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THE ITALIAN JOURNEY OF HESTER LYNCH PIOZZI;  
The personal and cultural transformation of a Georgian lady

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The Italian Journey of Hester Lynch Piozzi

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## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2004, I received the Pugh Grant from the history department at Mount Holyoke College to perform preliminary research in Italy and England for a senior independent project. I was returning from my junior year abroad in Italy, with the intention of studying the very broad topic of American and British women traveling in Italy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While researching this topic at the British Library, I came across a copy of the 1784 *Florence Miscellany* written by four Britons abroad: Robert Merry, William Parsons, Bertie Greatheed, and Hester Piozzi. I was intrigued by the involvement of Hester Piozzi in a literary endeavor in which she was outnumbered by men three to one.

When I returned to Mount Holyoke for the fall semester in September, my information sources expanded as I focused my study on the Italian tour of Hester Thrale Piozzi. The more I read her letters and diaries, and became involved in her life, the more I came to recognize the rich complexities of her life; she was a devoted wife and mother,

a proud aristocrat, and an ambitious literary figure. In her early adulthood, she endeavored to fill her expected role as an obedient Georgian wife, but throughout her first marriage she lamented the burdensome distraction and impediment that family life was to her literary pursuits. She was a woman who desired an intellectually engaging life in which her talents as a scholar would be nurtured and respected, but she was bound by the social conventions of eighteenth-century Britain. Her life choices were never hers to make; they were subject to the wishes first of her mother and uncle, then of her husband Henry Thrale and the family's close friend, Samuel Johnson. After Thrale's death, Hester's decision-making process came to be dictated by Thrale's friends, the executors of his will, the Thrales' daughters, and more generally, her social peers.

In 1782, when Hester resolved to marry the man of her choosing, the Italian musician Gabriel Piozzi, she consciously broke through the social confines of eighteenth-century British life. Her disregard of the expectations placed on her as a wealthy, middle-aged widow reveals that she grasped the importance of friendships and values not defined by economics and status. By asserting herself, she confronted conflicts of gender, religion, class, and culture. The negative

ramifications of her decision were hostility from her family and circle of friends, gossip spread about her throughout Britain, custodial loss of her children, and a slight decrease in the annuity from her husband's estate. The upshot of it, though, was that she gained financial freedom, liberty to write and publish, and the choice of where to live and with whom to be friends for the rest of her life.

Shortly after the Piozzis' wedding in 1783, the couple fulfilled Hester's lifelong desire of traveling to Italy. As she began a new life with a new partner, her scholarly temperament was stimulated by the novel and ancient charms that Italy exuded. She made serious work of observing and absorbing the sights, society, language, and literature around her; and more than most Grand Tourists, she immersed herself in the foreign culture. Her travel writing reveals a thoughtful, informed analysis of Italian values, social conventions, politics, and religion.

Hester was a woman who dared to take up the pen to define herself as a scholar through writing. She published her first books when she was in Italy including her commercially successful biography of Samuel Johnson. Her literary abilities allowed her to easily insert herself as an equal member of the group of poets and intellectuals of the

*Florence Miscellany*, which had some impact on the Romantic Movement, which was popular in the early nineteenth century. The friendship of the Florence coterie also caused Hester to reinterpret her political views as she witnessed the “enlightened” foreign rule of the Austrians in Italy.

Historians and literary scholars have not forgotten Hester’s eventful life in the nearly two centuries since her death; however, they have been apt to overlook her accomplishments to focus mainly on her relationship with “Dictionary Johnson,” during the period of her first marriage to Thrale. Many of her early biographies memorialize her in her role as wife, mother, and confidant of Johnson, and have such titles as *Dr. Johnson & Mrs. Thrale* and *Mrs. Thrale of Streatham Park*. L.B. Seeley’s 1891 work was entitled *Mrs. Thrale (afterwards Mrs. Piozzi)*, although she was Mrs. Piozzi for thirty-eight years and Mrs. Thrale for only eighteen. *The Letters of Mrs. Thrale*, edited by R. Brimley Johnson in 1926, contains more than three times as many letters of Mrs. Piozzi than of Mrs. Thrale.

Only in the last few decades, with the rise of the study of women’s history, have scholars begun to acknowledge the



later, literarily productive period of Hester's life. William McCarthy's *Hester Thrale Piozzi, Portrait of a Literary Woman*, traces Hester's entire career as a writer, from its meager beginnings to its demise, and with a thorough analysis of her major works. Within the last fifteen years, Edward and Lillian Bloom published an unparalleled selection of the over two thousand letters that Hester composed between the years 1784 and 1821. The last of the six volumes of *The Piozzi Letters* was published in 2002, and they have been an indispensable tool for hearing Hester's voice during this thesis project.

Hester Piozzi was the first person to write comprehensively about her life story. She had lived a closely scrutinized life, and she recognized the interest her private papers held for the public reader. In 1816, five years before her death, she left careful instructions for the care of her literary remains and named her admiring younger friend, Sir James Fellowes, as her literary executor.<sup>1</sup> In her will, she left him £200 for the care, collection and publication of her journals, pocket-notebooks, and letters (which she had prudentially instructed her friends to save).<sup>2</sup> Hester advised Fellowes, in 1819, that his first duty was to "protect my

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<sup>1</sup> Hayward, 235.

<sup>2</sup> Hayward 217 and Bloom, vol. 1, 16.

Remains—The poor Remains of The Piozzi: her *never-forfeited honour*—and secondly at immeasurable distance, *her Literary Fame.*”<sup>3</sup>

Hester chose Fellowes because of the interest he had shown in her life during their acquaintance, which began on January 15, 1815, after Hester had retired to Bath. Fellowes persuaded Hester to set down her own life story for posterity and to aid him with his job as her executor.<sup>4</sup> As a result of his curiosity, Hester wrote her invaluable autobiographical memoirs and presented them to Fellowes in December 1815.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, Fellowes was never able to carry out his obligation to Hester because her adopted heir (and Piozzi’s nephew), Sir John Salusbury Piozzi Salusbury, would not release her papers after Hester’s death.<sup>6</sup>

Edward Mangin, a friend of Hester’s during the later part of her life, was the first to publish a book about her, in 1833, entitled *Piozziana; or, Recollections of the late Mrs. Piozzi, with Remarks. By a Friend.* But it was not until

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<sup>3</sup> Edward A. and Lillian D Bloom, eds. *The Piozzi Letters: Correspondence of Hester Lynch Piozzi, 1784-1821*. 6 vols. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989, vol. vi, 293.

<sup>4</sup> Hayward, A, Esq, ed. *Autobiography, Letters and Literary Remains of Mrs. Piozzi (Thrale)*. 2 vols. London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861, vol. i, 235.

<sup>5</sup> Clifford, James L. *Hester Lynch Piozzi (Mr. Thrale)*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, 435-436.

<sup>6</sup> Sir John Salusbury Piozzi Salusbury was the name he took after being adopted by Hester in 1798. The second Salusbury was added when he was knighted in 1818. Bloom, 24.

Abraham Hayward's book was published, in 1861, that a comprehensive interpretation of Hester's life and works was presented to the public. Hayward's *Autobiography, Letters, and Literary Remains of Mrs. Piozzi (Thrale)* appeared in two volumes. Although he entitled it an autobiography, he wrote a 234-page introduction to her life and writings in the first volume before entering Hester's own seventy-page autobiographical memoir. The remainder of the first volume and the second volume are taken up with notes on some of her published works, "Miscellanies or original compositions in prose and verse,"<sup>7</sup> and excerpts from her diary, *Thraliana*.

The years 1941 and 1942 marked a new era in the study of Hester Thrale Piozzi with the publication of two major works. The first, in 1941, was that of the great eighteenth-century scholar James Clifford, who wrote the most complete and well-cited biography of Hester Thrale Piozzi to date. Clifford's biography has stood the test of time; it is in its second edition and was last reprinted in 1986. The other substantial work of the nineteen forties was the publication of Hester's entire diary, *Thraliana* (more than a century after Hester had left her instructions for Sir James Fellowes). Katharine C. Balderston undertook the massive task of editing the manuscripts, which are housed at the

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<sup>7</sup> Hayward, vol. 2, Contents.

Huntington Library in Pasadena. The immense two-volume set that she produced is the most direct to follow Hester's thoughts and activities for the period between 1776 and 1809.

As a result of auctions and sales in the early twentieth century, the original papers of Hester Thrale Piozzi now reside in various public and private repositories throughout North America and Britain. The John Rylands University Library in Manchester holds the largest collection of her letters, as well as the journals from her journey to the Continent between the years 1784 and 1786. Many American institutions also have large collections of Thrale/Piozzi manuscripts, such as the large collections at the Princeton University Library, Columbia University, the Houghton Library at Harvard, and the Beineke Library at Yale.<sup>8</sup>

This project, which began a year ago as a general look at the Grand Tour, has become an investigation of how one woman's life was transformed during, and as a result of, her journey through Italy. Hester Thrale Piozzi was an iconoclast who challenged the definition in which British society cast her. As a dissenter, she opens a window for us onto the

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<sup>8</sup> For a more complete list of Piozzi marginalia sales and locations, see Lillian and Edward Bloom's "Portrait of a Georgian Lady: the Letters of Hester Lynch (Thrale) Piozzi, 1784-1821." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*. 60 (1978): 303-338.

limiting expectations; yet true opportunities, for courageous women in Georgian England.

## THRALE'S DEATH AND HESTER'S LIFE

Already in repose for eight days, the body of Henry Thrale was taken to St. Leonards, the church of the family's estate at Streatham Park, on Wednesday, April 11, 1781. The church pews were draped in black for his funeral, and six mourners on horseback were paid to follow the deceased's casket to the church.<sup>9</sup> The body was laid to rest in the family vault in the crypt of the church, near his father, Ralph Thrale, his mother-in-law, Hester Maria Cotton Salusbury, and the eight Thrale children who had not survived their father.<sup>10</sup>

Thrale's close friend, Samuel Johnson, wrote of the event in his *Annales*, "on Wednesday, 11, was buried my dear Friend Thrale . . . and with him were buried many of my hopes and pleasures."<sup>11</sup> Johnson remained at Streatham Park to bury his friend and take care of his estate as one of the four executors.

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<sup>9</sup> *Thraliana*, 490, n. 4 (taken from Ry Eng. MS 598).

<sup>10</sup> "Thrale website." Thrale.com, 4/19/05.

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, Samuel. *Diaries, Prayers, and Annals*. ed. E.L. McAdam, Jr. with Donald and Mary Hyde, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958, 304.

Thrale's wife, Hester, however, was surprisingly absent from the funeral. She had done what she was accustomed to doing at the death of a loved one, and had left their house the very morning of Thrale's death.<sup>12</sup> Hester took their oldest daughter Queeney (Hester Maria) and departed their Grosvenor Square house (the house in which Thrale died) for Streatham Park. Hester, however, soon found she was "pursued with officious Friendship," and she took her daughter further away to Brighthelmston. In search of consolation, she visited a family friend there, Mr. Scrase, who had earlier comforted Hester upon the death of her son Ralph. It was there, she said, "I had Time to collect my scattered Thoughts, to revise my past Life, & resolve upon a new one."<sup>13</sup> From there, Hester retired with Queeney to Brighton, where they were when the funeral took place.

After a long decline brought on by a stroke, Henry Thrale's death of apoplexy occurred at age fifty-two, in his rented house in London in Grosvenor Square on Wednesday, April 4, 1781. Henry had not been a careful steward of his physical health and after his first stroke, in June of 1779, his

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<sup>12</sup> Hester was not present for the death of her younger son, Ralph in the summer of 1776 (Clifford, 126). A few days after the death and burial of her favorite child and only remaining male heir, Harry, Hester departed for Bath with her family (Clifford, 137).

<sup>13</sup> Balderston, Katharine C. *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (Later Mrs. Piozzi) 1776-1809*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942, 490.

personal habits, instead of improving, had become outright dangerous. He quickly acquired a copious appetite that terrified his friends and physicians; and instead of leading a healthful, retiring life, he sought excitement at every turn. A month before his death, Hester noted in her diary Thrale's penchant for making impractical plans: "Mr. Thrale talks now of going to Spa & Italy again: how shall we drag him thither? a Man who cannot keep awake four Hours at a Stroke, who can scarce retain the Fæces &c."<sup>14</sup> At the end of January 1781, the Thrales had taken up the house in the fashionable Mayfair neighborhood in London to be nearer to exciting society, and Thrale's doctors. And as Thrale's hunger for action and stimulation grew, his health seriously worsened.<sup>15</sup>

The week of Thrale's death was a typical week for the family. Hester went to church on Sunday, and on Sunday and Monday nights they entertained their regular guests, including Samuel Johnson, James Boswell, Sir John Lade, and Giuseppe Baretti (whom Hester disliked fiercely). Shocked by the "voracity" of Thrale's appetite, Johnson remarked, "Sir—after the Denunciation of your Physicians

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<sup>14</sup> *Thraliana*, 487.

<sup>15</sup> Clifford. *HLP*, 194.



this Morning, such eating is little better than Suicide.”<sup>16</sup>

Undaunted by Johnson’s remark and Hester’s rebuke, Thrale abandoned himself to unbridled excess.

