

"BE ANOTHER"

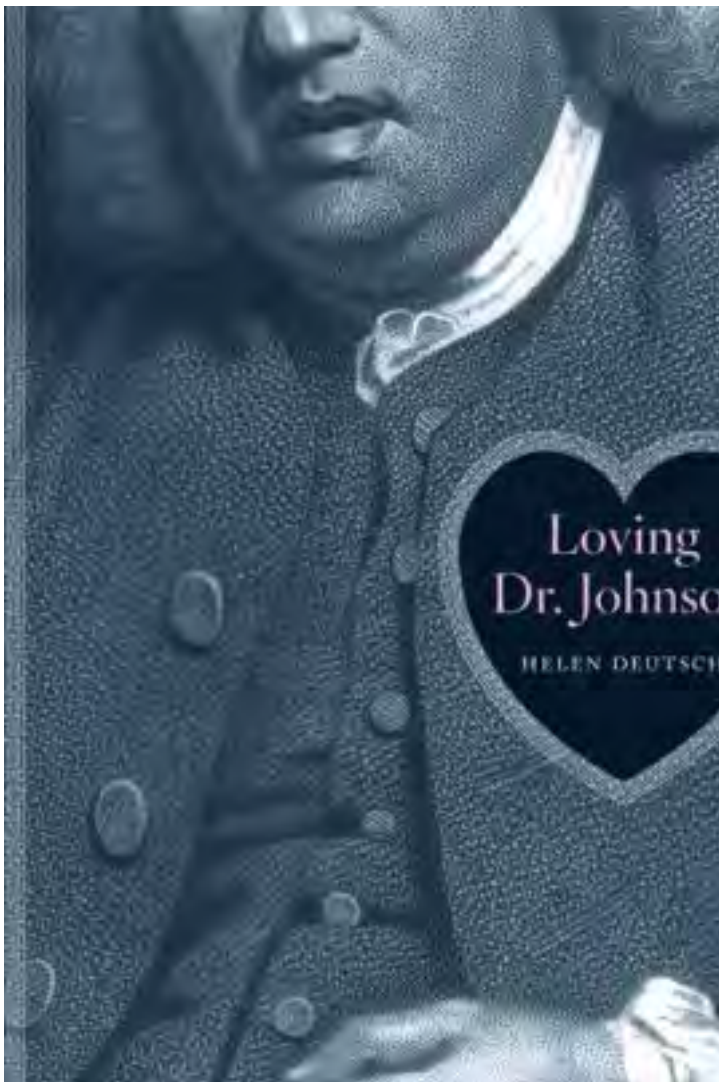
# Author Love and Anecdote

## HELEN DEUTSCH

An excerpt from *Loving Dr. Johnson* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), in which Deutsch analyzes postmortem devotion to the eighteenth-century icon

This book, originally to be titled *Dr. Johnson's Autopsy* began with my curiosity about why the exemplary eighteenth-century Englishman of letters was dissected, probably against his living will. While it has led me down many unexpected paths, that curiosity remains unsatisfied; it has resulted, instead, in my recognition—and profession—of love, both the love of literature and the love of Johnson, of which the autopsy was a complex and conflicted expression. In its service, I want in the rest of this introduction to consider not the anecdotal form in which Johnson endures but rather the material remains of Samuel Johnson's autopsy and my own and others' ongoing search for them. That autoptic desire to see the thing itself, a seeing by oneself and of oneself (as the word's etymology indicates) is not, as it turns out, so different from the familiar introductory impulse to focus upon an anecdote, since Johnson's selected remains, claimed by the surgeons and carefully preserved as "preparations," have yet to be found. One of the many functions of the anecdote—like the anatomical preparation, the result of a personal selection and preservation process—is to stand in for the lost body.

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I love anecdotes. I fancy mankind may come, in time, to write all aphoristically, except in narrative; grow weary of preparation, and connection, and illustration, and all those arts by which a big book is made. If a man is to wait till he weaves anecdotes into a system, we may be long in getting them, and get but few, in comparison of what we might get.

SAMUEL JOHNSON,  
as quoted by James Boswell,  
*Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*, August 16, 1773

Where then shall Hope and Fear their Objects find?

SAMUEL JOHNSON,  
*The Vanity of Human Wishes*

I am inclined too, I must admit, to begin with a form of apology, or at least explanation, for my use of the “I” in this introduction and periodically throughout what follows. My turn to the personal voice is a turn away from the certainty of linear argument and toward this book’s more literary anecdotal logic of association, allusion, and affection. This book owes its essayistic and emotional impulses in no small degree to my position as a woman attempting to participate in and to understand a largely all-male form of author love so passionately institutionalized as the proper form of literary authority that its roots in the subjective (as a form of love and thus of personal inclination or choice) and in the corporeal (as the preservation of a singularly eccentric authorial body) have been all but forgotten.

This “I” is hardly unaware of a variety of histories into which it fits, most recently the (oft-criticized) call in the mid-1980s, issuing most prominently from the Duke school, for feminist criticism in the personal voice. In my bringing of my own and Johnson’s persons into view, I owe something to the work of critics such as Marianna Torgovnick, who in *Gone Primitive* includes a personal writing exercise in which she imagines the anthropologist Malinowski’s body. Relocating Malinowski’s “authority to speak, his basis for generalization,” in the particularized anecdotal, personal realm of the diary he kept during his early fieldwork in Australia—a realm in which his body figures in vexed opposition and connection to those of his primitive objects of study—Torgovnick insists “that we reverse the ethnographer’s traditional gaze and look inward toward the ethnographic authority, not just out at the Primitive Other—that we use our eyes and imaginations to make Malinowski an anthropological exhibit as pointed and meaningful as any other.”<sup>1</sup> In a parallel economy of disavowal, behind the professional authority that until recently legislated both scholarly deportment and the agenda of an eighteenth-century British canon now in the process of being radically redefined, is a body so radically particular as to have been labeled monstrous in its own time.

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1. Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 235.

## Helen Deutsch

Helen Deutsch, Professor of English, earned her Ph.D. at the University of California at Berkeley in 1990.

She first came to UCLA in 1992 as an Ahmanson-Getty postdoctoral fellow participating in a year-long interdisciplinary program on “Constructing the Body in the 17th and 18th Centuries” at the Clark Library, and returned permanently in 1995. She teaches and publishes at the crossroads of eighteenth-century studies and disability studies and is particularly interested in questions of authorship, embodiment, and literary form, especially as these questions are played out against the eighteenth century’s relationship to antiquity. She also wrote *Resemblance and Disgrace: Alexander Pope and the Deformation of Culture* (Harvard University Press, 1996) and co-edited, with Felicity Nussbaum, “Defects”: *Engendering the Modern Body* (University of Michigan Press, 2000). She has also published translations of classical Latin poetry.