

## **The Guys Behind Me: “A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds’s”**

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When I offered to read this essay before the club I promised myself several satisfactions in doing so. The first was that of congratulating the Secretary if he penetrated the opacity of my title, which I thought he just might do. (I am still trying to decide whether his guess of the “guys and braces” from “Two Years Before the Mast” was inspired or desperate!) I hope now to see him strike his head and smile when I, quite literally, throw light on it.

The guys behind me and the President are right in front of you, and they may well have been before the Club in that sense since 1927! That was the year, according to Stephen Jay, that Charles Evans donated this engraving to the Club. This Charles Evans was sometime Librarian of the Indianapolis Public Library, a prolific bibliographer, and, as Steven put it, “the spark that lit our Literary Club flame.” He bought this engraving in London in 1877.

Discovering Steven’s very fine essay on the Club website, an essay which he delivered 4 years before I was voted into the club, was an unexpected satisfaction, and I have relied on it in some of what follows. His emphasis, however, was on the engraving itself and on the rise of Literary Clubs in America, especially this one. Mine will be on the guys in the engraving, their lives, the connections among them, and, especially, their language, spoken and written.

Here is copy of the engraving, “A Literary party at Sir Joshua Reynolds’s,” which you can actually see.

These are not, of course, “guys,” but gentlemen, literate, discerning, articulate, and accomplished gentlemen, men of consequence, celebrated rather than celebrities, and chosen, like us, by one another as worthy of one another’s company.

They are, moreover, behind me in another sense, in that I spent my academic career teaching, researching, and publishing on their writings and lives. Rejoining their company was the main pleasure I promised myself in preparing this essay; I trust some of you will take some pleasure in learning more about them, our predecessors. They constitute a remarkable group, assembled for a noble purpose, on a regularly scheduled occasion—the discussion of books, events, and ideas. So, in that sense, they are also the guys behind *us!*

The oil painting of 1848 on which our engraving is based has apparently disappeared—Steven Jay searched for it with much perseverance and ingenuity, but no luck. I have poked around some too, to no avail. [I suspect, as he did, that it might still turn up in the papers of James Prior, who wrote biographies of Burke and Goldsmith, and must have been a descendant of the poet Matthew Prior, whose “Life” Johnson wrote.]

As you can see from the engraving, it is a splendid example of a “Conversation Piece,” an informal group portrait very popular in Britain in the Eighteenth century. I have never seen any other Conversation Piece in which the conversation is so vivid you can almost hear figures in it speaking. It is my purpose this evening to use extracts from the letters, writings and publications of the guys in it to do just that, thereby entering into, even from this distance in time and space, their fine minds and good company.

I must first dispose of a few small bits of pedantry, knowing full well that pedantry is inimical to both conversation and good company. The engraving you have in your hands is an earlier version than the one that hangs on our wall—because I could get a clearer copy of it. And, as its title “A Literary Party at Sir Joshua Reynolds,” indicates, the occasion depicted is not, in fact, a meeting of the Literary Club. Paoli was never a member of the Club, and Goldsmith and Garrick were both dead before Burney and Warton were made members. “Conversation pieces” usual fabricated or embellished their occasions, rather than depicting an actual one. I would guess the date of this supposed gathering to be sometime around 1772—that is, some 75 years before it was painted.

### **Boswell:**

I begin with the guy on the far left, an alert, observant, and somewhat marginalized James Boswell—the youngest man at the table, by a good ten years. A Scot, a very canny Scot, an attorney, a biographer, a diligent and inveterate taker of notes, and a *bon vivant*. Boswell is the source of much of what we know about everyone else at the table and The Literary Club itself. He is, of course, best known for his *Life of Samuel Johnson*, the man to his right whom he seems by his posture to be both attached to and protective of. A good many of my fellow Johnsonian scholars regret this, and spend far too much time trying to separate Johnson from Boswell. I, on the other hand, think that biography one of the 3 or 4 of the greatest books in the English language, and I think the greatness of it is pretty equally divided between its subject and its author.