On Tuesday, Hester noted in her diary that Thrale did not have “one Symptom worse than he had had for Months.”<sup>17</sup> She was taken up with details for a party that Thrale had planned to host the next day. Gabriel Piozzi, an Italian singer that the Thrales employed as a music instructor for their eldest daughter, was put in charge of the musical entertainment for the evening. He observed Hester’s anxiety about Thrale’s health and the large party she was frantically preparing for. He sang her a song to sooth her, after which her friend Mrs. Byron observed, “You know, I suppose, that that Man is in Love with you.” To which Hester replied, “I am too irritated to care who is in Love with me.”<sup>18</sup> A few months later, however, Hester would care a great deal more about the affections of Mr. Piozzi.

On Tuesday afternoon, Thrale came home exhilarated about the impending event. Hester noted, “he had invited more People to my Concert or Conversatione or musical party of the next day, & was delighted to think what a Show

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<sup>16</sup> *Thraliana*, 488.

<sup>17</sup> *Thraliana*, 488.

<sup>18</sup> Clifford, 198, taken from Mainwaring Piozziana, i. 133.

we should make.”<sup>19</sup> In spite of the high spirits he had in anticipation of the next day’s gathering, Thrale quickly fell ill again just a few hours later. Queeney, the eldest daughter, discovered her father sprawled on the floor of his bedroom. When she asked him why he was there, he insisted, “I chuse it, I lie so o’purpose.”<sup>20</sup> Queeney fetched Thrale’s valet, and Hester sent for their friend, Dr. Pepys. Through the night, Thrale suffered a series of epileptic seizures.

Samuel Johnson arrived at the Thrales’ house around eleven o’clock in the evening and sat by Thrale’s bed during the whole ordeal, still holding out hope for his friend. Hester visited the ailing patient, but was too unsettled by the preparations for bleeding him and had to leave. Johnson later described the final night with Thrale:

I staid in the room, except that I visited Mrs. Thrale twice. About five, I think, on Wednesday morning he expired; I felt almost the last flutter of his pulse, and looked for the last time upon the face that for fifteen years had never been turned upon me but with respect or benignity.<sup>21</sup>

So ended the life of Henry Thrale, brewer and Member of Parliament for Southwark. Doubtless to his deep regret, Thrale had left no male heir, so ending the Thrale line.

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<sup>19</sup> *Thraliana*, 489.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Thraliana*, 490, n. 3, taken from Johnson, *Prayers and Meditations* entry of April 13, 1781.

The death of Henry Thrale dissolved the regular life of the Streatham Park coterie. Samuel Johnson, who for almost twenty years had been virtually a constant guest of the Thrales, was devastated by Thrale's passing. He claimed "No death since that of my wife has oppressed me like this."<sup>22</sup> Thrale left behind his wife Hester Salusbury, four unwed daughters, and the great Southwark brewery that had created his family's wealth.

Thrale's death evidently affected the different members of the household in different ways. For Johnson, it provoked melancholy thoughts of inescapable, fast-approaching mortality. The lexicographer was himself a sickly man of seventy-two years. He wrote to Hester a few days after Thrale's death:

I comfort you, and hope God will bless and support you; but I feel myself like a man beginning a new course in life. But our great care ought to be, that we may be fit and ready, when in a short time we shall be called to follow him.<sup>23</sup>

Johnson did not see himself at the beginning of a new milestone of his life, but rather nearing the end of it. For him, Thrale's death was the conclusion of one of the happiest

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<sup>22</sup> Piozzi, Hester Lynch. *Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D., to which are added some poems never before printed*. London: A Strahan; and T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1788, 191.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 197.

times in his life, and he could not believe that he would be so contented again.

April 4 was also the dissolution of the only life Hester had known since the beginning of her marriage to Thrale eighteen years earlier. Hester was now only forty years old, and spirited enough to look forward to a new stage of her life. Although Hester and Henry's marriage was a fundamentally functional arrangement, it had never grown to become a union built on love (or a faithful one on Thrale's part). For Hester, Thrale's death promised to be the first step on the path out of the oppression she had suffered for nearly two decades. Even Johnson, normally unsympathetic when Hester complained about the poor treatment she received from his "master," recognized that "she lived like [her] husbands kept mistress, -shut from the world, its pleasures or its cares."<sup>24</sup> Johnson was also the one who revealed to Hester that the reason Thrale had chosen her was that she was that only woman whom he asked that was willing to live in the Borough, away from bustling London.<sup>25</sup>

Hester had been made to wed Henry Thrale, in 1763, by her uncle and guardian, Sir Thomas Salusbury. Her father, John Salusbury, and her beloved tutor, Dr. Arthur Collier,

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<sup>24</sup> Hayward, vol. I, 257.

<sup>25</sup> Hayward, i, 256.

had both disapproved of Thrale and opposed the match; but her father died suddenly in December 1762, and Hester's circumstance came to depend on the good will of her uncle, Thomas. Upon her father's death, Sir Thomas Salusbury had promised Hester a gift of £10,000 and an annuity of £200. But even after many friends had implored Sir Thomas to honor his offer, he reneged and changed the terms, saying that he would give Hester the money when she married someone of her mother's choosing.<sup>26</sup> Since John Salusbury had squandered his fortune early on, Hester and her mother became gentlewomen with no way to support themselves and dependent on the charity of their family. Faced with no alternative but marriage, Hester wedded the indifferent businessman twelve years her senior on October 11, 1763.

The marriage ended Hester's mostly happy childhood, during which she was the "joint plaything" and only offspring to result from her parents' affectionate union. As an only child, her parents, particularly her father, nurtured and encouraged her curiosity through an uncommonly strong education for a female.<sup>27</sup> When Hester was seven years old, her father had grudgingly left his family to look for wealth in the new settlement of Nova Scotia under Governor Charles

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<sup>26</sup> Clifford, 25-46

<sup>27</sup> Hayward, vol. I, 242.

Cornwallis.<sup>28</sup> Hester and her mother went to London and stayed with various relations, where Hester's precocious wit was used to charm their benefactors.<sup>29</sup> Hester's adolescence was disjointed; moving from one household to another according to the invitations they received, Hester had no security and relied on her charm to win her relatives' favor. She was usually the only child among adults and took pleasure in being the center of attention (a trait that stayed with her to the end of her life).

After a childhood spent at the apex of British society, among such company as Lord Halifax, William Hogarth,<sup>30</sup> David Garrick, and the Duke and Duchess of Leeds, Hester's new life as a brewer's wife in the London suburb of Southwark provided little excitement. In her memoirs, she lamented feeling of such little importance during the early years of her marriage. Thrale offered her little sympathy: he did not feel that a lady's duty had anything to do with running the house and Hester claimed that she never knew what was for dinner until she saw it.<sup>31</sup>

Hester was left alone during the daytime while her husband worked at the brewery. He forbade her one of her

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<sup>28</sup> Clifford, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Hayward, i, 243-245.

<sup>30</sup> Hester claimed that she sat for Hogarth's *The lady's Last Stake* 1759 (Clifford, 23).

<sup>31</sup> Hayward, i, 256.

favorite pastimes, riding, because he thought it was unwomanly. In her loneliness, Hester returned to another favorite interest from her youth--composing verses. With the birth of their first daughter in September 1764 and by campaigning for a seat in Parliament for her husband, Hester said her worth to Thrale increased.<sup>32</sup>

The Thrales met Samuel Johnson through their mutual friend, the playwright, Arthur Murphy, in 1765. After his first dinner at the Thrales' Southwark house, Johnson became a regular fixture, progressively spending more time with them until the couple began to keep a room always ready for him, wherever they lived. From this arrangement, Johnson enjoyed a previously unknown, lavish lifestyle and engaging conversation, while Thrale enjoyed the notoriety of playing host and confidant to such an illustrious personage, and Hester gained an ear and collaborator for her literary interests.<sup>33</sup>

Henry Thrale had always been concerned about raising his status in society (being of middling origins, he could not claim a lofty descent like Hester), and was thrilled that the presence of Johnson and Hester's lively conversation regularly attracted leading dignitaries to Streatham Park.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 256-257.

<sup>33</sup> Clifford, 54-65.

During the late 1760s and 1770s, the Thrales also became intimate with such prominent figures as Joshua Reynolds, Giuseppe Baretti, Charles and Fanny Burney, and Oliver Goldsmith.<sup>34</sup> Concurrent with her duties as hostess during this period, Hester was also constantly pregnant; in the fifteen years between 1764 and 1778, Hester gave birth to twelve children (only four daughters survived to adulthood). With her success (and even fame) as a hostess and mother, Hester gained importance to her husband, too, though never true affection, and Thrale routinely chided Hester for giving him no surviving male heir.<sup>35</sup>

Hester's marriage to Thrale had nonetheless brought her into contact again with the foremost artists and intellectuals of her time. Although she had first been isolated by her marriage, society later came to her; and her opinion was respected among her peers. Hester reveled in the attention she received as hostess; but in spite of this, her duties as mother and obedient wife were all consuming and exhausting. She was constantly under stress from entertaining their guests,<sup>36</sup> worrying about the volatile business of the brewery, and nursing or mourning her children. Thrale often

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 66-67.

<sup>35</sup> Hayward, i, must find this entry.

<sup>36</sup> Johnson was the most demanding guest of all and would often require that Hester stay up chatting with him entire nights when he suffered from insomnia (Clifford, 67).



left Hester to deal with these hardships on her own, as he did in 1772, when she had to rectify Thrale's failed business venture because he was too depressed from his error to pull the brewery, and the family, out of financial danger.<sup>37</sup> The threat of venereal disease was also a constant worry due to Thrale's routine infidelity, and during his last years, she had to suffer humiliation from the obvious attentions he showed to their friend, Sophia Streatfield.<sup>38</sup>

After Thrale's death, Hester gradually found ways to break from the things that represented her oppressed married life to create her own life. On May 31, 1781, Hester and the four executors of the estate, John Cator, Henry Smith, Jeremiah Crutchley, and Samuel Johnson, concluded the sale of the brewery to the Quaker banker David Barclay for £135,000. Hester claimed that Johnson was the only member of the party who regretted the sale as he had briefly entertained the idea of becoming a wealthy businessman.<sup>39</sup> In her diary and letters, Hester expressed the relief she felt at the sale of the brewery and she called it the "greatest Event of my Life" and a "Golden Millstone" removed from her neck.

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<sup>37</sup> Hayward, ii. 36 and Clifford, 93.

<sup>38</sup> Clifford, 163 and Hayward, i, 296-297, 305-307.

<sup>39</sup> Hayward, 293-295.

<sup>40</sup> She no longer had to spend long days in the counting house and was able to take up her status as a Gentlewoman again.

Through May and June, Hester tried to find succor from her worries and grief in the soft voice of the singer Gabriel Piozzi. Piozzi left in July to visit his family in Italy, and before he left, he sang Hester an affectionate *partenza*, which she translated one part as:

Each Sentiment I feel for You  
No Pow'r on Earth shall e'er subdue  
For future Beauty's fairest Face,  
Obliterate my Delia's Grace.<sup>41</sup>

Throughout the summer, Hester's affection seemed to grow from absence and in October, she complained that she hadn't heard from him in a while. By the end of November, though, she claimed, "I have got my Piozzi home at last, he look thin & battered, but always kindly upon me I think."<sup>42</sup>

While Hester was cultivating her relationship with Piozzi, London newspapers were always speculating on her next move. They made the wrong assumption, however, that Johnson was the natural successor to Thrale.<sup>43</sup>

In a further step away from her former life, Hester let the family's estate at Streatham Park, in August 1782, to Lord Shelborne. Johnson was devastated to leave the house

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<sup>40</sup> *Thraliana*, 498 and Clifford, 202.

<sup>41</sup> *Thraliana*, 498.

<sup>42</sup> *Thraliana*, 519.

<sup>43</sup> Clifford, 212-213.

and it was often assumed that Hester let the house to be rid of Johnson, but financial difficulty was a more probable cause.<sup>44</sup>

With a decreased income, Hester could not afford the upkeep of a great house and she decided to retrench and take her daughters on a tour of the Continent (with Piozzi as guide).<sup>45</sup>

This idea was sidetracked, however, as her family and friends became aware of her affection for Piozzi.

By September, Hester was more open with her feelings for Piozzi, and her friend Fanny Burney took notice. Hester was conflicted and debated in *Thraliana* whether she should follow her heart or her prudence:

he is *below me* forsooth: in what is he below me? In Virtue—I would I were above him; in Understanding—I would mine were from this Instant under the Guardianship of his:--in Birth—to be sure he is below me in birth, & so is almost every Man I know, or have a Chance to know;--but he is below me in Fortune—is mine sufficient for us both? More than amply so. Does he deserve it by his conduct in which he has always united warm notions of Honour, with cool attention to Economy; the Spirit of a Gentleman with the Talents of a Professor? how shall any Man deserve fortune if he does not?<sup>46</sup>

Internally, she played devil's advocate and argued that she has five daughters from her first marriage whose reputations would be seriously damaged if she gave into her own sentiments.

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<sup>44</sup> Clifford, 212.

<sup>45</sup> *Thraliana*, 540-541.

<sup>46</sup> *Thraliana*, 544.

