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A Glimpse Into Childhood

CONSTANCE B. SCHULZ

Susan Paul, *The Memoir of James Jackson, the Attentive and Obedient Scholar, Who Died in Boston, October 31, 1833, Aged Six Years and Eleven Months*, ed. Lois Brown. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000. 192 pp., illus. \$36.95 (cloth), ISBN 0-674-00092-7; \$14.50 (paper), ISBN 0-674-00237-7.

Sources by or about the lives of young children are not widely or easily available; sources offering a glimpse into the life a young African American child are particularly scarce. For that reason alone, Lois Brown's rediscovery of this long-neglected *Memoir* and Harvard University Press's decision to publish it in a serious scholarly edition (in paper as well as cloth) is an important contribution to the literature. Brown describes the *Memoir*, originally published in Boston in 1835 by the white antislavery activist bookseller and printer James Loring, as a combination of "two distinctive nineteenth-century literary forms, the didactic spiritual narrative and the juvenile biography" (p. 34).

Intended for an audience of white and black children, the *Memoir* relates the life of its subject, James Jackson Jr., through seven brief chapters, short enough to be read by or to the youngest members of a family or class. Its author, Susan Paul, states clearly in her preface that she hopes its story will "do something towards breaking down the unholy prejudice which exists against color" (p. 67) and tells anecdotes throughout her narrative to bring home that message. Her chief illustration to that end is of James's goodness of behavior and his interest in the Bible, prayer, and heaven throughout his short life: "Now I think all good children will say that James was a good boy, and they would like to have seen him. Perhaps some one may dislike him because he was coloured. I would ask if James was not *good*; his having a dark skin does not make *bad*" (p. 71). The seven chapters memorializing James were followed by a pair of poignantly sentimental poems, "The

Little Blind Boy" and "Am I to Blame?" which both reinforce this didactic purpose.

By including in the *Memoir* moral tales of James and his desire to learn to read the Bible, attend Sunday school, be removed from the temptation of bad company, and in a sudden illness at the end of his life leave "this wicked world" and be with Jesus, Paul participated in an evangelical literary genre for children common in the early nineteenth century. What sets her story apart from most of that literature, however, is her incorporation into it of issues of race and condemnations of slavery and prejudice. From the *Memoir* itself, readers actually learn little about the real child James: his father died before he was two; he had brothers and sisters; he attended the primary school of the Boston African Church. The final chapter is perhaps an exception; it gives details of his sudden illness and painful death which seem particular to an observed event, rather than being an affecting generic tale of suffering and deathbed redemption.

In the introduction we learn that James was one of several children of James Jackson, "a respectable coloured man" (p. 4) about whom little is known beyond a series of addresses with Boston's sixth-ward African American community. The family was active in the African Church, and the children attended its primary school on Belknap Street. Most of the lengthy introduction is dedicated instead to the better-documented life and times of Susan Paul (1809–41), young James Jackson's teacher and memorialist. Her story is important in the growing literature on African American women in the early nineteenth century. Paul was born into an influential black Bostonian family; her father Thomas was a prominent Baptist minister at the Belknap Street African Church. She moved in literary and social circles that included abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and other antislavery activists. Well educated (probably in the school that occupied the basement of her father's church), she herself became a teacher in the primary school, the leader of a "Juvenile Choir" of African American children from that school, and an activist in evangelical education, temperance, and antislavery societies. The first African American officer in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1833, Paul

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never married. Her publication in 1835 of the *Memoir* makes her the first black woman biographer, predating by twenty-one years the biography of William Wells Brown published by his daughter in 1856.