We will hear more from Boswell as we make our way around the table. For now, look at his account of the founding of The Literary Club:

Soon after his [Johnson’s] return to London, which was in February [1764], was founded that Club which existed long without a name, but at Mr. Garrick’s funeral became distinguished by the title of The Literary Club. Sir Joshua Reynolds had the merit of being the first proposer of it, to which Johnson acceded, and the original members were, Sir

Joshua Reynolds, Dr. Johnson, Mr. Edmund Burke, Dr. Nugent, Mr. Beauclerk, Mr. Langton, Dr. Goldsmith, Mr. Chamier, and Sir John Hawkins. They met at the Turk's Head, in Gerrard-street, Soho, one evening in every week, at seven, and generally continued their conversation till a pretty late hour. (Boswell, *Life of Johnson*)

One last bit of pedantry: Scholars have worked out from the detailed, abundant, and surviving notes that Boswell kept all his life that he and Johnson can have attended the Club together perhaps no more than eight times in the 30 years they were very closely acquainted, and that they were in one another's company something under 200 times altogether, as Boswell lived and practiced law in Edinburgh, though he betook himself to London as often as he could. Most of the conversations Boswell records were set at the Mitre tavern, not the Turk's Head, where the Club met. On the other hand, Boswell often attended and records conversations at the dinner tables of friends, like the one in our engraving

### Reynolds

We turn next to the third guy from the left, *Sir* Joshua Reynolds, the host, the only one in the picture with a Knighthood, and for several reasons, the most important person here. Sir Joshua was the greatest English painter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the first president of the Royal Academy, and probably the most famous, richest, and nicest guy at the table—*his* table (although Samuel Johnson presides at it). The then exotic pineapple and plentiful beverages on the table and the well-fed look of the guys around it confirm Reynolds' reputation as an excellent host. Those are two of his own paintings on the wall, "Puck" and "The Infant Academy." (As far as I know, no one has identified the head on the plinth behind Reynolds or the small, barely visible, portrait behind Boswell.) Reynolds wears glasses and, hard of hearing, holds an ear trumpet in his right hand. He points it at Samuel Johnson--a reminder that these men were gathered around that splendid table to talk and listen, and to listen especially to the wisdom of Samuel Johnson.

Exceedingly well read, like everyone else at the table, Reynolds was educated at home by his father and then apprenticed for four years to a London painter, Thomas Hudson. He then spent three years studying paintings and painting in Rome, Florence, and Paris. Much influenced by Rembrandt, and still, to my mind, England's greatest portrait painter, Reynolds painted portraits of all of the other men at the table except Warton. Some of those portraits are undoubtedly the sources for James Doyle's figures here. By 1764 Reynolds was charging, and getting, 150 guineas per portrait—something like 15,000 of today's dollars—though that is the guess of an English professor, not an economist. No wonder he was famous for his lavish hospitality. Reynolds purchased the house in which this dinner takes place in 1760, and lived in it until he died in 1792. It was at 47 Leicester Square—then a very fashionable address indeed.

Reynolds first met Samuel Johnson in 1756, and always acknowledged him as the single most important influence on his life: "For my own part I acknowledge the highest obligations to him. He may be said to have formed my mind and brushed off from it a great deal of rubbish" [Hilles, *Portraits*, 66]. While Reynolds studied and painted the faces of all these guys, Johnson entered and enlarged their minds, and Boswell recorded much of their conversation.

Reynolds was selected as the first President of the Royal Academy in 1768 and the next year he received his Knighthood. "On that day [Thomas Hudson, to whom Reynolds had been apprenticed, wrote] [Samuel] Johnson broke his vow of abstinence and 'drank

one glass of wine to the health of Sir Joshua Reynolds' (Hudson, 93)". Reynolds painted six quite wonderful portraits of Johnson, while Johnson asked him to contribute three very fine essays on art to his periodical, *The Idler*.

### **Garrick**

The next guy to show his face is David Garrick, staring confidently at the viewer from the back of the table, just to Reynolds' left. He was the most famous English actor of the Eighteenth century, and is still said to be the most painted man in English history. He was elected into the club in 1773, the same year that Boswell was elected. Reynolds painted four portraits of Garrick, all of them rightfully famous, and one of them, as it happens, presented by Reynolds to Edmund Burke, who sits just across the table from him.

To put one more stitch into the close knitting of this group, as a boy Garrick had been a student of Samuel Johnson in Lichfield, and the two of them had ventured, all but penniless, to London together in 1737, Garrick determined to be an actor, though supposed to study law, and Johnson hoping for a career as a playwright.

Here is what Johnson told Boswell about his young pupil, in comparing him to his older brother: "I don't know but if Peter had cultivated all the arts of gaiety as much as David has done, he might have been as brisk and lively. Depend upon it, Sir, vivacity is much an art, and depends greatly on habit" (*Life*, March, 1776).

