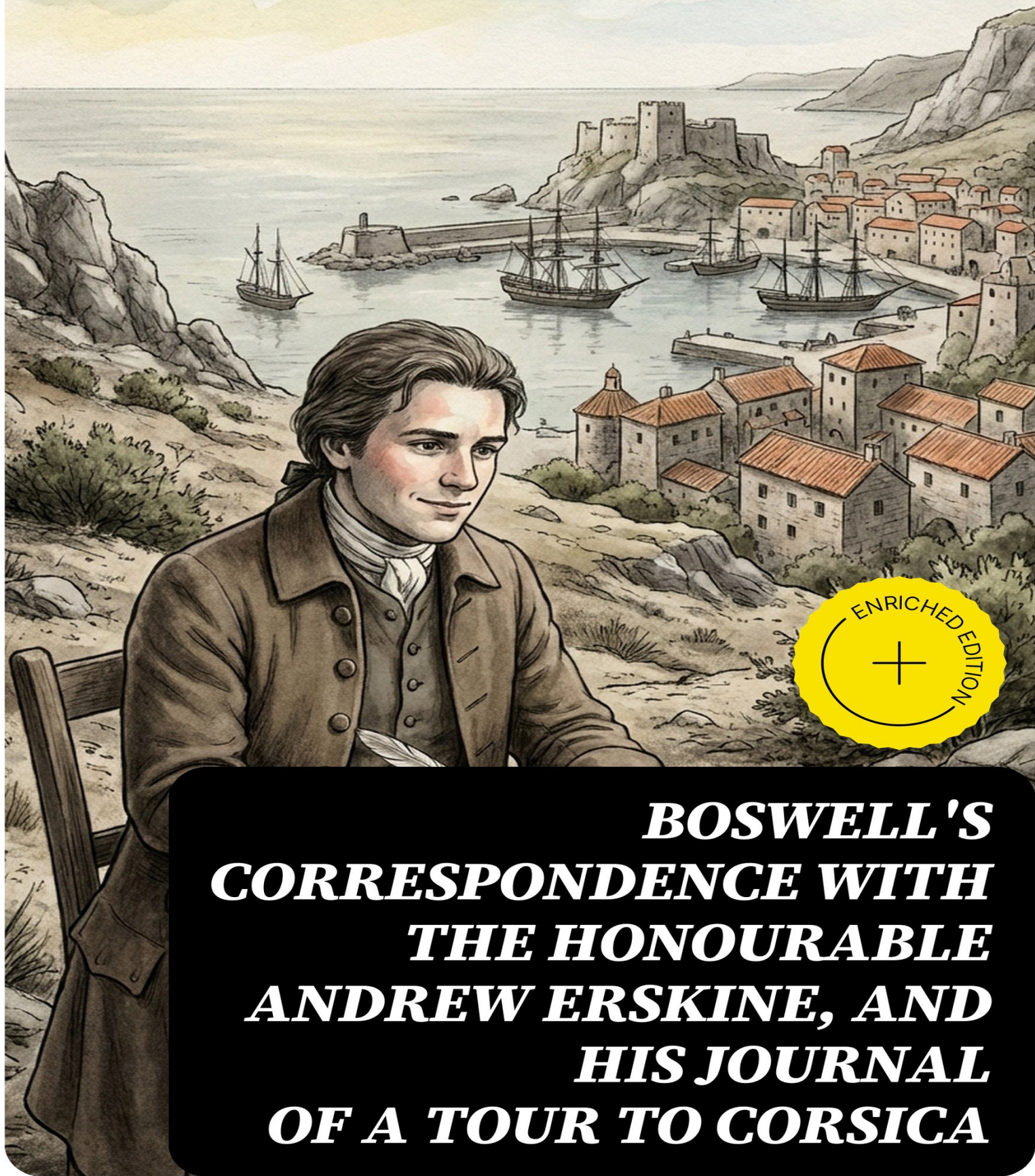


**JAMES BOSWELL**



**BOSWELL'S  
CORRESPONDENCE WITH  
THE HONOURABLE  
ANDREW ERSKINE, AND  
HIS JOURNAL  
OF A TOUR TO CORSICA**

**James Boswell**

# **Boswell's Correspondence with the Honourable Andrew Erskine, and His Journal of a Tour to Corsica**

**Enriched edition.**

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Eric Baylor*

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# Introduction

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## Curatorial Vision

Boswell's *Correspondence with the Honourable Andrew Erskine*, and *His Journal of a Tour to Corsica* brings together the playful private voice and the public traveler's voice of James Boswell, alongside the distinctive presence of Andrew Erskine. The letters display sociable wit, imaginative self-portraiture, and experiment with persona. The Corsican materials present observation, engagement with continental politics, and the figure of Pascal Paoli. Presented together, these works reveal the continuum between Boswell's convivial intimacies and his outward-facing ambitions. The collection frames a single authorial arc across friendship, travel, and moral curiosity, showing how an epistolary imagination matures into reportage and character study.

