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Boswell's Account of Bonnie Prince Charlie and the Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides



Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, with Samuel Johnson, LL.D., (1785) has generally been considered an introduction to his Life of Johnson, or, as Boswell himself calls it in the dedication to the Life, a "specimen" of Johnson's biography. Since most of the book does concern Johnson, his conversation, attitudes, reactions, and reception, this seems a reasonable classification. However, there is at least one sizeable portion of the book that is not about Johnson and that has, at best, a rather flimsy connection with him--the account of Bonnie Prince Charlie in the Hebrides. Boswell includes a number of other apparently extraneous narratives in the Tour, but they are usually short, incorporated within the text, and, on closer examination, directly related to Johnson: they concern people Johnson met on the tour or are presented as parts of conversations in which he took part. 2 The account of Bonnie Prince Charlie, though, is thirteen pages long and is not incorporated into the flow of events. It is separated from the rest of the text by short rules and has an introductory paragraph unrelated to the narrative of the tour; after the conclusion of the account, there is no return to Flora and Johnson's conversation -- the tour simply continues. Boswell also makes little attempt to relate the account to Johnson. Although he states that Johnson "listened to her [Flora Macdonald] with placid attention," the narrative is not presented as

conversation heard by him nor are we given Johnson's reaction to it. In the introduction, Boswell reports that he compiled it "From what she told us, and from what I was told by others personally concerned, and from a paper of information which Rasay was so good as to $send\ me$ " (italics are mine). In fact, the original journal contains less than a page of Flora's conversation; 3 and an examination of the journal and the paper from John Macleod 4 reveals that the primary sources were accounts told or written to Boswell, not Johnson.

Thus, if the *Tour* is simply a book about Johnson, this narrative is certainly a digression. Many critics of the *Tour* take no notice of the account, since they are concerned only with the parts about Johnson. A number of critics discuss the meeting of Johnson and Flora or the coincidence of Johnson's sleeping in the same bed Prince Charles had slept in, but not the following account. Several describe it as a valuable historical document or as a charming, romantic tale without discussing its relationship to the rest of the work. The critics who do deal with this relationship definitely consider it to be a digression. Croker, in his edition of the *Tour* (which he places in the middle of the *Life*), puts almost all of the account in an appendix. McAdam says of the account:

Dr. Johnson and the rescuer of the Prince had some conversation about her role in the rescue. Boswell, however, is not satisfied with reporting this, but introduces a thirteen-page digression in which he gives a fairly full story of the event. It is interesting in itself, but an error in judgment, since it stops the tour dead in its tracks for too long a time. 9

McAdam, like most other critics of the Tour, sees the book as a narrative about Johnson; therefore, anything that does not move that narrative forward, no matter how interesting, does not belong. Boswell, in this case, has made "an error in judgment." However, it is possible that Boswell knew what he was doing, but that what he was doing is slightly different from what many twentieth-century readers think he was doing. all, Pottle has shown that Boswell and Malone revised the Journal manuscript extensively, that the preparation of the Tour for publication was a deliberate undertaking. 10 Perhaps what is needed is a better description of the Tour. Michael J. Marcuse, in his article "The Rhetorical Design of Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides," has convincingly argued that the Tour is not simply a sample of Johnson's biography, but "an elaborate, extended advertisement -- a 'Prelude'." As a prelude, its main purpose is "to point beyond itself" to the

forthcoming *Life of Johnson*. ¹¹ Marcuse has shown that, throughout the *Tour*, Boswell has very carefully tried to demonstrate that he is highly and uniquely capable of writing *the* biography of Johnson. Therefore, the *Tour* is not just a book about Johnson the man, but also a book about Boswell the biographer. If the work is seen not as a biography of Johnson, but as a prelude to a biography, then parts of the *Tour* that, on the surface, appear to be digressions may, in fact, be essential to the structure of the work. It is my contention that the account of Bonnie Prince Charlie, along with some other shorter passages, are thus to be regarded.

