes suivantes:

[redacted]

Mémoire accepté le: 09.02.1998

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses upon James Boswell (1740-1795) and the discourse of the social phenomenology of melancholia in the mid-eighteenth century. My purpose is to explore Boswell's claim that he suffers from melancholia and place it in the context of historical formulations of subjectivity and self-perceptions of identity. The significance and function of melancholia in my study are at once historical and philosophical. The historical dimension of the paper refers to intertexts (Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Cheyne's *English Malady*) that would undoubtedly have shaped Boswell's perception of himself. The philosophical is based upon contemporaneous authors (Hume, Smith, Shaftesbury) who influenced Boswell.

I divide the paper into two main parts: Chapter one explores in Boswell's London years (1762-3). I focus upon the correlation between Boswell's melancholy and identity formation. Boswell uses his friends, companions, and various personæ as archetypes for himself in an attempt to establish and delineate a clear sense of identity. Using contemporary and historical texts on melancholy and ontology, I demonstrate how Boswell's own writings often enact such philosophical questionings.

Chapter two discusses the time Boswell spent in Holland (1763-4). This period is a quest for his proper formation of character. Applying models such as those written by Theophrastus, later adapted by Jean de la Bruyère, I highlight how they provide character "templates" for Boswell. These two

periods are their striking contrapuntal natures, yet, the one constant in his life is his melancholia.

My reading articulates the conflicted relationship between Boswell as an authorial subject and Boswell as a represented agent in his autobiographical writings. I conclude that Boswell's writings afford a register of ideological problems of subjectivity and the idiom simultaneously of identity and of ontology in mid-eighteenth-century life.

Keywords: James Boswell, Melancholia, Subjectivity, Hypochondria, Theophrastus

Résume de synthése

Résumé de Synthèse

Cet essai a pour sujet James Boswell (1740-1795) et les discours de la phénoménologie sociale de la mélancolie au milieu du dix-huitième siècle. Boswell écrivait prolifiquement un journal intime et avait aussi une correspondance considérable. Toutefois, très peu d'études se sont arrêtées sur Boswell l'écrivain. Les recherches concernant Boswell ont pratiquement toujours traité de sa relation avec Samuel Johnson ou encore de son magnum opus: *The Life of Johnson* (1791). Cet essai tente de réévaluer sa position dans l'histoire littéraire et culturelle britannique du 18e siècle.

Une des première renommée de Boswell est la véracité et la franchise de ses journaux intimes et de ses lettres. Plus important encore, il offre un aperçu unique de la culture matérielle de deux centres-clé en politiques et lettres au cours du dix-huitième siècle: l'Angleterre et l'Écosse. En tant qu'Écossais et avocat, Boswell fournit de multiples informations à propos de son pays natal, de ses parents et de ses amis. Cela fait de lui une ressource précieuse pour reconstituer et interpréter les pratiques sociales, interpersonnelles et légales de cette période.

L'approche critique que je vais appliquer à Boswell a deux objectifs: elle vise à le distinguer de Johnson et des études orientées vers Johnson et tente de l'établir, à sa juste valeur, comme figure littéraire complexe. Un des aspects singuliers du caractère de Boswell est sa conviction qu'il est hypocondriaque ou mélancolique. Dans mon étude, la signification et la fonction de

l'hypocondrie et de la mélancolie sont historiques et psychologiques à la fois. La dimension historique de l'essaie se reporte à des intertextes qui auraient, sans aucun doute, formé la conception que Boswell avait de lui-même. Mon histoire intertextuelle reconstitutive des présuppositions conceptuelles et affectives de Boswell commence donc avec des traités comme *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1642) de Robert Burton. Burton prépare la voie pour des oeuvres futures dont *The English Malady* (1733) de George Cheyne et *A Treatise of the Hypochondriack and Hysterial Diseases* (1730) de Bernard Mandeville. Ces oeuvres, connues de Boswell, fournissent un lexique technique historiquement nuancé pour comprendre l'hypocondrie que Boswell s'était auto-diagnostiqué. De plus, la religion, son but, et les tentatives de Boswell de définir son rôle dans sa vie façonnent la perception changeante qu'il a de lui-même.

Je divise l'essai en deux parties principales, les années de Boswell à Londres (1762-3) et le temps passé en Hollande (1763-4). Je vois ces deux périodes comme étant à peu près analogues à une recherche de l'identité et aussi à une quête pour une formation convenable du caractère. Dans le premier cas, Boswell utilise ses amis, compagnons et autres personnages comme archétypes pour lui-même. Dans le second cas, des modèles comme ceux écris par Théophraste, plus tard adaptés par Jean de la Bruyère, fournissent des archétypes caractériels pour les propres recherches de Boswell. Ce qui est fascinant à propos de ces deux périodes est leur nature contrastée. À Londres, Boswell est un débauché et en Hollande il est un homme retenu. En

dépit de ces différences, Boswell a une seule constante dans sa vie: sa mélancholie.

Mon interprétation démontre la relation conflictuelle entre Boswell sujet-auteur et Boswell agent-représenté dans ses écrits autobiographiques. En d'autres mots, cette recherche est une contextualisation interdisciplinaire et une interprétation critique de l'autoportrait connu mais rarement analysé de Boswell en tant qu'hypocondriaque et mélancolique. J'utilise des modèles contemporains du dix-huitième siècle pour organiser les prevues rhétoriques-littéraires, médicales, et sociopolitiques qui définissent la personnalité de Boswell. Je conclus avec le fait que les écrits de Boswell offrent un registre de problèmes idéologiques du sujet et de l'idiome de l'identité et de la perception de soi dans la vie du milieu du dix-huitième siècle.

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A Note About the Text

In this essay I have chosen to follow the date format that Chauncey Brewster Tinker used in his edition of Boswell's *Letters*. In addition I have, for the sake of clarity and due to heavy repetition, employed various abbreviations. The list is as follows:

LJ	London Journal
Holl	Boswell in Holland
Grand Tour i	Boswell's Grand Tour: Germany and Switzerland
Grand Tour ii	Boswell's Grand Tour: Italy, Corsica, and France
Letters	Letters of James Boswell ed. Tinker
Corr	Correspondence of James Boswell and John Johnston
Hyp	*The Hypochondriack* ed. Bailey
Tinker *FB*	Dr. Johnson and Fanny Burney
Johnson's *Letters*	Redford's edition of Johnson's *Letters*
Works	*The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*
La Bruyére	*Works of M. La Bruyére*. Trans N. Rowe

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Literary history often buries the voice of the author. Layers of critics and criticism conceal and obscure what was once an author, a writer, a voice. So often has this been the case that pages of scholarship have been devoted to the "recuperation" of these refracted voices. Can this be said of James Boswell? It is difficult to decide. On one hand we have the (in)famous *Life of Johnson* (1791), penned by the sycophant *extraordinaire*; while on the other hand, he has left us with volumes upon volumes of his journals and correspondence. *The Life of Johnson* deals with another man's life, the journals and other writings, his own. In both cases, people have acted and reacted to his writings. Friends, foes, ambivalent peers have all passed their judgments. The question could be posed to history: who tells the truest tale? This essay will examine Boswell's self-revelatory claims as placed against the sheer weight of over two hundred years of sediment. To achieve this, I will scrutinize his self-diagnostic claims of hypochondria and melancholy in an attempt to depict Boswell as a distinctly independent literary figure, though maintaining intimate ties to Samuel Johnson. This is not to say that Johnson in no way figures in this portrayal. It is nearly impossible to avoid the shadow Johnson casts over the second half of the eighteenth century. However, by probing the penumbra of Boswell's own personal journals and correspondence, I intend to let Boswell speak for Boswell. In isolating Boswell's voice from the clouds of criticism, I attempt to highlight how over-

simplified–even hostile–reactions and perceptions of his writings are often the product of the dislike of Boswell, himself. To do this, one must survey Boswell the man and gaze upon all the positive and negative aspects of this subject.

To frame this analysis, I want to investigate the concepts of hypochondria and melancholy–especially those formulations of these illnesses which are historically contemporaneous with Boswell. But more importantly, I feel that these psychological apperceptions are no more than localized, contingent representations of Boswell's own anxiety concerning his subjectivity. As mental signifiers, hypochondria and melancholia work symptomatically to play out Boswell's confusion towards contemporary philosophies of, for example, Hume and Shaftesbury, versus his own empirical day-to-day experiences. Indeed, Boswell wrangles with the issues that these two philosophers raise through all his life. It would be a monumental task to sort through this material. I believe that a syntagmatic slice of his life would be adequate to illustrate and point to the larger picture of his life. In light of this, I have chosen to focus upon the years 1762-1764, his London and Holland years. These two periods mark critical moments in Boswell's development. But in order to gain a more complex and variegated picture of contemporary contexts, one needs to look into ideas of melancholy and how it was represented up to and including Boswell's years. Melancholy has a complex, contradictory, history that has genius and madness at the opposite ends of its spectrum. Rather than give a detailed chronicle of this

distemper, I would prefer to highlight those general areas that factor into Boswell's lifetime, and pay particular attention to seventeenth and eighteenth-century viewpoints.

One aspect of the general history of melancholy is the inherent dualism of the self. Greek writers such as Galen (129-199 AD) state that unlike the soul the body is in a constant state of flux (Galen II.i). Later Patristic writers such as Nemesius (fl. late 4th century) "conceived of the soul as being divided into two parts, the rational and irrational, a view shared by most Patristic and Scholastic scholars" (Jackson 18). This distinction of rational and irrational is made more explicit with French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650) and the mind/body dualism. Descartes links previously ambiguous terms used to describe the irrational such as "animal spirits" to certain physiological states. With his "dualistic view of soul and body, it was these animal spirits of the nervous system that mediated the interaction between the soul and body, particularly through the pineal gland" (Jackson 21). It is clear that as early as late antiquity through to the early Renaissance the human subject is a battlefield between mind and body, reason and passion.

Similarly, writers on melancholy in England adopted sympathetic approaches to their predecessors and often had religion and reason as parts of the same dyadic whole. Robert Burton's (1577-1640) *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) presents a massive synthesis of classical, early and later Renaissance sources on melancholy. Particularly revealing in relation to Boswell is

Burton's apportioning to religion a preeminent role in his text. In many ways, quite unlike his predecessors' works, Burton's text has a specific moral–which is to be moral. This message extends far into the eighteenth century. The function of religion and its call to act and "be" a certain way have a heavy impact on readers such as Boswell.[1] It is clear that inextricably bound with his quest for selfhood, Boswell attempts to comprehend the role religion plays in his life. Restoration and eighteenth-century authors also wrangle with similar issues in their attempts to work out questions of the nosology of melancholy. Texts from such writers as Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), George Cheyne (1673-1743), John Hill (1714?-1775), and even fiction writers in the century attest to the preoccupation and belief that the topic of melancholy is far from being remotely resolved.

The religious body as battlefield of the irrational and rational also intensified to include the soul in this scope. It seems that apart from a vast battery of symptoms, there is no concrete definition of what exactly comprises melancholy. George Cheyne, in his statement on English ethno-physiology titled, *The English Malady* (1733), states that an enumeration of the symptoms of the Spleen or "Kinds of *Vapours* is impossible" (195). However, he does provide an excellent contextualization of eighteenth-century approaches to the disease which will allow for many of Boswell's voiced perceptions.

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[1] We do know that Boswell read Burton's *Anatomy* since he used a 6th edition of the text as a writing copy [see *Hypochondricack* #43, 1782]. This heavily annotated copy, originally belonging to Alexander Boswell, James's father, was sold at auction in 1825. (*Book Collector* vol 6 (1957). pp.406-7).

Cheyne continues in his text to give loose categorizations that somewhat contradict his earlier claims of the immutability of the term. The preliminary stages are denoted by problems in areas such as the stomach and bowels, or the "Alimentary Ducts" (196). Meaning in sum, a case of poor circulation, very much in the humoural tradition.[2] Also he notes other symptoms "besides Lowness of Spirits, [which] are Wind, Belching, Yawning, Heart-burning, Croaking of the Bowels . . . Shortness of Breath, and a tickling Cough..." (197). Secondary symptoms are somewhat less physically oriented, and point to mental disturbances: ". . .wandering and desultory Images on the Brain, and Instability and Unsettledness in all the intellectual Operations, Loss of Memory . . . Vertigo, Giddiness or Staggering, Vomittings of Yellow, Green, or Black Choler . . ." (199). This second stage is especially marked by "Fits, Convulsions, or violent Paroxysms" (200). The Third and indeed final stage is the most extreme, including such physical ailments as "Dropsy, Black Jaundice, Consumption, Palsy, Epilepsy, or Apoplexy, &c" (200). Obviously some of this epic catalogue might apply to Boswell, but given his minute veracity these symptoms would certainly occupy a larger portion of the narrative if he had truly suffered from them. Thus, in terms of eighteenth-century conceptions of Spleen, melancholy, and hypochondria, Boswell does not unequivocally fall under their nosological spell.

The conflation of terminology requires some clarification. What is the

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[2] One here perhaps can recall the advice Erskine gives to Boswell to turn capers about the room in order to dispel the phlegmatic effects of melancholy (06 May 63; *LJ* 253).

difference between melancholy and hypochondria? Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) cites the first entry under "Hypochondriack" as: "1) Melancholy; disordered in the imagination; and 2) Producing melancholy." Thus it would appear that these two words are used interchangeably to mean both the symptom and the malady. This is why Boswell's complaints often conflate the two terms. Hypochondriasis has more of a medical connotation. John Hill's work, *Hypochondriasis, A Practical Treatise* (1766), is similar to Cheyne's in that it describes symptoms of the disease for which the author then attempts to prescribe cures through diet, exercise or general lifestyle changes. The important distinction requires a separation of the malady and the affectation. Melancholy itself has a complicated narrative apart from the dualistic conflict of the mind and body.

There is also a tradition of melancholy as an indicator of genius. As far back as Plato, melancholy as a form of Divine madness has its own history. Aristotle, writing in the fourth century BC, ponders the seeming traits of this aspect of the temperament: "Why is it that all those who have become eminent in philosophy or politics or poetry or the arts are clearly of an atrabilious temperament, and some of them to such an extent as to be affected by diseases caused by black bile. . ." (Book XXX. 1.10)? A contemporary critic, Stanley Jackson, adds more context to this "artistic tradition" of the malady:

> In somewhat simplified terms, this melancholy disposition was thought to be the basis for intellectual and imaginative accomplishments, to be the wellspring from which came great wit,

> poetic creations, deep religious insights, meaningful prophecies, and profound philosophic considerations; and yet, at the same time, those so disposed lived at certain risk that their melancholic temperaments might lead them to melancholy the disease. (99)

This is known as the "dangerous bipolarity of Saturn" (Klibansky *et al* 261), or as Dryden says in *Absalom and Achitophel*: "Great wits are sure to madness near allied,/ And thin partitions do their bounds divide" (ll. 163-4). This belief gained a strong foothold in the popular mentality, so much so that by the eighteenth century, people claim melancholy as their birthright as an author. Even in Hill's *Treatise*, melancholy as an indicator of genius is still the predominant side effect of the malady: "From this we may learn easily who are the men most subject to it; the grave and studious, those of a sedate temper and enlarged understanding, the learned and wise, the virtuous and the valiant. . ." (Section II; 6-7). With Boswell's contemporaries writing on melancholy and its corresponding temperament,[3] or even the conflation of the two in treatises, it can often be a confusing wrangle of terminology. Again, Stanley Jackson contextualizes this dilemma for the eighteenth century:

> Although the occasional medical author thought of hypochondriac disorders as including instances of melancholic madness, most of the time these disorders were differentiated, as not being instances of

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[3] A small sampling would be Anne Finche's *The Spleen*, Matthew Green's poem of the same title, Edward Young's *Complaint, or Night Thoughts*, not to mention the outpourings of those who would later be referred to as the "Graveyard Poets." In terms of fiction, we have Smollet's Matthew Bramble in *Humphrey Clinker*, Unlce Toby in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and of course, Johnson's *Rasselas*.

> madness, from melancholia as one of the forms of madness. But this picture was confounded at times by certain colloquial usages. In addition to the tendency to employ the term *melancholy* loosely for any sort of dejected state, sometimes melancholy was used as a synonym for hypochondriasis without implying madness, and at other times hypochondriasis was referred to madness; but these were contrary to usual medical usage. For the most part such colloquial practices were akin to modern casualness often evidenced in the use of the terms *depression* and *crazy*. (301)

For the purposes of this paper, to avoid confusion and perhaps articulate Boswell's usages more clearly, I will use the term melancholy to describe the temperament in the Aristotelian sense. Also, I will employ the Latin root, melancholia, to denote the actual mental psychosis or symptoms thereof. Thus, I argue that Boswell's claims of hypochondria and melancholy do fall within the tradition of the genius's madness, or more appropriately by the eighteenth century, the popular *affectation*. But I do not believe this to be indicative of either the depth or the breadth of Boswell's articulations of woe. In my opinion, he is a true sufferer of the malady which at times crosses over into affectation or even emulation, but nevertheless, for the most part, his sufferings are real. In order to demonstrate this to be true, the term melancholia in its modern sense needs to be expounded.