Hester plainly realized the objections that society would pose to any match between her and Piozzi; his fortune and rank were decidedly beneath hers, he was a foreigner, a public performer and, most dreadful of all, a Catholic.<sup>47</sup> She was not deluded about the impediments to the match, but she did dispute the justice of a society that would deny her her choice:

I married the first Time to please my Mother, I must marry the second Time to please my Daughter—I have always sacrificed my own Choice to that of others, so I must sacrifice it again:--but why? Oh because I am a Woman of superior Understanding, & must not for the World degrade my self from my situation in Life. but if I *have* superior Understanding, let me at least make use of it for once; & rise to the Rank of human Being conscious of its own power to discern Good from Ill—the person who has uniformly acted by the Will of others, has hardly that Dignity to boast.<sup>48</sup>

It is clear from this passage that Hester was resolute to stand her ground and do what she felt was right. She was fed-up with following the will of her mother, Thrale, Johnson, Thrale's executors and her daughters; now she was ready to face the repercussions of deciding her own life.

The prediction of a dispute with her friends was not ill-founded, and it was not until July 1784 that Hester and Piozzi were finally able to wed. In the year and a half between the time Hester announced her intention and was

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<sup>47</sup> *Thraliana*, 545.

<sup>48</sup> *Thraliana*, 544-545.

finally able to execute it, she faced objections from all fronts, including Johnson, her daughters (especially Queeney), the Burneys, and the London press.<sup>49</sup> The so-called “Queen of the bluestockings,” Elizabeth Montagu, was so distressed about the connection that she blamed Hester’s affection on insanity.<sup>50</sup> In a letter to her friend and fellow bluestocking, Mrs. Vesey, Mrs. Montagu expressed the shock that many of her peers must have felt:

Mrs. Thrale’s marriage has taken such horrible possession of my mind I cannot advert to any other subject. . . I am myself convinced that the poor Woman is mad, and indeed have long suspected her mind was disordered. She was the best Mother, the best Wife, the best friend, the most amiable member of Society. She gave the most prudent attentions to her Husband’s business during his long state of imbecility and after his death, till she had an opportunity of disposing well of the great Brewery. I bring in my verdict lunacy in this affair. I am heartily grieved from Miss Burney, and Dr. Johnson; female delicacy, and male wisdom, will be much shocked, and they have both a very sincere attachment to their friends, and a delicate sense of honour. I respected Mrs. Thrale, and was proud of the honour she did to the human and female character in fulfilling all the domestick duties and cultivating her mind with whatever might adorn it. I would give much to make everyone think of her as mad, the best and wisest are liable to lunacy; if she is not considered in that light she must throw a disgrace on her sex.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Clifford, 217-218.

<sup>50</sup> Reginald Blunt, ed. *Mrs. Montagu, “Queen of the Blues,” Her Letters and Friendships from 1762 to 1800*. 2 vols. London: Constable and Company.

<sup>51</sup> *Mrs. Montagu*, ii. 274-275.

In January 1783, Hester's daughters pleaded with her that a connection with Piozzi would ruin the family. They finally broke her down and she tearfully ended the engagement with Piozzi, who returned to Italy.<sup>52</sup>

Over the course of the next year things worsened for Hester with the death of her daughter Henrietta and the illness of Johnson (from whom she was increasingly estranged) and of her daughter Cecilia. Hester also suffered from depression and exhaustion. By November she was sufficiently ill to worry her daughters, who at length relented and implored Piozzi to return to England for the sake of their mother's health. It was difficult to convince Piozzi to make the long and dangerous trip back, because he wanted to be sure that he would not be subjected to further distress. In March 1784, he agreed to return and went to Quinzano to obtain a copy of his birth certificate for the marriage contract; by June, he was on the way back to England.<sup>53</sup>

For the better part of the summer, Hester awaited the return of her "caro sposo." Once they were married, Hester finally intended to visit Italy and she hoped to bring her daughters with her and Piozzi. The trustees refused this plan, however, and the four young "misses" had no desire to live

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<sup>52</sup> *Thraliana*, 557-560.

<sup>53</sup> Clifford, 220-226.

with Piozzi anyway.<sup>54</sup> A family friend, Miss Nicholson took charge to chaperone the four girls and shield them from any damage to their reputation caused by Hester's approaching nuptials.<sup>55</sup> Fanny Burney, who was a mediator between mother and daughters during the whole ordeal, recommended to Queeney that, for decorum's sake, the girls should wait until Piozzi had landed in England to leave their mother: "For my own part, I wish him to *land* before you go, & think there is no other way for your going to be proper: for all that you mean to mark is a desire to avoid *him*, not quit *her*."<sup>56</sup>

The family did part ways only shortly before Piozzi's arrival at Bath on Sunday, June 27. Hester wrote that they parted, "prettily enough *considering* (as the Phrase is) We shall perhaps be still better Friends apart than together."<sup>57</sup> Hester's thoughts quickly turned from her daughters, however, to the anticipation of being reunited with her beloved. On July 1, Piozzi re-entered Hester's life when he dined with her at her house in Bath.

The next month was full of busy preparations for the wedding. On July 8, Piozzi signed a bond in front of the Bishop of Bath stating that there were no lawful impediments

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> *Queeney Letters*, 149.

<sup>56</sup> *Queeney Letters*, 98.

<sup>57</sup> *Thraliana*, 599.

to the union. Hester and Piozzi then traveled to London where they spent the better part of the month making arrangements with the Church and lawyers for the wedding.<sup>58</sup> As a result of their different religions, Hester and Piozzi encountered many tribulations and had to exchange their vows twice, once in a Catholic ceremony in London, and again in a Protestant ceremony in Bath. The marriage certificate was signed by Jean Balthazar, Comte d'Adhémar de Montfalcon, the French ambassador, which implies that the wedding took place in the chapel of the French embassy. After the nuptials were exchanged in London, the couple returned to Bath and was married in the Protestant faith at St. James's English Church on July 25.<sup>59</sup>

Hester Piozzi seemed contented in the first months of her marriage saying that in the six weeks since her wedding she “enjoyed greater and longer Felicity than [she had] ever yet experienced.”<sup>60</sup> On September 5, the couple was in Dover, ready to set out on their honeymoon voyage through the Continent to Italy. Hester must have been all eagerness to visit, “the finest Country in the World, in Company with the most excellent Man in it.”<sup>61</sup> She bid goodbye the country that

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<sup>58</sup> Clifford, 228.

<sup>59</sup> *Thraliana*, 611.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*



had tried to deny her freedom and happiness and set out on a journey of personal liberation.

## THE GRAND TOUR IN ITALY AND THE PIOZZIS' JOURNEY

By the mid-eighteenth century travel in Europe, and especially in Italy, was a standard part of the education of British gentlemen. The term 'Grand Tour' signified an extended journey for pleasure, a concept that did not exist on a large scale for the British until the early seventeenth century. The Grand Tour in Italy reached its maturity in the eighteenth century when travelers were more likely to visit the kingdoms of Italy than their belligerent neighbor, France. The tour of Italy specifically was a path to refinement through knowledge of ancient history and a heightened appreciation of art; Jeremy Black described the era as, "an ideal period in the fusion of tourism and social status."<sup>62</sup>

The British flocked to Italy in previously unheard of numbers as the eighteenth century progressed.<sup>63</sup> Travelers brought their tutors and servants along with them and

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<sup>62</sup> Black, Jeremy. *Italy and the Grand Tour*, 1.

<sup>63</sup> It was still nowhere near the levels it reached in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries but that was after the introduction of mass transportation and travel after 1815 is not considered 'The Grand Tour.' See Jeremy Black. *Italy and the Grand Tour*, 16. and Black, Jeremy. *The British and the Grand Tour*, 1-5.

although the upper class was the only social order able to travel on the continent recreationally, they did as a normal course of action. In Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, the famous doctor is quoted as saying, "A man who has not been in Italy, is always conscious of an inferiority, from his not having seen what it is expected a man should see."<sup>64</sup>

The concept of the Grand Tour for women, however, developed much later and had different motives and significance than the gentleman's tour. The pleasurable and educational journey to Italy did not come into vogue for British ladies until the end of the eighteenth century because women's motives for travel were different. Men went, or were sent, to study art and antiquity in order to make them better-informed British citizens and politicians upon their return. By observing, comparing, and conversing on their journeys, these gentlemen aspired to attain the Enlightenment ideals of rationality and reason and to carry these lessons and observations back with them to England.

Since women's place in society and, therefore, their education, differed from gentlemen's, what were their motives for going abroad? Some went with husbands or family members because of health or financial concerns (it

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<sup>64</sup> *Boswell's Life of Johnson* .(Oxford, 1965), pg. 742

was much cheaper to maintain a high standard of living in Italy than it was in England). Mariana Starke traveled to Italy from 1792-8 as a nurse to her consumptive mother and wrote a travel guide that set the standard for the genre.<sup>65</sup>

In many instances, women sought a reprieve from the rigid and meddling British society and they envisioned Italy as a place where they could be free from public scrutiny and live without the restraint of British societal norms. During her sojourn between 1791 and 1793, Lady Webster was able to escape an unhappy marriage to a man twenty-three years her senior while carrying on a love affair with Lord Holland. When her husband left the family in Italy and returned to England in May 1795, Lady Webster was able to travel freely throughout the peninsula with her children and lover. Italy did not always represent a liberty however; the Duke of Devonshire exiled his wife, Georgiana, to Italy to conceal an illegitimate birth and to check her extravagant lifestyle.<sup>66</sup>

In an extraordinary example, the Berry sisters traveled to Italy with their father to complete their broad education. Their story is unique in that their father took so much interest and time educating his daughters. It was his life's passion and both girls, though they never married,

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<sup>65</sup> Ingamells, John. "Starke, Mariana" *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

benefited from the fruits of his labor to become to Horace Walpole “the best informed and the most perfect creatures I ever saw.”<sup>67</sup> While in Italy, the sisters did all of the things that a gentlemen’s education in Italy might include such as studying the art of the Vatican and taking a course in antiquities in Rome.<sup>68</sup>

Although many went abroad to escape British society, Italy was, ironically, also a British cultural center. Travelers from England would often go in large groups or make plans to rendezvous with compatriot friends for different segments of their journey. Florence, Naples, and Rome were hubs for ex-pats in Italy and were often the cultural frontier for England. Countless numbers of British travelers enjoyed the hospitality freely offered at the Palazzo Manetti, the residence of Horace Mann, British representative at Florence from 1738-1786.<sup>69</sup> In his post as the British Ambassador to the Kingdom of Naples between the years 1764 and 1800, William Hamilton (and after 1791, with his wife Emma) created the nexus of the Neo-Classical movement. Rome was always a popular destination for British tourists because of

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<sup>67</sup> *The Walpole Correspondence*. Vol. 34, 24-26.

<sup>68</sup> Ingamells, John. “Berry, Mary” *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

<sup>69</sup> Ingamells, John. “Mann, Horace.” *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997 and Brian Dolan. *Ladies of the Grand Tour*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001.

the Ancient ruins and the art of the Vatican; and as the seat of the exiled Stuart court, it was the Jacobite headquarters until the rising was crushed in 1745.

Stately entertainment was offered to British abroad in Naples by Sir William and Lady Hamilton. The houses they kept in Naples were reminiscent of court life; artists, writers and “even respectable English visitors” flocked to the extravagant receptions.<sup>70</sup> These miniature British ‘colonies’ were a strange dichotomy between strict British social norms and new social standards of a foreign nation. Whereas in England, Emma was refused recognition from the Queen because of her low birth, in France, she met Marie Antoinette and became a close confidant of Queen Maria Carolina in Naples.

Sir William was a passionate scholar of antiquities and was fascinated by the discoveries at Pompeii and the active Vesuvius. During his residence in Naples, he actively collected ancient artifacts and volcanic samples. Lady Hamilton picked up her husband’s enthusiasm for newly discovered antiquities and took to dressing in ancient Roman costumes and recreating the poses that women were found making in paintings from Pompeii and ancient sculpture.

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<sup>70</sup> Jeaffreson, J.C. *Lady Hamilton and Lord Nelson*. (1887), pg. 282 [from [The Dictionary of National Biography](#)]

Emma's 'attitudes' might have been scandalous in another setting (by eighteenth century standards, she was scantily clad in them) but in Naples they drew the admiration of artists and classical scholars such as Goethe, Angelica Kauffman, and Hugh Douglas Hamilton.<sup>71</sup>

Hester Thrale Piozzi, well-known for her intimate friendship with Samuel Johnson, had many motives for going to Italy. She set out on her journey eager to visit Italy for her own didactic purposes. From Dover, before crossing the channel on September 5, 1784, she wrote:

I am setting out for the Country, which has produced so many People and things of consequence from the foundation of Rome to the present Moment that my Heart swells with the Idea and I long to leap across intermediate France.<sup>72</sup>

Mrs. Piozzi was a literary woman, fond of learning languages and studying poetry and literature. Her time in Italy was personally gratifying as she was able to indulge and inform her curious mind. Although Hester had long desired to see Italy, her need to go intensified after her marriage to the Italian musician, Gabriel Piozzi on July 23, 1784.

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<sup>71</sup> Ingamells, John. "Hamilton, William." *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997 and Andrew Wilton and Ilaria Bignamini, ed. *Grand Tour; The Lure of Italy in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Tate Gallery, 1996, 64-65.

<sup>72</sup> Piozzi, Hester Lynch. *Observations & Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey Through France, Italy, and Germany*, 12.