There are two parts to Boswell's prelude. The most important is the demonstration of his special knowledge of and intimate friendship with Samuel Johnson. But, in addition to this, Boswell also attempts, in several ways, to present himself as a good biographer in general. He includes several short passages (some of which, like the Bonnie Prince Charlie account, seeming digressions) scattered throughout the text that suggest to the reader that Boswell, because of his special abilities and friendships, is the person most capable of writing the biographies of certain noble and famous people. The account of Prince Charles is a more persuasive advertisement of Boswell's skills, since it is longer and the subject is a member of the royalty (as Boswell emphasizes in the footnote about Charles's title) and a figure of general public interest.

Boswell provides a basis for this presentation of himself as a good biographer through the inclusion in the Tour of a number of passages concerning the writing of biography or closely related matters. In these passages Boswell stresses two qualities--authenticity of information and a focus on what Johnson, in "Rambler 60," calls "domestick privacies." 12 Johnson, Boswell, and Mr. M'Queen discuss portrait painting and history writing and agree that "Truth, sir, is of the greatest value in these things" (Tour, p. 219-20); Johnson tells Boswell and Captain M'Lean that the best part of Burnet's History is that in which "Burnet himself was actually engaged in what he has told" (Tour, p. 285); while discussing Sir John Dalrymple's writing, Johnson says, "All history, so far as it is not supported by contemporary evidence, is romance" (Tour, p. 403). Johnson and Monboddo agree that history of manners and biography are the best kinds of history because they give us "what comes near to ourselves, what we can turn to use" (Tour, p. 79-80); Johnson, while talking of biography to Boswell and Mr. M'Queen, implies that "the common incidents of life" should be the first consideration of the biographer (Tour, p. 240). In the advertisement for the Life of Johnson which appears at the end of the Tour, the relationship between these two quali-

ties in a biography is made clear: both depend on intimate acquaintance with the subject. Boswell "was honoured with the intimate friendship of Dr. Johnson," and because of this, Johnson "communicated to him several curious particulars" of his life; in addition to his own authentic information, he will also include in his biography "the most authentick accounts that can be obtained from those who knew him best" (*Tour*, p. 421).

These references to the writing of biography are all from the Johnsonian parts of the Tour; however, they are also related to other passages, particularly to those places in the Tour where Boswell shifts his focus of attention away from Johnson to other noble and famous men whom he has known inti-These passages are not related to Johnson; in fact, they are not even directly related to the actual tour. Not one of these passages appears in the original journal; they were all written especially for the published Tour. 13 The subjects of these passages are: David Hume (Tour, pp. 30-32); Archibald Montgomery, 11th Earl of Eglintoune (Tour, pp. 149-150); James Macdonald (Tour, pp. 151-153); David Garrick (Tour, pp. 349-50); the Earl of Loudon (Tour, p. 372); Alexander Montgomery, 10th Earl of Eglintoune (Tour, p. 374); and Lord Elibank (Tour, p. 386). Sometimes Boswell calls attention to these passages by making a definite break in the narrative-the separate paragraphs devoted to Loudon and the 10th Earl of Eglintoune (paragraphs that do not include a reaction from Johnson or anything related to him); the insertion of Garrick's letter (all of which is included except the part about Johnson); or the insertion of James Macdonald's monument inscription and last letters to his mother (all of which Croker puts in the appendix, along with the better part of the account of Prince Charles). Sometimes there is merely a shift of focus from Johnson's opinions of these men to the men themselves, as with the Hume and Elibank passages.

In each case Boswell informs the reader, directly or indirectly, of his intimacy with the subject. He has spent "many an agreeable hour" with Hume; has "had the pleasure of knowing [James Macdonald] intimately;" receives personal letters from Garrick; has been a frequent guest at Loudon's house; spent "many of my early days" with the 10th Earl of Eglintoune. Because of this intimacy he can reveal "the common incidents of life." The atheist Hume "was cheerful, obliging, and instructive" and "charitable to the poor;" Loudon was kind to his mother; Elibank was the patron of the historian, Robertson, and the poet, Home, when these two were "'lads'." Boswell constantly stresses the authenticity of his information. He inserts actual letters; he learned of the 11th Earl of Eglintoune's popularity among the Highlanders from the

people themselves; Elibank himself told Boswell about his patronage of Robertson and Home.