I also use melancholia in a psychoanalytic sense and, consequently, borrow from modern theorists such as Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and

Julia Kristeva. However, I find many of the theories that they articulate already present in the eighteenth century but under the guise of different terms and language. For example, in 1917, Freud articulates melancholia to commence with "an object choice, [where] the libido has attached itself to a certain person." Freud continues to state that this relationship was undermined in some fashion and as a result, the link has not been broken: "The result was not the normal one of withdrawal of the libido from this object and transference of it to a new one. . ." One of the outcomes is "an identification of the ego with the abandoned object" (*Metapsych.* 170). Thus we see a fixation upon an object that is impossible to retrieve– a process that becomes internalized and directed back upon the subject. Compare this to Samuel Johnson's formulations found in *Rambler 47* (Aug. 1750). In this essay he speaks of mourning and sorrow where sometimes the victim cannot think of anything else. This bond can then become a pathological state if it does not terminate naturally: "Yet it too often happens that sorrow, thus lawfully entering, gains such a firm possession of the mind, that it is not afterwards to be ejected; the mournful ideas, first violently impressed, and afterwards willingly received, so much engross the attention, as to predominate in every thought, to darken gayety, and perplex ratiocination." Johnson further adds that this unbroken link turns back upon the sufferer: "An habitual sadness seizes upon the soul, and the faculties are chained to a single object, which can never be contemplated but with hopeless uneasiness" (*Works* III; 255). There is a close correlation between Freud and Johnson's two

sentiments.[4] The purpose of this paper is in no way an attempt to proffer a clinical diagnosis. Rather, I want to place Boswell in the center of questions of subjectivity and self-knowledge prevalent in the eighteenth century.

Given this aim, one must also address the history, both positive and negative, of Boswellian criticism. One branch of this criticism I will for facility's sake simply call the "Macaulayan" tradition. Thomas Babbington Macaulay is certainly not the first to lay down charges against Boswell, but he is one of the most vocal. In his now famous review of Croker's edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1831) Macaulay describes the Scottish biographer as follows:

> He was always laying himself at the feet of some eminent man, and begging to be spit upon and trampled upon. . . Servile and impertinent, shallow and pedantic, a bigot and a sot, bloated with family pride, and eternally blustering about the dignity of a born gentleman, yet stooping to be a tale-bearer, an eavesdropper, a common butt in the taverns of London, so curious to know everybody who was talked about . . . (202-3)

This vitriolic attack most definitely has its proponents in the present day. Macaulay sees Boswell as no more than a tick on the person of Johnson, mimicking and emulating the great man to such an extent that his own personality is secondary. This critical stance is a highly important factor to

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[4] Likewise, I find Hume's arguments concerning subjectivity and self-knowledge to come to the same conclusion as Lacan's later sentiment: "impossibility of the complete subject" (see his essay "The Mirror Stage" in *Écrits*). "The fact is that the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as *Gestalt*, that is to say, in an exteriority. . ." (Lacan 2).

bear in mind when considering Boswell's claims of hypochondria–a controversial assertion given the legendary status of Johnson's own *vile melancholy.* Although having more negative than positive words for Boswell, Macaulay has some fascinating comments on Boswell's "candor," to put it in the best of possible terms. He charges Boswell with excessive frankness: "All caprices of his temper, all the illusions of his vanity, all his hypochondriac whimsies, all his castles in the air, he displayed with a calm self-complacency, a perfect unconsciousness that he was making a fool of himself, to find a parallel in the whole history of mankind" (Macaulay 203). Macaulay even a hints at the possibility of mental instability: "Everything which another man would have hidden, everything the publication of which would have made another man hang himself, was a matter of gay and clamorous exultation to his weak and diseased mind" (203). So we see a pattern of the compulsive revelation of intimate personal details which a Victorian critic would unsurprisingly find somewhat distasteful. It is the peculiarity of the "diseased mind" that is often picked up by later critics and biographers of Boswell such as C. E. Vulliamy who refer to him as "a mentally broken man" whose "sensual pleasures are frantically pursued in order to escape from the crowding fears of madness . . ." (199). This methodology could allow one to ignore the writings of a man who they claim just luckily happened to write an excellent biography but only due to the nature of the subject matter. Boswell the buffoon got lucky. Even critics who are ostensibly sympathetic to his personality often make unwitting

concessions which, ultimately, contradict their love of Boswell as a subject of study. Rufus Reiberg, for example, falters when he seems to support Boswell: "Current interest in various aspects of the Absurd, in the Clown figure, for example, makes it possible for our generation of readers to accept Boswell as Boswell much more readily than could most persons of earlier generations" (252). Obviously he is responding to the Macaulayan tradition. However, even though it was written in 1966, it does little for aiding Boswell's claims to authorial legitimacy. This position reduces the Scot to no more than a court jester. To quote Rowe's translation of La Bruyère's *Les Caractères*, "'Tis not commonly seen, that he who makes us laugh makes himself esteem'd" (II; 83).[5] Indeed, this allowance threatens to undermine Boswell's position altogether. If Boswell is seen as nothing more than an entertainer, one may easily overlook his value as a testament to eighteenth-century philosophical questions of subjectivity.

On the other side, Frederick Pottle, a scholar intimately acquainted with Boswell's writings, is a strong defender of Boswell's artistic integrity: "It is important for those who call Boswell a fool to sit down and meditate on the whole nature of folly. Unless they are prepared to deny his genius altogether, they must realise that it was inseparably bound up with this romantic folly of

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[5] Jean de la Bruyère (1645-96) wrote his translation from the Greek of Theophrastus' *Characters* in 1688. What is remarkable about this text is that Bruyère appends a version of his own entitled, *Caractères ou les Mœurs de ce siècle*, Thus by translating a classical author he attempts to legitimize his own "updated" version. Nicholas Rowe's translation is apt since he in turn does to La Bruyère what La Bruyère did to Theophrastus. Rowe makes some editorial decisions in order to "translate" the French characters to fit British models.

his, which, when its airy castles prove to be of solid substance, has a very different look" (*Young Bos* 183-4). At the root of these conflicting interpretations lies Boswell's character itself. Is he so given over to emulation and hero worship that his own words are to be taken as mere mimicry? As I have mentioned earlier, I would like to acknowledge the history of Boswellian criticism while still allowing Boswell to speak for Boswell. A survey of his peers would never render a definitive answer as to his reception. Boswell is definitely an odd fellow, but this should not interfere with how we view his truth claims. Leo Damrosch states: "It is quite true that every piece of writing, whether it presents itself as fiction or not, is committed to a version of reality . . ." (9). Perhaps it would be more constructive not to weigh in the evidence empirical or otherwise on Boswell as a person, but rather, try to interpolate the kind of person Boswell saw himself to be.

It is most certainly true that Boswell sees himself as a hypochondriac. What Macaulay's interpretation does not take into account is the fact that he discussed this aspect of himself in detail before he even knew Samuel Johnson. As early as 1762 we find Boswell discussing this problem with childhood friend, John Johnston of Grange: "We are both Antiquarians.[6]" I can assure you, that even when I am in the very deepest dungeon of Age, I can argue in this manner, which tends to alleviate, tho' not to remove my distress. I think the severest circumstance attending the distemper is the want

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[6] ". . . for a man in that dejection of spirits which both you and I are unhappily subjected to; all things appear dismal then, and reason no longer bears away"(03 Aug. 63; *Holl* 47)

of hope; for when you are truly bad, you never expect to get rid of it" (13 Sept. 62; *Corr* 14-5). At this point in his youth, Boswell sees "antiquarian" natures as forms of depression to which one is prone in one's old age. There is no overt connotation of affectation here, and the Scottish regionalism of the terminology does not necessarily point to an external form of imitation. As we will see, Boswell's intimate correspondence with Grange contains many of his most personal outpourings. In addition to his letters, Boswell also confides similar sentiments in his journals. Not much more than a year later he remarks: "Melancholy cannot be clearly proved to others, so it is better to be silent about it" (17 May 63; *LJ* 261-2). Perhaps already he is confronted with disbelief concerning his voiced hypochondria. Little did he know then that this claim would pursue him up to the present day. How is one to deal with these outpourings? Macaulay himself asserts: "Of all confessors, Boswell is the most candid" (204). Indeed, it seems that on this we agree and thus must take him at his word and instead focus upon the factors that led Boswell to his melancholic utterances.

Boswell, through his melancholy, reacts to a variety of philosophical traditions which address questions of subjectivity and self-knowledge. The first of these philosophical histories is the one already mentioned: the history of melancholy. However, in tandem with the eighteenth century's changing views towards this malady are vigorous questionings of selfhood. Constructions of such abstract terms such as "identity" and "character" became major preoccupations for the eighteenth century and Boswell in

particular. How these concepts are fabricated and then localized in the individual offers fascinating insights into constructions of subjectivity at a particular historical moment. This is not to say that everyone at the time was equally affected by these issues, but, rather, those authors whose writings reflect such explorations. Thus, we see such conflicting ideas of self-knowledge and character-fashioning in the philosophies of John Locke (1632-1704), Anthony Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), David Hume (1711-76), and later, Adam Smith (1723-90).[7] Shaftesbury believes that all humans are inherently good and have the ability to regulate their behavior and modulate it towards virtuous ends. The major distinction here resides in his belief that this motivation is an intuitive rather than an overtly conscious process. We are all born with this "Common Sense" and as a result are inherently good and moral people. However, this process can be (or needs to be) self-regulated: "'Tis in reality a serious Study, to learn to temper and regulate that Humour which Nature has given us, as a more lenitive Remedy against Vice, and a kind of Specifick against Superstition and Melancholy Delusion" (*Characteristics* I; 128). So here there is a contradiction at the root of this sentiment–an inherently good unconscious trait that needs some cultivation to counter sloth and vice. Nevertheless, Shaftesbury's influence was widespread in the eighteenth century, a testament perhaps to its inherent self-flattering principle.

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[7] The major texts for these authors would be Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, and Opinions* (1711), Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), and Smith's *Theory of Moral* Sentiments (1759).

Another reason for Shaftesbury's continued popularity may in fact be that the alternative propounded by Hume was too frightening. Hume's skepticism disavowed complete self-knowledge and even the possibility of a God in so extreme a manner as to be almost apocalyptic for his Christian contemporaries. Following Locke's distrust of the senses, Hume asserts that one can only come to know oneself through others or at least in exteriority. The self is in a constant state of flux, never more than a momentary impression, a fleeting perception. Hume describes this process: "The very image, which is present to the senses, is with us the real body; and 'tis to these interrupted images we ascribe a perfect identity. But as the interruption of the appearance seems contrary to the identity, and naturally leads us to regard resembling perceptions as different from each other, we here find ourselves at a loss how to reconcile such opposite opinions" (*Treatise* 205). Therefore, in relation to subjectivity, it can be seen how Hume could be a particularly disrupting force for his readers' assumptions of selfhood. Also, Adam Smith's articulation of eighteenth-century sentimentalism heavily influenced many aspects of life and literature. He articulates how an empathetic bond established between two people not only allows one to understand more clearly another person's character, but can simultaneously offer an insight into one's own. While this oversimplifies these philosophical and ontological trends in the eighteenth century, these modes effect Boswell and his own self-perception. Moreover, these philosophical quandaries are inextricably bound up in his claims of hypochondria. Boswell is as much a

product of his own age as he is a litmus for ontological questions present today.

"Know thyself"

Here I want to return to the issue of melancholia. I believe Boswell to be a melancholiac not only for reasons he states so clearly in his writings, but for the philosophical conflicts questions of subjectivity argued earlier. Boswell's melancholia centers around his quest for ontological integrity. In other words, he yearns for a unity of self that writers such as Hume, Smith, Shaftesbury, and even Johnson frustrate. But these people are not enough to complicate Boswell's world. His own empirical existence contradicts his assumed beliefs at every step. His introductory caveat in what is now known as his *London Journal* simply states: "Know thyself." He pursues this thought further, allotting it a superior position in the knowledge hierarchy: "For surely this knowledge is of all the most important" (15 Nov. 62; *LJ* 39). Boswell's writings reflect the cacophony of issues the above mentioned philosophers' positions represent. It is his daily experience combined with various eighteenth-century theories of ontology that so utterly undermines the consistent sense of self for which Boswell pines. As Susan Manning suggests: "Boswell cannot find a single frame to encompass his model of what a self ought to be and his account of how he acts in practice, because he puts too much faith in empirical accounts of sensations to add up, cumulatively,

to the reality of a *self*" (128). This crisis of sorts is not necessarily wholly conscious on Boswell's part. Hence, in Freudian terms, his object relationship reflects his unconscious drives (ego) for a whole, united self. This unity being impossible in any manner, his ego, in a sense, yearns for a lost ideal. This liminal knowledge nevertheless haunts Boswell's conscious mind under the guise of identity and character crises. These conscious moments and flashes are ignited by his readings and exposure to the philosophical explorations of people such as Hume and Smith. Boswell's object is " a various but coherent self" and since this "longing for wholeness" (Morris 172) consumed much of his life, I believe that one can assert that his is a crisis of selfhood explored through the permutations of identity and character development.

How do character and identity formulations come into play? They are two ways in which Boswell literalizes his issues of subjectivity. The differences between these two terms also offer some insight into what exactly Boswell feels he needs. Johnson's *Dictionary* defines character as: "a representation of any man as to his personal qualities; the person with his assemblage of qualities" and, finally, a "particular constitution of the mind." As for identity, he defines it as "sameness; not diversity." In both cases, a totality of some form is posited. It is therefore no surprise that these two ideas could comprise an actualization of Boswell's melancholia. They are an appeal to a united, integrated self and connote consistency. This sentiment is summed up by Felicity Nussbaum: "In the eighteenth century, 'character' and 'identity' came to mean both a constant human nature and an individual

principle . . . personal identity implies permanence and sameness over time, a persistence in being . . ." (107). In terms of character, Boswell has many classical models from which to choose. Theophrastus (c. 370- c. 287 BC) wrote a series of observations which are entitled, *Characters* (*XAPAKTHPEΣ*). This is a collection of thirty descriptive sketches of various types of character.[8] These vignettes are templates for "real" people: "The Theophrastan characters illustrate typical traits of the human species, but they are also supposed to simulate real characters" (Nussbaum 107). One's character is therefore similar to the abstraction of Shaftesbury's "Common Sense," a property that requires cultivating. One corollary attribute is that external characteristics are demonstrative of inner integrity: "'Character' in these renderings is imagined to be a public construction, the material evidence of a private interior reality that reflects an individual's essence" (Nussbaum 107).

Identity, on the other hand, has no direct corresponding associations. It is not something that Boswell can work on in the same manner. His early life is marked by a series of role models both personal and institutional. Unlike character formulation, there is often no direct correlation between identificatory work and outcome. While Macaulay sees Boswell as a cheap imitation of Johnson, I read his interaction with Johnson as symptomatic of his desire for both a unity in identity and a constancy in character. His frustrations with both of these goals are as much a product of his melancholia

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[8] Some of the characters he depicts are: Dissembling, Flattery, Shamelessness, Garrulity, Arrogance, and Griping.

as they are a reflection of mid-eighteenth-century formulations of subjectivity. His probing attention to detail spares nothing, not even himself. Thus, we have volumes of material to work with in the form of correspondence, journals, newspaper articles, and a massive biography.

How is one to select from all this material? Quite simply, I have chosen two small, consecutive time periods in Boswell's life. Following the demarcations of the *Yale Edition of the Private Papers of James Boswell Trade Editions*, they are his *London Journal*, 1762-3 and *Boswell in Holland*, 1763-4. These two years exemplify Boswell's quest for a stable identity and constant character. He is a young man, starting at age twenty-two, seeking his place in society. My paper is divided into two parts: the London section marking his at times frantic search for identity and the Holland years as his attempt to establish a character with which he may be satisfied. The fascinating aspect of these two brief but concentrated periods is their diametrically opposed settings–both internal and external. It is at times hard to believe it is the same Boswell. But, the unifying component is his melancholia. Whether a profligate scamp in London or chaste scholar in Holland, Boswell describes the same symptoms and yearnings indicative of his particular form of melancholia. In each setting, despite such varied experiences including meeting Samuel Johnson, this common thread leads one to conclude that this disorder is one of the few constants in his life.