Uniting these texts foregrounds a through-line of self-making across genres. In the letters, Boswell and Erskine test identities through irony, affection, and competitive brilliance. In the travel narrative, Boswell refashions the same energies into descriptive authority and ethical reflection. The constant theme is sociability as a method of knowing: people are understood by conversation, place is understood by encounter, and reputation is negotiated in performance. The presence of Pascal Paoli concentrates this inquiry, offering an exemplar around whom admiration, politics, and narrative craft converge. Together, the works

replicate a laboratory of character in which style and conduct are mutually revealing.

Our aim is to highlight motifs that run from epistolary play to sustained observation: the drama of friendship, the allure of fame, the testing of courage, and the rhetoric of liberty. By juxtaposing the letters with the Corsican journey and the accompanying life of Paoli, the collection traces how private conviviality shades into public commitment. It also attends to Boswell's shifting tones, from raillery to earnestness, without partitioning them into separate spheres. The result is an integrated portrait that values the quicksilver exchange with Erskine as a seedbed for the narrative poise visible in the island chronicle.

This collection differs from single-work presentations by staging a conversation among forms that are often kept apart. Read in isolation, the letters may appear as mere diversion, and the travel narrative as solitary adventure. Read together, they illuminate each other. The correspondence discloses the theatrical instincts that animate the journey, while the journey clarifies the stakes—personal, aesthetic, civic—lurking in the earlier playfulness. The inclusion of *An Account of Corsica* alongside the journal amplifies this effect, supplying a frame for the portrait of Paoli and strengthening the sense of an author negotiating between intimacy and public purpose.

## **Thematic & Aesthetic Interplay**

The letters and the Corsican narrative speak across a vibrant tonal divide. With Erskine, Boswell practices affectionate mock-heroics and self-deprecation, refining a

comic mask that protects vulnerability and advertises charm. In the island writings, that mask turns transparent: humor remains, but it serves description, persuasion, and admiration. Recurring motifs migrate between the modes—friendship as trial, curiosity as courage, fame as temptation. The word “tour” signals movement through landscapes and reputations alike, and the depiction of Pascal Paoli concentrates Boswell’s ongoing search for exemplary character, first rehearsed in conversational play and then tested against the claims of history and place.

Symbols reinforce these echoes. The island functions as a moral stage on which liberty and loyalty are performed for visiting eyes, while the letter operates as a salon in miniature, a portable theater of wit. Dilemmas in both spheres involve audience and authenticity: how to be engaging without becoming merely theatrical, how to admire without surrendering judgment. Boswell’s alternating approaches—raillery, confession, panegyric—model a repertoire that toggles between charm and scrutiny. Erskine’s replies sharpen this repertoire, prompting feints, ripostes, and sudden candor, which later reappear as the journal’s shifts between scenic tableau, character sketch, and political meditation.

Contrast also clarifies perspective. Erskine, the Honourable correspondent, brings aristocratic levity and arch humor, while Boswell often plays the enthusiastic striver. In the Corsican materials, that energy redirects itself toward careful description of customs and leaders, culminating in the sustained attention given to Pascal Paoli. Between these poles—banter and witness—lies a single

method: approaching character by staging conversation. Whether with a friend across the mail or with figures encountered during the tour, Boswell's best pages depend on responsive listening. The correspondence supplies the grammar of repartee; the island writings deploy it for understanding communities and their aspirations.

Internal cross-references deepen the dialogue. The letters' habit of apostrophe, quotation, and playful exaggeration becomes a scaffolding for the journal's turns toward direct address. *An Account of Corsica* complements the travel narrative by assembling background that the journey then renders vivid. The memoirs of Pascal Paoli expand this composite portrait, translating admiration into sustained narrative attention. Across the volume, style and allegiance entwine: the comic elasticity practiced with Erskine authorizes tone-shifts that keep the Corsican material lively yet attentive, while the Corsican focus lends retrospective gravity to earlier moments of self-display, suggesting that play prepared Boswell for responsibility.