Not only does Boswell try to demonstrate that he would be a suitable biographer of these men, he also tries to create a need for what he is so capable of doing. In a footnote concerning Garrick's letter, he says, "I would not withhold from my readers a passage which shows Mr. Garrick's mode of writing as the Manager of a Theatre, and contains a pleasing trait of his domestick life." Of James Macdonald he writes, "This extraordinary young man,...having been deeply regretted by his country, the most minute particulars concerning him must be interesting to many." In this case, Boswell has also revised his journal entry to make Macdonald's memorial monument appear more dignified. In the journal the monument is described as "a very pretty one. The inscription is rather too verbose" (Journal, p. 118). In the published version this becomes "the monument..., which was elegantly executed at Rome,...has the following inscription, written by his friend, George Lord Lyt-

Boswell actually had planned to publish accounts of Hume and the 10th Earl of Eglintoune. While preparing the *Tour* manuscript for the press, he wrote two long passages about the Earl and the particulars of his life (*Journal*, pp. 416-7, 438-9). In one of those passages he wrote,

The most honourable testimony I can produce will be to arrange in good preservation all that I can collect concerning him. I have some of his conversation and several of his letters to myself. The Countess his mother presented me with all his letters to her Ladyship, and I hope to obtain some valuable communications from others.

(Journal, pp. 416-7)

For whatever reason, he did not include these passages in the final copy of the *Tour*, substituting instead the short paragraph mentioning the Earl's dramatic shift in life style and premature death. Although Boswell decided not to rouse his readers' interest by his proposed account of Eglintoune, he did tempt them with his account of Hume's deathbed memoirs, "which I may some time or other communicate to the world." He got at least one response in print to this promise. In Samuel Lyson's scrapbook, there is an article, probably from the *St. James's Chronicle*, which states,

Mr. B. promised in his tour, to give the publick some account of the behaviour and conversation of Mr. Hume in his last moments. It is ardently

desired that this gentleman will not delay the communication of intelligence, so extremely important to the interest of religion. 14

However, though Boswell did record materials for the life of Hume , 15 he never published them.

In all of these passages Boswell is advertising his skills and qualifications as a biographer, not only pointing out to his readers what he is capable of doing, but also trying to convince them that they need what he can produce. Probably his most important skill—Boswell's ability to turn conversation into biography—is also advertised, though not until it has been brilliantly exhibited. Near the end of the *Tour* this skill is mentioned and related directly to the events of 1745—6. The passage appears in the entry for November 11:

The rash attempt in 1745 being mentioned, I observed, that it would make a fine piece of History. Dr. Johnson said it would. Lord Elibank doubted whether any man of this age could give it impartially .-- Johnson. 'A man, by talking with those of different sides, who were actors in it, and putting down all that he hears, may in time collect the materials of a good narrative. You are to consider, all history was at first oral. I suppose Voltaire was fifty years in collecting his Louis XIV. which he did in the way that I am proposing .--'He did so. He lived much with all Robertson. the great people who were concerned in that reign, and heard them talk of every thing; and then either took Mr. Boswell's way, of writing down what he heard, or, which is as good, preserved it in his memory; for he has a wonderful memory.'--With the leave, however, of this elegant historian, no man's memory can preserve facts or sayings with such fidelity as may be done by writing them down when they are recent .-- Dr. Robertson said, 'it was now full time to make such a collection as Dr. Johnson suggested.' (Tour. p. 393)

Although Boswell does not mention that he would like to write this history, the obvious implication of the conversation is that this is exactly the sort of work at which Boswell would excel. 16 In his journal entry for 16 September 1785, Boswell wrote, "An addition to my 'Tour' (defending my faculty of writing conversations) occurred to me. So I staid in town and Malone and I laboured as usual." 17 Although this entry probably refers to the last paragraph of the *Tour* and not to this

conversation, 18 it does indicate that Boswell is concerned to advertise this particular biographical and historical skill. The attentive reader, considering this conversation, may well think back to the account of Bonnie Prince Charlie, which could be seen as one chapter of the book that Boswell could write so well, if he chose to.

