

Scientific Panic Attacks

"Scientists Attack the Federal Budget with the Politics of Calculated Panic" by Daniel S. Greenberg, in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Mar. 26, 1999), 1255 23rd St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037.

Again and again in recent years, leaders of American science have warned of impending catastrophe due to inadequate federal support for research. Nonsense, argues science journalist Greenberg, a visiting scholar at Johns Hopkins University. He offers samples of the alarmist rhetoric, and some deflating facts.

- Leon E. Rosenberg, then dean of Yale University's School of Medicine, asserted in 1990 that "our nation's health research program is burning, and the conflagration is spreading." *Fact*: Between 1980 and 1990, appropriations for the National Institutes of Health increased from \$2 billion to \$4.7 billion—an inflation-adjusted gain of \$1.7 billion.

- Leon M. Lederman, in his inaugural address as president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, ominously declared in 1991 that "our current capability for research is only about one-third what it was in the late 1960s—a golden age

whose achievements the nation is still profiting from." *Fact*: Between 1968 and 1991, federal support for science at colleges and universities increased from \$1.5 billion to \$10.2 billion.

Many scientists "have argued that the end of the Cold War removed a major stimulus for government spending on science," Greenberg notes. But federal support for basic research climbed from \$11.2 billion in 1990 to \$15.2 billion in 1998.

Somehow, the good news is never good enough, as scientists gloomily fixate on whether federal support is growing as fast as before. The important fact is that it's *growing*, contends Greenberg. From 1996 to 1997, "despite the usual dire warnings," the federal budget for research and development (including basic research) grew from \$71.2 billion to \$73.9 billion. That may not be sufficiently fast growth for some scientists, Greenberg says, but it *is* growth.

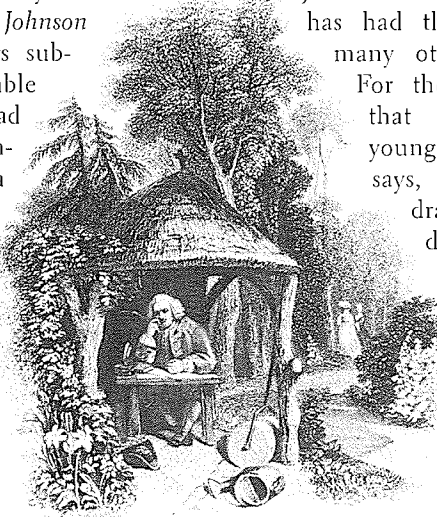
ARTS & LETTERS

Beyond Boswell

"Why Read Samuel Johnson?" by Stephen Miller, in *The Sewanee Review* (Winter 1999), 735 University Ave., Sewanee, Tenn. 37383-1000.

Many more people today read James Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791), studded with its subject's witty and forceful table talk, than trouble to read the estimable Dr. Johnson himself. That is a pity, contends Miller, a widely published essayist, because Samuel Johnson (1709-84) "was a great prose stylist with a profound understanding of the heart of man."

Although Boswell's classic may whet some readers' appetite for



A quiet moment in the life of Johnson

Johnson's own works, it probably has had the opposite effect on many others, Miller believes. For the portrait of Johnson that emerges from his young friend's book, Miller says, resembles the one drawn by Johnson's detractors, such as the 19th-century Whig historian Thomas Macaulay. "The characteristic peculiarity of [Johnson's] intellect was the union of great powers with low prejudices," claimed Macaulay, who also

insisted that Johnson “spoke far better than he wrote.”

But while Johnson in conversation “often played the part of the blustering arch-Tory” and does seem, in Boswell’s pages, to be driven at times by strong prejudices, Johnson the writer, Miller points out, was quite different. Even philosopher David Hume, who disliked Johnson, acknowledged that though “abusive in Company,” he never was so in his writings.

“The writer he most closely resembles,” argues Miller, “is George Orwell. Just as Orwell attacked the cant of international socialism, so Johnson poured cold water on all forms of cant—especially the cant of the sentimental revolution.” Johnson’s conviction that man is driven by many dark passions was at odds with the upbeat school of 18th-century thought that regarded man as innately benevolent. Feelings of benevolence come too cheaply, Johnson believed.

The best place to begin a tour of Johnson’s works, according to Miller, is probably with “his two extended narratives.” *Rasselas* (1759), “which touches on all the

main themes of Johnson’s work—the dangers of solitude as well as man’s restlessness, envy, and self-deception—is sometimes moving and often amusing.” *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) “mixes accurate description with acute reflections about the stages of political and economical development in various parts of Scotland—reflections that anticipate many of the points Adam Smith would make in *The Wealth of Nations*, which appeared a year later.”

Perhaps Johnson’s finest work, says Miller, is his four-volume *Lives of the Poets* (1779–81), which uses “telling incidents in a writer’s life to deliver an aphorism about human conduct.” Thus, Johnson writes of Alexander Pope that “his scorn of the great is repeated too often to be real: no man thinks much of that which he despises; and as falsehood is always in danger of inconsistency, he makes it his boast at another time that he lives among them.”

“No doubt there are many pleasures to be gained from Johnson’s conversation,” concludes Miller, “but there are far more to be gained from his writing.”

The Return of the Author

“The Primacy of the Literary Imagination, or Which Came First: The Critic or the Author?” by Paul A. Cantor, in *Literary Imagination* (Spring 1999), Assn. of Literary Scholars and Critics, 105 Franklin Dr., Ste. 220, Mount Pleasant, Mich. 48858.

With the Author famously proclaimed dead, academic critics in recent decades have stepped self-confidently to the fore, all of literature theirs to conquer, to deconstruct, to expose for its nefarious biases. At times, the critics have even seemed to suggest that *they* are the truly creative force. But they ought to be a little more humble about their calling, suggests Cantor, a professor of English at the University of Virginia.

The history of literature and criticism in this century, he says, shows that, in general, “critics have been more indebted to authors than authors have been to critics. Critics may have appeared to be working independently of authors, but in fact they have usually derived their ideas of what literature is and their standards for judging literary works from the new exemplars authors continually provide.”

The mid-century New Criticism movement is a premier example, Cantor argues. “The values the New Critics searched out and praised in literature—ambiguity, irony, paradox, metaphoric complexity, precision and concision of statement—are precisely the literary qualities that characterize the modernist revolution in poetry” brought about by T. S. Eliot and others. Cleanth Brooks and the other New Critics, Cantor says, “forever changed the way we read literature,” and their approach brought out previously neglected aspects of earlier works. But the New Critics and their disciples sometimes went too far. “[To] read the confessional poetry of the Romantics as if it were the anti-confessional poetry of the modernists,” for instance, is “at least in some sense to misread it,” he contends. Moreover, the New Critics eventually began applying their tech-