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In:

Susan Brähler; Kerstin-Anja Münderlein (Hrsg.), "When men are unprepared and look not for it"•: in Memoriam Christoph Houswitschka, Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, S. 286-297. DOI: 10.20378/irb-96531

Beitrag im Sammelwerk - Verlagsversion

DOI des Beitrags: 10.20378/irb-105205

Datum der Veröffentlichung: 04.12.2024

Hester Thrale Piozzi's Marginalia on her Edition of Samuel Johnson's Letters: Irony and Insolvency

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On 1 August 1790, Hester Lynch (Thrale) Piozzi (1741-1821) noted in her diary, subsequently published as *Thraliana*: "I have a Trick of writing in the Margins of my Books, it is not a good Trick, but one longs to say something" (II, 780). This offhand remark conceals the significance of an activity that she practised for much of her life: writing in the margins of her books was not a trick but a way of supplementing, contending with, and revising whatever she was reading or re-reading – including her own publications. The auction sale catalogues of her library, beginning in 1823, reveal the remarkable extent of her marginalia, which she inscribed liberally in well over a hundred books (Tankard 87) – many extant in libraries and in private hands.

Despite the exceptional interest of Piozzi's marginalia, which collectively amount to the equivalent of thousands of printed pages, no systematic study of this body of writing has ever been undertaken. A number of articles and essays have been published on individual volumes annotated by Piozzi, by critics and collectors such as Peter Hall (1829), Edward Mangin (1833), Minna Steele Smith (1922), Hilaire Belloc (1925), James P.R. Lyell (1934), Marjorie Nicolson (1936), Majl Ewing (1943), R.W. Chapman (1943), Edward G. Fletcher (1953), James Allison (1956), Morris R. Brownell (1977), and Patrick Spedding (2021).[1] An edition of James Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, edited by Edward G. Fletcher (1938), furnishes her marginalia in two copies of the book, while an edition edited by Robert Halsband (1974) does the same for her marginalia on Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*. General studies of marginalia, such as those by H.J. Jackson, Belinda Jack, and Patrick Spedding and Paul Tankard, typically devote at least some attention to Piozzi's copious annotations.[2]

Piozzi's marginalia, like those of other great book annotators such as her elder contemporary Horace Walpole and her younger contemporary Samuel Taylor Coleridge, are divided between her commentary on the works of others and that on her own publications. Among the latter are her two major works on Samuel Johnson, with whom she had a close friendship until her second marriage, to the Italian musician Gabriel Piozzi, in 1784: *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson* (1786)

[1] That only two such studies have appeared since 1956, despite the ever-increasing interest in women writers, is perhaps a sign of the changing nature of literary scholarship.

[2] There is also a monograph by Percival Merritt, *Piozzi Marginalia* (1925), of which the title promises more than it delivers: primarily concerned with Piozzi's commonplace books, Merritt considers only two of her annotated volumes, both of them copies of her historical work *Retrospection* (1801) which were then in his possession.

and *Letters to and From the Late Samuel Johnson* (2 vols., 1788). Her annotations on the *Anecdotes* have been preserved in a copy at Princeton University; those on her edition of Johnson's letters are in two copies, one at the Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge, and the other at Johnson's Birthplace Museum in his native Lichfield. Piozzi's marginalia on the Birthplace Museum copy, made in 1815 on a set that she presented to her literary executor, the military physician James Fellowes, are discussed by Abraham Hayward (1861). My focus here is on Piozzi's own copy of her pioneering edition, in which at various dates between 1803 and 1812 she added several hundred explanatory marginalia, ranging from single-word identifications of individuals to substantial reflective remarks. This set, which Piozzi bequeathed to her adopted son, John Salusbury Piozzi Salusbury, was acquired by Lord Rothschild and catalogued in *The Rothschild Library* (1954); it is now part of the Rothschild Collection at Trinity College.[3]

