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READING SAMUEL JOHNSON "ANEW": HESTER THRALE'S PRIVATE, SOCIAL, AND
PUBLIC VIEWS OF SAMUEL JOHNSON.

by

Anthony Louis DeLuca

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

2000

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

READING SAMUEL JOHNSON "ANEW": HESTER THRALE'S PRIVATE, SOCIAL, AND
PUBLIC VIEWS OF SAMUEL JOHNSON.

by

Anthony Louis DeLuca

Adviser: Professor Marlies K. Danziger

This dissertation is a study of Hester Thrale's private, social and public writings about and to Samuel Johnson. Thrale is cast as a "reader" of Johnson, who recorded her "responses" to him in her private diaries and journals, in her social letters, and in her public writings Anecdotes of the late Samuel Johnson, LL.D., During the Last Twenty Years of His Life, and Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D. In particular, I focus on the years 1766 to 1788. Thrale's reading process of Johnson was one of increasing dissatisfaction. It was this that caused Thrale to end her twenty-year friendship with Johnson, long before her well-known break with him in 1784 when she married Gabriel Piozzi. Through the insights of reader-response theory and by an examination of the private, social, and public dimensions of Thrale's writing on Johnson, this dissertation attempts to present a more complete picture of how Thrale viewed Johnson as a man and as a friend.

Of particular interest in this dissertation is how Thrale's expectations as a reader of Johnson continued to narrow because of Johnson's resistance to her attempts to cross over from the social to the private sphere in their friendship and because of his attempts to control how she read him. These two aspects of Johnson's friendship for Thrale became increasingly obvious to her over the course of her twenty-year friendship with Johnson, especially after Henry Thrale's

death when Thrale chose to pursue happiness by beginning a new life with Gabriel Piozzi in Italy. Thrale clearly loved Johnson and always respected him, but she would not let Johnson control how she read herself in the private, social, and public spheres of her life, nor would she let him define her for literary posterity.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Caroline Marie Sun, Esq., who has always been at my side when I have lost my way, and who has always believed in me. Caroline's love makes all dreams possible.

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Introduction

Hester Lynch Thrale (1741-1821), later Mrs. Piozzi (hereinafter "Thrale"), and Samuel Johnson (1709-84) formed a friendship that lasted for twenty years—a significant portion of both of their lives and certainly a time during which their relationship underwent many changes. However, many of these alterations and their ultimate effect on Thrale's friendship for Johnson remain unappreciated and unexplained. Thrale saw Johnson as a successful writer, critic, and scholar, but she also saw him as a friend, a literary mentor, a business advisor, a wise philosopher, and, most importantly, as an intimate confidant. However, she wrote about Johnson with mixed emotions. In this dissertation I hope to reveal how, although she admired his literary genius and was proud to know him and have his regard, Thrale experienced a justifiable and an ever-increasing disappointment in her efforts to make Johnson her friend and confidant.

This fact has been overlooked by Johnson's biographers and Thrale's critics, who have, for generations of readers, defined Thrale herself as the "problematic" friend. Out of a private animus that he bore her, Boswell hardly mentions Thrale in his Life of Johnson (1791). Joseph Wood Krutch called Thrale a "frivolous" woman in his 1944 biography of Johnson.¹ In two biographies published in 1975, John Wain writes that Thrale parted with Johnson primarily because of the demands of the infirmities he suffered in old age.² W. Jackson Bate states that she did so from a "need to reduce him as a claim on her affection and attention," and because she saw Johnson as a "symbol" of "the resentment

¹Joseph Wood Krutch, Samuel Johnson (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1944) 530.

²John Wain, Samuel Johnson (New York: Viking Press, 1975) 356.

she was already feeling in advance" of her decision to marry for a second time and move to Italy to be the wife of Gabriel Piozzi, an Italian composer, musician, and teacher.³

In these ways Thrale has been portrayed as self-involved and coldly calculating in casting off Johnson's friendship when he was seriously ill shortly before his death. But I reveal how the many disappointments that Thrale faced as Johnson's friend over the course of her twenty-year friendship with him were ultimately responsible for her final break with Johnson, not her decision in 1784 to marry Piozzi. In other words, I will show how Johnson failed to be a friend in Thrale's eyes long before Thrale met Gabriel Piozzi.