Chapter One
Identity in Flux: Boswell's London Journal Years, 1762-3

"An unequal Man is several Men in one; he multiplies himself as often as he changes his Taste and manners; is not this Minute what he was the last, and will not be the next what he is now. . ." (Rowe's translation of La Bruyère II; 211)

La Bruyère's view sums up Boswell's London years, especially in light of what I refer to as Boswell's crisis of identity. Boswell's goal during this period is to establish a stable sense of self. "Crisis" suggests Boswell's attempts to "fix" who he is by patterning himself after external phenomena–institutional religion, close personal friends, and even fictional personæ. This process, however, is fraught with difficulties and impossibilities, not the least of which is Boswell's own personality intruding upon the current model. Boswell's drive prompts him to seek his models elsewhere and establishes a pattern of imitation, frustration, and seeking a new model. He engages in this cycle by placing himself in the position of the instructed. It is a passive role he assumes in order to osmotically absorb information and traits he feels he needs. However, it is his own personality traits that obtrude upon these simplistic exemplars. His ideal eludes him at every step–as if his ego balked at the attempt to graft another identity onto it. Boswell's issues concerning his identity reflect a confusion towards any definition of the word. Even towards the end of the century, theorists such as Thomas Reid (1710-96), in his *Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), give ambiguous responses to the concept of

identity: ". . .it is sufficient for our purpose to observe, that all mankind place their personality in something that cannot be divided or consist of parts" (Reid 243). Here we see an idea of identity as some form of organic unity, yet Reid also writes that identity, at its root, is indefinable, ineffable–an ephemeral perception in the Humean sense:

> If you ask a definition of identity, I confess I can give none; it is too simple a notion to admit of logical definition: I can say it is a relation, but I cannot find words to express the specific difference between this and other relations, though I am in no danger of confounding it with any other. I can say that diversity is a contrary relation , and that similitude and dissimilitude are another couple of contrary relations , which every man easily distinguishes in his conception from identity and diversity. (242)

That identity for Reid is an "uninterrupted continuance of existence" (242) does little to aid someone like Boswell. His objective is to cement an identity which would allow him to achieve status in society. Boswell views inconstancy as somehow sub-standard. It is as if he feels that if he has no stable identity, he cannot predict what kind of person he will be. Unfortunately for Boswell, he personifies mutability and he knows it. Continual change is the inevitable result of attempting to graft another identity on/over his own. The resulting outcome is a contradictory, almost Manichean personality. This dualism is poignantly demonstrated in Boswell's youthful relation to religion and venery–or what I call (after Mircea

Eliade) Boswell's sacred and profane complex. In this chapter, as well as throughout the rest of this essay, each chapter will be subdivided into sections reflecting themes of Boswell's own writings and experiences. This structure attempts to recalibrate Boswell's own associative links and recalibrate them in a manner which reflects both his psychological makeup and his historical timeline.

Boswell and the Exigency of Religion: The Sacred and Profane Complex, or Under the Sign of Burton.

This first section focuses upon Boswell's initial flight to religion in order to produce the united sense of self he seeks. However, as we shall see, the internal conflicts built into religious beliefs and practices often provide too much free association to furnish fully a sound identity. The next two sections correspond to Burton's concepts of religious and love melancholy– two patterns to which Boswell unmistakably conforms. Love and religious melancholy comprise a major portion of Boswell's preoccupations. As Richard Mead (1673-1754) states: "Nothing disorders the mind so much as love and religion" (quoted in Jackson 366). These two factors, love and religion, play a large role in Boswell's life and are inextricably bound with his desire to see and experience as much as he can in his world. Raised in the Calvinist religion, Boswell's initial dissatisfaction with its doctrines and associations prompts him to reevaluate constantly his form of religion.

In terms of religious doctrine, there are some obvious reasons why Boswell would find Presbyterian practices somewhat unsettling. Passed on primarily from his mother, a woman whom Pottle describes as "very delicate, very hypochondriac" (*EY* 12),[9] Calvinism's doctrines can be said to leave little room for personal independence. Calvinism's doctrine of predestination had a strong effect on Boswell. Following Calvinism would mean Boswell would need to discover whether or not he was one of the saved--a process that might involve years of painful soul-searching. This simply would not appeal to Boswell, who loved himself as a topic of contemplation, but not necessarily the state of his soul. Always having time for some dramatic flair, at one point Boswell goes to a medieval cathedral at sunset and swears on the hilt of his sword and on his knees that ". . . if there is a Fatality, then that was also ordained; but if you had free will, as you believed, you swore and called the Great G– to witness that, although you're melancholy, you'll stand it . . . " (29 March 64; *Holl* 201). In either case, whether he is destined to suffer from hypochondria or it is a result of his own practices, he acknowledges that he is stuck with his melancholy regardless of its origin. He focuses on the empirical evidence before him, rather than theorise a cause. This quotation also marks Boswell's ambivalence towards his faith. Though he associates this religion with dreadful thoughts, it does not prevent him from attending its services. In many cases he reflects upon the service after it ends: ". . . in short the

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[9] In his *Sketch of my Life* written to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (03 Dec. 64) Boswell states "I was born of melancholy temperament. It is the temperament of our family" (*EY* 1).

whole vulgar idea of the Presbyterian worship, made me very gloomy" (15 May 63; *LJ* 259). Perhaps his allegiance to Presbyterianism is due to his love for his mother. Since she was the primary religious enforcer, her association with religion takes on an odd parental type role in Boswell's life. Elaine Perez Zickler states that Boswell's silence concerning his mother does not mean she is not there: she is unavoidably associated with churches and especially "in the way religion limns his melancholias and manias" (Zickler 42). Boswell's mania with respect to religion places him in the philosophical quandary which is demonstrative of Burton's religious melancholy. In other words, Boswell disavows certain religious beliefs, but in the end, his fear of the potential consequences brings him back to religion each time.

Eighteenth-century writers on melancholy such as François Boisser de Sauvages (1706-1767) describe this reaction that is very much a part of the Burtonian tradition: "This melancholia consisted of severe sorrow in which one experienced fear of God's judgments and, owing to a defect of conscience, had need of his forgiveness." However, according to de Sauvages, there is a distinction between sufferers of this form of melancholy and those who are truly religious: "This disease ordinarily attacked those whose spirits were low due to some misfortune or due to weariness from bodily pleasures. In contrast to truly pious men, the melancholics did not know the true religion and were uncertain, superstitious, constantly fearful, and reduced to despair" (quoted in Jackson 336). Boswell's "Sketch" written for Rousseau paints a picture of young Jamie, catechism in hand, heavy of heart: "The eternity of

punishment was the first great idea I ever formed. How it made me shudder!" (*EY* 2). Obviously, this aspect of religious faith had a great impact on Boswell's life. However, it does not seem to have done so on a consistent basis. He oscillates between virtue and vice. There are moments when he pleads for God's aid,[10] and then at other times he is solaced by such counsels of calm abiding as are found in Johnson's *Rambler* 29: "And why should we think, with painful anxiety, about that on which our thoughts can have no influence" (*Works* III; 159)? Even topical poems such as Matthew Green's (1697-1737) *The Spleen* (1737) offer helpful advice along these lines: "I no anxious thoughts bestow/On matters I can never know" (ll. 69-70). He is able to vanquish his melancholy thoughts through use of reason. For Boswell, it is not as simple as that. His reaction to religion is one of hopeful anxiety. He needs it to guide him and make him be the man he truly wants to be. When Calvinistic Presbyterianism fails to do so, he does not forsake religion, but tries a new one. He adopts a new personal religious ideal that tends to literalize the concept of religious ecstasy somewhat too often.

Boswell's brief conversion to Papism is a fascinating time in his life–a moment which also partially reveals his strategies for using religion to "fulfill" his sense of self. If one form of worship does not satisfy him, he tries another. Boswell's conversion to Papism also marks the dawning of his "religious sexuality." A link is forged that will never break. Boswell's flight to

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[10] "Prayed fervently to the unchangeable Father of all to drive away melancholy and keep clouds of Presbyterian Sundays from rendering mind gloomy" (22 Apr. 65; *Grand Tour* ii. 66).

London in March 1760 is described in an excerpt from his *Memoirs* published in the *European Magazine*: "He had acquired, from reading and conversation, an almost enthusiastic notion of the felicity of London, which he visited, for the first time, early in the year 1760, and his ardent expectations were not disappointed . . . having Mr. Derrick as his introducer into 'many-colour'd life' . . . But his views of the world were chiefly opened by the late Alexander Earl of Eglintoune . . ." (quoted in *Lit Car* xxxi). The significance of these events is the admixture of religious enthusiasm with sensual activity. Pottle comments on how Boswell was introduced "to such authors–mainly of a theatrical cast–as allowed him access, and to various ladies of the town. The neophyte who was prepared to give up all for a life of religion listened eagerly to the song of the Sirens" (*EY* 47). Pottle's observation reveals the conflict of selves seen in Boswell's early years. On one hand, there is the youthful Boswell–enthralled by the theatre life and gaiety he sees all around him and wanting desperately to be accepted into its folds. On the other, there is a Boswell who is willing to give up life and live in a monastery–the youth who under his father's withering eyes needs to and wants to be a Scots laird in all his medieval glory. None of this would have been possible if Boswell's conversion to Papism had been consummated. Instead, his religious yearnings are converted into libidinous ones: "Eglinton rescued Boswell from religious error by making him a libertine, in every sense of the word" (*EY* 48). This transition did not achieve its fully desired goal for Boswell. As much as

he was disappointed by religion's claims to inner peace, ignoring them altogether in the arms of debauchery did not dispel his sense of failing.

Boswell looking back on this moment has a flash of intense self-revelatory regret. After his return from Eglinton and London in 1760, he writes:

> I afterwards from my natural vivacity endeavoured to make myself easy; and like a man who takes to drinking to banish care, I threw myself loose as a heedless, dissipated, rattling fellow who might say or do every ridiculous thing. This made me sought after by everybody for the present hour, but I found myself a very inferior being; and I found many people presuming to treat me as such, which notwithstanding of my appearance of undiscerning gaiety, gave me much pain. I was, in short, a character very different from what God intended me and I myself chose." (01 Dec. 62; *LJ* 62)

These flashes of insight are, to a degree, self-deceptive. In many ways, Boswell's behavioral patterns have not changed. The religious drive and the libidinous drive are still in conflict. The conflagration could be painted as a clash of the Homeric gods wrestling for his soul. For the self-conscious Boswell, though, it is the institutional nature of religion that provides the most comfort. He enjoys a faith (almost any Christian faith, really) that will provide a space for worship, a sermon to instruct, and music to entertain. At mass one day he remarks: "This with the music and the good building put me into a very devout frame, and after service my mind was left in a pleasing

calm state" (10 Apr. 63; *LJ* 237). With increased frequency, nevertheless, Boswell's amorous nature becomes chained to his religious calmness. For example, the previous citation reveals his "calm state," but one is not certain (perhaps along with Boswell himself) whether this is due to the service or to his sexual exertions with a prostitute the night before.

Boswell's ambivalence towards both the religious service and his sensual escapades indicates his inability to decide which of the two plays the more important role in his life. This phenomenon is akin to Burton's description of a person suffering under the weight of a form of religious melancholy: ". . . they rise sober, and go sober to bed, plain dealing, upright honest men, they do no wrong to no man, and are so reputed in the world's esteem at least, very zealous in Religion, very charitable. . . well spoken of, beloved of all men: but he that knows better how to judge, he that examines his heart, saith that they are Hypocrites . . . they . . . frequent Sermons. . . come to Church all day, and lie with a Courtesan at night" (Burton III; 406). This description is strikingly similar to Boswell's own *modus operandi.* Religion has proven for Boswell not to be the most reliable of influences. His amorous inclinations displace it with increased frequency. This engenders his "sacred and profane complex": where one is present, the other is likely to follow.

When Boswell feels guilty, he always heads to either a church or someone closely related to religion. The day he makes his long-awaited assignation with Louisa, a belle from London, he feels the confessional

impulse to visit a clergyman. So, he calls on James Webster,[11] a man he only visits a few times while in London, and speaks of how Webster subdued his carnal inclinations: "he brought into my mind some dreary Tollbooth Kirk ideas, than which nothing has given me more gloomy feelings. I shall never forget the dismal hours of apprehension that I have endured in my youth from narrow notions of religion while my tender mind was lacerated with infernal horror." Unlike previous moments of utter despair, Boswell can now say: "I am surprised how I have got rid of these notions so entirely. Thank GOD, my mind is now clear and elevated. I am serene and happy. I can look up to my Creator with adoration and hope" (22 Dec. 62; *LJ* 102). It is difficult to ascertain the extent of Boswell's self-deception. Choosing to consult with someone of Webster's background after a morning of intimacy with Louisa is demonstrative of the close association of sexual episodes and religious encounters. Quite often for Boswell questions of religion or religious practice comprise a dimension of his courting ritual.

An example of this occurs in London, where he courts the young woman mentioned earlier, Louisa. While in her salon, he despairs of ever winning her love: "This forenoon I went to Louisa's in full expectation of consummate bliss." "I sat down and I talked with the distance of a new acquaintance and not with the ease and ardour of a lover, or rather a gallant... [I] then sat down by her in a most melancholy plight. I would have given a

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[11] James Webster, Boswell's first cousin, a man to whom Boswell later refers to as a well-known minister and one of the leaders of a strict branch of the Church of Scotland.

good deal to be out of the room." (22 Dec. 62; *LJ* 100-1). It is hard to imagine his use of melancholy here to mean anything other than an affective projection of his pitiful situation. His reaction to sexual tension is to press her on topics religious: "We talked of religion. Said she, 'People who deny that, show a great want of sense.' 'For my part, Madam, I look upon the adoration of the Supreme Being as one of the greatest enjoyments we have'" (22 Dec. 62; *LJ* 101). The obvious counterpoint to his hoped for sexual enjoyment is quite striking in that sexual frustrations fuel religious debates.

Over a year later, again trying to woo a young woman, Madame Geevlinck, a widow of extreme wealth and beauty, Boswell turns their conversation to religion. He pleads for some token of affection, even the slightest word that would intimate that she has reciprocal feelings for him: "'But say that perhaps—, something like that.—But what do you think on the subject of religion?" (19 Feb. 64; *Holl* 155). Here there are two disjointed thoughts linked by Boswell's own strange conflation of the two. His dramatic use of aposiopesis attests to his wish that any possibility may be spoken to satisfy him. In a typical Boswellian fashion, he finds that the best topic for conversation is himself: "'Madame, can you believe that only six months ago I was completely heedless, and gave great concern to the most excellent of fathers? I changed completely. Have I not made progress?" (19 Feb. 64; *Holl* 156). In both these instances we see a fascinating ability in Boswell to displace sexual desire with religious topics. Moreover, it seems his objective is to negate the sexual tension he feels so acutely by discussing religious matters.

The religious, the sexual, and the personal are all bound up in Boswell's conception of his identity and subjectivity. Forcing the conversation to himself as a topic is Boswell's method of garnering compliments confirming that he has indeed progressed on the road to being a better person. His personal makeup relies heavily upon this principle, and he uses this to guide his actions: "I am hurt with the taunts of ridicule and am unsatisfied if I do not feel myself something of a superior animal. This has always been my favourite idea in my best moments" (01 Dec. 62; *LJ* 61). This is a conscious realization for Boswell, indicating that he has moments of clarity when he is aware he does not always embody a desired identity. Not surprisingly, two weeks later he philosophizes that being a superior person is concomitant with being a lover: "Indeed, in my mind, there cannot be higher felicity on earth enjoyed by man than the participation of genuine reciprocal amorous affection with an amiable woman. There he has a full indulgence of all the delicate feelings and pleasures both of body and mind, while at the same time in this enchanting union he exults with a consciousness that he is the superior person" (14 Dec. 62; *LJ* 84). It is difficult to ascertain here whether or not his frequent indulgences in prostitutes are included in this formulation. Boswell here is exerting his own brand of abstract philosophy to mask a piquing, guilty conscience.

The longer Boswell is in London, the more his melancholia grows. Read symptomatically, this melancholia points to his frustrations about who he is versus the "superior person" he wants to be or be seen as. The following

section of my paper will demonstrate Boswell's increased use of personæ in an attempt to displace guilt and, at the same time, sanction what he does under the auspices of emulation. Also, his drive to pattern himself after others, especially those closest to him, marks his heightened sense that he needs an external structure in place to guide him. Religion has proven itself too controvertible to be of direct service. He does continue to need its solace, but its apparent absence will take on more of a presence in the form of a guilty reminder to mend his ways.

Boswell's Amorous Assignations and the Blurring of Identity through Others: Boswell's Love Melancholy

We have seen how Boswell initially turned to religion to satisfy his sense of personal development. The failure of religion for Boswell prompts a search on a more individual level. Apparently, while he does not consciously understand why he needs these structures in his life, Boswell does recognize that these external, societal elements personify characteristics he feels are worthy of emulation. The following section will explore his experimentation with the adoption of personæ at specific moments in his personal narrative. These moments are primarily the scenes of his sexual escapades. Why do these adopted personæ intrude here? I would argue that personæ are a particular manifestation of his melancholia. The phenomenon of self-displacement at these junctures could be similar to what Burton describes as

love melancholy. This distinction is not entirely correct, since it is often associated with the sighing and unconsummated ideals of Renaissance courtly love. However, the courtly tradition closely links facets of sexuality with melancholia. Rufus of Ephesus states that there is "a longing for coitus in melancholia" (quoted in Jackson 36). Perhaps this is due to the inherent longing in both conditions, each for something the self does not have on its own. For Boswell, this loose interpolation of love melancholy provides a framework that organizes his narrative along sexual, self-constructing lines. In other words, it allows one to read his self-constructing narrative as something more than the outpourings of a youthful libido as it has often been interpreted. More importantly, the distinction of love melancholy as a temperament points again to the deeper existence of real melancholia.