Piozzi's edition of Johnson's letters was preceded by her *Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson*, published by Thomas Cadell on 25 March 1786 at four shillings in an edition of 1,000 copies which sold out immediately. By May, the work had already gone into a fourth edition (Clifford 263-64). Although its initial reception in daily newspapers was generally positive, many of Johnson's old friends and acquaintances objected to his depiction in Piozzi's work. Among them was Charles Burney, Jr, brother of Piozzi's former friend Frances Burney, who reviewed it at length in the *Monthly Review* for May 1786 and objected to Piozzi's "exposing [Johnson's] failings and his weaknesses, to the curious, yet fastidious eye of the Public" (374).[4] Undeterred, however, Piozzi began work on her edition of Johnson's letters for the same publisher, Thomas Cadell, who issued 2,000 copies of *Letters to and From the Late Samuel Johnson* on 8 March 1788, at twelve shillings in boards. There was no second edition, but it was swiftly followed by a Dublin printing and many of the letters were also included in a 1792 edition of Johnson's works (Clifford 314 and n. 1).

Letters to and From the Late Samuel Johnson was the first edition of Johnson's letters to be published. It consists of 322 letters from Johnson to Hester Thrale,[5] all predating her second marriage and usually addressed to her at the Thrales' country estate, Streatham Park, 27 letters from her to Johnson, and 19 letters from

[3] I am grateful to the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, who elected me as a Visiting Fellow Commoner in Lent term, 2019; to Nicolas Bell, Librarian of the Wren Library, who made the Rothschild copy available for me to study and assisted with my enquiries; to the Canada Research Chairs Program, which provided financial support; and to Nathan Richards-Velinou, for his invaluable assistance with this essay.

[4] Several critics have wrongly attributed this review to Charles Burney, Sr; see Sabor 13.

[5] Hester Thrale's second marriage took place on 23 July 1784, five months before Johnson's death on 13 December. I shall call her Hester Thrale when referring to her correspondence with Johnson, and Piozzi when referring to her later work as editor and writer of marginalia.

Johnson to others, including Henry Thrale and the Thrales' two younger daughters, Susanna and Sophia. Regrettably, Hester's formidable eldest daughter Hester Maria, known as Queeney, the recipient of many delightful letters from Johnson, withheld them all from her mother, whose marriage to Piozzi she deplored. Both newspapers and monthly magazines were divided over the merits of Piozzi's work, making her, as Clifford observes, "again the centre of acrimonious controversy" (313). In *Thraliana*, Piozzi herself wrote a witty mock-review, ostensibly for the *Monthly Review*, in which she summarizes its "Excellencies & Defects," concluding that "upon the whole we find eight or ten Shillings very ill bestowed upon a few loosely-printed Pages stamped with Johnson's Name" (*Thraliana*, II, 704, 705). Lisa Berglund contends that "this wryly written parody is arguably the most insightful review *Letters* ever received" (22).

The edition contains no commentary, as Piozzi notes herself in an editorial preface, where she justifies the inclusion of some of her own letters on the grounds that they help explain obscurities in the epistles by Johnson to which they respond:

> But on revisal of these letters when at last they were collected, some notes began to appear almost necessary; partly therefore to avoid writing what could in that form have given little satisfaction, partly from finding in my own answers to him, a better comment on his meaning than I could *now* have written, I was induced to print trifles not originally intended for the Publick, on whose indulgence I depend for protection. (I, v)

As both the Trinity College and the Birthplace Museum copies reveal, however, Piozzi was well aware that even with the inclusion of some of her letters to Johnson, many passages in his letters required explication. In the Trinity College copy, her commentary includes some fascinating discussions of Johnson's irony, which in some cases is far from obvious and which could easily be misunderstood. I shall begin with an analysis of these annotations before turning to Piozzi's marginalia on financial matters, another major topic in her correspondence with Johnson and one which shows that his ethical approach to economic issues was often ill equipped to deal with the perilous state of Henry Thrale's finances: while Johnson was urging the Thrales to invest wisely, they were teetering on the brink of insolvency. Piozzi's marginalia, as I shall show, often supplement and correct the commentary in the two admirable modern editions of Johnson's letters: by R.W. Chapman (1952) and by Bruce Redford (1992-94).

