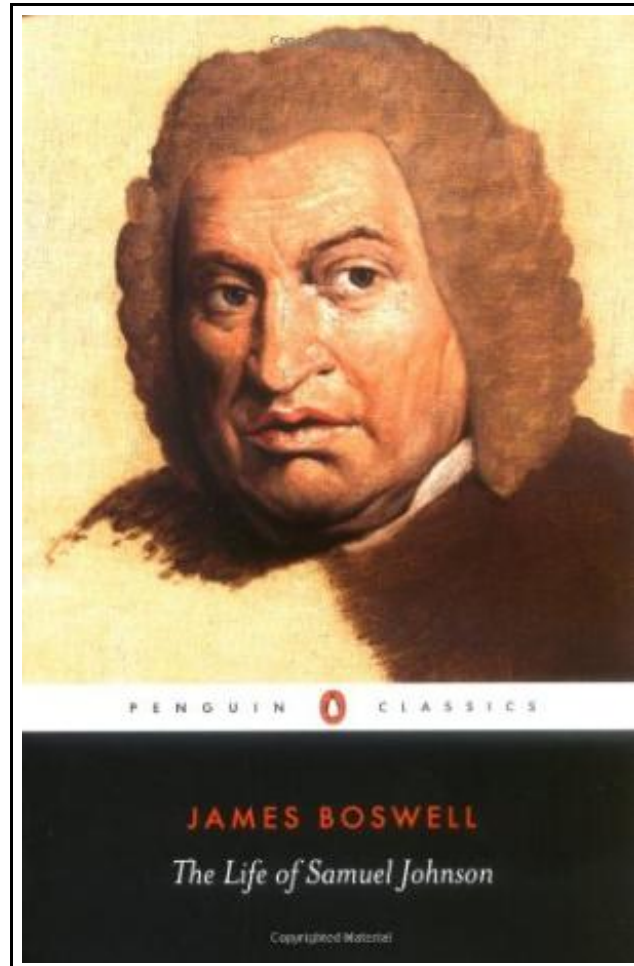


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Reviews

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Penguin Classics August 1979, 1979. Paper Back. Book Condition: New. 'Considered revolutionary in its day, Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson is to the biography what Tom Jones or perhaps even Tristram Shandy are to the novel. Instead of writing a deferential and ponderous account of Johnson's public life, Boswell renders a vivid picture of the complete man, incorporating conversations and personal letters into what is often considered the greatest biography yet written. Though its considerable heft (over 1200 pages) may seem daunting to the modern reader, The Life compels by the force of first-hand accounts and copious observation. The most cogent portions involve Johnson in the last quarter of his life, as Boswell did not make Johnson's acquaintance until the latter was in his mid-fifties. This fact is the book's most oft-cited criticism, since Johnson is remembered more as a sagacious socialite than the poverty-stricken writer that he was for most of his life. The Life of Samuel Johnson may have immortalized Johnson, but it equally promotes Boswell. Adopting a narrative style that leans toward the self-conscious, Boswell makes himself something of a hero, viewing Johnson in a novelistic frame and achieving (in the words of Claude Rawson) 'a sharp penetration of character, a fine sense of climax and anticlimax, and a graphic economy of portraiture.' Of this, Johnson would heartily approve, for he once famously said, 'biography is, of the various kinds of narrative writing, that which is most eagerly read, and most easily applied to the purposes of life.'



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