## **Enduring Impact & Critical Reception**

The collection remains vital because it captures a moment when private sociability and public action begin to interpenetrate modern writing. The lively correspondence models how personality becomes literary material, while the travel narrative demonstrates how encounter shapes ethical imagination. Together they offer a template for life-writing that is reflective without solemnity and engaged without dogma. The portrait of Pascal Paoli anchors debates about leadership and national character, yet it is the movement

between intimacy and reportage that gives the volume its lasting charge, inviting renewed attention to how curiosity, admiration, and self-scrutiny can coexist within a single voice.

Critical response has long emphasized the freshness of the letters' wit and the Corsican materials' role in widening the cultural presence of Pascal Paoli. The journal's blend of immediacy and interpretation is often noted as formative for later travel writing, while the correspondence continues to exemplify the pleasures of sociable style. Readers have returned to these works for their quick shifts in register and their ability to make character a shared project between writer and subject. The combination assembled here reinforces those recognitions by showing the mechanics of that project across both intimate exchange and outward observation.

The volume also nourishes broader afterlives. Its language and scenes are frequently cited in discussions of friendship, patriotism, and the rhetoric of liberty; its tonal agility has inspired biographical and travel narratives that refuse rigid categories. Within the collection, *DR. JOHNSON HIS FRIENDS AND HIS CRITICS* by GEORGE BIRKBECK HILL signals the ongoing vitality of the milieu to which Boswell belonged, sustaining public interest in the personalities and conversations that animate these pages. By keeping these texts in dialogue, the collection participates in a continuing cultural conversation about the uses of wit, the responsibilities of admiration, and the craft of depicting character.



Finally, the coherence of this assemblage invites renewed scholarly and creative approaches. Epistolary studies, travel literature, and reflections on political character converge here in a single field of inquiry, allowing attention to method rather than taxonomy. The letters with Andrew Erskine model testing ideas in company; the Corsican writings enact commitment informed by curiosity; the memoirs of Pascal Paoli bring both threads to a focused portrait. This interplay clarifies Boswell's craft without reducing its spontaneity. The collection endures because it records the making of a voice equal to friendship and history, hospitable to both play and judgment.

# Historical Context

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## Socio-Political Landscape

In the decades following the Union, Scotland's elites navigated power shared with Westminster, balancing metropolitan ambition and provincial loyalty. Boswell and Erskine's Letters arise from this negotiated identity, their wit and camaraderie shaped by Edinburgh's learned circles and London's patronage networks. The "Advertisement" and framing matter signal a society quick to turn private correspondence into public entertainment, yet still sensitive to rank. The pair write as gentlemen aware that print could amplify or compromise reputations. Their exchanges, playful as they are, echo a world in which social mobility depended on charm, connections, and a deft reading of Britain's composite polity.

The collection's paratexts—prefaces, dedications, and notices—belong to a vibrant commercial press in which literary personality had political consequence. Libel anxieties, subscription culture, and coffeehouse debate formed the ecosystem around Boswell and Erskine's Letters. Publication could circulate sociability as cultural capital while inviting surveillance by rivals and reviewers. The "Reviews" and "Opinions of the Press" included later in the volume memorialize how periodicals policed decorum, sanctioned patriotism, and adjudicated taste. Within these pages, literary play participates in the era's expanding public sphere, where parliamentary rhetoric, legal

argument, and salon conversation continually crossed into print for broader judgment.

The *Journal of a Tour to Corsica* enters European politics at a moment when small-state sovereignty faced the maneuvers of great powers. Its “Introduction,” “Account of Corsica,” and “Memoirs of Pascal Paoli” present an island experimenting with constitutional order under a celebrated leader. By addressing governance, militias, and local assemblies, the *Journal* invites British readers to compare Corsican aspirations with their own constitutional ideals. The dedication “To Pascal Paoli” makes advocacy explicit, and the narrative registers sympathy for a community resisting external domination. In doing so, the work situates travel writing within contemporary debates over legitimacy, consent, and the right to resist.

The geopolitical climate after the Seven Years’ War heightened sensitivities to strategic islands, maritime routes, and the legitimacy of intervention. The *Journal of a Tour to Corsica* thus speaks to readers attuned to shifting alliances and nervous about continental realignments. While diplomatic prudence urged non-involvement, the rhetoric of liberty stirred admiration for reforming leadership and civic virtue. The *Journal* accommodates both impulses by documenting institutions, praising discipline, and letting Corsicans voice their claims. The appended sections and later “Preface to the Third Edition” signal a continuing argument with the moment, revisiting facts and emphasis as events developed and audiences expanded.