One brief, revealing, anecdote about that gaiety and that pliable and often painted face: "While Garrick sat for Hogarth for his ... picture he mischievously altered his countenance so as to render the portrait perfectly unlike,' forcing the artist to start over several times before discovering the trick" [McPherson].

Good company though Garrick always was, we must leave him, mentioning that Samuel Johnson sobbed uncontrollably at his death, a death which, he wrote "eclipsed the gaiety of nations, and impoverished the publick stock of harmless pleasure" (*Life*, 1731).

Edmund Burke's epitaph for Garrick, written—but not selected—for Garrick's monument in Poet's Circle, Westminster Abbey, is:

Shakespeare was the chosen object of his study: in his action, and in his declamation he expressed all the fire, the enthusiasm, the energy, the facility, the endless variety of that great poet. Like him he was equally happy in the tragic and comic style. He entered into the true spirit of the poets, because he was himself a poet, and wrote many pieces with elegance and spirit. He raised the character of his profession to the rank of a liberal art, not only by his talents, but by the regularity and probity of his life and the elegance of his manners. (Stone and Kahrl, *David Garrick: A Critical Biography*)

### **Paoli**

We come next to Pasquale Paoli, the Corsican soldier, politician, and patriot, and the most exotic guy at the table. We will not linger on him, remarkable man though he was. Trained in Artillery, well read in classical history and contemporary political economy, the author of the Corsican constitution in 1755, and founder of Corsica's first university, Paoli had been living in exile in London since the defeat of the Corsican resistance to the Genoese at the hands of the French in 1769.

The year before that *An Account of Corsica, the Journal of a Tour to that Island, and Memoirs of Pascal Paoli* had been published; it was written, very well written, by one James Boswell and it made Paoli a great hero and Boswell a man to be reckoned with. Look with me at passage #3, for an excellent record of the meeting of two great minds, keeping in

your mind the excellent work of Boswell in engineering, conducting, recalling, and presenting this meeting, of which there would be many more—even though, as I have mentioned, Paoli was never a member of the Literary Club.

On the evening of October 10 [1769], I presented Dr. Johnson to General Paoli. I had greatly wished that two men, for whom I had the highest esteem, should meet. They met with a manly ease, mutually conscious of their own abilities, and of the abilities of each other. The General spoke Italian, and Dr. Johnson English and understood one another very well, with a little aid of interpretation from me, in which I compared myself to an isthmus which joins two great continents. Upon Johnson's approach the General said, "From what I have read of your works Sir, and from what Mr. Boswell has told me of you, I have long held you in great veneration." The General talked of languages being formed on the particular notions and manners of a people, without knowing which, we cannot know the language. We may know the direct signification of single words; but by these no beauty of expression, no sally of genius, no wit is conveyed to the mind. All this must be by allusion to other ideas. "Sir, (said Johnson,) you talk of language, as if you had never done anything else but study it, instead of governing a nation." The General said, "*Questo e un troppo gran complimento;*" this is too great a compliment. Johnson answered, "I should have thought so, Sir if I had not heard you talk." (Boswell, *Life of Johnson*)

Boswell also records a splendid evening at Paoli's house, where Boswell often stayed when he was in London, which took place in 1776. Paoli, Johnson, and Boswell talked about, among other things, Garrick, Goldsmith, translation, and, most suitably, given their host, travel to Italy.

[April 11, 1776] A journey to Italy was still in [Johnson's] thoughts. He said, "A man who has not been in Italy, is always conscious of an inferiority, from his not having seen what it is expected a man should see. The grand object of travelling is to see the shores of the Mediterranean. On those shores were the four great Empires of the world; the Assyrian, the Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman.—All our religion, almost all our law, almost all our arts, almost all that sets us above savages, has come to us from the shores of the Mediterranean." The General observed that "THE MEDITERRANEAN would be a noble subject for a poem." (Boswell, *Life of Johnson*)

Given that date of 1776, it is quite likely that Johnson, no friend of the Colonies, had *us* in mind under that collective and judgmental noun, "savages."—Burke, as we will see, thought better of us, or at least of our Colonial ancestors.

Paoli's company was enjoyed, and his accomplishments celebrated by, Thomas Gray, William Pitt, John Wesley, and George III, among others. The King granted him a pension to acknowledge his accomplishments and encourage his support for England over France. Paoli returned to Corsica in 1790, in hopes that the French Revolution would guarantee Corsican freedom; it did not. While Paoli is buried in Corsica, he has a bust in Westminster Abbey.