As mentioned earlier, there is an ongoing conflictual relationship between the Boswell he pictures himself as and those actions which contradict that imagined self. Though these two identities may merge at times, they quickly lose their structural integrity. In the wake of their mutual elimination, only the guilt from the action that remains. Particular to these licentious moments in his early years, manifestations of guilt need to be displaced. Thus, by collapsing his own self into a fictional, created identity, his actions are justified not only by the text in which these characters originally appear, but, also, in that it is not *really* Boswell who is carrying them out. David Daiches in the introduction to *New Light on Boswell*, refers to Boswell as "the very reverse of the 'impartial spectator' that Adam Smith, whose

lectures Boswell had heard in Glasgow, postulated as the theoretical arbiter of moral approval. Boswell aimed to be the *partial* spectator, not in the sense that he imposed his own interests on those of his subject but, that he wanted to take his subject's part, to enter into him" (4). Although Daiches' comments refer to those whom Boswell interviewed, I find it much more poignant in regard to the personæ he adopts. Daiches, however, incorrectly argues that this "entering in" is the case with Boswell's "real-world" friends. Instead, Boswell prefers to copy them as a template and in turn, combine those traits with his own particular identity, making a hybrid form. He states early on in his journal:

> I felt strong dispositions to be a Mr. Addison. Indeed, I had accustomed myself so much to laugh at everything that it required time to render my imagination solid and give me just notions of real life and of religion. But I hoped by degrees to attain to some degree of propriety. Mr. Addison's character in sentiment, mixed with a little of the gaiety of Sir Richard Steele and the manners of Mr. Digges, were the ideas which I aimed to realize. (01 Dec. 62; *LJ* 62)

This passage conveys to the attentive reader a highly significant and subtle distinction. Boswell expresses an aspiration to *be a* Mr. Addison, as opposed to being Addison. He searches for the attributes that comprise an Addisonian identity, not the actual identity itself. This delineation explains why Boswell cannot fully disavow the guilt he experiences in the wake of his escapades. He fails to become the other person because he knows it is impossible. He wants

their attributes grafted onto his own in order to offset and perhaps explain away his immoral deeds. However, given these moments of sexual "transgression" in the moral sense, it is no surprise they follow drinking bouts. Liquor serves as a temporary palliative as well as an excuse to break his vows of abstinence. This marks the introduction of an element that seriously affects Boswell's sense of identity and his time in London is frequently marked by such "roaring." Liquor often serves as the catalyst to erring, and as is so often the case, "The conscience is that part of the psyche that is soluble in alcohol" (Ober 14).

Boswell's pattern of drinking and whoring is not unusual for eighteenth-century culture. However, his displacement of his identity in the process is highly distinctive. Whether this drive is congenital or learned, it exacerbates his melancholia by the lure of a temporary respite from guilt. Bernard Mandeville speaks of a compulsion of those suffering from "hysterick Cases, and other Chronick Deficiencies of the Spirits" to seek their solace in the sauce. Serving as only an immediate salve, these strong liquours "leave the People worse than they found them; and how refreshing and restorative soever they may seem the moment they are taken, the Patients are always more dispirited after them; which could not be, if by them they were not robb'd of something" (Mandeville 357-8). This is the case with Boswell, though, at this stage in his life, it is not a serious drinking problem. Moreover, use of alcohol to expose part of his identity forces Boswell to try to suppress it. Thus it does become symptomatic of his melancholia. As

Manning states, "It is part of the self he is, but not of the self he wants to be; his journals record a tussle between the consistent social being he would like to project and his compulsive honesty towards the private experiences which will not accommodate themselves to his conscious shaping" (Manning 128). Thus adopting attributes of others and drinking function as layers Boswell attempts to employ to bury his guilt. Indeed, his journal during the London years is replete with moments of rationalization and displacement.

One of the most famous moments in the London Journal is what has been commonly called the "Louisa episode." She is Boswell's first "real" relationship of sorts in these years. But, as mentioned earlier [cf. p. 30], even she is the object of his rationale: "But, then, I thought Louisa was only in the mean time, till I got into genteel life, and that a woman of fashion was the only proper object for such a man as me" (18 Jan. 63; *LJ* 149). Again, Boswell places himself in the position of the "superior person" who stoops to dally with a woman who allows him to be someone he truly is not. Her surrendering of herself allows Boswell to exclaim "but surely I may be styled a Man of Pleasure" (12 Jan. 63; *LJ* 140). He accepts the characteristics of someone else's life briefly into his own. During this vignette, he plays a different role which depicts the London gallant. For Boswell, it is simply a little drama: "We contrived to seem as if we had come off a journey, and carried in a bundle our night-clothes, handkerchiefs, and other little things." One can only imagine the extent to which these circumstances brought out the actor in Boswell: "On our arrival at Hayward's we were shown into the parlour, in the

same manner that any decent couple would be." Not content with this subterfuge, he continues the scene by signing the name of "Mr. Digges" to the register. Boswell and Louisa are even given "the very room where he [Digges] slept" (12 Jan. 63; *LJ* 137), indicating an almost total collapse of separate identities. Having the same bed as Digges is obviously significant and one might even say desired by Boswell to complete the scene. This vignette leads off with Boswell and Louisa "acting" out the part of a married couple. Obviously, this is meant as an attempt to lend legitimacy to what they are about to do--the greater the ceremony the greater the sex (the same is often said by Boswell concerning his devotion at mass; cf. p. 29).

Perhaps to shed a greater light on Boswell's machinations in this scene, one should consider how he himself describes West Digges: "Indeed, I must say that Digges has more or as much of the deportment of a man of fashion as anybody I ever saw; and he keeps up this so well that he never once lessened upon me even on an intimate acquaintance, although he is now and then somewhat melancholy, under which it is very difficult to preserve dignity; and this I think is particularly to be admired in Mr. Digges" (01 Dec. 63; *LJ* 62-3). Thus one clearly sees the role Boswell saw himself as acting out. This instance illustrates very clearly the drive to legitimize what he does by placing another person in that role. If Boswell respects Digges as a man of fashion by adopting his persona and acting as Digges, Boswell's gains are twofold: firstly, he can take the compliments bestowed on Digges and apply them to himself; secondly, he can displace his own guilt for his actions by rationalizing that it

is no more than something a worthy man like Digges would do. This maneuver of identity co-optation and displacement parallels Burton's theory of love melancholy: "The Idoll which they worship and adore is their Mistris . . . Satan is their guide, the flesh their instructor, Hypocrisie their Counsellor, Vanity their fellow-souldier, their will their law, Ambition their Captaine . . . All their endeavours are to satisfie their lust and appetite, how to please their *Genius*, and to be merry for the present . . ." (III; 396). There is a distinctive doubling effect when Boswell uses the persona to narrate his own actions, almost as if to decide whether or not he approves.

A by-product of his melancholia, this metacritical function of the persona also operates as an internal fail-safe, allowing Boswell the illusion of a choice. Similarly, Adam Smith's formulations of a moral sentiment advocate fostering a self-critical external perspective: "We can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us. But we can do this in no other way than by endeavouring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them" (III.i.2; 109). Boswell does not quite give himself this detached observation; however, through his employment of the persona and especially by writing his journal, he does achieve the same distance from his actions. The result is, of course, guilt and the immediate need to expiate its effects. This is done primarily through the confessional role, but this method will be explicated in greater

detail in a later section. Boswell's need for an identity in which he satisfies his urges to be both a man of fashion and a learned scholar prompts him to continue this pattern of persona projection. One of his favorite roles is that of the rogue. This is one aspect of his identity that has no place in his "set" identity, and is the most problematic for the young Scot. Nevertheless, he has stories of how he "sallied forth to the Piazzas in rich flow of animal spirits and burning with fierce desire" (19 May 63; *LJ* 263-4).There he meets two young girls who agree to accompany him although he has no money, based solely upon his gay humor. These moments often border on the exultant for Boswell: "I surveyed my seraglio and found them both good subjects for amorous play. I toyed with them and drank about and sung *Youth's the Season* and thought myself Captain Macheath."[12] (19 May 63; *LJ* 263-4). This is yet another instance of his desire to frame the event through someone else's eyes. Although he chooses Macheath, it is still Boswell watching and interpreting the way in which Macheath was portrayed in Gay's work, thus forming Boswell's reading of Gay's reading of a fictional character--or a representation of a representation. As in all cases, the further one moves from the original, the more distorted and derivative that copy becomes. In the case of Boswell, he creates an image that, in its bastardized state, can almost become any set of traits he desires.

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[12] Gay's character from the *Beggar's Opera* (1728) holds particular significance for the young Boswell for many reasons, not the least of which was his desire at the time to be one of the London Guards. In the eighteenth century, the figure of the genteel rogue that Macheath represents could be said to be Boswell's romantic ideal.

The next day, Boswell's guilty feelings lead him to seek approval from a source who would legitimate both man and actions: Lord Eglinton. The man who initiated Boswell as a rake has an all too predictable response. According to the journal, he "was highly entertained with my last night's exploits, and insisted that I should dine with him. . ." (20 May 63; *LJ* 264). Obviously for Boswell the night is not complete without the relation of it to a sympathetic audience. The fantasy of the previous night has worn off, and now Boswell seeks the company of the type of person who would approve of his actions. Boswell takes it a step further by stating that Lord Eglinton "insisted" that Boswell dine with him as if Boswell now inhabited an equal position to that of the lord. Boswell's position towards Eglinton, to be generous, is highly ambivalent. Except for these rare moments, he usually tries to distance himself as far as possible (morally and literally) from Eglinton and the dissolute lifestyle he represents. La Bruyère claims that in the current age this is not an unusual hypocritical oversight: "The same Vices which are deform'd and insupportable in others, we don't feel in ourselves, they are not burdensome to us. . ." (Rowe's translation of La Bruyère II; 276). Boswell can freely critique Eglinton's debauchery while ignoring his own participation in similar events. There are episodes of hypocrisy in the pages of the journal– this Macheath episode being one of them. However, if one remarks that for Boswell the adopting of a persona is as intoxicating as the liquour he imbibes, then, as manifestations of a form of melancholia, Boswell's hypocrisy can be understood. Mandeville's musings on the addicting qualities of "Spirits"

apply to Boswell's use of external identities as well: ". . . the Certainty of the Benefit they [melancholics] constantly receive from them, continually tempts them to repeat what has so often reviv'd them; which if they forbear longer than ordinary, must without doubt make them very uneasie, and consequently worse; and this latter is likewise the Reason, why it is so difficult to wean them from those Draughts of Oblivion . . ." (358). He needs to lose himself to find his identity in an uncanny mixture of self and other.

The last of these examples marks Boswell's move from imitating a friend whose traits he envies to a fictional character with whom he would identify to himself, to acting the role of both. The very next day, after promising both himself and his friend, Temple, he would adhere to a higher moral principle, Boswell records in his journal: "It was the king's birthnight and I resolved to be a blackguard and to see all that was to be seen." He then takes up this persona and continues: "I went to the Park, picked up a low brimstone (virago), and called myself a barber. . ." (04 June 63; *LJ* 272). This is the first episode of the evening, the second comes a little later: "In the Strand I picked up a little profligate wretch and gave her sixpence." He, however, gets into an altercation with her and she calls for help. She attracts the attention of other "whores and soldiers" whom Boswell manages to persuade that he is in the right: "I got them on my side, and I abused her in blackguard style, and then left them." He then finds number three but has no money so she leaves him. His summation of the evening: "My vanity was somewhat gratified tonight that, notwithstanding of my dress, I was always taken for a gentleman

in disguise" (04 June 63; *LJ* 272-3). Again Boswell wants to be recognized for the nobility within that he exhibits and thus constantly performs these dramas in order to bring about that conclusion. He violates his vow of the day before in a seemingly oblivious manner and buries his guilt in an excess of debauchery. These personæ provide Boswell with the sensation of experiencing life to the fullest. He needs to go out of character in order to penetrate spheres usually closed to him. The immoral events do take their toll, however, and there is a marked increase in Boswell's need for approval. One senses that Boswell's satisfaction with himself is superficial. Since he does not feel himself to be "superior," he needs others (here read the lower classes) to think him a "gentleman." This pattern of sought after approval is a proportionately consistent component of his melancholia: "In the clinical picture of melancholia dissatisfaction with the self on moral grounds is far the most outstanding feature; the self-criticism much less frequently concerns itself with bodily infirmity, ugliness, weakness, social inferiority; the thought of poverty alone has a favoured position" (*Metapsych.* 169). Applying Freud's idea to Boswell, one can see that Boswell's moral dissipation defines his melancholia. London provides the geographic and cultural space to explore alternative identities, which is perhaps why it always holds a special place in his heart. Digges, Macheath, and even the blackguard are all "diamonds in the rough" who have their good, inner natures shine through the seedy façades of the lives they lead, though he wakes the next day after his "fatigues of last night" believing that they have provided him with a mind frame that is

"calm, indolent and meditative" (04 June 63; *LJ* 273). But to Boswell, these instances are also maddeningly ephemeral. His strong sense of religion (and religious fear) creeps back upon him which leads to a cycle where he makes and breaks resolutions in an attempt to mend his ways. The conflict of inconsistent behavior generates a significant moral quandary. Johnson warns that these lapses can often be self-originating: "Irregular desires will produce licentious practices; what men allow themselves to wish they will soon believe, and will be at last incited to execute what they please themselves with contriving" (*Works* III; 41). Given his internal conflict with religion, Boswell needs to buttress his rationale for erring so frequently. If the adopting of a persona under the auspices of "seeing all that is to be seen" of both the world and himself does not freely excuse his deeds, perhaps solipsistic reasoning might: "Consider, pray, the morality of the Gospel; and if you find illicit concubinage forbidden, abstain from it and keep yourself strong for marriage" (18 Sept. 63; *Holl* 24). Notice here that Boswell allows himself the play of interpretation; *"if you find"* allows for some flexibility in moral decisions. He executes to the letter that which Johnson warns against. Nor does Boswell follow this sound advice from *Rambler* 8: "He therefore that would govern his actions by the laws of virtue, must regulate his thoughts by those of reason . . . " (*Works* III; 46). But, even more importantly, Johnson states: "Such therefore, is the importance of keeping reason a constant guard over imagination, that we have otherwise no security for our own virtue, but may corrupt our hearts . . ." (43). The extent to which Boswell is a willing

participant in this logical deception is indicated by his inability to keep himself from indulging his sensual appetites–thus enforcing the need for continued sophistry.