Andrew Erskine’s social position—indicated in the *Letters* by title and tone—situates the correspondence within a

genteel military and courtly orbit. The letters often flit between mock-heroic bravado and earnest career concerns, reflecting expectations placed on younger sons and officers in peacetime. They suggest a world of commissions, half-pay uncertainties, and the need to display urbane accomplishment alongside martial readiness. Against this background, wit is not merely diversion but a resource for navigating patronage and uncertainty. The letters' rhetorical high spirits coexist with an implicit understanding of rank, obligation, and the delicate economy of favor in British society.

Boswell's legal training and metropolitan aspirations likewise inform both the Letters and the Journal. The Letters display forensic quickness and social observation; the Journal reports on Corsican courts, councils, and procedural order with a lawyer's eye for precedent. The comparison between British and Corsican constitutional practice is not schematic, yet readers are quietly invited to weigh claims of custom, representation, and rule of law. The narrative's emphasis on discipline, education, and civic morality presents governance as a lived practice, not an abstraction. By staging conversations with island authorities, the Journal offers a grounded, institutional portrait alongside patriotic feeling.

The presence of George Birkbeck Hill's *Dr. Johnson His Friends and His Critics* within the anthology draws the eighteenth century into a late-Victorian arena of national self-definition. Hill's sober evaluation of literary authority unfolds alongside "Opinions of the Press," showing how newspapers and journals had become arbiters of canon and

character. This Victorian framing underscores the persistence of moral seriousness, scholarly rigor, and cultural consolidation as instruments of soft power. By including Hill's work, the collection reveals a second political horizon: the nineteenth-century effort to stabilize exemplary figures and texts, aligning literary history with broader narratives of national achievement.

## **Intellectual & Aesthetic Currents**

Boswell and Erskine's Letters exemplify a culture that prized sociable wit, epistolary sparkle, and theatrical self-fashioning. The correspondence plays with personae, mock-erudition, and affectionate teasing, yet also rehearses serious questions about ambition, taste, and happiness. Its voice belongs to a milieu where conversation was an art and the letter a public-facing form even when addressed to a friend. The "Preface" and "Advertisement" foreground the artifice of publication, reminding readers that the collection is curated performance. The result is a poised blend of elegance and improvisation, at once spontaneous and crafted to meet the ideals of polite eloquence.

The Journal of a Tour to Corsica innovates within travel writing by entwining narrative with compendium. Its "Introduction" sets purpose and method; the "Account of Corsica" synthesizes geography, economy, and custom; the "Memoirs of Pascal Paoli" elevate biography to a civic exemplar. Description alternates with dialogue, observation with statistical enumeration, producing a hybrid that marries sentiment to inquiry. The dedication enacts a politics of admiration while the journal proper tests

impressions against what was seen, heard, and recorded. Such structural layering exemplifies a period bent on organizing knowledge while preserving the immediacy of encounter.

Aesthetic ideals in the Journal oscillate between the allure of the picturesque and the moral pull of exemplary leadership. Scenes of landscape and hospitality are never merely decorative; they frame questions of virtue, education, and public spirit. The text valorizes disciplined freedom and communal courage, not as abstractions but as habits embedded in institutions. Footnotes, appendices, and successive prefaces enact a self-correcting impulse, acknowledging the provisionality of reports. The work thereby models a way of knowing that integrates affect, testimony, and system—an approach aligned with contemporary curiosity, yet anchored in the classical insistence on character and civic measure.

The anthology's "REVIEWS" and "OPINIONS OF THE PRESS" document a culture of criticism that had matured into a quasi-institution. Criteria such as propriety, authenticity, and utility to the nation are repeatedly invoked. Readers encounter not only the works but the protocols by which they were judged: the expectation of balance in praise, the suspicion of vanity, the preference for fact checked against experience. This meta-layer transforms the collection into a primer in eighteenth-century critical literacy, showing how audiences were trained to approach travel narrative, correspondence, and character writing with a mix of skepticism and admiration.



George Birkbeck Hill's *Dr. Johnson His Friends and His Critics* represents a later scholarly ethos grounded in annotation, cross-reference, and historical situating. Its tone embodies the professionalization of literary study and the rise of editorial science. By placing Hill alongside the *Letters* and the *Journal*, the anthology stages a dialogue between spontaneous sociability and disciplined scholarship. The contrast illuminates how interpretation itself became an art, guided by chronology, citation, and the weighing of testimony. Hill's method reinforces what the earlier texts already imply: that style, judgment, and evidence must be held in dynamic tension to produce trustworthy knowledge.