I

The first of Piozzi's remarks on Johnsonian irony occurs in a letter of 27 November 1772, beside a passage in which Johnson tells her: "I was yesterday at Chatsworth. It is a very fine house. I wish you had been with me to see it; for then, as we are apt to want matter of talk, we should have gained something new to talk

on" (I, 69). Read literally, the letter suggests that the correspondents, who had first met seven years ago and had been writing to each other ever since, have run out of things to discuss: "we are apt to want matter of talk" (I, 69). But Johnson's irony is at work; he and Hester Thrale were growing ever closer, and they had any number of subjects on which to dwell. Piozzi's marginal note, "Ironical," makes this clear.[6]

A year later, in a letter of 3 November 1773, Johnson congratulated Hester Thrale and her husband, the prosperous Southwark brewer Henry Thrale, on "the rising reputation of the brewery," adding the hope "that the sweets of doing right will so much engage us, that we shall never more allow ourselves to do wrong" (I, 199). Something rings false here; "the sweets of doing right" sounds more like Jane Austen's sanctimonious Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* than the forthright Dr. Johnson, with his celebrated loathing of cant. Piozzi's marginal comment explains that this was "a hack Phrase of Perkins's," Henry Thrale's chief clerk; Johnson's irony is in play again.[7]

Among a handful of letters from Johnson to Henry Thrale in Piozzi's edition is one of 2 January 1775, in which Johnson tells his friend: "This, I know, is a happy week; you will revel with your constituents in plenty and merriment" (I, 210-11). Chapman has no annotation here (II, 1); Redford notes simply that Thrale, the Member of Parliament for Southwark, "customarily entertained his constituents at the New Year" (II, 165, n. 3). Piozzi, however, writes "Ironical" in the margin, thus underlining Johnson's point that such entertaining was a dreary but necessary task for Thrale. Johnson adds his hope that "every man will go from your table more a friend than he came" (I, 211). Thrale, that is, was attempting to buy their votes, in time-honoured eighteenth-century fashion; rather than enjoying the company of his constituents, he was bribing them.

Five months later, on 13 June 1775, Johnson wrote to Hester Thrale, complaining, inter alia, about his sufferings from flatulence, which "distressed me again last night," and opining sententiously: "The world is full of ups and downs, as I think I once told you before" (I, 234). Neither Chapman nor Redford finds the remark in need of explanation. Piozzi, however, underlined the word "once" and wrote "Ironical" beside it in the margin. In doing so, she emphasized that Johnson is no Polonius, as he might seem in an unironic reading of his remark; instead, he is drawing attention to his own very human tendency to repeat himself. He is not, that is, congratulating himself on his own wisdom, but rather laughing quietly at his own foibles.

[6] R.W. Chapman quotes Piozzi's comment here (*Letters of Samuel Johnson*, I, 294, n. 2); Bruce Redford, however, fails to do so.
[7] Chapman, but not Redford, records Piozzi's comment (I, 388, n. 13).

Johnson uses a similar form of irony in a letter that he wrote to Hester Thrale on 21 July 1775. The context here is that Giuseppe Baretti, employed by Henry Thrale to teach Italian to Queeney, had received a letter from Frances Wilton Chambers, to whom he had formerly taught Spanish. Johnson, an old friend of Frances's husband Robert Chambers, now a judge in Bengal, had also received a letter from her, which he had enclosed in a previous letter to Hester Thrale, so that both the Thrales and Baretti could read it. In exchange, Baretti sent the letter that he had received to Johnson, addressing it to the poet Anna Williams, who shared accommodation with Johnson in London – as Johnson reports in his letter: "Mr. B-----i very elegantly sent his pupil's letter to Mrs. Williams without a cover, in such a manner that she knows not whence it was transmitted" (I, 283). By underlining the adverb "elegantly" and writing "Ironical" above it, Piozzi makes it clear that there was nothing elegant about Baretti's proceedings.[8] After reading the letter, sent from India to Streatham Park, he should have provided a fresh cover sheet with Johnson's London address, together with a note to Johnson and Williams on the verso. His failure to do so might have been in order to reduce the postage costs, born by the recipient, not the sender; as Chapman notes, Henry Thrale was then in London, and thus his frank could not be used (II, 72, n. 1). The additional cost of a single sheet, however, would have been small, and Johnson seems to have found this attempt at economy ill-advised.