Boswell's philosophizing concerning who should be allowed to "propagate the species" is a fascinating moment when he realizes that his actions are not sanctioned by the Church:

> I should have mentioned some time ago that I said to him [Erskine] that if venereal delight and the power of propagating the species were permitted only to the virtuous, it would make the world very good. Our pulpits would then resound with noble descriptions of conjugal love. Preachers would incite the audience to goodness by warmly and lusciously setting before their imaginations the transports of amorous joy. This would render the pleasures of love more refined and more valuable, when they were participated only by the good. Whereas at present it is the common solace of the virtuous and wicked, the man of taste and the man of brutality. (25 March 63; *LJ* 227)

Obviously in this sense, Boswell casts himself in the role of the "virtuous" man, though it is not entirely clear how this joy would be confined to the virtuous. We also see the literalization of his sacred and profane impulses in addition to Boswell's fantasy that they could emanate from one, sanctioned source. This alignment does not seem to match his choice of imitative models, that is, personæ who might have some difficulty fitting into the same "virtuous" bracket. So too with Boswell when he claims to act as a character

in Vanbrugh's play, *The Provok'd Wife* (1697): "I went to St. James's Park, and, like Sir John Brute, picked up a whore" (25 March 63; *LJ* 227). Now, in this case, Brute has no inner beauty to shine forth–he is both the brunt and the dupe of this play. He is a gruff, hypocritical husband who drives his wife to adulterous actions through his utter insensitivity. Boswell's projections do not always light upon a favorable character. This is, I believe, an indication of his belief that what he does is not always moral. Flashes of insight often reveal his self-consciousness: "At night I took a streetwalker into Privy Garden and indulged sensuality. The wretch picked my pocket . . . When I got home I was shocked to think that I had been intimately united with a low, abandoned, perjured, pilfering creature. I determined to do so no more; but if the Cyprian fury should seize me, to participate my amorous flame with a genteel girl" (18 June 63; *LJ* 280). The compulsion to "carnality" may lead to his eternal damnation, which is his true fear. This echoes the admixture of love and religious melancholy so often seen in Boswell's writings. On one hand, he boasts of his amours, on the other he laments: "I looked with a degree of horror upon death. Some of my intrigues which in high health and spirits I valued myself upon now seemed to be deviations from the sacred road of virtue" (25 Jan. 63; *LJ* 172). He also later reflects upon another adventure that brought on sharp pangs of regret: "Yet after the brutish appetite was sated, I could not but despise myself for being united with such a low wretch" (10 May 63; *LJ* 255-6). He places himself in the "brutish" camp of those who should not be allowed to practice sexually. So it would seem that

these guilty conjurings are the result of two fears: one for his soul and the other for his identity. The ambivalence of these moral sentiments points to the failure of Boswell's projection of actions onto another persona since, these models always remain unstable. His remorse can take on the discourse of disease, a rancor that has recurrences similar to his bouts of gonorrhea: "This last *thief* and monster may cure you completely...[a]ttain self-government . . ." (18 June 63; *LJ* 280). [13] His sexual episodes need to be purged from his body to allow him to attain a sense of health–a metaphor that is apt both mentally and physically. Alcohol cannot blur the memory of the deed any more than a passing identification with an externalized character. Later in life Boswell will observe that alcohol has unusual effects upon him: "An opinion has been generally entertained that the real character of a man is best shown when he is drunk, for then he is without disguise. I cannot admit the truth of this opinion. On the contrary, I am perswaded [sic] that Drunkenness frequently alters a man's real character, and creates one totally different, so that instead of being without disguise, he is, according to the common phrase, 'disguised in liquor'" (*Hyp* I; 352). It seems more likely that he is hesitant to admit that he is the sole agent of his immorality. Mandeville's description of liquor and guilt corresponds with Boswell's own oscillation between sex and morality:

> In the Beginning indeed of my Distemper, when I was first seized with Melancholy thoughts, I have sometimes taken Sanctuary in a large

[13] Perhaps as well, Boswell thinks of Burton's harsh words on the topic where he refers to the relations with a whore: "Such love is a snare to the soul, &c., a bitter honey, sweet poison, delicate destruction, a voluntary mischief, a defiling filth, a dung-pit" (III; 218).

> Dose of Claret to ease me; but there is no Pleasure, *ubi culpam pæna premit comes*: (where the Punishment accompanies the crime): I never had any Relief from it, without a greater Punishment upon the Heels of it: It has laid my Pains, appeas'd my Soul, made me forget my Sorrows, and fancy over-night , that all my Afflictions had left me; but the next Morning, before the Strength of the Charm has been quite worn off, they have in Crowds return'd upon me with a Vengeance, and my self paid dearly for the deceitful Cure. 'Tis unspeakable in what Confusion of Horror, Guilt , Fear, and Repentance I have wak'd, in what depth of Grief, Anguish, and Misery my Spirits have been sunk, or how forlorn and destitute of all Hopes and Comforts I have sometimes thought my self after the Use of this fallacious Remedy. (373-4)

It becomes increasingly apparent in Boswell's life that in the wake of religion's failure to guide him morally, and his own ability to disguise his deeds he immediately regrets, another form of agency needs to be sought. Perhaps the most overt symptom of his melancholia is his need to borrow and incorporate positive identities from other people. He employs the persona to better himself and smooth over his darker moments. Thus the externalized imitation is incorporated into almost every action he undertakes. Unlike his adoption of abstract personæ, his turning to close personal friends is a plea for direct guidance in his life. He wants and needs to be instructed, to be told how to act. Institutional and self-adapted models have

proven unsuccessful; therefore Boswell turns to the immediate examples of his friends.

Two Selves, Circling: Boswell and Role of Friendship

"Admonish me, but forgive me."

–Boswell to Temple. (01 Feb. 67)

The previous section dealt with Boswell's need to "experience" life at all costs, endangering his physical health, his autonomy, and his identity. Adopting a persona serves to displace the concomitant guilt and the confession that followed his deeds. All throughout this process his search for a unified identity emerges as one of the few consistent themes of his life. His employment of the persona to understand who he is through a form of "psychological distancing" (Bronson 65) does not achieve its desired effect. This quest for self-knowledge is the "motivator to his knowledge or attempts at knowledge of others" (Weinsheimer 104). By choosing traits to emulate, Boswell approximates his identity. This process is based on the fact that all knowledge of the self cannot be gained through a close study of that self. Instead, it is gathered by exploring outside the self.[14] As Joel Weinsheimer's book on hermeneutics in the eighteenth century argues, Hume believes that one cannot fully understand human nature in general through a study of the

[14] The need for the self to seek knowledge outside of its own sphere is aptly represented by Hume's famous passage from the *Treatise*: "The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations"(253).

self alone (106). Certainly, Hume's theories influence Boswell's London years. His amorous dalliances often produce an extreme separation in his identity, and "[f]requently the cleavage is so wide that the two roles seem independent of each other, simultaneously activated by different intelligences" (Bronson 64). The cleaving has direct consequences for the organic identity that Boswell's melancholia drives him to seek. He realizes the need for a more overt regulatory presence in his life. This awareness introduces the complicated role that his friends enact in his life. In fact, he needs a more interactive association which the static nature of the persona did not allow. He is simply following the advice that undoubtedly surrounds him, whether it be from Hume's philosophy or Johnson's Ramblers. Even Burton propounds the gains to be had from the person's controlling himself, avoiding the company of someone who stimulated his desires, arranging a change of scene, and confessing "his grief and passion to some judicious friend (the more he conceals, the greater is his pain) that by his good advice may happily ease him on a sudden" (Burton III; 217). This palliative to melancholy leads Boswell to turn to his friends for solace. In creating a regulatory agency in characters like Grange and Johnson, Boswell initiates his imitative process. In other words, in asking his friends to "take charge" of his moral development, Boswell believes they possess the qualities he would like to emulate. Boswell needs a superego as a form of surveillance over his actions.

A parent would be an obvious choice for such a role. Yet, he does not include his father in these more frank admissions and excludes almost all comment on their relationship. Clearly, his father does not manifest the qualities Boswell feels he needs. However, the two seem to agree that Boswell needs a strong, moral, and close-to-hand advisor. In a letter to the young Boswell, Alexander Boswell, Lord Auchinleck advises: "I would further recommend to you, to indeavor [sic] to find out some person of worth who may be a Friend, not one who will say as you say when with you and when he is away will make a Jest of you as much as any other" (30 May 1763). Critics such as John Morris see this patterning of himself after others as a form of juvenile insecurity: "Insecure in the tenure of his identity, Boswell, especially in his early years, seeks in the world about him figures from whom he can draw, not only strength . . . but other qualities that will enlarge and somehow define him" (193). I do agree there are numerous characters to which Boswell is attracted and that "the length of the list suggests his sense of the insufficiency of his own unified character" (Morris 194). However, I cannot support his conclusion that Boswell's identifications reflect a "youthful search for the self." Rather, I believe them to be an expression of his peculiar melancholy. This leads one to believe that Boswell will eventually grow out of this "phase." Yet Morris cites examples of Boswell's adoption of personæ as late as 1790 which would complicate if not refute his theory of an "adolescent" yearning for identity (208). In light of this, I would argue that Boswell is at times aware of his fragmented identity but not of its cause. At

one point he even laments: "I am vexed at such a distempered suggestion's being inserted in my journal, which I wished to contain a constant picture of a young fellow eagerly pushing through life. But it serves to humble me, and it presents a strange and curious view of the unaccountable nature of the human mind" (27 Feb. 63; *LJ* 205-6). Boswell often reflects on his character. In contrast to Morris's idea of Boswell's life-long search as a mere "passing phase," I would instead agree with Erin Labbie, who states: "As he identifies with others, Boswell's efforts to discover his 'true self' lead him astray, for he believes that his relationship with each new person reveals his 'authentic' self. Thus Boswell becomes the creator of his own fragmented identity–the very instability that he seeks to avoid" (Labbie 53). This follows Boswell's melancholiac pattern more accurately than a mere adolescent infatuation that somehow remains with him his entire life. Boswell needs these people in his life, yet as Labbie posits, he is his own undoing, thereby necessitating a quest towards unity. The perpetual creation and destruction of models produces a psychic peregrination in Boswell's life. He divides his friends into those who serve as moral guides and those who become partners in crime.[15]

One of Boswell's childhood friends, John Johnston of Grange has always been an intimate confidant. Though in his correspondence Boswell oscillates between the advisee and the advisor, Grange will always be his

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[15] Of Boswell's friends, William Johnson Temple and John Johnston of Grange are the most notable. They had met each other in Robert Hunter's Greek class in 1755. The two companions who play the largest role in these years (especially London) are Andrew Erskine, whom Boswell met in 1761 and George Dempster, the man who introduced the latter two to each other.

touchstone. They are both Scots, and this binds them together. Thomas Crawford believes that Boswell's correspondence with Grange "was essential to his 'soul-making'" (16). Also, especially in light of this foundational connection, one finds that for these two friends, it is the topic of melancholy that makes up a large part of their letters: "I am perswaded [sic]that you and I shall enjoy lasting happiness in a future state of being when our souls are purified and refined from that dross which now occasions these gloomy clouds of Spleen" (14 Dec. 62; *Corr* 31). Their roles are usually mutually supportive, but Grange is by far more often the counselor to Boswell. Occasionally Boswell will try to assume a more dominant position, but it is usually only to advise through his experience as a melancholiac: "Consider that the gloom and weakness of mind which you sometimes experience in this imperfect state is necessary to compleat the great schemes of heaven. . ." (22 Feb. 63; *Corr* 49). This is a position in which Boswell is most confident. Grange, for the most part, holds a conservative line and tries to remind Boswell to do the right thing. In Freudian terms he could be considered a form of externalized superego. This function is akin to the role each friend enacts for Boswell. Thus, Grange's opinion can strike a fatal blow to Boswell's "castles in the air" and it is often his duty to do strike them down:

> I remember my friend Johnston told me one day after my return from London that I had turned out different from what he imagined, as he thought I would resemble Mr. Addison. . .the observation struck deep. Indeed I must do myself the justice to say that I always resolved to be

> such a man whenever my affairs were made easy and I got upon my own footing. For as I despaired of that, I endeavoured to lower my views . . . (01 Dec. 62; *LJ* 62)

Grange serves as Boswell's "reality check" and as such is an integral component in his identity formation. In actuality, however, they seem to fulfill complementary roles where Boswell is the cosmopolitan "citizen of the world" and Grange is the provincial Scot. This denotes a fascinating dynamic which reveals Boswell's need for an anchor in Grange.

Boswell, ever disdainful but fearful of his father's wishes, needs to be reminded that his actions have consequences. Grange always encourages Boswell to remember his obligations to family and decorum: "If you should fail, it is deceiving your father, and undoubtedly must Confirm the World of your unsteadiness and want of Resolution; The opinion of the World must not be despised. Whenever one sinks in its esteem, he must be unhappy, and rendered useless to his Country and friends . . ." (27 June 63; *Corr* 80). Grange knows how to strike a resonant chord with his friend, and also is able to ascertain what motivates him. Grange, too, is often a sounding board for Boswell's psychological extrapolations. At one point Boswell responds that they must both fight off the Spleen and in particular hide its effects: "What I want to do is to bring myself to that aequality of behaviour that whether my spirits are high or low, People may see little odds upon [i.e. difference in] me . . . I am perswaded that when I can restrain my flightiness, and keep an even external tenor, that my mind will attain a settled serenity" (30 June 63; *Corr*

81). Notice here Boswell believes that perfecting the external self will also calibrate the internal self. This sounds like Hume's belief that we can never truly know ourselves except through others. However, it is more explicit in respect to the external viewing that forms part of Smith's idea of perceiving ourselves through the eyes of other people. Could this perhaps be a desired projection of how people see him or his character-- his public persona that has nothing to do with the whoring at night? Clearly he is not sure how to go about this entire process. However, he does enlist the help and advice of Grange. Their friendship never really progresses beyond this commiserating during these years. Yet, for Boswell, having the opportunity to share one's suffering is often more than enough: "Indeed it is very hard to have no friend to whom we can lay open our dejected minds, and by tender sympathy obtain relief" (14 Dec. 62; *Corr* 30). Each person plays a specific part in the play of Boswell's life. He seeks to extend their confessional exchange by asking Grange to unburden himself as well: "But pray my friend do this in your letters. Whenever you are in low spirits sit down and write to me all your thoughts, tho' never so gloomy: freely and without Study. This will do you good and by imagining that you are talking to your absent friend you will insensibly feel yourself lightened by the dreary burthen under which your fancy labours" (14 Dec. 62; *Corr* 30). They are simply two men who live different but linked lives. Both are melancholic or "antiquated" to use their personal jargon, but Boswell's needs in the relationship are not so easy to define. His true melancholia seeks to add Grange's stability to his own–a hope

that is destined to fail. Since they see each other so seldom during these years, their bond is merely through letters. As a result, Grange may instruct Boswell and sometimes bring him to reflect upon his actions, but ultimately Boswell needs a stricter instructor. Grange cannot prevent his friend's dallying in London with "waggish" friends, who, like Boswell's libido, often get him into all sorts of trouble. However, this indicates that Boswell has companions with whom he can "roar."

Boswell's conflicting motivations generally produce two forms of personalities: one whose attributes he approves and another of which he does not. Both still function in his daily life; he does not or cannot prevent himself from doing things that make him regret his actions later. In typical Boswellian style, he cultivates close personal relationships with people who can be seen as almost direct projections of his psyche. Grange is his touchstone, but his other Scottish friends in London, namely Andrew Erskine and George Dempster, represent his playmates. No where is this better represented than in Boswell and Erskine's *Correspondence* (1763). These lighthearted letters, obviously re-worked for publication, are harmless enough in and of themselves; however, they are nonsensical and had no ostensible perceived literary purpose. Grange writes Boswell to inform him that Lord Auchinleck is furious with this publication, which he sees as a breech in decorum perpetrated by his wayward son. However, Grange would never offer his own direct criticism of Boswell, instead he opts for a more oblique approach: "I am afraid of my Lord's displeasure, which you Seem to

dread. It Surely ought in a great measure to Influence your Conduct. Tho' he has not indulged you So much as Some parents would have done. . ." (28 Apr. 63; *Corr* 73). In addition to this publication, these two along with Dempster also wrote a pamphlet entitled *Critical Strictures* (1763). This reaction to the play of fellow Scot, David Mallet, is based more upon Mallet's altering his surname (Malloch to Mallet) than it is a piece of true literary criticism. The authors (then anonymous) instead received heavy censure for what was rightfully deemed an *ad hominem* attack. These two written productions, as well as a third that was apparently in the works,[16] mark Boswell's literary aspirations in these London years.

Nevertheless, despite their artistic collaborations, Boswell has some seriously ambivalent moments regarding Erskine and Dempster. In his journal, he paints Dempster in somewhat unflattering terms: "His sceptical notions give him the freedom and ease which in a companion is very pleasing, although to a man whose mind is possessed with serious thoughts of futurity, it is rather hurting to find them considered so lightly" (25 Feb. 63; *LJ* 203). Therefore one can deduce that as Boswell himself was often in two minds, so too with his relationships with his friends. This phenomenon is not lost upon his friends either. At one point, Erskine stops Boswell and accuses him as follows: "'I believe, Boswell,' said he, 'you don't consider me as

[16] The third work is mentioned in a letter from Dempster to Boswell. Dempster informs Boswell of the reception of Wilkes's *An Essay on Woman*, saying how much trouble it got Wilkes into with the authorities. He then alludes to the unknown project: "How lucky your *jeu d'esprit* and Erskine's was never published" (26 Nov. 63; *Holl* 71). There is no record of what this work may have been, but it does illustrate their relationship as jokesters--one from which Boswell later distances himself.

a friend. You don't consider Dempster and me as you do Temple and Johnston. You would not tell us your deep secrets.' I replied that I liked Dempster and him much, but that I considered them more as literary partners and as companions than as friends" (07 July 63; *LJ* 296). Boswell consciously forges friendships to meet his personal impulses and they are in no way indicative of a steady resolve. His equality of public identity with a private self has not yet been truly honed. Erskine reads this clearly and calls him on his fickleness. Boswell chooses with whom he interacts and in what manner he shall do so. The division of relationships is a fascinating manifestation of his melancholia in that he is able to maintain these distinct friendships. The choosing of a companion is much more than cultivating different friends for different activities. These men are living projections of identity characteristics which Boswell tries to attain. If he can reconcile his relationship with these men, he can also do the same with his psyche. To express this in nationalistic terms: Boswell looks for the English traits in people like Temple and Johnson and eschews the Scottish traits of Dempster and Erskine. It is difficult to monitor the extent to which this is a conscious process–his displeasure with Dempster and Erskine does not translate to his displeasure with himself, though this must obviously occur on a subconscious level.