## **Legacy & Reassessment Across Time**

The *Journal of a Tour to Corsica* quickly circulated a story of a community striving for self-government, but subsequent events altered its horizon of expectation. As the island's fate changed, the book was reread less as advocacy and more as a documentary record of constitutional experiment. Later audiences measured its descriptions against evolving debates on sovereignty and intervention. The dedication and "Memoirs of Pascal Paoli" continued to exert magnetic appeal, yet scholarly attention shifted toward the *Journal's* methods—its citation practices, interviews, and care for institutional detail—treating the work as a primary source for political culture rather than a mere travelogue.

Boswell and Erskine's *Letters* underwent a parallel transformation from playful performances of friendship to documents of social history. Nineteenth-century readers

often sought moral exempla and decorum; twentieth- and twenty-first-century audiences have been more attuned to irony, self-fashioning, and the managed permeability between private and public spheres. The prefaces now appear as interventions in reputation management, and the “Advertisement” reads as evidence of the commodification of personality. Without abandoning delight in repartee, critics increasingly value the letters for their insight into class, gender expectations, and the machinery of polite society under the pressures of publicity.

George Birkbeck Hill’s contribution shaped how subsequent generations approached the eighteenth century, installing scholarly apparatus as the gateway to authority. His *Dr. Johnson His Friends and His Critics*, present here, interacts with the “REVIEWS” and “OPINIONS OF THE PRESS” by mapping long arcs of reception. Where earlier readers sought heroes, later interpreters pressed for context, contradiction, and contingency. This shift reframed the Letters as artful constructions rather than transparent windows, and the Journal as contingent testimony rather than timeless exemplar. The anthology, by juxtaposing texts and their reviews, makes visible the evolution from celebratory tradition to contextual critique.

Editorial history has become a key site of debate. Variants recorded in prefaces, the “Preface to the Third Edition,” and appendices invite questions about authorial intention and readerly expectation. Scholars continue to ask how amendments clarify or reshape the works’ political posture, whether paratexts disclose anxieties about accuracy, and how much self-correction belongs to honesty

versus strategy. The inclusion of “APPENDIX A,” “APPENDIX B,” and “APPENDIX C” foregrounds the documentary impulse and the temptation to finalize meaning. Recent editions, indexes, and archival recoveries have reinforced the sense that these texts live in transmission, their authority co-authored by successive editors.

Today the anthology is approached as a conversation across genres and centuries: letters that dramatize sociability, a journal that chronicles political possibility, and criticism that codifies standards of judgment. It remains pertinent whenever questions of small-state autonomy, media influence, and the ethics of advocacy reemerge. The Letters model friendship negotiated in public view; the Journal models political curiosity disciplined by method; Hill and the “REVIEWS” model accountability to evidence and argument. Together they show how literature both reflects and shapes civic life, inviting readers to balance admiration with scrutiny and to treat style as inseparable from responsibility.

# **Synopsis (Selection)**

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## **Boswell and Erskine's Letters**

An epistolary exchange between James Boswell and the Honourable Andrew Erskine showcases two young Scots testing wit, taste, and friendship through playful satire and theatrical self-display. Across the sequence, their mock-heroic postures make room for candid notes on literary ambition, social maneuvering, and the texture of Edinburgh and London life. The lively, self-mocking tone anticipates Boswell's later blend of intimacy and reportage, linking private performance to a quest for public identity.

## **The Journal of a Tour to Corsica; and Memoirs of Pascal Paoli**

Boswell's travel narrative follows his journey to Corsica during its struggle for autonomy, weaving landscape and custom into a political portrait of the island and an admiring life of its leader, Pascal Paoli. Encounters and observations accrue into an argument for the Corsican cause, casting Paoli as a modern exemplar and the voyage as a moral and intellectual apprenticeship. Earnest and promotional yet observant, the work marks Boswell's shift from playful correspondence to committed advocacy and self-fashioning.

## **Appendices A-C**

These supplementary materials extend and clarify the Corsican narrative with background, corroboration, and contextual notes on people, places, and events. Their documentary tone reinforces the work's claims to reliability and helps situate the journal's observations within larger historical and cultural frames. Together with the main text, they encourage readers to weigh narrative against evidence.