In a letter to Hester Thrale of 20 September 1777, Johnson's irony is again directed against himself. Here he is asking for a loan from Henry Thrale, so that he can supply the impecunious Boswell with funds for a journey. He tells her: "I have not much with me, and beg Master to send me by the next post a note of ten pounds, which I will punctually return, not in opportunities of beneficence, though the noblest payment in the world, but in money, or bank-paper" (I, 380). Piozzi writes "Ironical" twice in the margin and underlines the phrases in question: "opportunities of beneficence" and "noblest payment in the world." She also adds an explanatory note: "a Trick he often plaid us." Johnson, that is, had a habit of receiving loans from Henry Thrale without repaying them. The grandiloquent underlined phrases are a way of satirizing his own failings: by not settling his debts Johnson has certainly afforded his friend opportunities to be beneficent, but he is well aware that this is not the form of payment desired. Neither Chapman nor Redford cites Piozzi's helpful marginalia on this page, without which readers might suppose that Johnson is being self-important, rather than self-mocking. The irony continues in the next paragraph, which is, as Piozzi observes, "A ridicule of the Newspaper Language The cant Phrases of the Day" (I, 381;

[8] Chapman states that he had at first thought "elegantly" must have been Piozzi's misreading of "negligently," until he came to understand the irony (II, 72, n. 1); Redford leaves the irony unexplained.

quoted by Chapman, II, 211, n. 5). Here Johnson claims that far from writing to borrow money, he is doing so to fulfil a correspondent's obligations:

> When I miss a post I consider myself as deviating from the true rule of action. Seeing things in *this light*, I consider every letter as something in *the line* of duty; upon *this foot* I make my arrangement, and *under whatever circumstances* of difficulty, endeavour to carry them into execution; for having in some degree *pledged myself* for the performance, I think the reputation both of my head and my heart engaged, and *reprobate* every thought of desisting from the undertaking. (I, 381)

As warning signals, Piozzi italicized the phrases "*this light*," "*the line*," "*this foot*," "*under whatever circumstances*," "*pledged myself*" and "*reprobate*": all examples of what Johnson terms cant.[9] Although Redford suggests that Johnson "is parodying the stock rhetoric of contemporary politicians" (III, 72, n. 11), Piozzi's reference to "Newspaper Language" seems more to the point; politicians, after all, are hardly alone in their habitual abuse of English.

Nine days later, in a letter of 29 September 1777, Johnson sends Hester Thrale news of Diana Langton, the mother of his old friend Bennet Langton: "Mrs. ***** grows old, and has lost much of her undulation and mobility. Her voice likewise is spoiled; she can come upon the stage now only for her own benefit" (I, 389). Readers might suppose from this that Mrs Langton is an ageing actress, near retirement, who would perhaps make a final appearance on stage for a lucrative benefit performance. Johnson, however, is being ironic, as Piozzi noted by underlining the word "benefit" and writing in the margin: "a Joke—She was too fond of Theatrical Conversation—it teized M^{r}. Johnson to hear her." Chapman provides this annotation (II, 217, n. 5); Redford, less helpfully, cites a marginal comment by Piozzi in the Birthplace Museum copy (III, 78, n. 8). There she writes of Mrs. Langton that Johnson "hated her perpetual Conversation about the Actors and Actresses, and said She waved her Head and hands in some awkward Manner" – a remark that underlines Johnson's dislike of the stage without explaining his use of irony in the word "benefit."

A letter to Hester Thrale of 27 October 1777 shows Johnson's use of irony at its most adroit. His subject is what he terms "the great epistolick art" (II, 14), which he defines in these words: "In a man's letters, you know, Madam, his soul lies naked, his letters are only the mirrour of his breast; whatever passes within him is shown undisguised in its natural process; nothing is inverted, nothing distorted; you see systems in their elements; you discover actions in their motives" (II, 14-15).

[9] Chapman (but not Redford) quotes Piozzi's marginal comment and notes the underlines, but seems unaware that they too are by Piozzi (II, 211, n. 5).