Part of this ambivalence towards his hapless companions is due to Boswell's conflicted feelings towards his Scottish roots. Grange works as a steady reminder of all the things Boswell loves about his Scottish home, and he has exceptionally strong feelings towards his history and Scottish ancestry

(hence the attack on Mallet). Yet when Boswell is in London, he revels in the contradictory nature of the city, as well as its anonymity. He wants to be able to choose how and when his Scottish feelings are treated–he wants Scotland on his own terms. These sentiments engender his now famous attempts at distancing himself from the Scottish accent. In fact this was a point of pride for him.[17] At the production of Mrs. Sheridan's *The Discovery*, Boswell imagines himself as Steele "sitting in judgment" over a new play. This transportation is disrupted, however, by the encroachment of his Scottish friends:

> This gave me much pleasure, in so much that I could have wished my two companions absent from me, as they brought down my ideas and made me imagine myself just in Edinburgh, which, though a kind of a comfortable idea, was not so high as what I was indulging. I find that I ought not to keep too much company with Scotch people, because I am kept from acquiring propriety of English speaking, and because they prevent my mind from being filled with London images, so that I might as well be in Scotland. (03 Feb. 63; *LJ* 177)

Boswell likes the anonymity of the city since it allows him a free play of the mind and the loss of the private self in the formlessness of the public. Even here in this light-hearted scenario, Boswell cannot enjoy the company of his compatriots. Erskine's comment to Boswell seems to apply here. Boswell does

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[17] The extent to which he was successful is always debatable. Fanny Burney provides an alternative perspective: "He spoke the Scotch accent strongly, though by no means so as to affect, even slightly, his intelligibility to an English ear" (Tinker *FB* 221).

not necessarily care for Erskine and Dempster as much as the characteristics they enable in him (author, gallant etc.). Unfortunately for them, sometimes these qualities do not work in their favor. Sometimes their Scottishness serves as an unwelcome reminder for Boswell. There is a competition here between Scottish and English characteristics. The former deals with a dissipated, melancholy youth, the latter, a moral and mature man. The composed man comes with a plan for life as well: "After getting into, or studying to get into, a proper well-behaved plan, with the assistance of my friend Temple, the Scotch tones and rough and roaring freedom of manners which I heard today disgusted me a good deal. I am always resolving to study propriety of conduct. But I never persist with any steadiness. I hope, however, to attain it" (03 June 63; *LJ* 272).[18] This conflict of identity is closely tied to the perception he has of his friendships. Boswell makes a distinction in the difference that his friends' relationships signify. His Scottish friends in London are not really friends, but companions, whereas Grange and Temple qualify as friends: "A companion loves some agreeable qualities which a man may possess, but a friend loves the man himself" (07 July 63; *LJ* 296-7). He is explicit in his drawing the lines between the distinction of friends and companions:

> I joked and said that if I was going to be married, Temple and Johnston would be the men whom I would have in my room, with the door

[18] Boswell's father seems to come to the same conclusion but sides with things Scottish: "Your notion of independency seems to consist in contemning your relations and your native country. . ." (30 May 63; *LJ* 340).

> locked, a piece of cheese, two moulded candles, and a bottle of claret upon the mahogany table, round which we would sit in quiet attention consulting and examining the settlements. But that when the wedding was over and festivity was going on, then I would send for Dempster and Erskine, and we would be jolly and hearty and laugh and talk and make sport. (07 July 63; *LJ* 297)

Erskine and Dempster are the "merry men," those with whom Boswell likes to "make sport," but this lighthearted London carousing can only go so far. They do not allow Boswell to create a critical distance in order to affect a kind of superiority. Indeed, this is a problem throughout his life. This trait makes him exceedingly easygoing, embodying what Bruce Redford calls *Gemütlichkeit*– an all around good-natured pleasantness. His "good nature" allows Boswell to associate with "Libertines" (193), people who range from Wilkes and Lord Mountstuart to wags such as Erskine and Dempster. To befriend all these various people and still win the affections of a moralist such as Samuel Johnson is no mean feat. It is a testament to the infinite amicability of one man.

Boswell's search for intimate camaraderie leads him to alienate those who he feels are not good social equals. In other words, Boswell is always willing to sacrifice decorum in order to find out the truth or share some of his life's experience. However, when the person with whom he shares this information is not the calibre of person with whom he feels he should constantly associate, he snubs them. Nevertheless, often they will not let

Boswell re-assume his "social" elevation. This is especially true with servants.[19] Once Boswell "stoops to their level," they will not let him ascend to his rank again. Thus they serve as a constant reminder of his fall. Boswell's consistent climbing up and falling off the social ladder is made up of moments such as these. The result is that he begins to resent the people with whom he stooped, and they resent him for his affected haughtiness.[20] This certainly is the case with his "companions," who do not share the infinite patience it seems to require to listen to Boswell's schemes. Before leaving for the Continent, Boswell describes an interesting scene with himself, Erskine, and Dempster: "In the evening we walked in Kensington Gardens, and talked of being abroad, and what was to be acquired. I said I wanted to get rid of folly and to acquire sensible habits. They laughed" (23 June 63; *LJ* 281-2). He makes no other commentary than those final two words, "they laughed," but it seems he is stung by the reaction he receives. Again, at a different moment, similar circumstances arise:

> I brought on the subject of reserve and dignity of behaviour [with Blair and Macpherson]. Macpherson cursed at it, and Blair said he did not

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[19] Boswell's servant throughout most of his time on the Continent was one Jacob Hänni. Their relationship exemplifies this pattern in Boswell's life. He becomes so intimate at one point with Jacob that his servant feels he can chide Boswell on his irregular lifestyle (06 Jan. 65). In the end Boswell dismisses him: "I was, however, glad that he left me; for after having rebelled and been so free, it was impossible he could be a good servant for one of my disposition" (03 Jan 66). It is clear that Boswell cannot keep the social lines drawn.

[20] Boswell's one confidant (if he can be called that) in Utrecht is one Rev. Robert Brown, to whom Boswell tells his life story. Not very long afterwards Boswell turns on him: "You found him out to be a cunning, hard little man. You must not let him attempt to take too much liberty with you . . . remember your character will depend much on what he says" (29 Nov. 63; *Holl* 73-4).

> like it. It was unnatural, and did not show the weakness of humanity. In my opinion, however, it is a noble quality. It is sure to beget respect and to keep impertinence at a distance. No doubt (as Blair affirmed) one must give up a good deal of social mirth. But this I think should not be too much indulged, except among particular friends." (23 May 63; *LJ* 266)

Certainly these are not the reactions of a friend who accepts Boswell as he is– someone who could see him at his lowest but would be someone who "would then regard me as much as ever" (07 July 63; *LJ* 296). Simply put, Boswell holds up constancy as a sign of true friendship. Grange, Temple, and Johnson all share this quality and, consequently, remain his friends while Erskine and Dempster do not. In fact, Boswell will take the side of the "friend" against the "companion."

One instance of the prioritizing of friend over companion takes place when Boswell brings Dempster and Johnson together. Boswell demonstrates an almost unconscious adopting of one person's views against the other. Johnson and Dempster argue over philosophical ideas, a match that seems clear to be a complete set up. Boswell depicts the "drama's" *dénouement:* "After Johnson went away, I took up the argument for subordination against Dempster, and indeed after his hearty drubbing from the hard-tongued Johnson, he was but a feeble antagonist. He appeared to me a very weak man; and I exulted at the triumph of sound principles over sophistry" (20 July 63; *LJ* 316). It is not surprising, that Boswell takes over Johnson's position once he

leaves his beleaguered opponent. To an extent, in this scene, Boswell epitomizes the "henchman" moniker so often applied to him in taking Johnson's victory as his own. Boswell's assumed victory is a triumph of characteristics–the drinking companions have fallen beneath the weight of Boswell's close friends. The unconscious side of Boswell tries to rid itself of the "frivolous" associations that Erskine, Dempster, Blair and Macpherson represent. The loss of the companion should put Boswell well on his way to a better, more constant sense of self. As Samuel Johnson advises the young Scot: "'Sir, I think your breaking off idle connections by going abroad is a matter of importance. . .'" (23 June 63; *LJ* 284). The words of Johnson, as a friend, echo Boswell's personal feelings. Johnson is truly the most extreme representative of the identity Boswell would most like to emulate. He represents everything Boswell holds up as his idol. In Johnson, Boswell sees the embodiment of an author, a moralist, a melancholic, and a conversationalist. His role in Boswell's life can never be overestimated.

A Tour Through the Identities; or, Boswell's Friend, Sam. Johnson

"This noble dignity of man I see,
But fear it cannot be attain'd by me."

Boswell on Johnson. (30 March 64; *Holl* 202)

Since Johnson plays a large role in Boswell's life, a discussion of how he became cast in the role of instructor seems appropriate. Though much ink

has been spilled on this topic, too much it seems has been spent on misrepresentations. Idol worship is one of the main charges laid against Boswell, even by his contemporaries. Fanny Burney, for example, has some unkind representations of Boswell's behavior towards Johnson: "He had an odd mock solemnity of tone and manner, that he had acquired imperceptibly from constantly thinking of and imitating Dr. Johnson . . . every look and movement displayed either intentional or involuntary imitation. Yet certainly it was not meant as caricature; for his heart, almost even to idolatry, was in his reverence of Dr. Johnson" (Tinker *FB* 221-2). Burney goes on to relate how her father, Charles Burney, accuses Boswell of a servile–even masochistic–attachment to Johnson. Though this certainly does not adequately seem to capture their relationship, I feel it is indicative of a predominant assumption. My intention here is not to reevaluate the dynamic of their relationship but to emphasize that Boswell had his own notions of who he was before he met Johnson. While I agree that there is a dominant/subordinate power dynamic at times, this is not necessarily indicative of deviant behavior. Boswell relates Johnson's feelings on this particular topic: "'Sir, I am a friend to subordination. It is most conducive to the happiness of society. There is a reciprocal pleasure in governing and being governed'" (25 June 63; *LJ* 284). Boswell's melancholia, as I argued in an earlier section, craves a sense of wholeness, a unity that reconciles his conflicting selves. Among the ranks of men Boswell at one time or another emulates and incorporates, Johnson is the most prominent model. Though

in these years their association is in its nascent form, the friendship does lay down much of the groundwork that will prompt Boswell to write Johnson's biography later in life (again, one could argue, taking Johnson's victories as his own). It is difficult to assess the immediate impact that Johnson had on Boswell: whether Boswell wants to be like Johnson or whether he wants Johnson to share his experiences. In either case, Boswell's melancholia still holds him to the same patterns we have seen since his arrival in London. He has moments of virtuous successes punctuated by libidinous episodes. His contradictory behavior still bothers his conscience: "Since my being honoured with the friendship of Mr. Johnson, I have more seriously considered the duties of morality and religion and the dignity of human nature. I have considered that promiscuous concubinage is certainly wrong. It is contributing one's share towards bringing confusion and misery into society; and it is a transgression of the laws of the Almighty Creator. . ." (304). However, he finishes the paragraph in true contrapuntal form: "Notwithstanding these reflections I have stooped to mean profligacy even yesterday. However, I am now resolved to guard against it" (16 July 63; *LJ* 304). But, as Pottle writes in the footnote: "The memoranda are not quite so firm: "['. . . Swear to have no more rogering before you leave England] except Mrs.-----in chambers. . .'" (304 n.3). Consider also his comments two days earlier where he writes in cipher his plans to get a whore in the park: "But, to be sure, you have time before nine, when you are to be with Johnson, to go and have one in Park. . ." (14 July 63; *LJ* 300 n.9). Boswell has a difficult time

remaining constant in his pursuits despite having Johnson's solid advice. Johnson writes to Boswell:

> The dissipation of thought of which you complain is nothing more than the Vacillation of a mind suspended between different motives and changing its direction as any motive gains or loses Strength. If you can but kindle in your mind any strong desire, if you can but keep predominant and Wish for some particular excellence or attainment the Gusts of imagination will break away without any effect upon your conduct and commonly without any traces left upon the Memory. (08 Dec. 63; Johnson's *Letters* 239)

Johnson, it seems, has a clear idea of Boswell's inconsistent patterns. Given the examples here of Johnson's advice and Boswell's whoring, neither offers direct evidence of Johnson's overwhelming influence. Instead, one finds here a very distinct personality in Boswell, one with drives different from Johnson's.

One of the main criticisms of Boswell is that his "melancholy" is an affectation based upon Johnson's own. Indeed, it is a topic that is often discussed by the two friends in their later years. However, from the years 1762-4, Boswell was not aware of Johnson's own melancholy until he first confessed his: "I complained to Mr. Johnson that I was much afflicted with melancholy, which was hereditary in our family. . . He advised me to have constant occupation of mind, to take a great deal of exercise, and to live moderately; especially to shun drinking at night. 'Melancholy people,' said he,

'are apt to fly to intemperance, which gives a momentary relief but sinks the soul much lower in misery'" (22 July 63; *LJ* 319). This is advice very similar to Mandeville's suggestions. The conversation continues with Boswell recording his reactions to the hearing of Johnson's own melancholy: "It gave me great relief to talk of my disorder with Mr. Johnson; and when I discovered that he himself was subject to it, I felt that strange satisfaction which human nature feels at the idea of participating distress with others; and the greater person our fellow sufferer is, so much the more good does it do us" (22 July 63; *LJ* 319). Boswell senses himself elevated in this exchange of knowledge, but the effects of learning about Johnson's melancholy at this point in his life are minimal.

He places Johnson in the role of instructor and sees him as a vast source of knowledge and wisdom from which much could be gained. One result is certainly the comfort and inspiration that Boswell gained from a "fellow sufferer" who, despite his illness, manages to be highly productive. Boswell at one point exclaims: "Mr. Johnson filled my mind with so many noble and just sentiments that the Demon of Despondency was driven away" (02 Aug. 63; *LJ* 332). Johnson has the power to create and dissipate the traits that Boswell would garner in his search. Therefore, it is no surprise that he asks Johnson to set him aright: "I then complained to him how little I knew, and mentioned study." Johnson replies to Boswell "I will put you upon a plan," and Boswell asks: "'Will you really take a charge of me?'" (25 June 63; *LJ* 284-5). This relationship is marked by the mentor and pupil dynamic, but

no more so than some of Boswell's earlier relationships, or even than in his current practices. People such as Henry Home, Lord Kames, Hume, and Temple (who will be discussed in the next chapter) are also placed in similar mentor positions. But rather than conclude that Boswell is simply a sot who must imitate and fawn on his betters, it should be noted that Boswell shares this compulsion in the world of ideas as well.

Perhaps this "idol worship" should be reevaluated in terms of Boswell's enthrallment to certain ideals from which, as a result, he transfers that worship to the people whom he sees as embodying them. For example, he strives towards abstractions of "constancy," "morality," and "integrity," not necessarily towards being Grange, Johnson, or Temple. Where one might think that this process is merely a conflation, later in Holland, he differentiates between Johnson's intellect and his social behavior. Boswell clearly identifies and assigns the characteristics to the people who best personify them. In this scenario, he aspires to Johnson's learning while maintaining his own "vivacity." In a "French Memorandum" from Holland, Boswell paints himself as the "sought after socialite." In a truly Boswellian fantasy, he thwarts the conceptual axioms of superficial socialites by a confession that he too is writing a Scots dictionary: "But how taken in are they when they learn that the blockhead and the man of genius are one and the same! How surprised they are when they learn that I am writing a dictionary myself" (24 Feb. 64; *Holl* 162)! This exemplifies Boswell's aim at a united identity, one that incorporates his strong points yet integrates those he

finds in others.[21] Perhaps in light of this inner/outer distinction, Boswell may be seen as something other than an oversimplified sycophant. This paper argues for a more complicated picture of a man whom critics have wrongly reduced to a mere toad.

The purpose of this first chapter has been to unpack Boswell's complicated claim that he is a melancholiac and locate his belief in terms of a search for identity. His psyche seeks ideas that will better his view of himself in an attempt to counteract the fragmenting role melancholia plays in his life. In addition, Boswell's melancholia manifests a psychological process that makes him a more complex character than is usually granted. Even "pro-Boswell critics" also tend to misinterpret him through oversimplifications. Perhaps by looking closely at one critic, this trend can be further examined. Allan Ingram's book, *Boswell's Creative Gloom: A Study of Imagery and Melancholy in the Writings of James Boswell* (1982), is an example of such a misrepresentation. Ingram takes the stance of "critical analysis" (viii) in order to trace the "idea" of melancholy according to Boswell's usage of the term. It seems that Ingram's analysis is more interested in defining his own use of the words "image" and "imagery" rather than the implications of the word "melancholy" itself, though this is in the title (see his Introduction). Ingram believes that Boswell's literary employment of the image of melancholy is an overtly conscious act. This premise would place Boswell in complete control

[21] The impossibility of this task is also mirrored in the reality of Boswell's situation, for he never does get beyond a few notes in the creation of a Scots dictionary. I feel the failure of the project marks the failure of his search for unity.

over his subjectivity, representation, and reception: "When he produces an image he is reaffirming his own identity as Boswell the image-producer, and, the more striking the image, then the more satisfying it is to be Boswell" (45). Ingram does not read Boswell's melancholy symptomatically, and, as a result, the reader is presented with the picture of a bloated fop whose greatest desire is to please himself with puerile imagery. It is difficult to sympathize with an approach that unequivocally accepts one history of melancholic imagery (i.e., Boswell's usage of melancholy to force the belief that he is a genius) rather than attempting to contextualize it in any fashion. This author, whose goal it is to "understand another person's mind," (viii), instead reduces it to no more than a mere narcissistic engine. Macaulay himself could have done no better.