Italy was in many ways a temporary escape for Hester; nevertheless it was a productive exile. Hester's marriage to Piozzi had put her out of favor with her closest acquaintances in England, including Johnson and her daughters and a lot of malignant gossip had been published in London newspapers about the couple.<sup>73</sup> Naturally, Hester needed to distance herself from that hostile environment until tempers cooled and public interest waned.

A two or three year tour of the Continent also achieved two other purposes, that of improving their financial situation and raising Piozzi's status in the eyes of the British. Two years before departing for the Continent, Hester wrote in her journal, *Thraliana*, about going to Italy alleviate financial difficulties. A lawsuit brought against Hester by her uncle's widow had brought financial debt and necessitated leasing the family's residence at Streatham Park. On August 22, 1782 she wrote:

After having long intended to go to Italy for Pleasure, we are now settling to go thither for Convenience: the Establishment of Expence here at Streatham is more than my Income will answer; my Lawsuit with Lady Salusbury turned out worse in the Event, & infinitely more costly than I could have dreamed on . . . I must go abroad & save Money. To shew Italy to my Girls, & be shewed it by Piozzi, has long been my dearest wish.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Clifford, James C. *Hester Lynch Piozzi (Mrs. Thrale)*, 218, 230, & 240.

<sup>74</sup> *Thraliana*, 540.



This passage already demonstrates her affection for Piozzi, but by the time Hester actually was able to make the trip with him, it was under much different circumstances than she had imagined. Either because her daughters did not want to go or because the guardians of Thrale's estate forced a separation with her children, Hester went to Italy only with her new husband and their servants.

The Countess Evelyn Martinengo Cesaresco revised Hester's observations of her tour in Italy and republished them in 1892 in *Glimpses of Italian Society in the Eighteenth Century*. In her preface, she provides another motive for Hester's trip to Italy: raising Piozzi's social status. Cesaresco wrote that her residence abroad was, "also a means of raising Piozzi in the eyes of the world by showing that he was cordially welcomed in his own country."<sup>75</sup> One of the many objections made against the marriage by Hester's friends was that he was a public performer and therefore socially beneath her. Hester thought that if Italian nobility recognized his higher status, so would her friends on their return to England.

### The Italian Journey

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<sup>75</sup> Cesaresco, Countess Evelyn Martinegno. *Glimpses of Italian Society in the Eighteenth Century from the Journals of Mrs. Piozzi*. London: Seeley and Co. Limited, 1892, 4.

The Piozzis departed England six weeks after their marriage and arrived in the port of Calais on September 7, 1784. Hester had visited France before in 1775 with Johnson, her first husband Henry Thrale, her eldest daughter, Queeney, with Giuseppe Baretta as their guide. A plan was made during that trip for another one to Italy in the future, but was indefinitely postponed due to the illness and death of the Thrales' only male heir. Hester kept a separate travel journal on the French tour, a habit she maintained to great effect on her later trip to Italy with Piozzi.<sup>76</sup>

From Calais, the Piozzis moved through Montreuil, Amiens, and Chantilly, arriving in Paris around September 11. During their two-week stay, Hester enjoyed revisiting of sites that she had seen on her 1775 trip. They spent time in the company of some Italians, including the aging satirist Carlo Goldoni, and Hester took the opportunity to practice her Italian.<sup>77</sup> The couple was in Lyons on September 25 from which they took a path well-traveled by British tourists through the Alps to Turin.<sup>78</sup> The trip through the Alps filled Hester with the sense of the sublime that would entrance later

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<sup>76</sup> After her return from the Continent, she published her journals in *Observations & Reflections made in the course of Journey through France, Italy, and Germany* in 1789.

<sup>77</sup> *Observations & Reflections made in the course of Journey through France, Italy, and Germany*, 10, 12.

<sup>78</sup> See, Jeremy Black's, "From the Alps to the Arno." *Italy and the Grand Tour*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003, 33-45.

Romantic poets. It gave her “a sensation of fullness never experienced before, a satisfaction that there is something great to be seen on earth—some object capable of contenting even fancy.”<sup>79</sup> The description of this leg of the journey is indicative of the detailed, often poetic style that Hester employed throughout the written records of this trip.

By October 17, the Piozzis had crossed over, “the majestic boundaries of Italy,” and arrived in Turin.<sup>80</sup> While in Turin, Hester bemoaned the hostility and lack of letters from her daughters and she also received an insulting letter from Giuseppe Baretti condemning her imprudent marriage and attacking Piozzi’s character. As ever during her tour, Hester was torn between what she experienced in Italy and her ties in England. Although she had left England, she was still a topic of London gossip that reached her ears abroad.

The Piozzis were in Genoa at the end of October through November 3<sup>rd</sup> when they pass through Pavia on their way to Milan. They arrived at Milan on November 4 and by November 13, 1784, they had set up their house at the Casa Fedele.<sup>81</sup> Piozzi, although born Venetian, had been educated in Milan under the patronage of the Marquis D’Araciel and

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<sup>79</sup> *Observations & Reflections made in the course of Journey through France, Italy, and Germany*, 20.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Thraliana*, 616.

more than any other Italian city, Milan was home to the Piozzis. They spent five months there at the beginning of their tour and another four months there shortly before leaving Italy for Germany in the summer of 1786. Hester's home journal, *Thraliana* was left at the Casa Fedele while they visited other parts of Italy during which time she recorded her thoughts exclusively in her travel journal.

The couple quickly settled themselves in the society of Italian writers and prominent Church officials. Hester, always happy to be the center of attention, relished in the compliments she received from the Milanese: "the Marquis of Araciel brings me Presents of China, the Abate Bossi writes Verses in my Praise . . . my Heart is happy, & my Bones begin to get Flesh upon them."<sup>82</sup> Word of Dr. Johnson's death reached Hester on December 4 and she began to write her biography of him shortly after, with the persuasion of husband. They passed a happy Christmas in Milan when the servants and masters danced together without thought to their station and in February they watched the archduke and duchess parade down the street as part of the merrymaking of carnival. During Lent, the opera house

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

closed but like many noble houses, the Piozzis hosted a weekly concert for entertainment.<sup>83</sup>

On April 6, the Piozzis closed up the Casa Fedele and made their way through Lodi, Cremona, Mantua, Verona, Vicenza, and Padua, then down the Brenta River by boat to Venice. They passed the better part of April and May visiting the Doge's Palace, Saint Mark's, Murano Island and the other typical attractions of Venice. They had to adjust to the late hours kept by Venetians as they enjoyed Quirini's Casino where women were admitted and they discussed literary topics with personages such as Zingarelli and Ferdinand Bertoni.<sup>84</sup> Hester departed Venice, the "seat of enchantment" as she termed it, with regret on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May, stopping in Ferrara on the way to Bologna.<sup>85</sup>

The Piozzis spent a week in Bologna, which Hester found a melancholy, sorrowful town. She enjoyed the art in the Zampieri Palace and especially extolled the work of the Caraccis, Guercino and Guido Reni. Increasingly during the tour, Hester wrote about the art she saw and how it affected her. In a healthy display of physical strength, she made the three-mile climb under the porticos to the Church of San

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<sup>83</sup> *Thraliana*, 623 and *Queeney Letters*, 194.

<sup>84</sup> *Observations & Reflections*, 77-118.

<sup>85</sup> *Observations & Reflections*, 113.

Luca on a hill overlooking the city. Gabriel and Hester visited the University museums and Hester commented on the presence of the great female professor at Bologna, Laura Bassi. The King of Naples was also a visitor that week and they attended a *festa di ballo* in his honor. In the end however, Hester was not pleased with the amusements offered in Bologna and happily left the “disagreeable city.”<sup>86</sup>

The couple crossed over the Apennines to Florence without stopping to sleep. They arrived on June 4, and commenced their summer residency at the Hotel Menghitt, where everything was done “in the English way.”<sup>87</sup> For the first time since leaving England, the majority of the Piozzis’ social circle was British. They spent most of their time in the company of William Parsons, Robert Merry, and Bertie and Ann Greatheed. Over the summer, Hester and the first three wrote and privately published a book of poetry entitled, *The Florence Miscellany*.<sup>88</sup> Italian poets Cavalier D’Elci, Ippolito Pindemonte, and Lorenzo Pignotti also contributed to the book.

Hester spent a good deal of time in Florence studying famous manuscripts at the great Medici libraries and

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<sup>86</sup> *Observations & Reflections*, 136.

<sup>87</sup> *Observations & Reflections*, 137.

<sup>88</sup> See Chapter 3 [or page #]

occasionally attended the *conversazioni* held on Saturday nights at the Palazzo Manetti, home of the “sick & old”<sup>89</sup> diplomat, Horace Mann.<sup>90</sup> She visited the countryside and remarked on the flowers, fruits and livestock of the region. She was a few times in the company of the grandson of James II, whom she described as a pitiful figure. Hester became ill with a fever at the end of the summer, which pushed their departure date to September 12.

Hester recovered from her illness in the town of Lucca where she was impressed by the long-held liberty of the small region. They also visited the church and leaning tower in Pisa, where Hester was struck by the frequent use of profanity by the locals. The Piozzis settled in Leghorn for a few weeks while Hester compiled her *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D. during the last twenty years of his Life* and shipped them to her editor, Thomas Cadell, in London. They retired to Bagni di Pisa after the completion of the book to relax and take the waters, at which point Gabriel became ill. This was a miserable part of the journey for the Piozzis. In the country house they had rented, Hester felt the locals were taking advantage of her, vermin were so

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<sup>89</sup> *Observations & Reflections*, 140.

<sup>90</sup> *The Dictionary of British & Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800* claims that Gabriel Piozzi was not invited to some assemblies of British nobility (like the ones hosted by Mann) because of his Catholicism but Hester recorded that she attended them at least.

abundant, they made the bed “all alive,”<sup>91</sup> and on their last night there was a ferocious thunderstorm.

The journey continued south through Sienna to Rome where the Piozzis stayed from late October into November at Strofani’s in Piazza di Spagna. They met up with the Greatheeds again and as they visited ancient ruins, Hester consulted Bertie Greatheed for information about the ancient Romans. Hester’s writing about Rome demonstrates a wide knowledge of ancient Roman and early Christian history. Hester was invited to attend the *conversazioni* of the Cardinal de Bernis and Madame de Boccapaduli and was extremely embarrassed when the Roman ladies had to cover their noses due to her pungent perfume. This seems to have caused her enormous mental anguish, because she wrote about it in *Thraliana*, in letters home, and in the book she published about Italy after her return.<sup>92</sup>

The Greatheeds and the Piozzis traveled together to Naples in November. This was the most southerly point of the Piozzis’ tour and the turning point from where they slowly retraced their steps through Italy. The Piozzis took an apartment in full view of the active Vesuvius, which fascinated Hester. She climbed Vesuvius herself and would

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<sup>91</sup> *Observations & Reflections*, 140.

<sup>92</sup> *Observations & Reflections*.



have given up before the top if Ann Greateed had not given the example of climbing it with her four-year-old son. Hester credited the British envoy at Naples, Sir William Hamilton for exciting the popular and scholarly interest in the volcano.

The travelers were back in Rome at the end of February to witness the last three days of carnival there. During this three-month stay, the Piozzis hired a *cicerone* to get the full course in ancient studies. Hester also tried to get a glimpse of the rare manuscripts in the Vatican library, but was only allowed to see a love letter from Henry VIII to Ann Boleyn because it was the only item there that the librarian decided “pertained to her.”<sup>93</sup>

Holy Week in Rome was a, “perpetual gala” and caused Hester to be nostalgic about springtime in England.<sup>94</sup> Before leaving Rome, Hester praised the artist Angelica Kauffman not only for her paintings, but also for her engaging conversation (a trait that Hester valued highly). On April 19, 1786 the Piozzis were on the road again towards Ancona. They stopped in the town of Terni three days after an earthquake had hit; the town was in alarm. They continued over the Apennines to Spoleto, where their coach broke down at the porta. A British classical scholar, Leonard Chappelow,

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<sup>93</sup> *Observations & Reflections*, 278.

<sup>94</sup> *Observations & Reflections*, 273.

fortuitously came to the rescue and they slowly continued on the road together back to Bologna, visiting Pesaro, Rimini and Ravenna on the way.

Much to Hester's disappointment, the group missed visiting the home of her favorite painter, Guercino, because the broken carriage could not carry them all the way to the town of Cento. The Piozzis reunited with the Greatheeds in Padua in the first week of May. The Greatheeds, Mr. Chappelow, and the Piozzis went to Rovigo together and then took a leisurely cruise down the Brenta to Venice again, reciting poetry and listening to Gabriel on his portable piano forte. In Venice, they dined at the Doge's palace on "plate order finer than the Pope's."<sup>95</sup> Unfortunately the June heat made the stench of Venice unbearable and they had a very short stay.

Through the month of June 1786, the Piozzis traveled through Padua (where they picked up their repaired carriage), Verona, Mantua, Parma, Piacenza and Lodi. On June 21, the couple was back in Milan reconnecting with their old friends. Milan was once again their home away from home and over the course of the summer they took smaller trips from there. Count Borromeo let them use Isola Bella in Lago Maggiore for an idyllic week in July. The couple celebrated their

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<sup>95</sup> *Observations & Reflections*, 317-318.

wedding anniversary in a country house in the Varesotto and passed ten days in the villa of the Marquis d'Araceli at Bergamo. They left Milan for the final time on September 22.