### **Barber**

That attentive and assured servant behind Paoli seems to be Francis Barber, Johnson's servant, dependent, and companion for the last 30 years of his life. Johnson had had him educated and left him an annuity of seventy pounds, perhaps \$7,000, which allowed him to keep a small village school after Johnson died. And Joshua Reynolds painted a very fine, very formal, portrait of him. We have little record of his conversation.

### **Warton**

We come now to the two gentlemen at the right-hand end of the table, who seem to be engaged in a sotto-voce conversation of their own. Thomas Warton, a poet, literary historian, and satirist of whom I daresay most of you have never heard, turns away from the company and shields his mouth with his hand to make some comment to the man on his left. A graduate of Trinity College, Oxford and a frequent and clever satirist of that university, Warton was twice elected Professor of Poetry there, and later appointed Professor of history. Ordained in 1752, he held, somewhat leisurely, several curacies and a chaplaincy in addition to his academic posts. A longtime friend of Johnson, he was admitted into the Literary Club in 1782, and with the help of Joshua Reynolds, he was appointed Poet Laureate in 1785. Warton is thus the only academic at the table, and the only clergyman.

### **Goldsmith**

If Warton is a third magnitude star in this constellation of genius, the man to whom he is whispering, Oliver Goldsmith, was of the second magnitude. An Irishman, a man of considerable vanity, and, along with Reynolds, Johnson, and Burke, one of the original 9 members of the Literary Club, Goldsmith always wanted to shine in company, and was willing to play the clown to do so. Like Burke, Goldsmith was a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, and there are statues of both of them at the College Green Entrance. Goldsmith was not a serious student. He considered entering the clergy, tried to emigrate to America, but missed his ship, considered law school, and enrolled in medical school in Edinburgh, then continued his medical studies in Paris, Leiden, and the Netherlands. He seems never to have taken a medical degree. He became a “philosophical vagabond,” (his own term) wandering around Europe for a year, apparently supporting himself by playing the flute and gambling!

Never returning to Ireland, Goldsmith spent the rest of his life in London, writing, prolifically and with ease and charm, for Grub Street. He has some 40 books to his name: several biographies, a mediocre novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, an assortment of histories, a pretty good, though somewhat sentimental, poem, *The Deserted Village*, and a pretty good play, *She Stoops to Conquer*.

Boswell’s treatment of Goldsmith in *The Life of Johnson* is noticeably unfavorable, but probably not inaccurate. He writes, for example, of “Goldsmith’s incessant desire of being conspicuous in company. [545].” Sir John Hawkins, another member of the Club, and probably its grumpiest, tells us: “As he wrote for the booksellers [i.e. GrubStreet], we, at the club, looked on him as a mere literary drudge, equal to the task of compiling and translating, but little capable of original, and still less of poetical composition.” [Hawkins, *Life* 420]

Goldsmith died, bitter, quarrelsome, and deeply in debt, in 1774. He has a portrait medallion in Poet’s corner, with a Latin epitaph written by Samuel Johnson. Here it is, in translation:.

Oliver Goldsmith, Poet, Naturalist, Historian; who touched almost every kind of writing, and touched none that he did not adorn. A powerful but kindly master of the emotions whether he would move to tears or to laughter. Of genius lofty, lively, versatile; in style great, graceful, and charming. This monument to his memory has been raised by the love of his companions the fidelity of his friends the veneration of his readers.

(April 4, 1774)

### **Burney**

Moving back to the left along the front of the table, we come to another gentleman of the second magnitude, the pensive and attentive figure with his right hand on his chin. This is Charles Burney, then a well known organist, composer, and teacher of music. He is still known in some circles for his 4 volume *General History of Music*, which took him 15 years to complete, covered the music of all of Europe, and made him, early on, a Fellow of the Royal Society—the only holder of that distinction at this table. Samuel Johnson wrote the dedicatory epistle to this work, dedicated to Queen Charlotte. Burney did not become a member of the Literary Club until 1780, or so. He wrote of The Club in a letter, that:

It was Johnson's wish that our Club should be composed of the heads of every liberal and literary profession, that we might not talk nonsense on any subject that might be started, but have somebody to refer to in our doubts and discussions, by whose Science we might be enlightened. (16 July 1791, Cor., 331)

Burney's singular expertise in music and wide travels in acquiring it made him well qualified for membership, and he attended faithfully. Nevertheless, by 1776 Johnson thought the Club had become too large, and perhaps too full of Whigs. Within a year or two, Johnson's attendance diminished.