Johnson rapidly warms to his task, as he continues to pile on the rhetorical figures:

> Is not my soul laid open in these veracious pages? Do not you see me reduced to my first principles? This is the pleasure of corresponding with a friend, where doubt and distrust have no place, and every thing is said as it is thought. The original idea is laid down in its simple purity, and all the supervenient conceptions are spread over it *stratum super stratum*, as they happen to be formed. These are the letters by which souls are united, and by which minds naturally in unison move each other as they are moved themselves. I know, dearest Lady, that in the perusal of this, such is the consanguinity of our intellects, you will be touched as I am touched. I have indeed concealed nothing from you, nor do I expect ever to repent of having thus opened my heart. (II, 15)

In the margin beside this set-piece, Hester Piozzi wrote a telling remark: "This is very pretty Irony; He was always ridiculing Epistolary Correspondence & always tormenting his Friends to write Letters ... only to *himself* indeed, for if one wrote to anybody else, he was half angry" (II, 15; ellipses in the original). Neither Chapman nor Redford cites Piozzi's observation on this passage. Chapman, instead, refers his readers to Johnson's celebrated remarks on letter-writing in his "Life of Pope" and Redford follows suit (Chapman, II, 228, n. 2; Redford, III, 89, n. 2). Here Johnson denies outright that "the true characters of men may be found in their Letters, and that he who writes to his friend lays his heart open before him." Instead, he declares:

> There is, indeed, no transaction which offers stronger temptations to fallacy and sophistication than epistolary intercourse. In the eagerness of conversation the first emotions of the mind often burst out, before they are considered; in the tumult of business, interest and passion have their effect; but a friendly Letter is a calm and deliberate performance, in the cool of leisure, in the stillness of solitude, and surely no man sits down to depreciate by design his own character. (IV, 58)

As Tom Keymer remarks, however, in a fine essay on Johnson and epistolary writing, even here Johnson is not merely hostile to the act of letter-writing. "In denying the letter its representational claims," as Keymer observes, "Johnson also elevates it as a creative art in which the writer's self is not so much naively reflected as constructed or willfully shaped" (228).

If irony were simply a way of expressing one thing while meaning another, the situation would be clear. In his letter about the power of epistolary correspondence to unite souls and minds, Johnson's "very pretty Irony," as Piozzi terms it, would be expressing the opposite of his true beliefs, which are to be found, instead, in the much more jaded remarks in his "Life of Pope." Elsewhere in his correspondence with Hester Thrale, however, Johnson writes more positively about the value of his letters, telling her that "though there is in them not much history of mind or any thing else, they will, I hope, always be in some degree the records of a pure and blameless friendship, and in some hours of languour and

sadness may revive the memory of more cheerful times" (2 August 1775; Redford, II, 260). And in the passage on letter-writing that Piozzi rightly termed ironic, Johnson was not only being negative: he was, I believe, both mocking exaggerated claims for the veracity of correspondence and recognizing its capacity for bringing sender and recipient closer together. Irony, after all, can either express one thing and mean another, or, at least on occasion, it can mean both one thing and another.

II

In her marginalia on financial matters, Piozzi often emphasized the gulf between Johnson's traditional views on economic prudence and her husband's rage for speculation. In a letter of 19 November 1772, for example, Johnson reminds her of the importance of maintaining capital so that annual interest can be generated: "Every two thousand pounds saves an hundred pound interest, and therefore as we gain more we pay less. We have a rational hope of success; we have rather a moral certainty, with life and health. Let us therefore not be dejected" (I, 66-67). His advice here elicited one of the longest of Piozzi's marginal comments:

> Dear Doctor Johnson had not yet learn'd the Grand Commercial Vice—Speculation. M^{r}. Thrale only wish'd to *do more Business* & consequently to run more hazards;—he never wish'd to *lay up Money* w^{ch} he said paid but 3 p^{r} Cent—much less to realize Land, w^{ch} he considered as a mere Joke.—Dirt & Houses,—Ploughs & Repairs to pay for, as he said.
>
> His Wish was to gain enough to lay out in Malt and Hops to brew *more* and to build *more* Vats & Warehouses in w^{ch}. to keep it. (I, 67)
>
> Johnson learned this afterwards, & combated the Opinion with unavailing Logic, & Rhetoric unregarded. See Second Vol.[10]

As Piozzi observes here, Johnson's increasing familiarity with Henry Thrale would later enable him to attempt, in vain, to dissuade Thrale from the speculative ventures that would be his undoing. "Rational" is a key word for Johnson, as his phrase "rational hope of success" indicates; for Henry Thrale, in contrast, the prospect of spectacular riches far outweighed the dull probability of modest financial gains.