Verona was the last resting point in Italy before heading into the Dolomites and into Austria. The Piozzis took a circular route back to England, through Vienna and Prague, up to Dresden and Berlin, Brandenburg and Hanover, and into Brussels. Through Brussels they reached the northwest tip of France and arrived back at the port of Calais. They crossed the channel to Dover and were back in London in March 1787.

## WRITING ON ITALY

While in Italy, Hester maintained two journals:

*Thraliana*, which she had kept as a personal and family record since the time of her first marriage and her *Italian and German Journal*, a two-volume set, which was an account only of her time spent on tour with Gabriele Piozzi.<sup>96</sup> Her first entry was from Dover on September 5, 1784 right before crossing the English Channel; the final entry is from Lille in March 1787 (the Piozzis returned to London on March 10).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Balderston, Katharine C. *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (Later Mrs. Piozzi) 1776-1809*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942. This was the only instance that *Thraliana* has been published in its entirety. Balderston remarks in her introduction about the purpose and title of this collection of personal anecdotes, “Mrs. Thrale was beginning an English *ana*, undoubtedly modeled after the many French *anas* with which she was familiar, and which she extravagantly liked, as she herself revealed in 1780 when she wrote: ‘I talk now of nothing but French Literature—these *Anas* have seized me so.’ (*Thraliana*, 463, n.3) . . . It must be remembered that when she began to write the *Thraliana* she had no real English precedent . . . The English commonplace-book was still to be met with in Mrs. Thrale’s day (although its vogue was already going out, but its character was distinct from the *ana*, being a collection of pious or beautiful quotations, rather than anecdotes of living people and treasures of wit. This dearth of systematic collections of anecdote is strange in a century already disposed to love biographical minutiae, and about to produce, in Boswell, the biographer who raised familiar biography to a plane of high art; but it is a fact,” *Thraliana*, xi. Upon returning to England, Hester wrote, “God Almighty having graciously preserved us through a Journey of four Thousand Miles, without any thing which we could call a real illness, or a real Accident; and restor’d me on the 10<sup>th</sup> March to my native Country” (*Thraliana*, 678). Henry Thrale gave a set of six leather-bound, blank books to Mrs. Thrale a few weeks before their thirteenth wedding anniversary in 1776

In her travel journal, Hester chronicled her less personal anecdotes, events and reminisces of her tour on the Continent through France, Italy, and Germany. The *Journals* were a more complete description of the journey because the cumbersome *Thraliana* was left in Milan while the couple traveled around Italy.<sup>98</sup> In her 1942 edition of *Thraliana*, Katharine Balderston compared the two logs and found that the entries overlapped on three occasions: in Paris on September 23, 1785, Genoa on November 3, 1785 and Milan on February 10, 1785.<sup>99</sup> Apart from these entries, the subjects discussed loosely refer to each other but the tone and purpose of the *Italian Journal* and *Thraliana* are clearly different. *Thraliana* maintains the domestic, private tone that it always carried while the *Italian Journal* is a descriptive travelogue.

Hester drew from both of these journals to compile her book, *Observations and Reflections made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany*, which was published by Strahan and Cadell in 1789.<sup>100</sup> On May 29, 1788, she wrote in *Thraliana*, “I will write my Travels &

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and this became *Thraliana*, *Thraliana*, x. The Italian and German journals can be found at Ry. Eng. MSS 618.

<sup>98</sup> *Thraliana*, 638.

<sup>99</sup> *Thraliana*, 613, n. 1.

<sup>100</sup> Thomas Cadell was also Hester’s editor for *Anecdotes of the Late S J., LL.D. during the last twenty years of his Life* (published in 1786) and *Letters to and from the Late S J, LL.D. to which are added some Poems never before printed. Published from the original MSS. in her Possession.* (published in 1788).

publish them—why not? ‘twill be difficult to content the Italians and the English but I’ll try—& tis something to do.’<sup>101</sup> In June, Hester removed herself and her family to Exmouth in Devonshire,<sup>102</sup> in order to assemble and complete her travel account. It is clear by the way she distanced herself from the lively company that she was accustomed to being a part of that she was not writing simply for “something to do.” During the summer and into the fall of 1788, Hester followed a daily regimen of writing; she rested only on Sundays and declined most social engagements. She wrote to her friend Sophia Bryon, in September, “[Mrs. Lewis] is very vexed at present that I won’t go to Weymouth, but I will go nowhere till my Work is done.”<sup>103</sup> For someone so used to being the center of attention in her large coterie, this change to the quiet country demonstrates her resolve to complete her book. Her first copy, hand-written, totaled seven volumes, which she then recopied into three volumes that she estimated to

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<sup>101</sup> *Thraliana*, 717.

<sup>102</sup> Hester’s daughter Cecilia, it seems, was more forgiving than her sisters and their guardians, as she was the only daughter to come and live with Hester and Gabriele after their return to England. Hester expressed her feelings about the situation in this November 10 entry: “Mr. Piozzi talks of going to Italy in Spring upon Business—if I go with him I lose Cecilia; & for every Reason am *sure* to lose her: the moment we are off, Cator sends for her, which as he is her Guardian, I have no right to hinder; the Sisters seize her *Person*, & her *Mind*, & by the Time we return back, *both* will be alienated, *She* will treat us as *they* do:--with as good Reason certainly, for they have none at all. I must not stir from my Post if I mean to defend it—*He* may come again to me, but *She* never can” (*Thraliana*, 721).

<sup>103</sup> *Piozzi Letters*, 264, 267, 276.

equal 1000 pages when she sent an offer for it to her editors on November 14.<sup>104</sup>

*Observations* was Hester's first independent publication, which distanced her from her most famous role as "friend of Johnson." Hester did not have Johnson's encouragement and guidance as she had had with some of her early published poetry and translations; and unlike her *Anecdotes of the Late S J*, this work was entirely her own idea.<sup>105</sup> Also, unlike the *Florence Miscellany*, which was privately printed, Hester did not view this book as a literary amusement among friends<sup>106</sup> but regarded it more seriously, a work she dedicated months of solitude to complete. Among scholars it has been deemed Hester's best-written work of prose.<sup>107</sup>

The audience for *Observations and Reflections* is clearly Hester's upper-class, British peers. It is apparent that she was familiar with the existing travel literature as she mentions or quotes from such popular works as those of Joseph Addison, Lady Miller, and Dr. John Moore.<sup>108</sup> Hester

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<sup>104</sup> Ry. Eng. MSS 619, and (*Piozzi Letters*, i, 286).

<sup>105</sup> Before their break, Johnson had advised Hester to author his biography upon his death. See, *Thraliana*, 625.

<sup>106</sup> Piozzi, Hester Lynch. "Preface." *The Florence Miscellany*. Florence: G. Cam, 1785.

<sup>107</sup> McCarthy, William, 155-156,

<sup>108</sup> Addison, Joseph. *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, &c. in the years 1701, 1702, 1703*. London: Jacob Tonson, 1705, Miller, Anna, Lady. *Letters from Italy*. London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1776, & Moore,

anticipated that her readers would also be acquainted with the foremost travel writing and she aimed to give her audience a new perspective. Her narrative is filled mainly with stories and observations about the people she encountered, and the general character and atmosphere of the cities she visited. Once, during a stay in Rome, Hester broke from her typical social/sentimental commentary while still expressing the overall tone of the book, when she wrote, “in this town, unlike to every other, the *things* take my attention all away from the *people*; while, in every other, the people have had much more of my mind employed upon them, than the things.”<sup>109</sup> Hester focused on making social comparisons between the Italian states and Britain instead of making lists and descriptions about the sites she visited. She did, of course, make all of the standard grand tour stops, but Hester’s social perspective brought originality to the well-established genre of travel literature.

Hester brought her own easy, conversational manner to the genre. She was criticized for using the lingua franca, and for writing in the same manner in which she conversed. Horace Walpole was an especially severe critic of her

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John. *A View of Society and Manners in Italy*. London: W. Strahan & T. Cadell, 1781.

<sup>109</sup> *Observations and Reflections*, 207.



*Observations and Reflections*. In a letter to Elizabeth Carter dated 13 June 1789, he wrote:

It was said that Addison might have written his [*Remarks on Several Parks of Italy*] without going out of England. By the excessive vulgarisms so plentiful in these volumes, one might suppose the writer had never stirred out of the parish of St. Giles. Her Latin, French, and Italian too, are so miserably spelt, that she had better have studied her own language before she floundered into other tongues.<sup>110</sup>

The informal tone of the work seems logical for someone whose most effective medium was in fact, conversation.

As anyone might do when keeping a travelogue, Hester does not keep an even tone throughout her *Observations*, and her opinions about a certain places or people changed depending on what she experienced during her tour. This is natural because Hester did not begin her trip with a specific literary agenda; she wrote what she saw as she was experiencing it.<sup>111</sup> Without saying that Hester contradicts herself, her remarks sometimes changed from a critical to a complimentary quality or vice versa. Varying degrees of

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<sup>110</sup> W.S. Lewis, ed. *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*. 47 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961, vol. 42, 244-245.

<sup>111</sup> "Every Church is already well known, and every Picture of the Place is well described; my own admiration of them is all that is left me to add: Reflections on Religions & Government are what all who seek their own Peace will agree to avoid, yet every discrimination of human Life is occasioned by Religion & Government, as every discrimination of the human Form is occasioned by the Bones & Fibres – nor can a superficial View of either be of the smallest Value. All Anatomy however is disgusting, and when I have told the things I see others may if they please relate the Things they think." Italian Journal, 618 Thrale-Piozzi MSS.

homesickness may also account for changes in tone. For example, in June of her last summer in Italy, Hester wrote in

*Thraliana*:

I ought to be thankful, & in good humour with my own Country now—for every Reason. Indeed comparing it with others, one must allow it a gainer; for tho' vicious enough God knows—our People do not run after each other with unbridled Licentiousness as the Venetians make no scruple of doing, . . . Our People of Fashion do not rob, nor our Robbers acknowledge themselves such without a Blush, like the Inhabitants of Milan or Ancona . . . This Italy is indeed a Sink of Sin. . . I verily do believe [England] is the *best* part of Europe to live in, for almost every reason.<sup>112</sup>

At this point, Hester was a few months away from leaving Milan for the last time, before the long journey back to England. She was resolute in her conviction of British moral superiority. Less than a month before leaving Milan, however, Hester wrote a more regretful diary entry about leaving Italy: “I expect in three Months sincerely to regret Italy, & particularly Venice & Milan—for all the Pleasure of which two places I can think of nothing in London that Is to make me amends: excepting a Muffin in the Morning, & Mrs. Siddons at night.”<sup>113</sup> Hester’s sentiments are mixed on this point, which reflects the internal conflict with which she must have been suffering. Her return to England meant that she would have to face the society that had not been able to

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<sup>112</sup> *Thraliana*, 638.

<sup>113</sup> *Thraliana*, 671.

accept her decision to marry Piozzi; however, she had been away for two years and had reconciled herself to Italian ways.

Certain topics caught Hester's interest throughout her journey and recurred as themes throughout her writing while in Italy. The most striking theme is the comparison between English and Italian manners and values. This topic encompasses other discourses under its umbrella, such as religious differences between Protestantism and Catholicism, social freedoms vs. political freedoms, and refined vs. natural society. The recurrence of these issues reflects Hester's English moral sensibility.

Religion is one of the most frequent subjects in Hester's writing, and it is the one in which she is most critical of the Italians. The prominence of this subject is a result of the constant presence of religious fervor in Hester's life (which is perceptible in her personal papers) and because she is frequently made to defend her Anglican beliefs to her Italian acquaintances while on her tour.<sup>114</sup> In fact, harassment by her Catholic acquaintances was one of Hester's greatest afflictions while in Italy. Hester writes most about the

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<sup>114</sup> It is important to remember that Hester did not submit to her "Anglican piety" when she broke with expectations and married a Catholic; however, neither the bride or the groom converted for the wedding. Only years later did Gabriel become a member of the Anglican Church.

admonishment she suffers during her sojourn in Milan because she spent the most time in the company of Catholic priests there. She said that, “The people persisting in my being Damned so, teizes me terribly: I am so afraid they should make my Husband hate me for being a Heretick.”<sup>115</sup> Most of Hester’s writing on this obviously painful subject is in her personal journal, *Thraliana*, in which she permits herself to express more fiery comments.

During the last week of her stay in Milan, before passing through Cremona, Mantua, and Verona to leave Italy, Hester reflected on the frustration that these attitudes had caused her. She writes in *Thraliana*,

These individuals have indeed treated me better than those at home, & I hope to be always grateful—yet I *know* that their Respect is all paid to my *Birth, Talents, & Behaviour*; while they consider & lament my Soul as forfeited to eternal Punishment: --I therefore feel a secret uneasiness in their Company, especially that of the old bigoted Priests, whose Tears spring to their Eyes very often while they think so much Excellence forsooth devoted to Destruction—and make me obliged, afflicted, and disgusted all at once.<sup>116</sup>

If Hester’s Italian friends appreciated her “birth, talents, & behaviour,” but despaired of the salvation of her soul, Hester said, they could not accept her whole person and she could not feel comfortable with them.

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<sup>115</sup> *Thraliana*, 657.

<sup>116</sup> *Thraliana*, 676-677.