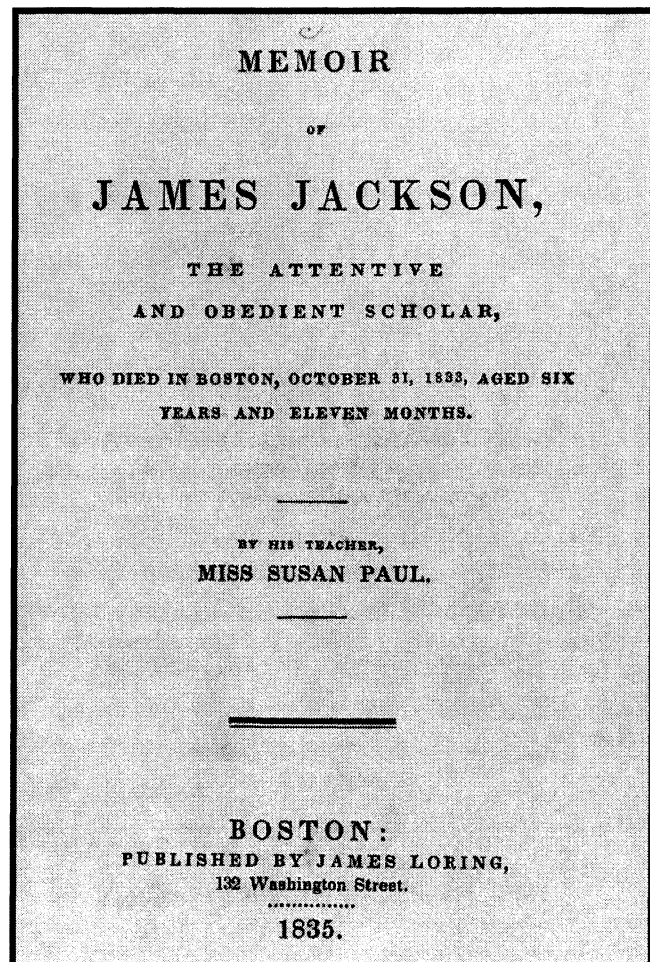
With its lengthy introduction and detailed annotation, this edition of the *Memoir* makes an important contribution to scholarly knowledge of free northern African American women in the early nineteenth century. The editor, Lois Brown, now an assistant professor of English at Mount Holyoke and a member of its African American and African Studies Program faculty, is well grounded in the literature and history of African American literary contributions in antebellum New England. She uses the introduction to do a fairly extensive literary analysis of the content and intent of the *Memoir*, placing it within African American writing as a context for understanding the forms of pious identity and evangelical piety of the text. In reviewing it for this audience, however, it is necessary to go beyond that intellectual and historical analysis to examine its editorial approaches and contributions.

This well-intentioned and thoroughly researched edition falls short in a few particulars of what most editors would consider "best practice." In concept, this is essentially a literary "clear text" edition of a published source rather than a historical documentary edition. Its editorial apparatus includes a detailed introduction greater in length (sixty-three pages) than the thirty-eight-page *Memoir*. After the *Memoir* this edition includes a fourteen-page selection of transcriptions of articles and letters published in *The Liberator* between 1834 and 1837, concerned primarily with Susan Paul's Juvenile Choir and its performances. A four-page chronology focuses primarily on events in the life of Susan Paul and on the publication of other African American sources; the birth of James Jackson Jr. is not included. The introduction, *Memoir*, and the appended section of articles and letters are extensively annotated. For the *Memoir*, the editor has reproduced in the notes the full text of the verse of each biblical reference. The text is illustrated with eight halftones, four of them reproductions of articles in *The Liberator*, the remainder a map of Boston in 1835, a photograph of the African Church, the title page of the original 1835 edition of the *Memoir*, and a facsimile reproduction of a letter by Susan Paul to William Lloyd Garrison.

Two things are prominent by their absence: an index to the extensive information found in the introduction and the annotations, and some explanation of editorial methodology, particularly as it relates to transcription of the original source texts. The source text for the *Memoir* seems to be the copy originally in the library of the Yale College

Brothers in Unity but now at Butler Library at Columbia University, one of six extant (perhaps five, see note 70, p. 153). The National Union Catalogue of pre-1957 imprints lists five, one of which was then still at Yale. Other copies listed by Brown are at Oberlin College, the General Theological Seminary of the Protestant Episcopal Church in New York, the American Antiquarian Society, and the Library Company of Philadelphia. The editor has apparently examined most of them but does not clearly identify which was her source. The original text is described in the introduction (p. 24) as eighty-eight pages; the present transcription is only thirty-eight pages. Were there any problems with the text? Any typographical errors or other anomalies? If so, has the editor silently corrected them, and what policies did she follow in doing so? What about the materials in the "Articles and Letters" section after the transcribed text of the *Memoir*? The presence of a fac-

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The title page of the first edition of the Memoir of James Jackson.