## **Reviews**

Gathering critical responses—including a survey of Dr. Johnson's circle and a selection of press opinions—this section reflects on how Boswell's methods and milieu were received and debated. It probes questions of accuracy, taste, and the aims of biography and travel writing, reframing Boswell's narratives through contemporary and retrospective judgment. As meta-commentary, it converses with the letters and the Corsican journal, testing personal portraiture and political advocacy against public scrutiny.

**BOSWELL'S CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE  
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HIS FRIENDS AND HIS CRITICS.

By GEORGE BIRKBECK HILL, D.C.L.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

# BOSWELL AND ERSKINE'S LETTERS.

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## PREFACE.

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BOSWELL did not bring out his "Life of Johnson" till he was past his fiftieth year. His "Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides" had appeared more than five years earlier. While it is on these two books that his fame rests, yet to the men of his generation he was chiefly known for his work on Corsica and for his friendship with Paoli. His admiration for Johnson he had certainly proclaimed far and wide. He had long been off, in the words of his father, "wi' the land-louping scoundrel of a Corsican, and had pinned himself to a dominie—an auld dominie who keeped a schule and cau'd it an acaadamy." Nevertheless it was to Corsica and its heroic chief that he owed the position that he undoubtedly held among men of letters. He was Corsica Boswell and Paoli Boswell long before he became famous as Johnson Boswell.

It has been shown elsewhere[\[1\]](#) what a spirited thing it was in this young Scotchman to make his way into an island, the interior of which no traveller from this country had ever before visited. The Mediterranean still swarmed with Turkish corsairs, while Corsica itself was in a very unsettled condition. It had been computed that, till Paoli took the rule and held it with a firm hand, the state had lost no less than 800 subjects every year by assassination. Boswell, as he

tells us in his Journal, had been warned by an officer of rank in the British Navy, who had visited several of the ports, of the risk he ran to his life in going among these "barbarians." Moreover a state of hostility existed between the Corsicans and the Republic of Genoa—which, the year before Boswell's visit, had obtained the assistance of France. The interior of the island was still held by Paoli, but many of the seaport towns were garrisoned by the French and the Genoese. At the time of Boswell's visit war was not being actively carried on, for the French commander had been instructed merely to secure these points, and not to undertake offensive operations against the natives. From the Journal that Boswell gives, we see that when once he had landed he ran no risks; but it is not every young man who, when out on his travels, leaves the safe and beaten round to go into a country that is almost unknown, and to prove to others that there also safety is to be found. With good reason did Johnson write to him—"Come home and expect such welcome as is due to him whom a wise and noble curiosity has led where perhaps no native of this country ever was before." With scarcely less reason did Paoli say, "A man come from Corsica will be like a man come from the Antipodes."

How strongly his journey and his narrative touched the hearts of people at home may still be read in Mrs. Barbauld's fine lines on Corsica:—

"Such were the working thoughts which  
swelled the breast  
Of generous Boswell; when with nobler aim  
And views beyond the narrow beaten track  
By trivial fancy trod, he turned his course



exemplary enough to merit publication, and thus as shaping public notions of cultivated interaction.

GEORGE BIRKBECK HILL's DR. JOHNSON HIS FRIENDS AND HIS CRITICS shifts the focus to intellectual authority, delineated not by office but by discourse with friends and critics. The appended OPINIONS OF THE PRESS amplify this portrait, revealing leadership in terms of citation, influence, and evaluation. Although Johnson is the subject rather than the author here, the title's triad—Johnson, friends, critics—parallels the Corsican triad of ACCOUNT, JOURNAL, MEMOIRS by suggesting that persons, communities, and public commentary collectively define reputations. Leadership, under this optic, crystallizes where conversation meets critique, and where a figure's voice resonates through networks documented within the anthology.

Across the anthology, leadership emerges in complementary modalities: political in the MEMOIRS OF PASCAL PAOLI, social in LETTERS I–XLII between Erskine and Boswell, and intellectual in HILL's study of Dr. Johnson's circle. The Corsican APPENDICES A–C and the REVIEWS further contextualize these portrayals, reinforcing how documents and reception history consolidate authority. Prefatory materials—PREFACE, INTRODUCTION, and the PREFACE To the Third Edition—mediate each representation, guiding readers toward exemplary interpretation. Rather than a single model, the curation juxtaposes spheres where guidance operates: command, companionship, and critique, each shaped by textual framing that stabilizes or complicates the image of a leading figure.