Johnson's rational hopes are also manifested in a letter to Hester Thrale of c. 3 July 1775, in which his subject is the prospect of a good harvest – which should lower the price of malt. Such prospects, he acknowledges, have in the past "ended in melancholy retrospects," but, he continues, "I am of opinion that there is much corn upon the ground. Every dear year encourages the farmer to sow more and

[10] This remark is transcribed, with a full-page illustration, by Rothschild (I, 323). He mistakenly, however, gives the page number as I, 20 (instead of I, 66-67), and has several misreadings, including "Planks" for "Ploughs." Neither Chapman nor Redford provides Piozzi's marginalia here.

more, and favourable seasons will be sent at last. Let us hope that they will be sent now" (I, 259). Beside the final sentence, Hester Thrale has a marginal note: "very wise, & very true, & so the Event shows:—but Corn grows dearer notwithstanding."[11] Johnson, that is, had taken a rational approach: since farmers had sowed more malt, in the expectation of higher sales, the greater yield should eventually drive prices down. But as Hester Thrale observes, the laws of supply and demand are unpredictable; her husband was buying ever-increasing quantities of malt, but at ever-increasing prices.

A week later, in a letter to Hester Thrale of 11 July 1775, Johnson gives his advice on how a large sum of money of indeterminate origin, acquired by Henry Thrale, could best be put to use: "Fourteen thousand pounds make a sum sufficient for the establishment of a family, and which, in whatever flow of riches or confidence of prosperity, deserves to be very seriously considered. I hope a great part of it has paid debts, and no small part bought land" (I, 265). In a marginal comment, noted by Chapman (II, 62, n. 2) but not by Redford, Piozzi responds tersely: "Debts Yes, Land No." For Johnson but not for Henry Thrale, land acquisition was a sure way of preserving and increasing one's fortune. He gives renewed counsel to the Thrales on the proper use of wealth in a letter written two years later, on 15 September 1777:

> We have at last fair weather in Derbyshire, and every where the crops are spoken of as uncommonly exuberant. Let us now get money and save it. All that is paid is saved, and all that is laid out in land or malt. But I long to see twenty thousand pounds in the bank, and to see my master visiting this estate and that, as purchases are advertised. (I, 369)

Johnson here, as he frequently does in his letters to Hester Thrale, writes himself into her consciousness: "Let us now get money and save it" could be Hester writing to Henry, as could "I long to see" and "my master."[12] Hester, fully conscious of Johnson's identification with her, wrote "Ay so did I"[13] beside Johnson's wish for Henry Thrale to invest money in order to amass interest and to buy land, which would inevitably increase in value, while also knowing, unlike Johnson, that her husband would never take such prudential measures.

On 8 June 1779, Henry Thrale underwent a stroke, "a dreadful Event," which Hester recorded in *Thraliana*. He was, she writes:

> suddenly struck with the palsy as he sate at Dinner with his Sister Nesbitt last Tuesday: his Brain is apparently loaded if not for ever injured by the blow. poor dear Master! this

[11] Neither Chapman nor Redford provides this annotation.
[12] Berglund, discussing another passage in Johnson's letters, likewise notes his "use of the pronoun 'we' in recommending retrenchments," thus "emphasizing his identification with the Thrale family" (43, n. 24).
[13] Neither Chapman nor Redford provides this annotation.