Instead of concentrating upon the semiotics of melancholy, my analysis focuses on Boswell's crisis of subjectivity as a reflection of the rise of the individual and the growing process of self-awareness in the eighteenth century. Throughout this period one can trace this questioning of self-definition whether it be in Hume's scepticism or in Rousseau's naturalism. The trend denotes a complicated notion of identities spinning out of control rather than being simplified and unified through language. Boswell's frustrations with his search for a consistent identity reflect theoretical problems that are still unresolved today. His vacillations between religion and profanity, morality and casuistry, unity and cacophony mark these London years with the stamp of melancholia. His identity still in a state of

growth, Boswell's next stage is to "set" his character. The identity and the character are two aspects of a complex psychological process for Boswell–part of it conscious but most symptomatically unconscious. These two periods in his life in many ways reflect the almost Manichean aspects of his life, only here they are pleasure and study–London and Holland. On his last day in London before setting sail, Boswell offers these poignant words: "I am now upon a less pleasurable but a more rational and lasting plan. Let me pursue it with steadiness and I may be a man of dignity . . . Let me commit myself to the care of my merciful Creator" (04 Aug. 63; *LJ* 333).

Chapter Two
Boswell in Holland, or a Stranger in a Strange Man, 1763-4

"When I am abroad, I will not have such temptations to foolish extravagant conduct; as I will be among Strangers, and so may take what character I chuse, and persist in it." (02 July 63; *Corr* 83)

For Boswell, Holland marks a new beginning. He is acutely aware of the various shortcomings and failings he experienced in London. Now, he feels he has the ability to forge a new identity through the active cultivation of a character. This is the one conscious exertion that can make a difference. Upon his entrance to London in 1762 he remarks: "Since I came up, I have begun to acquire a composed genteel character very different from a rattling uncultivated one which for some time past I have been fond of. I have discovered that we may be in some degree whatever character we choose. Besides, practice forms a man to anything" (21 Nov. 62; *LJ* 47). Clearly, for Boswell, character functions as Shaftesbury believes and can be cultivated by study. Practice makes perfect, and Boswell's temperament and journal allow him a structured form of self-regulation. He knows that his character is an aspect of his identity he can effect. To understand his position on character formation one need simply recall his famous statement: "As a lady adjusts her dress before the mirror, a man adjusts his character by looking in his journal" (*Life of Johnson* III:228). The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how even though Boswell's external trappings may change, the process by which he attempts to define himself remains constant. Some critics

see Boswell's melancholy in Holland as a result of the "psychic depletion in which his year in London had quite naturally resulted" (Morris 208). I see it more as the single constant throughout his life. He concretizes conceptualizations of public and private spheres which are directly effected by his melancholia. In order to project a calm, *retenu* façade, he needs to reinforce the stability of his character. In her discussion of autobiography, Felicity Nussbaum defines certain parameters for establishing character reference points. She states: "Public and private become increasingly distinct naturalized categories, their reconciliation available in the elusive 'truth' of character" (Nussbaum 103). However, Nussbaum also believes that Boswell patterns himself after literary analogues but to a different end: they serve to 'make meaning' from his daily jottings" (Nussbaum 104). She attempts to make this pattern stand for all of Boswell's character development. In fact, however, Boswell sometimes relies upon literary models but never as a constant structure. The few times he does engage these models (Macheath, for example), they seem to function no differently from the "real" people he emulates. Therefore, Nussbaum misses the point, especially in reading Boswell's quest for a "unified life" (Nussbaum 104). He is not recording these "daily jottings" to prove there is a united self he can read in a journal but rather to rectify patterns that fragment his sense of self. Boswell's journals serve as a means to "stabilize the self" (Manning 129), not as evidence of a unified self.

Nussbaum also attempts to graft questions of gender onto Boswell's problems of identity and character. While it is true, for Boswell, that to have a successful sense of self is to be "manly," it is only insofar as the idols he chooses are men. I do not believe this to be evidence of an anxiety towards women authors, as Nussbaum claims: "Boswell seems to seek sufficiently 'manly' self-representation in an attempt to triumph in the newly intensified contest against women for narrative authority over the minute particulars of private experience" (Nussbaum xx). Boswell supposedly competes with women in order to be considered a better journalist or diarist. Not only do I find this argument wholly unsubstantiated, it is also highly anachronistic. Nussbaum uses Hester Thrale and Fanny Burney as examples of contemporary diarists, but how would Boswell have knowledge of these fellow journalists when their diaries were yet to be published? Why would Boswell's complete silence in regard to women's journalizing indicate the presence of a literary anxiety? In addition, Nussbaum's reading of Boswell, like Ingram's, leads to an oversimplified portrait. She divides Boswell's subjectivity into two neat sections, public and private: "'Self,' then, splits between what may be surveyed and what must be hidden from view. In short, in the early memoranda and journals, Boswell attempts to confine his various public and private subject positions to two: the public as a construct, and the private as an "essential core that may secretly change" (Nussbaum 110). This is partially true, but highlights the "essential" inner self to be more "true" than the public self. Her argument also sets up a evaluative distinction

between Boswell's conscious public and private concepts of identity, which does not entertain the possibility for a symptomatic reading. In this instance, however, Boswell's desire to forge a character is very conscious as is his awareness of his public and private selves. Manning observes this phenomenon of journal writing: "Any eighteenth-century writer expressing melancholy was doubly conscious of its public and private dimensions: in Boswell's journals its presence focuses the problems of integrating life and writing with the degree of intimacy that his record tries to achieve" (126). Perhaps given these ideas, a few more words on Boswell's exposure to contemporaneous theories of "character" is necessary.

Under Construction: Or, The Quest for Character

"For such is the inequality of our corporal to our intellectual faculties, that we contrive in minutes what we execute in years . . ."

–Johnson (*Works* III; 41).

In this thesis I have quoted Nicholas Rowe's translation of La Bruyère's *Les Caractères de Théophraste traduits du grec, avec les Caractères ou les Mœurs de ce siècle* (1688). Jean de La Bruyère translated a collection of vignettes written by the Greek philosopher, Theophrastus. His text breaks humanity into certain "types," and each is listed and marked accordingly. These types have a serious impact on the later seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries. The series of translations and borrowings testify to this,[22] especially La Bruyère, who not only translated Theophrastus but also added his "Characters of the Present Age." This indicates that people both read Theophrastus and updated his characterizations in order to make the texts fresh and applicable to the life they saw around them. These templates of characters could be seen to lead to certain cultural institutions.[23] For certain they could be viewed as attributes and selves to which one should aspire, or as J. W. Smeed states: "The 'character' is the relish in the sandwich, the entertainment between two slices of instruction" (67). Therefore, these exemplary, unified characterizations created disturbances for those who read them literally and wanted their own characters to match the ones they read. Felicity Nussbaum's assessment of its impact seems accurate. Though she states that the late eighteenth century was slowly turning against the "Theophrastian" conceptualizations of a united identity, that model's effects were still widespread: "When the grid of the Theophrastan character is laid over the lived experience of real men and women of the eighteenth century, the paradigm of the fully intelligible and nicely rounded identity that it depends on breaks down" (Nussbaum 107). The outcome is that we see people

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[22] Though still heavily moralistic, these characters take on an additional layer when they interact with the social realm: "This movement away from the purely moral–let alone theological–towards the social brings us to a central question regarding the 'characters' in the 18th c periodicals" (Smeed 72). This filtering and mutating of the role of the "character" could not have taken place if not for its widespread use in publications such as the *Spectator papers*.

[23] One could certainly make a case for these "character" sketches being the predecessors of the rise of the eighteenth-century "courtesy books." Both function as guides for personal development and decorum.

such as Boswell trying to eliminate disparate elements from their lives and writings. For Boswell this struggle "issues from a complex essence within the self, one that is continually trying to unify its disparate identity elements" (Labbie 53). This dynamic typifies Boswell's Holland years. He recognizes on a conscious level that he can influence the projection of his external/public character (which could also repair his inner/private one). Thus the majority of his mental energy is directed back upon himself in an attempt to streamline his personality. His oscillations in London are a constant source of annoyance to him, especially since they represent his ultimate failure. Manning observes Boswell's frustrations: "Attempting to 'fix' himself in a character, Boswell cannot accept that self may be composed of contradictory elements, and is not something uniform or single, that the social and private may be continuous with one another without becoming the same thing" (140). Hence, Boswell must become his own regulatory agent. He does not have the support-group that London offered, and really, in terms of character development, he is the only one who can change it. His ongoing melancholia with respect to his lost unified identity still persists, which is why he relies upon the advice and counseling offered through his correspondences, especially with Temple. But here, he is primarily on his own.

One very interesting aspect of these solitary Holland years is Boswell's writing of his Memoranda. These are always written in the morning and survey his actions of the previous day. One can see Boswell trying to invoke the worlds of Johnson in his messages to himself: "This serious and impartial

retrospect of our conduct is indisputably necessary to the confirmation or recovery of virtue, and is therefore, recommended under the name of self-examination, by divines, as the first act previous to repentance" (*Works* III; 44). Here, in these private messages, he resorts to the usage of the imperative. No other place is Boswell's self-regulation so overt. He enacts a very sentimental *modus operandi,* a principle reminiscent of "sensibility." Smith depicts this *spaltung* as follows: "When I endeavour to examine my own conduct, when I endeavour to pass sentence upon it, and either to approve or condemn it, it is evident that, in all such cases, I divide myself, as it were, into two persons; and that I, examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of" (III.i.6; 113). Also, Smith continues, "And in the same manner we either approve or disapprove of our own conduct according as we feel that when we place ourselves in the situation of another man and view it, as it were, with his eyes and from his station, we either can or cannot entirely enter into and sympathize with the sentiments and motives which influenced it" (III.i.1; 109). This seems to be the operative association for Boswell at this time–he needs to "adjust his character," and only by observing it himself is he able to execute this aim. Whether it is the combination of the reaction to a new setting or simply a desire to determine his own character through an act of

will,[24] Boswell holds to his use of the imperative throughout these years. By this method of private self-policing he feels he can alter his public self: "For Boswell, then, character is a public display of consistency, a consistency confirmed by others. Thus, the struggles among various 'selves' and between private and public representations of self dramatize the shifting planes of discourse about the self, and the journal form allows for gaps in the positioning of the individual in spite of Boswell's putting in place a 'free' subject who can become a public commodity" (Nussbaum 109). After trying many different models in London, Boswell fails to find the right one. In Holland perhaps he realizes that change must come from within. For the period of September and October, Boswell goes along quite well enough, seeing himself in the second person: "Yesterday you did not at all keep to rules as you ought to do." So here we see an example of how in the absence of mentor figures or instructional figures, Boswell chooses to use his journal to speak to himself and guide his actions and activities. Further on in his daily memorandum, Boswell writes: "Be always candid to censure in your mems, and you'll amend" (31 Oct. 63; *Holl* 56). He exults in reading his correspondence and finds succor in Johnson's *Ramblers*. Indeed, it seems that they speak particularly to Boswell: "He that would govern his actions by the laws of virtue, must regulate his thoughts by those of reason. . . and

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[24] Enforcement of character by the enacting of the will is still very much within Burton's tradition: "*Will*, is the other power of the *rational soul, which covets or avoids such things as have been before judged and apprehended by the understanding.* If good, it approves; if evil, it abhors it: so that the object is either good or evil" (I:146).

remember that the pleasures of fancy, and the emotions of desire are more dangerous as they are more hidden . . ." (*Works* III; 46). Early on in Holland Boswell has much to be proud of: "You felt high satisfaction at looking back on two months spent in study and in propriety. You found real satisfaction in religion and piety. You determined never to relax in your warfare; and always to have a consistent conduct, and by rehearsing to prepare for real life" (06 Nov. 63; *Holl* 61). The contrast between his time in London versus his present life in Holland is not lost upon Boswell.

However, within a week of this October memorandum, his rigidity in self-regulation shows some flexibility. As seen in London, Boswell often falls prey to his own rationalizing sophistry. He begins to doubt his ability to be Boswell, *juge de lui-même:* "You are not then to judge of yourself. You are to be patient." He also tells himself that "you deal too hardly with yourself at times" (06 Nov. 63; *Holl* 61)–this is an astonishing remark considering his past behavior. Boswell is able to remind himself of his own shortcomings, but it is as if these chidings did not have the same power coming from him. One reads in La Bruyère, "Wise conduct turns upon two Axis's, the past and the future: He who has a faithful Memory and great Foresight, is out of danger of censuring in others those faults he may have been guilty of himself; or condemning an Action which in a parallel case, and in like circumstances, would be impossible for him to avoid" (Rowe's translation of La Bruyère II; 276). However, this dynamic is entirely internalized in Boswell. He has been in Holland only a few months, but already he knows that his grasp on his

"new character" is tenuous. His reminders are written with increased frequency: "This day show that you are Boswell, a true soldier. Take your post. Shake off sloth and spleen, and just proceed. Nobody knows your conflicts. Be fixed as Christian, and shun vice. Go not to Amsterdam" (22 March 64; *Holl* 92).[25] It is ironic that Boswell uses military imagery to buttress his self-esteem in light of his failure to attain a posting in the London Guards. Compared to the sprawling London metropolis, Utrecht was a relatively small and conservative town, where his libidinous antics would certainly have drawn too much attention. Like his attitude towards religion, Boswell's fear of punishment prevents his transgression. He tells himself to wait for marriage to indulge this side of his self: "Reserve for wife except some Maintenon occur" (23 March 64; *Holl* 93). Pottle tells us a "Maintenon" is a mistress of a superior kind. Boswell's structuring of his hierarchy of moral decisions is often based on class assumptions. Put in its best light, his differentiations can be seen as his move towards moderation; he knows himself well enough to know that he will not be able to wait until marriage, and thus a "high" class liaison should not be out of the question. Boswell's exception perversely restructures a similar idea noted by Cheyne: "There is no surer maxim . . . than that Diseases are cured by the contrary or opposite methods to that which produc'd them. If nervous disorders are the diseases to the wealthy, the voluptuous, and the lazy . . . and are mostly produc'd, and always aggravated and increased, by luxury and intemperance . . . there needs no great depth of

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[25] In going to Amsterdam, Boswell would be in search of a prostitute.

penetration to find out that temperance and abstinence is necessary towards their cure" (158-9). Boswell knows that he cannot accomplish his goals on his own, and frankly, this Holland period is as close to moderation as he will ever come. Perhaps sensing his inability to oversee his actions and knowing he is far from any of his close friends prompts Boswell in these years more than any other to rely upon the moral ministrations of his dear friend, William Temple.

His Body is *not* a Temple

To you, my friend, I fear not to disclose
My real sorrows or my fancied woes;
For you can all my dreary stories hear,
Nor make me fretful by a galling sneer.
To you, whom from my earliest youth I've known,
Not ev'n my faults am I asham'd to own.
Doom'd to a life of sadness from my birth,
I live a weary stranger on the earth;
In vain I struggle to escape my doom;
In vain I struggle to be free from gloom.

- Poem addressed to Temple, 15 March 64

The specific roles each friend plays in Boswell's life have already been discussed. However, William Johnson Temple can be said to hold a very

unique position in Boswell's life. Unlike Johnson, Grange, Erskine, and Dempster, Temple is allowed full access to Boswell's private self: he calls him "my great comfort in all difficulties" (30 June 63; *LJ* 286). Every other friend receives the partial disclosure–none ever seeing the entirety that is Boswell. This is not so with Temple. He is Boswell's mentor, advisor, confidant, friend, and, above all, comforter. Where Grange is Boswell's Scottish touchstone, Temple is his character touchstone, ever guiding, chiding and confiding. Temple is the mirror in which Boswell gazes to understand himself better:

> I was rational and composed, yet lively and entertaining. I had a good opinion of myself, and I could perceive my good friend Temple much satisfied with me. Could I but fix myself in such a character and preserve it uniformly, I should be exceedingly happy. I hope to do so and to attain a constancy and dignity without which I can never be satisfied, as I have these ideas strong and pride myself in thinking *that my natural character is that of dignity*. My friend Temple is very good in consoling me by saying that I may be such a man, and that people will say, 'Mr. Boswell is quite altered from the dissipated, inconstant fellow that he was. He is now a reserved, grave sort of man. But indeed that was his real character; and he only deviated into these eccentric paths for a while.' Well, then, let me see if I have resolution enough to bring that about. (13 May 63; *LJ* 258 emphasis mine)

his station–advice that echoes his own father, Lord Auchinleck. In order to aid his identity formation, Boswell shares all information concerning his sexual exploits with Temple. Having caught the clap already, Boswell knows he is at risk when he engages in unprotected sex. Despite this, he does it anyway and has a rendezvous in the park with a prostitute. The next day he is fearful and writes in the memorandum: "... Tell Temple your risk, and make him lay restrictions upon you never to have any connection without a permission from him, as you really may get into sad scrapes. . ." (17 May 63; *LJ* 262 n.7). In writing this, Boswell attempts to remove agency from himself and give it to Temple, which indicates the extent to which Boswell views his friends as both moral guides and parental figures. Because he does not have the willpower to restrain himself, he must be put under the surveillance of someone else close to him. One often wonders how Boswell is able to divulge such gross details and overt examples of his inconstancy to someone whom he regards as an advisor. Indeed this desire to absorb intimate details is often a criticism leveled against him, especially with respect to Johnson.[26] Perhaps, if one looks at Boswell in light of his melancholia, this is not so unusual. Freud remarks on this phenomenon of the melancholiac: "[s]hame before others, which would characterize this condition above everything, is lacking in him. . ." (*Metapsych.* 168).Certainly Freud's insight provides insight into

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[26] Here I am thinking of the passages in *The Life of Johnson* where Boswell prompts Johnson to confess various fantasies and beliefs (May 1776, 10 April 1778 etc).