Burney continued teaching music until he was 78, and lived until 1814. He was planning to write a biography of Johnson before he died, but never did. His daughter, Fanny, a novelist now known only to Graduate Students in English literature, published 3 volumes of his memoirs; she was not a reliable editor. His memorial in Westminster Abbey is, for obvious reasons, not in Poet's Corner.

### **Burke**

Moving to the center of the table and the foreground of the picture, and back to writers and thinkers of the first magnitude, we come to Edmund Burke, who wears his own hair instead of a wig, and directs his attention, and ours, to Samuel Johnson, who is addressing him. Boswell provides a characteristically brief and vivid account of the minds of these two men, and the strenuous energy and emulation evident when they were in one another's company:

It is very pleasing to me to record, that Johnson's high estimation of the talents of this gentleman was uniform from their early acquaintance. .... "[O]nce, when Johnson was ill, and unable to exert himself as much as usual without fatigue, Mr. Burke having been mentioned, he said, 'That fellow calls forth all my powers. Were I to see Burke now, it would kill me.' So much was he accustomed to consider conversation as a contest, and such was his notion of Burke as an opponent.

(Boswell, *Life of Johnson* March 21, 1776)

As I have mentioned, Burke was a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, after which he went on to study law at the Middle Temple. But, like Garrick, and much to his father's disappointment, Burke, too, allowed himself to be deflected from the law, moving on to a brilliant career as a Member of Parliament, political philosopher, statesman, aesthete, orator (indeed, "the English Cicero"), author, and friend of the Colonies.

Every inch an Irishman, Burke was also a wit, and excellent company. One Richard Stevens was startled on first meeting him, at a Royal Academy dinner, "by the Fun, Frisk, and Anecdote of [his] conversation: I never heard anything so animated or captivating in my life; and, perhaps, I never shall: we laughed immoderately for nearly (two) hours at his eccentric and witty conversation."

Johnson said: “Burke’s talk is the ebullition of his mind; he does not talk from a desire of distinction, but because his mind is full” [*Life* 1 March 1783].

We hear some of that talk in Quotation #5, a good example of the quality of the conversation among these guys, and one more reminder of the sharp ear, mind, and pen which Boswell brought to the recording and reporting of it. This is from a meeting of the Literary Club of 1778. The full account goes on for 7 pages:

[April 11, 1776] A journey to Italy was still in [Johnson’s] thoughts. He said, “A man who has not been in Italy, is always conscious of an inferiority, from his not having seen what it is expected a man should see. The grand object of travelling is to see the shores of the Mediterranean. On those shores were the four great Empires of the world; the Assyrian, the Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman.—All our religion, almost all our law, almost all our arts, almost all that sets us above savages, has come to us from the shores of the Mediterranean.” The General observed that “THE MEDITERRANEAN would be a noble subject for a poem.”  
(Boswell, *Life of Johnson*)

Having had no occasion to read Burke since I retired, I found this opportunity to do so most welcome. The next passage is an Address Burke wrote expressing the opposition of the Rockingham Whigs to the way both Houses of Parliament had persuaded the King to treat the Colonies. It is a splendid example of the best intellectual prose of the period. I suppose it resonates particularly with me because I grew up in Arlington, Massachusetts, right next to Lexington and Concord.

Bear with me while I look carefully with you at the words and ideas in this passage, examining its semantics and syntax. It is full of well-expressed wisdom based on a solid understanding of human nature, and well-balanced considerations of right and wrong. It distinguishes power from force, and watches the latter move through terrain Burke had never seen. I call all of this “Augustan Humanism,” though none of the guys in our picture would have used this term. (You, of course, will want to use it on the Hour Exam.)

The passage relies on weighty abstractions like “discontent,” “disobedience,” “resistance,” “opportunity,” “liberty,” and “forbearance,” and collective nouns like “methods,” “means,” “disorders,” and “victories.” Each of these is loaded with political meaning and edged with humanistic judgment. All this sense and weight is further strengthened by giving each pair of nouns a phrase or a clause of its own and connecting some of them to vivid verbs like “menace” and “provoke.”

Other methods were then recommended and followed, as infallible means of restoring peace and order. We looked upon them to be, what they have since proved to be, the cause of inflaming discontent into disobedience, and resistance into revolt. ...

We could not conceive, when disorders had arisen from the complaint of one violated right, that to violate every other was the proper means of quieting an exasperated people. It seemed to us absurd and preposterous, to hold out, as the means of calming a people in a state of extreme inflammation and ready to take up arms, the austere law, which a rigid conqueror would impose, as the sequel of the most decisive victories.