It was not only Catholic clergy that bothered Hester about her religion; the Piozzis' lay Italian friends also badgered her with their ignorance and judgment of the Anglican Church. This is the one way that she complained of the treatment she received from her Italian friends; otherwise, she was utterly satisfied with the flattery they gave her. When in the company of her favorite Italians, Venetians, she wrote that hospitable reception of the English in that state,

is made more remarkable by their firm persuasion that the subjects of Great Britain are not Christians – *ma fanno veramente Vergogna a noi altri* they say: quite in the Spirit of the old Romans who thought every nation barbarous except their own. One Lady told me I did well to look at the Churches in Venice because we had none in England – but we had so many other fine things; squeezing my hand to shew me she meant no offence, nor thought the having Churches a Thing of much Importance: for added she – chi pensa d'una maniera, chi d'un'altra.<sup>117</sup>

The first part of this passage demonstrates that Hester perceived the Italians as haughty and unaccepting of another branch of Christianity. However, the anecdote from the Venetian lady expresses Hester's impression that the Italians were completely ignorant of what Anglicanism was. After having her religious beliefs insulted by the Italians, Hester switched to the role of critic to make the Italians seem ignorant because they thought their religion superior.

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<sup>117</sup> Italian Journal, 618 Thrale-Piozzi MSS

Hester poked fun of the Italians for holding that every faith is “barbarous except their own,” but this is certainly the way that Hester wrote about her own religion. She said that, “their aversion [to Anglicans] is implacable, & the last Day alone will convince them that it was criminal.”<sup>118</sup> Hester’s religious convictions are not uneducated rants, however. She drew on her knowledge of the Bible, Reformation history, and discourses with Catholics to inform her opinions. Her ever-present aptitude for observation created evidence for her strongly-worded reflections. The fiercest of these is found in *Thraliana*, in March of the Piozzis’ first year in Italy:

*Shall I not be revenged on such a Nation as this? As says the Prophet of the Lord. But indeed Vengeance is coming on them with hasty Strides; I hope I shall have Time to view the Monuments of ancient & Modern Art before they are all destroyed by the Judgments of an incensed Creator, & then retire with my virtuous Husband untainted by their Crimes, to Some Corner of the Earth: --any Corner, where Christianity is tolerated in a purified State; and Moral Virtue is not become ridiculous. I have always been partial to Peter as elder Brother, tho’ I acknowledge him neither for Padre nor Monsignore: but I shall now be a follower of dear Martin [Luther] as much from preference as from being born and educated where his Heaven-dictated Reformation is the established Church. These People by treating my notions as Heretical, have made me a Protestant in despite of myself; who always used to say that tho’ I dissent from the Romish Church, I did not protest against it: but when they profess to worship Man instead of God, ‘tis Time to protest against such gross Impiety. No Sir said I to a Priest t’other day, you do not pay divine Honours either to Saints or Angels—you*

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

*respect* them. On the contrary Madm replied he *We adore them*; and so we do the *Pope*; and it is Heresy to oppose that Adoration.<sup>119</sup>

This loaded tirade again attests to Hester's belief that Protestantism was in the right and Catholicism was heretical; Protestant reforms were "heaven-dictated."

In this passage, Hester remarked that she originally ventured to Italy with no intention of disputing Catholicism; the Italian Church disgusted her to such an extent that she was driven to protesting against it. Because the Italians harangued her so much about her own beliefs, she in turn became critical of theirs. Her repugnance of what she observed of the Roman Church was so severe that almost against her own will she had to object to it. The "impiety" of the Italians seemed so great that she satirically hoped that God would only hold off his judgment until she could finish her tour. Her own Italian Catholic husband had luckily not been influenced by the rest of his countrymen.

This passage also confirms the importance of religious deliberation for Hester during her journey. Perhaps it took a central part in her writing only because Italians raised the subject with her so often. Unlike other British travel writers, she wrote much more vehemently about the religious differences she encounters than about the objects

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<sup>119</sup> *Thraliana*, 636.

she saw and the places she visited. While she was in the company of other British people (for example, during her stay in Florence), her writing did not linger on religious issues because she did not have to argue her views. Most other travel writers would not likely have had as much dialogue with Italians and therefore would not have entered into situations in which they would have to defend the Anglican Church.

In other entries in her journal or in *Observations & Reflections*, Hester appeared less animated but more specific in her attacks. Her commentary often mimicked the original Reformation discourses. She disapproved of clergymen who misbehave and are not punished because of clerical immunities.<sup>120</sup> In Naples, in particular, she was shocked by the superstitious and uninformed idolatry of the lower classes, manifested by the brands of saints that they burned into themselves. She was appalled that they were never taught the Bible and could not read it for themselves because

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<sup>120</sup> “To make one happy in the Reformation, a Journey to Rome & Naples is quite the Thing: for one sees how Life is carried on in Places where the Romish Religion reigns *unreformed*: A Fryar killed a Woman in the Church while I was resident in the last nam’d City, for not consenting to his Desires; --nor was any Step taken towards punishing the Murderer-- because he was *Religioso* forsooth, --&di piu *Cavaliere*. When one sees high Birth, & outward profession of Sanctity protect such horrid Crimes from Justice, one feels the Necessity of Reform, and desires the Execution of it: *Yet let not their precious Balms break my head* as the Psalmist says” *Thraliana*, 653.



it wasn't available in the vernacular.<sup>121</sup> She thought that the Italians were still in a "state of babyhood," because they had not been properly educated by the Church, or punished by it for indiscretions.<sup>122</sup>

The poor state of the churches and the impropriety of the Church services themselves also shocked Hester. She said that the Italian mass changes,

the house of God into a Theatre, where Lords & Ladies meet, chat, & mingle pretending Piety with casual Conversation: while the Holy Sacrament is hourly expos'd to Insult and Irreverence, and the Attention is divided or more properly suspended between Heaven and Earth like the Prophets Tomb we read of.<sup>123</sup>

After seeing the squalid condition of the churches and observing how the congregation behaved in them, she did not believe that there was genuine piety there.<sup>124</sup> Hester argued the superiority of a faith based on morality (that of the Anglican Church) to a faith built on superstition, which was what she experienced in the Catholic Church.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Italian Journal, 618 Thrale-Piozzi MSS

<sup>122</sup> *Thraliana*, 647.

<sup>123</sup> Italian Journal, 618 Thrale-Piozzi MSS

<sup>124</sup> *Observations & Reflections*, 237.

<sup>125</sup> Hester said in her Italian Journal, an Italian, "rather *feels* than *knows* he is Xtian." She observed their superstitious form of Christianity in Naples: "Mr. Piozzi is perpetually shocked at the savage Manners of the low Neapolitans, which nothing more completely proves than their manner of burning figures on their Flesh as the Angel Raphael for example, or the Blessed Virgin, or Santo Gennaro whom they esteem still more I believe, & 'tis confidently said here, that when the Mountain burns or any less Disaster threatens them they are uninstructed to think it a good notion to pray to our Almighty Saviour himself, for his

While writing from Milan in June of 1786, Hester recorded a short prayer in *Thraliana* for Christian unity.<sup>126</sup> By the end of her journey, however, it seems there are too many contentious points between the two churches for Hester to desire reconciliation. She was a true Protestant Englishwoman, and religion was not a debate that she was willing to compromise on.

In her writing, Hester contributed to the discourse of comparisons between the refined civilization of the British and the natural honesty of the less-refined Italians. Hester's position in this debate is interesting; although for the most part, she believed that the British manner was superior, in *Observations and Reflections* she made attempts to defend the Italians from the British stereotype that they were savages. Hester approached this issue by saying that the Italians were not immoral people; they were simply uneducated in the right, i.e. the British, values.

Hester's explanations of the Italian's behavior seem highly prejudiced by today's standards; but she attempted something new for her time by defending the Italians to her peers in England. In a forward-thinking vein, she explained how travelers should approach forming an opinion of a

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Intercession with the favourite Martyr" Italian Journal, 618 Thrale-Piozzi MSS.

<sup>126</sup> *Thraliana*, 649.

different culture: “few things can be foolisher than to debate the propriety of customs one is not bound to observe or comply with. If you dislike them, the remedy is easy; turn your and your horses’ heads the other way.”<sup>127</sup> This is a response to other British tourists who judge Italian culture without trying to understand it.

It is obvious that Hester struggled with her resolution to keep an open mind, because she often could not bring herself to understand or forgive the flaws of the Italians. In one instance, while in Venice, whose population she normally praises, Hester slipped into a nostalgic moment about home: “Ah, happy England! Whence ignorance is banished by the diffusion of literature, and narrowness of notions is ridiculed even in the lowest class of life.”<sup>128</sup> But judgments such as this are not always made without some sensitivity for different ways of life. In *Thraliana*, she exhibits the conflict between her critical English morality and her effort to keep an open mind:

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<sup>127</sup> *Observations and Reflections*, 251.

<sup>128</sup> This immediately follows an anecdote about Venetian life: “It is really just so one lives at this lovely Venice: one has heard of a horse being exhibited for a show there, and yesterday I watched the poor people paying a penny a piece for the sight of a *stuffed one*, and am more than persuaded of the truth of what I am told here, That numberless inhabitants live and die in this great capital, nor ever find out or think of enquiring how the milk brought from Terra Firma is originally produced. When such fancies cross me I wish to exclaim, Ah, happy England . . .” *Observations & Reflections*, 86.

The grossness of the Women's behaviour both high & low shock[s] my English maid & myself excessively—God keep our Consciousness of their Errors from blunting by frequent Observation—and God keep us likewise from condemning too hastily a Conduct to which we have no Temptation—I believe they have many.<sup>129</sup>

This is an uncensored criticism of the behavior she observed of those around her, but she quickly lessens the sting of her judgment by acknowledging her uninformed standpoint as an outsider. She made the point that Grand Tourists are not in a position to judge a way of life that they will never have to experience.

It is apparent that Hester believed that the English have the moral high ground over the Italians (especially from the manner in which she admonishes their religious practices); she, however, explains their immorality as ignorance instead of evil. This ignorance, as she perceived it, may even be a positive thing because it creates a more natural lifestyle; and although Italian society may be more ignorant than British, it may also be more innocent. Natural behavior is something she mourns in English society, where, she said, “the everlasting scourge of *what will they think? And what will they say?*” festers.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *Thraliana*, 631.

<sup>130</sup> *Observations & Reflections*, 331.

England has many things that Italy does not, such as a parliamentary government and a strict moral and religious code, but it lacks that ease of manners that Hester cherished in Italy. Hester compared British and Italian manners to reflect the different value sets:

Well! We will not send people to Milan to study delicacy or very refined morality to be sure; but were the curse of British affectation lifted off many a character at home, I know not whether better, that is *honester*, hearts would be found under it . . . The mind of an Italian, whether man or woman, seldom fails, for ought I see, to make up in *extent* what is wanted in *cultivation* . . .”<sup>131</sup>

Hester highlighted the advantages of a genuine culture as opposed to a refined one; she appreciated natural goodness, even if it came at the price of some barbaric traits. This disparity is all the more poignant for her because of the ostracization she suffered from disingenuous friends in England before departing for Italy. This quotation from *Observations and Reflections* may be intended as a veiled insult to those friends who abandoned her at her second marriage.

Hester refuted the British-held stereotype that Italians were depraved malefactors and claimed that instead they were not educated to respect the English set of moral values. Their lack of refinement was not an indication of innate evil,

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<sup>131</sup> *Observations & Reflections*, 52.

but rather a symptom of ignorance, which, according to Hester, is not altogether a negative thing. Although Hester did judge the Italians against her own British morals, she did not feel that a British way of life should be imposed on the Italians. For her, the moral innocence represented a simple honesty that was also virtuous.

Hester enjoyed the social freedoms of Italy where she thought people were allowed to do as they pleased without the burden of the judgment of peers. She considered the difference between the political freedom of the English and the social freedoms of the Italians and concluded that the two forms of liberty cannot exist together:

Restraint is made for man and where religious and political liberty is enjoyed to its full extent, as in Great Britain, the people will forge shackles for themselves, and lay the yoke heavy on society, to which, on the contrary, Italians give a loose, as compensation for their want of freedom in affairs of church or state.<sup>132</sup>

The British, Hester claimed lack oppression from their government so they created a new type of subjugation for themselves; one which dictated how a person should act and what they should say.

Hester grappled with the British form of oppression in her marriage to Henry Thrale and in her choice to marry to Gabriele Piozzi. From these two instances, Hester learned

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<sup>132</sup> *Observations & Reflections*, 149-150.

what it meant to follow society's expectations and what it meant to break from them. Although Hester suffered personally from the intrusive rules of her social order in England; she did not completely disagree with the English system and the political liberties that are enjoyed with it. She remarks in *Thraliana* how great England was because it advanced members of society who merit it:

Miss [Fanny] Burney has 200£ a Year my Letters tell me, & a Place at Court. What a glorious Country is ours! Where Talents & Conduct are sufficient to raw mean Birth & original Poverty out of the Shades of Life, & set their Merit to ripen in the Sun. No such Hopes, no such Possibilities in these wretched Nations; where Pride & Prejudice, Pedigree & Pomp chain up every liberal Idea and keep the Mind enslaved, as their Tyrants keep the Body of their Subject; never permitting them to quit the Capital without leave of the Prince.<sup>133</sup>

In her writing, Hester bemoaned the singular importance of birth to Italian society. Family is the only attribute that decided an Italian's station in life; talent and money never equaled the advantages of a noble birth.

