

INTRODUCTION

This booklet contains extracts from the diary of Mrs Hester Lynch Piozzi (1741-1821) who married the Southwark brewer, Henry Thrale, in 1763. They lived at STREATHAM Park Estate where they became known for their generous hospitality. Their intellectual circle included Joshua Reynolds, David Garrick, Dr Johnson and the literary critic, Giuseppe Baretti. MR THRALE died in 1781 and Hester, against the wishes of her friends, married the Italian music master, Gabriel Piozzi. She introduces her diary with the following note:

It is many years since DOCTOR SAMUEL JOHNSON advised me to get a little book, and write in it all the little ANECDOTES which might come to my knowledge, all the OBSERVATIONS I might make or hear, all the Verses never likely to be published, and in time ev'rything which struck me at the time.

28 MAY 1777

Sir Joshua had ordered us early to sit one Day – my Friend Miss Owen & myself, we were sadly behind our Time, and walked up to him – he was very deaf – with our hands joined pray-pray-fashion. Ay says he you come into the *House Petitioners*; but I shall *return* you the *sitting Members*. It was at the Time of the general Election.

Baretti ... went on as usual notwithstanding, making Streatham his Home; carrying on Business there when he thought he had any to do, and teaching his Pupil at by Times when he chose so to employ himself; for he always took his Choice of hours, and would often spitefully fix on such as were particularly disagreeable to me, whom he has now not liked a long while if ever he did. He professed however a violent Attachment to our eldest Daughter, said if She had died instead of her poor Brother he should have destroyed himself, with many as wild expressions of Fondness.

Baretti could not endure to be called or scarcely thought a Foreigner; and indeed It did not often occur to his Company that he was one: for his Accent was wonderfully proper; and his Language always copious, always nervous, always full of various Allusions, flowing too with a rapidity worthy of Admiration & far beyond the Power of nineteen in twenty Natives – he had also a

Knowledge of the solemn Language & the gay; could be sublime with Johnson, or Black Guard with the Groom, could dispute, could raily – could quibble in our Language.



JUNE 1777

I have fancied lately that there was something of this Nature [coldness] between Sir Joshua and Miss Reynolds; he certainly does not love her as one should expect a Man to love a Sister he has so much Reason to be proud of; perhaps She paints too well, or has learned too much Latin, and is a better Scholar than her Brother: and upon more Reflection I fancy it must be so, for if he only did not like her as an Inmate why should not he give her a genteel Annuity, & let her live where and how She likes: the poor Lady is always miserable, always fretful; yet She seems resolved – nobly enough – not to keep her Post by Flattery if She cannot keep it by Kindness: – this is a Flight so far beyond my power that I respect her for it, and do love dearly to hear her criticize Sir Joshua's Painting ...

Mrs Montagu says She was vastly struck with him [Oliver Goldsmith] the first Time they met: it was at some great Table I forget what – but Lady Abercorn was there – a Lady of about seventy six or eight Years old – and the Company remarking how Young She

looked, were led to mention her Age & apply to the Dr – I am no great Judge says Goldsmith, for I never saw an old Woman before; except I mean an Applewoman or a Beggarwoman or some such Body – *Ladies* always look *young* I think, for they are finely dress'd up – so I can't tell whether this *Lady* looks well of her Age or no- 'tis a new Species to me.



AUGUST TO SEPTEMBER 1777

The three great Characters of Female Beauty are Dignity Vivacity and Softness; the Juno, Pallas & Venus of the Ancients: Most Men I fear would take his Judgement too and prefer the Delicacy of the Queen of Love to all the Intelligence of Minerva or Dignity of Juno. 'Tis very odd however how poor Women are so seldom beautiful, but I have often observed that Among Charity Girls for example, and even in the Foundling Hospital though so spacious a Receptacle, I never saw yet one eminently pretty Face.



SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER 1777

Money chanced to be the Topick of the Morning Talk, and Mr Johnson observed that it resembled Poyson, as a small Quantity would often produce fatal Effects;

but given in large Doses though it might sometimes prove destructive to a Weak Constitution, yet it might often be found to work itself off, & leave the Patient well.



MARCH TO APRIL 1778

The Eyes of the famous Courtezan Kitty Fischer; being a Species quite apart, deserve to be mention'd: their Colour was of a Sky Blue, like a Ribbon, I never saw so beautiful a Brilliant Blue: the Expression was less peculiar, but the Colour was truly Celestial.



10 FEBRUARY 1779

Mr Thrale is making me a Cold Bath; I am very fond of Bathing, and think it an extremely beneficial Thing to general Health, though more fit for many Women than for me: the Lax fibred Ladies who are seized with a Purging whenever they are vex'd, or cry whenever they are contradicted, should certainly be often plunged in to the coldest Water, - and Women who are subject to miscarry would doubtless be greatly strengthened by its use; but I who am rather plethoric, am to blame sometimes for indulging myself too much in the Habit of it. There are however so many Temptations!

14 JULY 1780

I have put it in my Head to write the Characters of all the People whose Pictures are putting up in our Library at Streatham, but I will not write them out till they are complete: there are none finished now but Murphy, Baretti, Burke and Lord Westcote – Sir Philip indeed longed to see me draw his Portrait, so I did it to divert him, but he is not among the Number of those who hang up, so in short I shall not insert them in the Thraliana till they come properly all together.



10 JANUARY 1781

Of Reynolds what Good shall be said – or what harm?
His Temper too frigid, his Pencil too warm;
A Rage of Sublimity ill understood,
To seek still for the Great, by forsaking the Good;
Yet all Faults from his Converse we sure must disclaim,
As his Temper 'tis peaceful, and pure as his Fame;
Nothing in it o'er flows, nothing ever is wanting,
It nor chills like his Kindness, nor glows like his Painting;
When Johnson by Strength overpowers our Mind,
When Montagu dazzles, or Burke strikes us blind;
To Reynolds for Refuge, well pleas'd we can run,
Rejoice in his Shadow, and shrink from the Sun.

20 NOVEMBER 1788

Fox, Burke, Sheridan, all The Opposition People want an unlimited Regent: – how unconstitutional! how dreadful! Pitt I think wants a settled Republick; how unconstitutional is *that* too, but far less dangerous – anything but Despotism for God's sake – let us not now take up what France is beginning but now to lay down! after all Pitt is honest the others are not. He is ambitious only, they are avaricious; let us fall into *his* hands at least who is actuated by noblest Passion. The Prince's Character makes his Elevation to power extremely perilous to the State; his Connection with a Catholic Lady increases our peril, yet the Right is *his* of Succession certainly – and to be Sole Regent he has every Claim, which Character & Connection cannot destroy. How unfortunate that he should be so wicked – how unhappy that his Wickedness *must* affect us some way! Either by ill use of Power in his own person, or by frightening us to the other Extreme of so doing without him. Would to God the Father were well or the Son honest, – or both.