Boswell's character and highlights a trend in his life. Temple seems to take Boswell's excessively frank nature in stride and, as a serene clergyman, often functions as its counterpoint.

Temple serves as another possible identification for Boswell's character. As the epitome of constancy, he guides Boswell through example and advice: "I then passed all the day with Temple, who advised me by all means to acquire habits of study and self-command, and then I will be happy in myself and respected by others" (03 July 63; *LJ* 288). Boswell knows this to be the case and freely admits to his friend: "The longer I talk to you in this way, so much the better will it be for me" (14-5 July 63; *Letters* I: 21). Temple intercedes in these Holland years to offer Boswell an outlet for frustration and exasperation at foreign culture. Boswell sees himself and his character in a state of constant flux. At times it seems as if he needs to lash out in order to control himself. But he must resort to correspondence since there is no one in Utrecht to aid him in this manner. This process often seems to be cathartic in and of itself, as if he could predict Temple's response in advance. Perhaps this is a direct reflection of his perception of Temple's constancy of character. At one point, he writes to Temple: "Pray are you subject to this mutability which ruins me? . . . My ideas alter above all with respect to my own character. Sometimes I think myself good for nothing, and sometimes the finest fellow in the world. You know I went abroad determined to attain a composed, learned and virtuous character . . . Rouse me to ardour, my friend. Impart to me a portion of your calm firmness" (17 April 64; *Holl* 223). This letter--part

apostrophe, part rhetorical questioning--begs a response from Temple that Boswell himself could write. The fact that the information comes from an external source–namely Temple–gives it strength. Temple's eventual responses intend to soothe and guide: "But, my dear Boswell, if you pay any regard to your own character, if you have any affection for me, I beg you may endeavour to act a part more becoming yourself...Remember your resolutions before we parted, allow reason to reassume her dominion, think of Johnson, and be again a man" (13). Strong reproof indeed! Temple turns Boswell's own advice against melancholy back at him and gives him a stern dressing down. He makes claims to Boswell based on his own melancholy, though tempered with a positive outcome: "Allow me in my turn to prescribe the same regimen to you (which I have a better right to do, having experienced its effects), and I make no doubt of receiving in a very short time a letter very different from your last" (13). During the Utrecht years, Temple functions as Boswell's confidant and instructor. His position as such is unchallenged. His words trigger in Boswell a moment of self-perception which serves as an antidote to his doldrums. This effect is related in Boswell's summary of Temple's letter to Grange: "I received a letter from Temple imputing my misery to idleness and beseeching me to act a part worthy of a Man" (Sept. 63; *Corr* 113). This, in combination with finding some of Johnson's *Ramblers*, serves to fortify Boswell's sense of self: "I began to think that I had no title to shelter myself for blame under the excuse of Madness which was perhaps the suggestion of an idle Imagination" (*Corr* 113). Perhaps he is thinking of

Rambler 47: "The safe and general antidote against sorrow, is employment" (*Works* III; 257)[27]. His next letter to Temple reveals good advice can have positive results: "Your letter gave my mind a proper direction. Mr. Johnson confirmed and carried me on" (23 Sept. 63; *Holl* 27). This letter marks a course that will follow Boswell throughout his life. He says later in his letter to Grange that this "advice" gives him newfound vigor: "Thus prepared I resolutely determined to return to Utrecht to fix myself down to a regular plan and to persist with firmness and spirit and combat the foul fiend." He sounds battle-ready and steels himself against his foe, and believes that "Melancholy can be got the better of" (23 Sept. 63; *Corr* 114). Furthermore, there are times when Boswell feels he can defeat his foe, vanquish it for good. But he finds it necessary to use military imagery to do so: "Indeed my friend, it was the crisis of my distemper. I had allways [sic] yielded to spleen as to an invincible foe. He at last pushed the oppression of a Conqueror so hard that I turned upon him and fairly obtained a victory" (20 Jan. 64; *Corr* 117).[28] The correspondence with both Temple and Grange highlights how melancholy is a real presence in Boswell's life. Once again to point to the difference between his friends, Boswell's companion Dempster describes spleen as "a bullying boy

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[27] The need for mental employment is a favorite topic of Johnson's. He later returns to it in *Rambler* 85: "It is necessary to that perfection of which our present state is capable, that the mind and body should be both kept in action; that neither the faculties of one nor the other be suffered to grow lax or torpid for want of use; that neither health be purchased by voluntary submission to ignorance, nor knowledge cultivated at the expense of that health..." (*Works* IV, 84).

[28] The military imagery also calls to mind the famous passage in the *Life of Johnson* where Boswell likens Johnson's mind to that of a combatant in the Colisæum at Rome, "like a mighty gladiator, [who] combated those apprehensions." (27 Oct. 69). Clearly for Boswell, the psyche is a battlefield.

at school: insupportable till he is once heartily thrashed, and then for ever after your humble servant" (29 Oct. 63; *Holl* 18). Clearly, Dempster does not really understand the depth of Boswell's melancholy, which is one reason why he and Boswell cannot be more intimate. Boswell needs to give and receive advice on how to thwart these bouts of melancholy. He can often cite what needs to be done to banish it; however, the execution of that advice eludes him. In one letter, he counsels Grange on how to succeed against melancholy: "The great point is not to brood over the suggestions of a dreary disposition. Reasoning cannot remove them. But employment will; therefore at the time that all employments seem insipid, let the Antiquarian force himself to do something briskly and his rusty ideas will vanish" (20 Jan. 64; *Corr* 117-8). With Temple, Boswell's victories are somewhat mitigated. He vows: "I will not allow myself the vanity of being melancholy." However, he still needs Temple to support him: "I beg to hear from you without delay. Encourage me, and bid me conceal my distress" (23 March 64; *Holl* 195-6). Certainly Boswell's feelings towards his distemper are ambivalent. However, his need to discuss it with his intimate friends predominates.

These Holland years demonstrate Boswell's most articulate performances of the conflict within his psyche. To develop character is to unify his sense of self. Though this may not be his conscious goal, to eliminate all non-conforming aspects of his imagined, moral, dignified self, he differentiates the varying selves symptomatically. The evocation of his

"*retenu*" self against the horrors of the "*etourdi*" [29] self marks the conflict of character he experiences in his time in Utrecht and the Continent. The battleground is Boswell, and the field notes are the memoranda: "The memoranda declare an increasingly rigid bifurcation between a public and private identity in which the *retenu* self cannot tolerate its opposite, the fluctuating *etourdi*" (Nussbaum xx). To be *retenu* is to be dignified, removed, wise–very much the public persona, as Nussbaum states. It is a point of pride for Boswell to feel removed from a scene. On several occasions he remarks: "If you persist in this retenu, you'll be quite the man of fashion" (15 Feb. 64; *Holl* 148). The main reason I believe Boswell to be his most successful at this point is because he inhabits the French environments of the Utrecht upper class. Surely, his *retenu* is contingent upon his inability to communicate freely in French. He himself admits that using a foreign language really allows him to be *retenu*: "You do right never to speak of a thing till long after; and if you speak only in French, you'll learn *retenue*, for you don't blab in French . . ." (05 Feb. 64; *Holl* 137). His *langue maternelle* leads him astray: "You stayed tea with Rose, and talked of madness and spleen and lying abed; you yielded too much to indolence. Resolve no more English speaking." (15 March 64; *Holl* 181). Whether he refers to indolence, *etourdi* or dissipation, these words all signify a fragmented sense of self. The word "dissipation," a

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[29] *Étourdi* is a kind of absentmindedness, scatterbrained; dissipation is a lack of concentration (*OED*).

staple of the Boswellian vocabulary, has the ability to disrupt his imagination,[30] his attempts to solidify a character, and his peace of mind:

> I have of late been rather too dissipated. It is a very unhappy situation of mind. It debases the soul; deprives it of sollid [sic] Enjoyment, and feeds it only with frivolous amusement. And yet a Man on whom the gloomy Dæmon of Melancholy takes strong effect is often glad to fly to Dissipation for relief. This is so much my case, and when groaning under the pressure of dark despair, I give up all my high ideas of propriety and of dignity and am glad to compound for humble ease and undistinguished forgetfulness of care. (17 May 63; *Corr* 73)

Here Boswell uses "dissipation" as an antidote, but it also seems to function more as a result. He propounds a teleological argument when he believes that dissipation can be both a result and a palliative for melancholy. In reality it is dissipation and "melancholy" which become symptomatic self-diagnoses of his true melancholia. In a different letter to Grange, he articulates similar connections between melancholy and dissipation: "I wish from my heart that I may be able to make myself a Man, and to become steady and sensible in my Conduct. But alas, this miserable melancholy is allways weighing me down, and rendering me indifferent to all pursuits" (30 June 63; *Corr* 81). His ability to control his moods, like his character, often breaks down in his private correspondence. He reveals much more of his "true self" than his public

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[30] One evening when out with Temple he remarks: "We endeavoured to work our minds into the frame of the Spectator's, but we could not. We were both too dissipated" (12 Apr. 63; *LJ* 240).

persona. Even his correspondence with Zélide does not take this close personal tone–he adopts a "public" persona of equanimity. In a letter to her, he paints a studied picture of himself: "You know I am a man of form, a man who says to himself, Thus will I act, and acts accordingly. In short, a man subjected to discipline, who has his orders for his conduct during the day with as much exactness as any soldier in any service. And who gives these orders? I give them. Boswell when cool and sedate fixes rules for Boswell to live by in the common course of life, when perhaps Boswell might be dissipated and forget the distinctions between right and wrong, between propriety and impropriety . . ." (09 July 64; *Letters* I: 45-6). The militaristic overstatements in this letter would probably ring a little hollow for someone as intelligent as Belle de Zuylen, whose initial interactions with Boswell would show the empirical evidence to contradict Boswell's claims. He also depicts himself as her stern "Cato,"[31] the one to whom she can confess all her troubles. Boswell attempts to construct another mentor relationship which, in typical Boswell style, ultimately undermines itself, and instead, Zélide ends up listening to his outpourings. Of course, for both of them, in the end, the silence is all that speaks on either side of their eroded correspondence. In many ways, Zélide embodies Boswell's feelings towards Utrecht in that one can see his first real attempt and success at holding to a character he desired, and then of its inevitable loss amidst the chaos.

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[31] Cato, the Stoic.

These Holland years for Boswell are an admixture of success and failure, character development and extreme melancholy. Pottle notes that Boswell's writings are "the record of a soul in torment: groaning, wailing, repining, but also of a soul struggling and resisting with every resource in its power" (*Holl* xiii). This is Boswell–existing is a struggle of selves every minute of the day. The melancholia that disrupts his daily life can be likened here to Cassian's words on acedia, the Medieval manifestation of the distemper. In this case, "The afflicted . . . became restless; he complained that his situation was no longer spiritually fruitful and that he was useless in it; and he thought that he would never be well unless he left the place. In his continuing restlessness, time seemed to pass very slowly; he yearned for company; and he considered seeking solace in sleep" (Quoted in Jackson 67). This form of restlessness, whether one calls it acedia or melancholia, is symptomatic of an inner crisis of subjectivity–an existential quandary of selfhood. Pottle attributes Boswell's melancholia to a form of thwarted aspirations, a "frustration of his overweening ambition by any course of life...." He continues to paraphrase Boswell: "Be good, be prudent, be sober, be reserved, be industrious, and you'll be happy, said his father; and he copied it down and said it over and over to himself" (*Holl* xiv). Pottle believes that this was supposed to lead Boswell to become a "Great man," but the path never seemed very direct. Although Boswell's frustration must be a part of Boswell's psychological makeup, it does not explain his melancholia. Not becoming the "Great man" he felt he deserved to be is the result of a more

complex psychological interplay than frustrated ambition leads one to believe. Perhaps Boswell does not reach his greatness because inherently he knows that he himself idolizes great men and has to subsequently overlook faults that he himself shares with them. But during these years, frustrated ambition does not account for all the various manifestations of his melancholia. He has been allowed his "Grand Tour" and plans to survey the Continental European courts. Not surprisingly these travels will allow him further opportunities to adopt different personæ, mold a new character (such as Boswell, Baron d'Auchinleck) depending on the country through which he travels. Thus Boswell remarks upon leaving Holland: "I shall ever reverence Utrecht, for it was there that I first began to act upon steady and manly principles. I am allready [sic] not a little altered. But, altered for the better . . . last winter I was the ardent votary of pleasure, a gay sceptic who never looked beyond the present hour, a heroe and Philosopher in Dissipation and Vice. Now I am all devoted to Prudence and to Morality" (20 Jan. 64; *Corr* 119).

Conclusive Musings on the Boswellian Ego?

The cultural phenomenon of the melancholy temperament in the eighteenth century provoked ontological and epistemological issues of subjectivity. Primarily seen as an affectation of the leisured upper-classes, "melancholy" found its way into the imagery, literature and psyches of innumerable writers, statesmen, and ordinary people. The problem arises, however, of where one differentiates between what became fashionable melancholy and what is now known as melancholia the psychosis. Frequently today critics are quick to assign the label of "melancholy" to writers at the expense of a complex, and at times tragic symptomalogy of melancholia. James Boswell is one of these literary-historical victims. The intricate manifestations of melancholia in his life and writings form a litmus for corresponding events in both the history of science and medicine and psychological inroads into conceptualizations of subjectivity in the eighteenth century. In order to frame this discussion, I have attempted to position the historical specificity of melancholia in relation to Boswell's writings and thought. As well, contemporary eighteenth-century views on formulations of ontology expounded by thinkers such as Hume, Shaftesbury, and Smith were explored to explain possible causal connections to Boswell's personal crisis of subjectivity. This paper's trajectory aimed at a rereading of Boswell's subjectivity in light of his self-diagnostic claims of melancholia. The issue remains not one of believing Boswell's claims: it is impossible to know that with perfect certainty. More to the point, Boswell's *belief* that he did suffer

from this affliction should never be disregarded. This tenet, taken in tandem with the copious evidence he provides in his journals and correspondence, supplies ample inductive material from which a more accurate conclusion regarding the effects and possible nosology of James Boswell's melancholia can be drawn.

We have seen how Boswell's crisis of subjectivity results in a form of melancholia. His inability to adhere to any consistent characteristic denotes a hyper-awareness and self-reflexivity that few people possess. This state is exacerbated by his meticulous recording of his day-to-day life. When Boswell is the subject of Boswell's vision (and pen), no detail is too obscure, no fact too insignificant. As a result, the two periods I have selected delineate this dichotomy of self that manifests itself in Boswell's writings and interactions with other people. Boswell's reliance upon others, whether they be personæ, companions, or friends, is the consistent aspect that unites his experience. Despite the two extremes to which Boswell tends–and which the years in London and Holland represent–his description of his melancholic symptoms remains constant. No matter what identity or "character" Boswell exhibits, the depiction of his suffering is consistent throughout.

One can label James Boswell many things, not all of which would be flattering. Certainly critics throughout literary history have done so. Some of these appellations may even be justified. However, my desire in this essay was to expose certain preconceptions of affected melancholy as both unjust and unsupported. I believe there exists more compelling evidence for

Boswell's melancholia than critics have hitherto allowed. Perhaps exploring Boswell's claims in light of varying ideas of melancholy from Plato to Ficino, Burton to Cheyne, and eighteenth-century philosophies has provided the reader with a broader, more rounded view of one man's experience. Perhaps again, such a study makes it more difficult than ever to fully ascertain Boswell's difficulties with both his identity and character. In the end, though, we *can* draw one conclusion: understanding James Boswell is certainly no more confounding for the modern reader than it was for Boswell himself.

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