Neither Italian nor English society met Hester's ideal of liberty. On the one hand, her travels in Italy provided Hester the freedom to move as she pleased, do what she wanted, and consort with whom she chose. However, in the Italian nations, she missed the parliamentary government of England and regrets the impositions and edicts of the foreign

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<sup>133</sup> *Thraliana*, pg. 662.

Austrian rulers in Italy. It is ironic that these two diverging points are what allow for Hester to be a part of the *Florence Miscellany*. The Della Cruscans made an affront to one of the decrees of the Grand Duke, which abolished the pro-Italian Accademia Della Crusca, when they published *The Florence Miscellany*; and it was only because of the social freedoms that Hester experienced in Italy that she came into contact with her fellow authors.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>The “Della Cruscans” was the title given to Hester and the co-authors of the book of poetry, *The Florence Miscellany*, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.



*THE FLORENCE MISCELLANY*

Hester arrived with her husband in Florence on June 3, 1785, after working her way south from Milan and Venice through Padua, Ferrara and Bologna.<sup>135</sup> She and her English maid had been looking forward to staying at the English-run Hotel Meghitt and to accommodations “all in the English way.”<sup>136</sup> The Hotel Meghitt was a popular inn, which catered to the multitude of British Grand Tourists passing through or residing in Florence. For the first time since arriving in Italy, Hester was in the society of her compatriots for the majority of the time.

Hester fell in with a small group of other British lodgers at the inn. Hester reported they were constantly in each other’s company. Lord and Lady Cowper, William Parsons, Robert Merry, Bertie Greatheed and his wife, Ann, all shared a love of things Italian. Their mutual interest in Italy endeared them to each other, and they formed a tight

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<sup>135</sup> *Piozzi Letters*, pg. 145.

<sup>136</sup> *Observations & Reflections*, pg. 137.

group that dined in the Piozzis' apartment every other day and enjoyed the sights of Florence together.<sup>137</sup>

Parsons, Merry, Bertie Greatheed, and Hester took to writing original translations for each other throughout the summer, in praise of their friendship and Italy.<sup>138</sup> They composed poetry using Italian meters and florid language to describe the passions that Italy excited in them. They compiled a book of their work over the summer; and in August a private, English-owned publisher in Florence printed one hundred copies of the work, known as the *Florence Miscellany*.<sup>139</sup> In her preface to the work, Hester said "we wrote them to divert ourselves, and to say kind things to each other" but the *Florence Miscellany* evolved from this small beginning to become an influence on the Romantic movement.

The *Florence Miscellany* was made to be given as a token to friends in Italy and England, which it was. The book, however, was leaked to magazines back in England, and bit-by-bit, individual selections were published in *The World*, a popular English magazine.<sup>140</sup> Without the intention of its authors, the *Florence Miscellany* attracted a large

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<sup>137</sup> *Piozzi Letters*, pg. 157.

<sup>138</sup> *Piozzi Letters*, Pg. 160 & *The Florence Miscellany*.

<sup>139</sup> Hargreaves-Mawdsley, W.N. *The English Della Crusicans and Their Time, 1783-1828*; Robert Marshall. *Italy in English Literature*, 177.

<sup>140</sup> *Clifford, James, L. Hester Lynch Piozzi*.

following of readers who were charmed and exhilarated by this new sentimental brand of poetry.

The popularity of the group in England did not begin until the friends had already branched out into their own literary careers, but their genre of poetry continued to be fashionable through the medium of magazines. The name “della Cruscan” often is used to represent the movement that took place years after the publication of the *Florence Miscellany* by the means of poetical discourse in these popular magazines, but the *della Cruscan* movement itself was not a joint effort or objective of the original contributors.<sup>141</sup>

Parsons, Merry, Greethead & Piozzi termed themselves the “Della Cruscans,” but the book also included works by Italian poets Ippolito Pindemonte, Lorenzo Pignotti, the Cavalier D’Elci, and the anonymous D.M.L. Gabriele Piozzi also composed the music for a serenata at the end of the book. The Della Cruscans took their name from the Florentine Academy, L’*accademia Della Crusca*, which had been abolished by the “enlightened despot,” Grand Duke Leopold, in 1783. The original *Accademia Della Crusca* was founded in Florence in 1582-3 by Renaissance scholars who

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<sup>141</sup> Cited as “della Cruscanism” in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*. For more about the London Della Cruscans, see *The English Della Cruscans and their Time, 1783-1828* by W.N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley.

wished celebrate and preserve the “pure” Tuscan Italian of Boccaccio and Dante.<sup>142</sup> When the Austrian ruler Leopold took his position as Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1760, he began a series of reforms to implement his Enlightenment ideas. One of his reforms closed down the Florentine academies that had played such an important role in the scientific and intellectual Renaissance in Tuscany. He viewed them as safe houses for intellectual nonconformists and hotbeds for political dissent. Shortly after abolishing the traditional Florentine academies, he created his own, the *Real Accademia Fiorentina*, which he could effectively monitor and censor.<sup>143</sup> By adopting the name, Della Crusca the authors of the *Florence Miscellany* voiced their protest to the foreign rule of the Austrians.

In 1934, Roderick Marshall included the work of the *Florence Miscellany* in his comparative study, *Italy in English Literature 1755-1815: Origins of the Romantic Interest in Italy*. This was the first comprehensive analysis of the poetic work; however, in it, Marshall underestimates Hester’s role. Marshall asserts that she was “not really a competent judge of the aims of the *Miscellany*,” because she contributed little to the collection and was “out of touch”

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<sup>142</sup> Hargreaves-Mawdsley, W.N., 5-6.

<sup>143</sup> Hargreaves-Mawdsley, W.N. *The English Della Crusca and Their Time, 1783-1828*.

with the other authors.<sup>144</sup> Marshall's statement is unfounded for a few reasons. He says she contributed little to the collection, but she provided three more poems to the book than Bertie Greatheed, yet his significance is not underrated like hers. It is also unlikely that Hester could have been out of touch with the political inclinations of the other members of the coterie when she hosted them in her apartment to dine every other day. In fact, the group was so emotionally attached that Merry actually shed tears when the Piozzis departed Florence in September 1784.<sup>145</sup> How could a woman who was especially famous for her witty and informed conversation be unaware of the passionate political sentiments of friends that she met with daily?

Marshall's claim is also baseless because Hester had a closer relationship to Italian natives than any of the other English members of the group. Hester was observant and perceptive of the political situations in every region she visited in Italy. She had already witnessed and discussed the oppression of Austrian rule in Milan, as evidenced by her

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<sup>144</sup> Marshall, Roderick. *Italy in English Literature*, 178. Marshall's theory is restated by W.N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley in *The English Della Cruscan and Their Time* and James L. Clifford's article, "Robert Merry-A Pre-Byronic Hero," which was published in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* in 1942. Neither of these authors provide further evidence nor reasoning for this assumption.

<sup>145</sup> Clifford, James L. "Robert Merry-A Pre-Byronic Hero," 6.

previous comments in *Thraliana*. In March 1785, months before joining the Florence coterie, she observed:

The Emperor tears away their favourite *Funzioni* here with both hands to be sure, & sends the Church Plate to the Mint by Pounds—I wonder how 'twill end: the Priests lament aloud, the Nuns are driven *into* the Streets, & the Poor driven *out* of them. Cesare o bene o male riforma tutto.<sup>146</sup>

At some point, Hester went back and footnoted this entry in *Thraliana* with “these Austrian rulers are very tyrannical indeed. Count Kinigl another German Nobleman wants me to join in *downing* the old Court—but I won’t.”<sup>147</sup> These comments demonstrate that Hester was practicing her own brand of dissent towards the Austrian rulers before her involvement with the *Florence Miscellany*. With this evidence of Hester’s political acuity and intimacy with the other *Florence Miscellany* collaborators, it is implausible that she did not share the ideas, or at least was not cognizant, of the political significance of the work.

Hester was the only female author of the *Florence Miscellany* and the member with the most wealth, notoriety, and social standing. Every member, however, brought unique abilities and interests to the group. Most likely this set would never have formed back in England because of their varied personal histories and social status. Here it is important to

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<sup>146</sup> *Thraliana*, 635.

<sup>147</sup> *Thraliana*, 635, n. 2.

give some account of the lives of the authors of the *Florence Miscellany* in order to understand the political outlook, sentiment, and chemistry of the group.

Robert Merry was the idealist of the four. Although born into a wealthy family, he had squandered his inheritance with gambling debts. After trying a number of professions and not succeeding at any, he went to the Continent in 1780. Arriving in Florence in the spring of 1781, he took up residence there for the next seven years and became adept at living the life of the free-spirited poet. He attained notoriety among the colony of British in Florence for his reputation and for the infamous affair he carried out with Lady Cowper. In 1784, he published the precursor to *The Florence Miscellany*, *The Arno Miscellany*, together with other British verse enthusiasts, including Allan Ramsey.<sup>148</sup>

After the publication of the *Florence Miscellany* it was Robert Merry who continued to popularize the ornate, sentimental poetry of the movement. He was a friend of the editor of the *World*, and in 1787, that magazine printed a new work of his, which he signed for the first time with the pseudonym *Della Crusca*. His “Adieu and Recall to Love” was followed by a response from a poet calling herself “Anna Matilda,” which quickly led to a published correspondence

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<sup>148</sup> Allan Ramsay was better known as a painter than as a writer.

between Anna Matilda and Della Crusca, to which other poets occasionally contributed under equally romantic pseudonyms.<sup>149</sup>

This amorous and very public association ended suddenly. In 1789, Merry met Anna Matilda in person for the first time; she was the forty-six-year old and rather unattractive Hannah Cowley.<sup>150</sup> Merry was apparently disappointed by the actual woman and published only one more installment to Anna Matilda entitled, “The Interview,” in which he effectively ended the correspondence.<sup>151</sup> The flurry of writing between the year 1787 and 1789 continued the fame of the Della Cruscans, and the influence of della Cruscanism as a literary movement can probably be attributed to the popularity of Della Crusca’s poetry during those years.

Around this time, too, there occurred a rift between the members of the original Florence Della Cruscans, mainly Greatheed and Merry. The cause of the argument was probably Merry’s jealousy when Greatheed interfered in his poetical romance with Anna Matilda. Hester wrote in

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<sup>149</sup> Bertie Greatheed was the only other member of the original “Della Cruscans” to participate in the verse exchange in the *World*. He published a poem dedicated to ‘Anna Matilda,’ which he signed ‘Reuben’.

<sup>150</sup> Merry was only thirty-four years old at the time of their meeting.

<sup>151</sup> Hargreaves-Mawdsley, W.N., 199-200 and John Strachan, ed. *British Satire, 1785-1840. Vol. 4, Gifford and the Della Cruscans*, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003, 188-191.



*Thraliana* on May 29, 1788 that she anticipated that Greatheed and William Parsons would eventually end the dispute because “Della Crusca has more literary Abilities than the other two together.”<sup>152</sup> They did not make up, however, and Hester eventually sided with Greatheed and Parsons.

Merry’s attentions were soon drawn to other endeavors, most notably campaigning for support of the French Revolution in England. He visited France in 1789 and again in 1791. He was a member of radical groups in Paris and London and wrote plays, poems, and pamphlets espousing his views. Finally, his desire to be a radical freedom fighter was realized. His work on behalf of the Revolution, however, hurt his reputation among the British aristocracy and may have cost him the honor of being named poet laureate.<sup>153</sup>

Merry wed Ann Brunton, a well-known actress in 1791. Ann spent another year on the stage as Mrs. Merry, but his family thought it indecent to have a female member of their family act on the stage, and they prevailed upon the couple to give up Ann’s acting career. Merry’s libertine

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<sup>152</sup> *Thraliana*, 717.

<sup>153</sup> Russell, Corinna. “Merry, Robert (1755-1798),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18611>, accessed 8 March 2005]

lifestyle landed him in debt once again; so when Ann received a lucrative acting offer in America, the couple eagerly accepted it, moving first to Philadelphia and then to Baltimore, where Merry could enjoy life in a republic. He never returned to England; two years after arriving in America he died of an apoplectic fit at the age of forty-three. Literary historians argue the importance of Merry's work and ideals; some claim that his was a vital step on the way to Romanticism, but he is often remembered as being frivolous and superfluous.<sup>154</sup>

Hester first met William Parsons, the youngest author of the *Florence Miscellany*, in Milan in the spring of 1785. She wrote in *Thraliana* that she did not know Parsons, a member of the Sussex Militia, well at that point, but that he frequented the concerts the Piozzis hosted at Casa Fedele. On the first of March, Hester discovered a poem about Johnson

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<sup>154</sup> The negative reputation that tarnished Merry's legacy is most likely due to William Gifford's satires, "The Baviad" and "The Maviad," see Strachan, John, ed. *British Satire, 1785-1840. Vol. 4, Gifford and the Della Crusicans*, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003. Sources for the biography of Robert Merry: Clifford, James L. "Robert Merry-A Pre-Byronic Hero." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library University of Manchester*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (December 1942) 1-22, Russell, Corinna. "Merry, Robert (1755-1798)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18611>, accessed 8 March 2005], McCalman, Iain, et al. "Merry, Robert (1755-98)," *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. McCalman, Iain, et al. "della Cruscanism" *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. and Ingamells, John. "Merry, Robert" *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

that Parsons had anonymously left at the house for her. She replied with a short poem but did not send it, “for fear of their being seen in this Land of Power, and of Prejudice.”<sup>155</sup> So began the lyrical relationship between Parsons and Piozzi. Parsons was the only other English author that Hester met before arriving at the Hotel Meghitt in Florence.

