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London Journal 1762-1763 (Penguin Modern Classics)



PENGUIN CLASSICS

JAMES BOSWELL

London Journal 1762-1763



Synopsis

Edinburgh-born James Boswell, at twenty-two, kept a daily diary of his eventful second stay in London from 1762 to 1763. This journal, not discovered for more than 150 years, is a deft, frank and artful record of adventures ranging from his vividly recounted love affair with a Covent Garden actress to his first amusingly bruising meeting with Samuel Johnson, to whom Boswell would later become both friend and biographer. The London Journal 1762-63 is a witty, incisive and compellingly candid testament to Boswell's prolific talents.

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Customer Reviews

James Boswell, twenty-two year old Edinburgh gentleman, kept a daily diary of adventurous stay in London from 1762 to 1763. Unknown for 150 years, the journal is a witty and detailed account of his adventures in the theaters, coffee-houses, and salons of Georgian London. His entries provide endless entertainment, and present a picture of London life that is vibrant and quite frequently shocking. Boswell recounts, among other things, his first meeting with Samuel Johnson, and his many visits to the theater, where he saw and came to know the great David Garrick, and his

experiences with whores. Most will approach the journals from familiarity with Boswell's life of Johnson, and there are many interesting entries regarding Johnson in the journals, including their first meeting. "I drank tea at Davie's in Russell Street and about seven came in the great Mr. Samuel Johnson, whom I have so long wished to see. Mr. Davies introduced me to him. As I knew his mortal antipathy to the Scotch, I cried to Davies 'Don't tell where I come from.' However he said From Scotland. Mr. Johnson [,] said I [,] indeed I come from Scotland, but I cannot help it. 'Sir' replied he [,] 'That I find is what a great many of your countrymen cannot help.' " (Monday 16 May 1763) Boswell, who came to know the actor, saw David Garrick in King Lear: "I went to Drury Lane & saw Mr. Garrick play King Lear. So very high is his reputation even after playing so long, that the pit was full in ten minutes after four, altho' the play did not begin until half an hour after Six. ... Mr Garrick gave me the most perfect satisfaction. I was fully moved & shed abundance of tears." (Thursday 12 May 1763) A dirty story: "I toyed with her. Yet I was not inspired by Venus.

James Boswell (1740-95) was excited to be in London on his second long visit to the city. He had briefly stayed in London in 1760 only to return in November, 1762. He would leave for legal studies in Utrecht Holland in August 1763. Boswell was a college graduate but at twenty years old was melancholic and adrift as he considered his future career. His father who was a wealthy and well respected Scottish laird wanted James, his oldest son, to enter the legal profession. While Boswell would eventually become a lawyer he wanted to spend time on the streets of London. During his second sojourn in the city the young Boswell wanted to:

- a. Obtain an officer's commission in a British Guards regiment which would ensure his being posted in urban London.
- b. Meet famous persons in literature and politics. Boswell accomplished this goal by becoming acquainted with Dr. Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, Sir Joshua Reynolds and many others. Boswell would win literary immortality with the 1791 publication of his greatest work "The Life of Dr. Samuel Johnson."
- c. Enjoy various amours with well born women. Though he did have wealthy girlfriends he also resorted to sex with prostitutes. Boswell was ill with gonorrhoea for five months during his London residence.
- d. Boswell wished to exert his budding literary chops. During this London stay he managed to publish a series of letters between himself and his Scottish friend Erskine. Boswell would go on to Utrecht, become a lawyer, marry well and make several visits to London to see Dr. Johnson and enjoy urban living. He is one of the geniuses of the art of biography. I enjoyed his journal in which he frankly admits his sinful behavior, his quest for God's forgiveness and his many exploits in the Georgian city.

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