In his ground-breaking biography, Hester Lynch Piozzi (Mrs. Thrale) (1941; 1968),⁴ James Clifford rescued Thrale from being known simply as the intimate friend who betrayed Johnson by publicly criticizing him after his death in her memoir, the Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D. During the Last Twenty Years of His Life (1786) (hereinafter "Anecdotes").⁵ Clifford's book garnered increased respect for Thrale as an intelligent and learned woman. Most importantly, it presented Thrale as a person rather than as the traditional caricature of her as the flighty, vain, vindictive and treacherous friend of Johnson. Clifford's work remains the standard biography on her. Clifford wrote about the Thrale/Johnson relationship, but his primary

³ W. Jackson Bate, Samuel Johnson (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975) 567.

⁴ James Clifford, Hester Lynch Piozzi (Mrs. Thrale) (New York: Columbia UP, 1941; 1968).

⁵ Hester Lynch Piozzi, Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D. During the Last Twenty Years of his Life, ed. S. C. Roberts (1932; New York: Arno Press, 1980).

focus was the much more general one of writing a life of Thrale. Indeed, in the "Introduction" to his biography of Thrale, Clifford described his work as "the history of the Thrales."⁶ There is no doubt that Clifford respected Thrale. He expressed his admiration for her learning and quick wit, and for her abilities in performing many roles: as an obedient daughter to her mother, an intellectual, a wife, a mother, and a friend to Johnson. However, in addition to praising her, Clifford called Thrale "a bundle of contradictions" and found her to be a flawed friend of Johnson's.⁷ In fact, at times he portrayed her as an inconsistent, hysterical, melodramatic, and self-centered woman who often overreacted and behaved in a less-than-forthcoming manner, and even, occasionally, in cowardly ways in her friendship with Johnson. By contrast, Clifford depicted Johnson as a loyal, benevolent, and true friend to her. But I will highlight numerous periods in their twenty-year relationship when Johnson was not so trustworthy, loyal or benevolent to Thrale. By doing so, I hope to present a more balanced view of Thrale's friendship with Johnson, and show that Johnson was equally "a bundle of contradictions" to her. Because of his erratic behavior, she was justified in not always trusting him. Moreover, the sequence of events that occurred between them made her eventual estrangement from him quite understandable. Indeed, I will illustrate that Thrale gradually became so disillusioned with Johnson that she parted with him well before her famous break with him in 1784 over her decision to marry the Italian composer, musician, and teacher Gabriel Piozzi (1740-1809).

⁶ Clifford, Piozzi xix.

⁷ Clifford, Piozzi 459.

An important resource for Clifford was Katherine Balderston's edition of Thraliana (1951),⁸ which he called "the most important authority for her [Thrale's] life."⁹ It remains so today. Thraliana, one of several private journals that Thrale kept in the course of her life, is an inexhaustible source of her views on Johnson as a writer, thinker, and friend. However, Clifford was not able to use the completed manuscript of Balderston's edition of Thraliana because she was still in the process of editing it when he published his biography of Thrale in 1941. Even after Balderston's edition of Thraliana was published, the revelation of Thrale's private views on Johnson did not prompt Clifford to change his opinion of her as an inconsistent friend when he revised his biography of her in 1968. William McCarthy wrote about the Thrale/Johnson friendship in his Hester Thrale-Piozzi: Portrait of a Literary Woman (1985).¹⁰ But he was primarily interested in adding to Clifford's depiction of Thrale's life as a scholar and writer rather than her views on Johnson.

This dissertation therefore covers new ground by examining Thraliana in its entirety to show that Thrale had valid reasons to end her friendship with Johnson long before her break with him in 1784 over her marriage to Piozzi. In addition, I closely examine the extant Thrale correspondence with Johnson to show how it also supports this interpretation of Thraliana. Finally, I reconsider how she wrote about him publicly in Anecdotes after his death. Through this analysis, I try

⁸ Hester Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Katherine C. Balderston, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942; 2nd edition 1951).

⁹ Clifford, Piozzi xvii.

¹⁰ William McCarthy, Hester Thrale-Piozzi: Portrait of a Literary Woman (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1985). See also McCarthy's essay, "The Repression of Hester Lynch Piozzi; or, How We Forgot a Revolution in Authorship," Modern Language Studies 18:1 (1988): 99-111.

to present a comprehensive view of how Thrale viewed Johnson as a writer, a man, and, most importantly, a friend.

