



Boswell's Presumptuous Task: The Making of the Life of Dr. Johnson

Adam Sisman

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A heroic, brilliantly detailed portrait of the biographer as artist.

James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* is the most celebrated of all biographies, acknowledged as one of the greatest and most entertaining books in the English language. Yet Boswell himself was regarded by his contemporaries as a man of no judgment and condemned by posterity as a lecher and a drunk. How could such a fool have written such a book?

Boswell's "presumptuous task" was his biography of Johnson. Adam Sisman traces the friendship between Boswell and his great mentor, one of the most unlikely pairings in literature, and provides a fascinating and original account of Boswell's seven-year struggle to write the *Life* following Johnson's death in 1784. At the time, Boswell was trying -- and failing -- to make his mark in the world: desperate for money; debilitated by drink; torn between his duties at home and the lure of London; tormented by rival biographers; often embarrassed, humiliated and depressed. *Boswell's Presumptuous Task* shows movingly how a man who failed in almost everything else produced a masterpiece.

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