> day have we been married sixteen Years and eight Months: & last Tuesday was he brought me home apparently Paralytick. (I, 389)

She wrote to Johnson about this misfortune in a letter to which he replied on 12 June; her letter is not extant, but she included his reply in her edition:

> Your account of Mr. Thrale's illness is very terrible; but when I remember that he seems to have it peculiar to his constitution, that whatever distemper he has, he always has his head affected, I am less frighted. The seizure was, I think, not apoplectical, but hysterical, and therefore not dangerous to life. (II, 47)

Piozzi here inserted two marginal glosses. The first was a single word, "True," endorsing Johnson's remark about Henry Thrale's ailments always affecting his head. Her second, much longer comment provides information that neither Johnson nor she could have had when Henry Thrale's stroke took place:

> It *was* Apoplectical –he had dined with his simple Sister M^{rs}. Nesbit, who had so lately lost her Husband;—and since these *Letters were printed* have I found out that talking the dead Brother in Laws Affairs over, it was fully certain that he died *Insolvent*; --& M^{r}. Thrale, knowing how he was bound for him, felt the Black Dog's Bite in his breast directly—but of all this dear D^{r}. Johnson & I had no suspicion. [14]

The "Black Dog" is depression, from which both Henry Thrale and Johnson suffered throughout their adult lives. And here, Piozzi ascribes it directly to the financial disaster brought about by the sudden death of her husband's brother-in-law, Arnold Nesbitt, whose debts Henry Thrale had guaranteed to pay.

Twelve years later, on 20 April 1791, Piozzi wrote an entry in *Thraliana* that expands on her marginal comment on Henry Thrale's stroke. She now goes further, suggesting that it was the direct cause of his death in April 1781:

> He died of sudden Shock & Terror I am now sure, which he received that fateful Tuesday 8th of June, when driving to London apparently in sound Health . . . [to] dine with his Sister Nesbitt, then lately become a Widow ... well might he be struck poor Soul! well might he! when it seems that Fellow Nesbitt died insolvent; at the Time my Husband was bound for him in a forfeiture of two Hundred & twenty Thousand Pounds. Well! M^{r} Thrale recovering, kept the Secret, tho' he lost his Wits ... his Health and Happiness forsook him from that Hour however, & tho' he lived near two Years ... he never looked up more. (II, 803-04)

In her marginal comment on Johnson's letter of 19 November 1772, quoted above, Piozzi had noted Johnson's ignorance of Henry Thrale's financial speculations. Those of Arnold Nesbitt, however, were much worse, and the sum for which Henry Thrale was liable was far greater than his own net worth. As Katharine C. Balderston, the editor of *Thraliana*, explains:

> Nesbitt . . . had bought French annuities, and later, needing money, had sold them at public auction, being permitted to do so by the Government on condition that security

[14] Chapman, but not Redford, provides this annotation (II, 290, n. 1).

> was offered for their payment. To provide the security Thrale and Nesbitt joined in a bond. At the overthrow of the French government, payment of the annuities ceased, and Mr. Thrale's estate became theoretically liable. A suit in Chancery was instituted which was still dragging out in 1805. (II, 804 n. 1)

In this instance, therefore, Piozzi could not have provided an accurate commentary in 1788, when her edition appeared; she could only have done so in 1791, when she seems first to have made the link between Nesbitt's bankruptcy and her husband's fatal stroke.

Even this brief analysis of Piozzi's marginalia on her copy of *Letters to and From the Late Samuel Johnson* has, I hope, demonstrated the significance of her unpublished commentary and its potential value in illuminating some aspects of Johnson's correspondence. The vast majority, however, of her marginalia remains unexplored. In a stimulating article growing out of his literary biography of Hester Piozzi, William McCarthy deplores the lack of attention paid to her major published works such as *British Synonymy* (1794) and *Retrospection* (1801), neither of which has received a modern edition or much critical study. Piozzi's manuscript writings, including her copious marginalia, have been similarly neglected. A six-volume selection of her letters, from her second marriage in 1784 to her death in 1821, has been published, but most of her earlier letters, except for those to Johnson, have never appeared in print. The successor to *Thraliana*, a commonplace book kept by Piozzi from 1809 to 1820 (now at Harvard), is likewise unpublished. While Piozzi may no longer suffer from what McCarthy terms a "rhetoric of belittlement" ("Repression" 108), her writings are still too often overlooked. And it is surely time, almost a century after its publication, for Percival Merritt's *Piozzi Marginalia* (1925) to be replaced with a much wider ranging study of this important but little-known part of Hester Thrale Piozzi's vast body of work.

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