After traveling around France and Switzerland, Parsons arrived in Italy in 1784. In Florence, he contributed to the *Arno Miscellany* along with Greatheed and Merry. Then he traveled north again, where he met the Piozzis in Milan and Venice, returning to Florence and joining the other members at the Hotel Meghitt in June 1785.<sup>156</sup> Parsons was only twenty-one years old when he participated in the *Florence Miscellany* and was by far the poorest of the group, but he had a gift for classical and modern languages and a strong desire to be a poet and to live among literary men.<sup>157</sup>

Parsons contributed the largest number of verses to the *Florence Miscellany*: he wrote thirty-one original poems and “imitations” and translated other works from Italian, Latin, and French into English. In *English Della Cruscons and their Time*, Hargreaves-Mawdsley particularly links

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<sup>155</sup> *Thraliana*, 634.

<sup>156</sup> *Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers to Italy 1701-1800*, 743.

<sup>157</sup> *The English Della Cruscons and their Time*, 87-88.

Parsons' fervor for Italian poetic style to that of Keats.<sup>158</sup>

Parsons was an ambitious man who looked for every opportunity to promote himself in society and to promote his work to the public. He took on the job of editing the *Florence Miscellany*, and John Longaker believes that he was the person who leaked the collection to the London press.<sup>159</sup>

During his time in Italy, Parsons also wrote *A Poetical Tour in the years 1784, 1785, and 1786. By a member of the Arcadian Society at Rome*; and in 1807, he published a collection of his poetry entitled *Travelling Recreations*, which was also an autobiographical work. In 1828, after living for a few decades in obscurity and mourning the backlash caused by William Gifford's satires of the *Della Cruscans*, Parsons died.<sup>160</sup>

Bertie Greatheed is considered the most levelheaded member of the group. He was a serious scholar, especially of the Italian language. He was a true English gentleman, educated on the Continent and inclined to enjoy gentlemanly interests such as literature, travel, and art. Hester describes him as

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<sup>158</sup> Hargreaves-Mawdsley, W.N. *The English Della Cruscans and their Time, 1783-1828*, 60.

<sup>159</sup> Longaker, John Mark. *The Della Cruscans and William Gifford*, 13-14.

<sup>160</sup> Hargreaves-Mawdsley, W.N. *The English Della Cruscans and their Time, 1783-1828*, 298-300.

good, and flexible, and kind hearted, high in Principles of Religion, & sweet of Temper; too easy perhaps, and plastic in the hands of artful or violent Associates, who can without much difficulty mould him as *their* Passions not *his* own direct.<sup>161</sup>

Greatheed had his wife, Ann, with him in Florence, and she became a close friend of Hester's during their summer together.

The Greatheeds arrived in Florence in 1784, and Bertie Greatheed also published verses in the *Arno Miscellany* with Merry and Parsons. During the summer of 1785, when the composition of poems in the *Florence Miscellany* was underway, the Greatheeds' apartment at the hotel was the other regular meeting place of the group.<sup>162</sup> Greatheed, like Merry, was a proponent for independently ruled republics, which he demonstrated in many of his works in the *Florence Miscellany*, when he calls for the Italians to rise up against their foreign rulers.<sup>163</sup>

The Greatheeds and the Piozzis remained friends. After leaving Florence, they met up with each other again in Naples and in Venice, and kept up with each other upon returning to England.<sup>164</sup> Once back in England in 1786, Bertie Greatheed retired to a quiet country life at his estate,

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<sup>161</sup> *Thraliana*, 714.

<sup>162</sup> Hargreaves-Mawdsley, W.N. *The English Della Crusicans and their Time, 1783-1828*, 90.

<sup>163</sup> Marshall, Roderick. *Italy in English Literature 1755-1815*, 182.

<sup>164</sup> *Thraliana*.

Guy's Cliff, in Warwickshire. He participated in the dialogue in *The World* between 'Della Crusca' and 'Anna Matilda,' which may have sparked the jealousy of Robert Merry. But for the most part, he led a calm, private life without ambitions to be a great poet.<sup>165</sup>

The Della Cruscan movement first took off while the authors were still abroad and without their consent. In February 1786, *European Magazine* became the first British periodical to print selections from the *Florence Miscellany*. The Della Cruscans were still on the Continent and unaware of how the *European Magazine* had gotten hold of their book to pirate it. At first they were angered about the misuse of their work, but Parsons, and Merry especially, came to appreciate the recognition that printing in periodicals brought. On average, the *European Magazine* printed excerpts from the collection three times a month. Gradually, other periodicals realized the growing interest in the group's poetry, and *The London Chronicle and Gentlemen's Magazine* both began printing selections from the *Florence Miscellany* as well. From the book about Johnson that Hester

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<sup>165</sup> Further biographical information about Bertie Greatheed came from: Ingamells, John. "Greatheed, Bertie" *A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy 1701-1800*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, and Russell, Corinna. "Merry, Robert (1755-1798)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18611>, accessed 8 March 2005].

had written and published while in Italy, her literary fame was already quite large. It can be viewed from this stance that her notoriety pulled the rest of the group into the limelight until interest was drawn to the poetry instead of the name.<sup>166</sup>

The Della Cruscans had their critics, though, among them Horace Walpole, who disdained the poetry as an “unmeaning, laboured painted style.”<sup>167</sup> The personal, florid style of the coterie was naturally difficult for some members of Georgian society who were accustomed to the reserved, rational style of Pope and other earlier poets. Harsh criticism of this nature was the main reason that the prominence of Della Cruscan poetry ended rather abruptly in 1791. By 1789, Merry had already stopped publishing poetry under the penname “Della Crusca,” when he ended the correspondence with Anna Matilda.

It was another force, however, that ruined the literary reputation of the movement. William Gifford published his first satire of the Della Cruscans in 1791, entitled *The Baviad; A Paraphrastic Imitation of the First Satire of Persius*. According to Hargreaves-Mawdsley, the attack was made not purely for poetical reasons but also for political

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<sup>166</sup> Hargreaves-Mawdsley, W.N. *The English Della Cruscans and their Time, 1783-1828*, 138-139.

<sup>167</sup> *Walpole Correspondence*, vol. XXXIV, 91. Letter to Lady Ossory, 30 December 1789.

reasons. *The Baviad* struck at the liberalism of Merry and other members of the group. Gifford was a respected critic by the time he wrote *The Baviad*; and with his devotion to the trend of classical poetry of the earlier part of the eighteenth century, he berated the Della Cruscans for their lack of accuracy in expression.<sup>168</sup> In Gifford's tirade he assaulted the poets *and* the readers that admire them. He further humiliated the poets by satirizing and emphasizing embarrassing personal anecdotes.<sup>169</sup>

The Della Cruscans defended themselves in a flurry of verses published in various periodicals. Again a poetical dialogue ensued, this time between Gifford and supporters of the Della Cruscans. Gifford's fury was not soothed, however, and he published another satire in 1795. *The Maviad* focused on the original *Florence Miscellany*, which Gifford had been unaware of in its original book form. The two satires of William Gifford achieved their goal of reducing the worth of Della Cruscan poetry to trivial nonsense. To the public, their reputation as serious poets was irrevocably marred.

Since *The Baviad* and *The Mæviad*, very few English scholars have taken the group's work seriously, and they have been almost forgotten to history. Though they have

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<sup>168</sup> Longaker, John Mark, 63.

<sup>169</sup> Longaker, John Mark, 51-52.



often been overlooked, the significance of the movement lay in its break with the old poetic spirit and anticipation of the new Romantic movement ushered in in the nineteenth century. As Longaker wrote, “we can feel the warming rays of the dawning sun of romanticism, but the chill of the morning twilight lingers.”<sup>170</sup> The Della Cruscan were a first attempt at an idealistic, personal brand of poetry, which, although unsuccessful, shared a link with the later, successful generation of Romantic poets.

Hester returned to England from Italy with the ability to control her own life. She regained custody of her youngest daughter, Cecilia and lived once again in the limelight of London society. She continued writing books, including *Letters to and From the Late Samuel Johnson* (1788), *Observation and Reflections made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany* (1789) and *British Synonymy, or An Attempt at Regulating the Choice of Words in Familiar Conversation* (1794). In 1795, she retired with her husband to Wales, her motherland. She and Piozzi built their own Italian-style villa near her ancestral home and named it Brynbella, a word created by the mixing of their native tongues. The couple adopted Gabriele’s nephew from Venice in 1798; and in homage to Hester’s care and

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<sup>170</sup> Longaker, John Mark, 8.

generosity, he took her maiden name and called himself John Salusbury Piozzi.

Hester remained busy as ever at Brynbella and continued to stay connected with current events and popular culture. In Wales, she was inspired by the natural landscape to composed poetic verses expounding its awesome beauty. In 1801, she undertook her most ambitious work, *Retrospection*, which was a broad history of the previous 1800 years. This book was not a commercial or critical success, but broke from the female appropriate genres and it is now being reevaluated by feminist scholars.

Gabriele Piozzi succumbed to gout in 1809, and Hester wrote her last entry in *Thraliana* on that day:

30 March 1809. Every thing most dreaded *has* ensued,--all is over; & my second Husbands Death is the last Thing recorded in my first husband's Present! Cruel Death!<sup>171</sup>

This was most certainly a devastating time in Hester's life, but she did not resign herself to sorrow. She devoted herself to the education of her adopted heir and in 1814, she gave him Brynbella and all of her Welsh properties as a wedding present. After this, her income was much reduced and she removed herself to Bath, where she lived a rather quiet life, in a much-reduced manner. She had her admirers, such as Sir

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<sup>171</sup> *Thraliana*, 1099.

John Fellowes and Edward Mangin, but on the whole she was forgotten. Most of her peers were either dead or retired from high society and the next generation was at the forefront.

For her eightieth birthday, Hester threw an extravagant bash with over 600 guests. Hester astounded her guests by dancing the night away into the early hours, not showing her age or any weariness. The next morning, her friend, Samuel Lysons, called on her at an early hour and was surprised to find her awake and energetic as usual, probably still exhilarated from being the center of attention once again.<sup>172</sup>

Hester had to retrench once again from society, this time to Penzance, because of the debt that the huge birthday celebration had left her (John Salusbury Piozzi showed now charity towards his patroness). On March 10, 1821, she suffered a terrible fall as she was climbing into her bed, from which she never recovered. Through March and April, her injury persisted, but her humor remained intact; writing to a friend on March 18, “poor H.L.P.—always a *blue*—now a *black* and blue Lady.”<sup>173</sup>

On April 27, Hester ceased writing in her diary. Word of her poor health was sent to her children and Sir John

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<sup>172</sup> Clifford, 450-451.

<sup>173</sup> *Piozzi Letters*, vi, 509.

Salisbury Piozzi Salisbury (his title from being knighted in 1818). Her daughters Queeney and Sophia were at her side as she lay dying. When her Doctor came over from Bath, it is said that she made one last joke of raising her finger in the air and tracing the shape of a coffin. Her daughter Susanna arrived late on May 2 and Hester Thrale Piozzi passed quietly shortly after.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Biographical information is taken from Clifford's, *Hester Lynch Piozzi* and from Michael J. Franklin. "Piozzi, Hester Lynch (1741-1821)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

## CONCLUSION

Hester Thrale Piozzi lived a long, full life. Today, she is certainly not a well-known historical figure, but fortunately, thanks to her own perseverance in diary and letter writing, her story has not been lost in time. Over the past two centuries, her significance has been overlooked, but it is hoped that through a modern reevaluation, her life will come to be interpreted as more than the role that past scholars have assigned to her.

Hester lived in society, but she was capable of breaking through the confines that society placed on her because she chose to live by her own rules. She kept her own strict code of conduct and by adhering to it, she was true to her personal values; she cherished her friendships and followed her heart, even when it caused her tremendous difficulty. She was confident in herself and her abilities and dedicated to her writing in the second half of her life. Hester did not write in the acceptable female genre of the novel but undertook, to varying degrees of success, analytical, biographical, linguistic, and historical works. She was never

ashamed of her literary ambitions and although she was not trained to be a nonfiction writer, she substituted education for determination and interest.

The visit to Italy from 1784-1786 was the first time that Hester spread her wings in her new role as an independent woman. She filled her days pursuing her interests and filling her mind with new ideas. In Florence, her voice was respected by her scholar-poet peers. Her participation in the *Florence Miscellany* demonstrated her self-assured ability to collaborate with her male counterparts on an equal level. As she took in the awesome sites of her journey, the Alps, Vesuvius, the Coliseum, her intellect was impressed and stimulated.

When Hester returned to England in 1787, she maintained her identity as a liberated woman. She created a new life for herself with her husband and she made the major decisions concerning her life; she continued to author and publish books, she chose her social circle, and her family resided in her motherland, Wales. In her life, she considered herself poorly treated by British society, but she never became dejected. After the death of her first husband, she did not resign herself again to the will of others; she rebelled and claimed her life as her own. Hester Piozzi's life is an

exceptional case of a Georgian lady successfully asserting her independence and her experience sheds light on the restrictive culture of eighteenth century Britain.

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