In Boswell's account of Prince Charles on Sky and Rasay, there is great emphasis placed on authenticity and on "domestick privacies" and "the common incidents of life." He stresses the authenticity of his narrative in several ways. On the title page it is called "An Authentick Account;" at the end of the account he states, "Here I stop -- having received no farther authentick information." In the paragraph of introduction he emphasizes the fact that his sources were spoken or written accounts of people "personally concerned." Another method Boswell uses to stress authenticity is to show that he himself talked to or was on close terms with the people involved -- "The mistress of Corrichatachin told me;" "I led him [John M'Kenzie] into a detail of the particulars;" "my worthy friend Malcolm." And, in fact, almost all of the information in the account is from the conversations Boswell had recorded in his journal or from the "paper of information" sent to him by John Macleod. 19 It is also significant that Boswell does not include anywhere in the Tour two passages from the journal dealing with the events of 1745-6 in which the information is from secondhand, unauthentic, sources (Journal, pp. 277-9, 446-7).

Boswell definitely emphasizes the "domestick privacies" rather than the larger, political aspects of his subject. Nearly one-third of John Macleod's twenty-three-page account concerns plans for the Prince's escape or details of its execution. Boswell eliminates almost all of this except for what is necessary for an understanding of the narrative. His narrative is less the story of a prince in a dangerous, romantic situation than of a brave, good-humored man in a fatiguing, sometimes ridiculous, situation. The scenes that stand out in Boswell's narrative are of the Prince crossing a stream in women's clothing or talking during a troubled sleep or singing an Erse song on a rough sea; of John M'Kenzie contradicting the Prince or of the old woman refusing to wash his feet because she thinks he is a servant. Although Boswell eliminates indelicate references to such things as the Prince's dysentery or his drinking, he retains most of the human or humorous aspects of the story. Occasionally he slightly alters the source (either his own journal or Macleod's paper) to heighten these aspects. For example, Macleod writes that the Prince, talking of what his enemies would do with him if he were captured, "did not believe they durst take his life publickly,

but thought they wou'd take it privately by poison or assassination."20 Boswell changes the latter part of the statement to "he dreaded being privately destroyed...." Macleod writes that the Prince tried to disguise himself by tying "a foul handkerchief about his head and put his bonnet above it."21 Although Boswell eliminates the word "foul," he changes "bonnet" to "nightcap." Other changes Boswell makes tend to raise the stature of the Highlanders or heighten the impression of the Prince as a comrade of Malcolm Macleod and his cousins. John and his brother are "gallant;" Malcolm is "trusty." He emphasizes that the Prince's eating oat bread and whiskey "was very engaging to the Highlanders." He de-emphasizes most of the references to acts of homage offered to the Prince by the Highlanders. For example, Macleod reports that 'Mackinnon... seeing the prince, was so transported he cou'd not help falling on his knees before him and bless his Royall highness aloud."22 Boswell states merely that he "did homage to the Wanderer."

Boswell's account of Bonnie Prince Charlie is a short, but thorough, authentic segment of biography, which "is interesting in itself," as McAdam admits; it would certainly serve as a miniature piece of evidence proving that Boswell is a good biographer.

Although we do not know for certain how Boswell viewed its relationship to the rest of the Tour, we do know that he deliberately tried to draw attention to it and to set it apart. In all three editions published during his lifetime the account is given three lines on the title page: "With an Authentick Account of The Distresses and Escape of the Grandson of King James II. in the Year 1746." In all editions the account is separated from the text by short rules. In the paragraph preceding the account Boswell refers to it as "The following abstract;" at the beginning of the thirtieth paragraph within rules, he declares, "Here I stop,--." And although he wrote to the king on 6 June 1785, "If I am not permitted to avoid what would hurt my tenderness for what even has been Blood Royal, I shall leave out those Anecdotes,"23 he obviously was quite anxious that "those Anecdotes" did become part of his book. He wrote to the king and then spoke with him concerning the title to be used for Charles. 24 He had had his source material from his journals for over ten years and the paper from John Macleod for almost that long; 25 yet he put his account together on 13 July 1785.²⁶ In other words, this was not something he had already written, but something written especially for the Tour.

Boswell wanted to call attention to his account of Prince Charles, and he was successful—at least the popular press paid attention. The magazine reviews made little mention of

the account, but it was published as a separate piece in three newspapers—The London Chronicle, The General Evening Post, and The Edinburgh Evening Courant—in October, 1785²⁷ and in The Hibernian Magazine in November.²⁸ So even those readers who did not read the entire Tour had before them a complete biographical sketch by James Boswell.