Recourse, indeed, was at the same time had to force; and we saw a force sent out, enough to menace liberty, but not to awe opposition; tending to bring odium on the civil power, and contempt on the military; at once to provoke and encourage resistance. Force was sent out not sufficient to hold one town: Laws were passed to inflame thirteen provinces.

This mode of proceeding, by harsh laws and feeble armies, could not be defended on the principle of mercy and forbearance. (Burke, *An Address to the King*, 1777)

All of the hallmarks of Burke's prose are evident in that passage: the embellishing resonances among recurring polysyllables: "inflammation," which occurs in each of the first three paragraphs, and "violated," which is doubled in the second. Burke selects and places his adjectives with care: "exasperated," "preposterous," and "austere" for example. These choice words are incorporated into sturdy structures that balance or oppose them against each other, buttressing and invoking their meaning. Consider, for example, "a force sent out, enough to menace liberty, but not to awe opposition," and "This mode of proceeding, by harsh laws and feeble armies." And, finally, notice the impact that placement and contrast give the simple, solid, and judgmental nouns "odium," "peace," and "mercy."

Burke could have been buried in Westminster Abbey, but he elected to be buried at his estate in Beaconsfield instead.

### **Johnson**

Which brings us, finally, to Samuel Johnson, the center of attention in our engraving, in the Literary Club, and in a good deal of my teaching and research. Accustomed though I am to speak of him in 50 minute lectures—3 or 4 of them—I will do him for you now in a few minutes, with the threat of returning to him at greater length in a future essay. My Johnson is a lexicographer, a wisdom figure, and a moralist—a thoughtful, rather than a prescriptive, moralist, always eager, in conversation, letters, and print, to provoke others to think—about language, literature, and right and wrong.

This made him, in select circles, including, I trust, this one, good company. And thanks to Boswell and his numerous publications, we can still savor that company. In person Johnson was somewhat awkward, as he is in the engraving, and sometimes activated by a strong sense of contradiction. Much of the time he was, however, to use his own word, which suits the present purposes admirably, "clubbable."

Above all and at all times, he was, as befits the commanding figure in the Literary Club, bookish, as Boswell makes abundantly clear: "... no man had a higher notion of the dignity of literature than Johnson, or was more determined in maintaining the respect which he justly considered as due to it." And, more vividly, one morning in 1776 Boswell: found him very busy putting his books in order, and as they were generally very old ones, clouds of dust were flying around him. He had on a pair of large gloves, such as hedgers use. His present appearance put me in mind [Boswell concludes,] of my uncle, Dr. Boswell's description of him, 'A robust genius, born to grapple with whole libraries.

The seven years Johnson spent compiling his *Dictionary of the English Language* furnished his mind with a thorough understanding of the meanings of words he used so clearly and impressively whenever he spoke or wrote. While he never used an unnecessarily big word, like Burke, he relied on polysyllabic and Latinate abstractions which enabled him to deal with general principles and comment on the human condition. And, again like Burke, he wrote and spoke in periodic sentences, rich in clauses that expand and refine his meaning. "Perspicuity" is a good example of such a word. Here is the definition from his *Dictionary*:

Clearness to the mind; easiness to be understood; freedom from obscurity or ambiguity. Perspicuity consists in the using of proper terms for the thoughts, which a man would have pass from his own mind into that of another's.

Johnson's own perspicuity enabled him to enrich the minds even of those around that table, and, still, of readers willing to put their own minds to work.

I end with my favorite single paragraph from this, my favorite writer. I love the wisdom and perspicuity it exhibits, the sentiments it expresses, and the fact that my wife and I trod that same ground about 20 years ago. It concludes Johnson's account of the strenuous and informative trip around the Highlands and Islands of Scotland that Boswell had dragged him on—on horseback and on foot in 1773—perhaps the year after the dinner we have been discussing.

We were now treading that illustrious Island, which was once the luminary of the Caledonian regions, whence savage clans and roving barbarians derived the benefits of knowledge, and the blessings of religion. To abstract the mind from all local emotion would be impossible, if it were endeavoured, and would be foolish, if it were possible. Whatever withdraws us from the power of our senses; whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present, advances us in the dignity of thinking beings. Far from me and my friends, be such frigid philosophy as may conduct us indifferent and unmoved over any ground which has been dignified by wisdom, bravery, or virtue. That man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona!

(Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, 1775)