Boswell included in the Tour a variety of materials which together form a prelude to his Life of Johnson. The Johnsonian material is the largest, most important, and most obvious element of this prelude. But other parts of the work, including some passages that seem to be digressions, have essential, though more subtle, prelusive functions. These other parts fall into three categories--descriptions of good biography, short (usually less than one page) biographical accounts of noble and famous men, and the narrative of Bonnie Prince Charlie. The descriptions of good biography function in two ways: they are records, in part, of some of Johnson's opinions; but they also serve as a basis for judging all of the biographical elements. Because these descriptions are parts of reported conversations, Boswell gives the impression that he is not simply offering his own opinion; Johnson, Lord Elibank, Robertson, Monboddo, Mr. M'Queen, all seem to agree on the proper nature of biography. In addition to telling the reader what biography should be, Boswell also gives him several short examples; and, of course, Boswell's examples conform to his definitions quite well. Therefore, the short biographical passages, positioned throughout the book, suggest to the reader that Boswell is a capable and qualified biographer. The account of Bonnie Prince Charlie, in approximately the center of the book, is a miniature but whole, interesting, extractable example of Boswellian biography, an example that could easily be serialized in the newspapers so that many thousands of people (not just buyers of the Tour) could see what Boswell was capable of producing. The definitions and short examples not only reinforce each other, they also reinforce the Johnsonian material. In the "specimen" of Johnson's biography which constitutes most of the Tour, Boswell follows, on a large scale, the guidelines he has recorded: he emphasizes authenticity of information and reveals many "domestick privacies" from this portion of Johnson's life. The short examples of non-Johnsonian biography suggest that since Boswell is, in general, a good biographer of famous men, he will be a good biographer of Johnson.

If the *Town* is viewed simply as a book about Johnson, then it is a less than unified work with at least one major and a number of minor digressions; from this viewpoint, Boswell has made not just one "error in judgment" as McAdam suggests, but several. However, if these are errors, they are errors which

Boswell made very deliberately since all of these seeming digressions were not parts of the original journal, but were, in fact, written especially for the published *Tour*. Not only did Boswell choose deliberately to include these passages, he also deliberately (and, in the case of the Bonnie Prince Charlie account, obviously) called attention to them. This deliberateness seems to indicate that Boswell had a definite reason for including these passages, that he considered them to be important, even essential, to the structure of the *Tour*. If the *Tour* is viewed as a prelude to the *Life of Johnson*, and not simply as a flawed partial biography of Johnson, the account of Bonnie Prince Charlie and the other short biographical passages are essential elements of the whole structure and combine with the Johnsonian material to form a much more satisfying, unified work of literary art.

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NOTES

- ¹ Citations of the *Tour* are to *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, *Together with Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides and Johnson's Diary of a Journey into North Wales*, ed. G. B. Hill, Revised and Enlarged by L. F. Powell, 2nd ed., vol. 5 (Oxford, 1964). The account of Bonnie Prince Charlie appears on pp. 187-205.
- ² See, for example, the short history of Mr. Boyd's life (p. 99); the story of Lord Errol's surgeon that "he told us" (p. 101); or the story of Lady Grange, apropos of which Johnson remarks that his host might profit by establishing "a place for naughty ladies" (p. 227-8).
- ³ Citations of the original Hebridean journal (referred to as *Journal*) are to Frederick A. Pottle and Charles H. Bennett, eds., *Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides...*, new ed., with add. notes (New York, 1961). The record of Flora Macdonald's conversation is on p. 161.
- ⁴ #C1864 in the forthcoming Catalogue of the Boswell Papers at Yale University (For the Greater Part Formerly the Collection of Lt.-Colonel Ralph Heyward Isham), ed. Marion S. Pottle, Claude Colleer Abbott and Frederick A. Pottle.

- ⁵ See, for example, John N. Morris, Versions of the Self: Studies in English Autobiography from John Bunyan to John Stuart Mill (New York, 1966), pp. 204-5; Ann Schalet, "Literature as Product and Process: Two Differing Accounts of the Same Trip," Serif, IV (1967), p. 16; and William R. Siebenschuh, Form and Purpose in Boswell's Biographical Works (Berkeley, 1972), p. 36.
- ⁶ See *Critical Review*, 60 (Nov., 1785), p. 343 and Hill-Powell, *Tour*, p. 532.
- ⁷ See A. R. Brooks, James Boswell (New York, 1971), p. 71; D. B. W. Lewis, The Hooded Hawk, or the Case of Mr. Boswell (New York, 1946), p. 145; and Moray McLaren, A Highland Jaunt. A Study of James Boswell and Samuel Johnson upon their Highland and Hebridean Tour of 1773 (London, 1954), pp. 139-46.
- ⁸ John W. Croker, Ed., The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., Including a Journal of his Tour to the Hebrides, vol. 2 (London, 1831).
- ⁹ E. L. McAdam, Johnson and Boswell: A Survey (Boston, 1969), p. 212.
 - 10 See Pottle-Bennett, Journal, "Preface," pp. x-xxiii.
- ¹¹ Marcuse, p. 2. Paper read before the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, Chicago, April 21, 1978.
- 12 Frank Brady and W. K. Wimsatt, eds. Samuel Johnson: Selected Poetry and Prose (Berkeley, 1977), p. 183.
- 13 All but the passages on the 11th Earl of Eglintoune and James Macdonald occur at the beginning or end of the Tour; there are no journal entries or only rough notes for these parts. For the Eglintoune passage, see Pottle-Bennett, Jour-nal, pp. 114 and 116; for the Macdonald section, p. 118.
 - 14 In the manuscript collection at Columbia University.
- 15 Frederick A. Pottle et al., eds., Boswell in Extremes, 1776-1778 (New York, 1970), pp. 11-15.
- 16 Boswell did consider writing this history. See Hill-Powell, Life, III, 162; and Frederick A. Pottle, The Literary Career of James Boswell, Esq. (Oxford, 1929), p. 305.

17 Frederick A. Pottle, ed., Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle in the Collection of Lt.-Col. R. H. Isham (Mt. Vernon, New York, 1928-34), XVI, 124. I wish to thank the Yale University Library for granting me permission to quote from the Private Papers.

- 18 See Pottle, *Literary Career*, p. 122. The *Tour* was almost completely printed by September 16.
- ¹⁹ The following indicates the location of the information in either or both of these sources for each paragraph of Boswell's account of Bonnie Prince Charlie:

Paragraph	1	Journal, Macleod,	•
"	2 3-4	Journal, Macleod,	•
**	5	Journal,	pp. 124-5
"	6-14	Macleod,	pp. 3-8
"	15	Macleod, Journal,	. .
"	16	Macleod, Journal,	pp. 9-11 p. 130
11	17-18	Macleod,	pp. 9-12
**	19	Macleod, Journal,	
"	20	Macleod, Journal,	pp. 14-6 p. 131
11	21	Journal, Macleod,	p. 129 pp. 17, 20
*11	22-26	Macleod,	pp. 17-20
**	27		pp. 21-2 pp. 129, 140
11	28-29	Macleod,	pp. 22-3
**	33	Macleod, Journal,	•
**	34	Journal,	p. 139
**	35	Journal,	
11	36–44		similar to material in pp. 162-3

- ²⁰ Macleod, p. 11. I wish to thank the Yale University Library for granting me permission to quote from the Macleod letter. This permission applies to this quotation and to the others which follow. I also wish to thank the staff of the Yale Boswell Editions for furnishing xeroxes of the documents I needed and for providing helpful suggestions and corrections.
 - ²¹ Macleod, p. 18.
 - ²² Macleod, p. 21.
 - ²³ Pottle, Private Papers, XVI, 277.
 - ²⁴ Pottle, Private Papers, XVI, 99-101.
- 25 See #C1863 and #C1864 in the forthcoming *Catalogue of the Boswell Papers at Yale University*. The account was sent to Boswell with a letter dated 12 July 1775.
 - ²⁶ Pottle, *Private Papers*, XVI, 110.
- ²⁷ Anthony E. Brown, Boswellian Studies, A Bibliography (Hamden, Conn., 1972), p. 118.
- ²⁸ Richard Cole, "James Boswell and the Irish Press," BNYPL, 13 (Nov., 1969), p. 592.