Critical Methodology

In this dissertation, I examine Thrale's changing views of Johnson through the insights provided by reader-response theory. Some theoretical concepts of this theory are very useful in tracing Thrale's growing dissatisfaction with Johnson over the course of her twenty-year friendship with him. In addition, to present a more complete picture of how Thrale "read" Johnson, I examine the private, social, and public dimensions of her writing on him: how she wrote about him privately (in diaries and journals), socially (in letters to and about him), and publicly (in books).

Reader-Response theorists posit that a reader has as much to do with the meaning of a text as does the text itself.¹¹ A reader is guided, but not controlled, by the text in the formation of meaning. Stanley Fish¹² and Jonathan Culler,¹³ among others, have posited that this is true because each reader brings a different set of experiences, knowledge, and reading skills to a text. Most importantly for my purposes, reader-response theorists consider the meaning that a reader sees in a text as a cumulative and a collaborative process which has at its core a constantly changing dynamic: as one reads and acquires new information, one reinterprets the meaning of what one has read. The final outcome of this "reading process" is that a reader arrives at what

¹¹ Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). For example, Iser posited that to make sense of the text of a novel, a reader must intuit meaning by inferring it from the "indeterminacies of meaning" in the text.

¹² Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1980).

¹³ Jonathan Culler, Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1975).

Roman Ingarden called a "concretization" of the text, or a final meaning for it.¹⁴

Reader-Response theorists suppose a reader and a text. But "reading" or interpreting an actual person is just as collaborative a process as reading a book. One can read a person's writing, spoken words, and actions, as Thrale did with Johnson for twenty years, to arrive at a final meaning as to what that person meant to one. In this way, the collaborative process of one person's communicative and interpretive interaction with another is a "reading process." Clearly, Thrale's writing to and about Johnson are her responses to "reading" him. She was "guided" in her reading of Johnson by his written and oral responses to her. More importantly, she eventually parted with him because he sought to control her readings of him. At other times, she inferred meaning from the "gaps" or information that he did not openly reveal to her in their twenty-year friendship, along with the information he did provide. Moreover, Robert Jauss, building on the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, posited that a reader reads a text within an "horizon of expectations," or the literary, social, and cultural expectations that a reader brings to a text in the "historical moment" of its appearance.¹⁵ I focus on Thrale's changing personal expectations of Johnson, and on how, as she became increasingly disillusioned with him, her horizon of expectations of him narrowed significantly both in response to Johnson's behavior toward her, and, just as importantly, in response to her changing expectations of herself.

¹⁴ Roman Ingarden, The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art, trans. Ruth Ann Crowley and Kenneth R. Olsen (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1973).

¹⁵ Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," trans. Elizabeth Benzinger, New Literary History 2 (1970) 14.

In the terminology of Jonathan Culler, Thrale was an "uninformed reader" when she first began to read Johnson. She eventually became an "informed reader" of him, and, in some senses, an expert reader of him. Indeed, as she grew more confident in her readings of him, her views of him changed. By chronicling, in writing, her responses to Johnson's conversation, his letters to her, and his writing as an author, Thrale left us a record of her "reading process" of Johnson in which her changing evaluations of him can be traced. However, although she became an increasingly "informed reader" of Johnson during her twenty-year friendship with him, she never did arrive at a final, or concretized, meaning for him.

To provide a more complete view of Thrale's reading process of Johnson, I examine the private, the social and the public spheres of her writing about and to him. Privately, amidst her praise of him in her journals and diaries, Thrale expressed her anger, disappointment and dissatisfaction with Johnson straightforwardly because she did not have to worry about how others interpreted her negative views of him. Socially, Thrale knew that she wrote her letters to an audience that consisted of Johnson and anyone to whom he decided to communicate her words. Thus, in her letters to him, she expressed her unhappiness with him with the complex subtlety that social tact requires. In her public writing on him, especially in her Anecdotes, Thrale's final disappointment with Johnson is most dramatically illustrated, especially her inability to arrive at a concretized meaning for him, which one can see in how she both praises and condemns Johnson in this work. Indeed, she seems unable to keep from criticizing him even as she attempts to present to the public the image of the ideal friend she had always hoped to have, but, in the end, did not have in Johnson. Of particular

interest in this dissertation is how the changes in Thrale's expectations of Johnson were driven by Johnson's resistance to her attempts to cross over from the social to the private sphere in their friendship.

The validity of dividing a writer's work into public and private spheres continues to be contested. In a special edition of Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism (December 1995) dedicated to "The Intersections of the Public and Private Spheres in Early Modern England," Paula Backscheider and Timothy Dykstal debate the usefulness of making such a distinction. Backscheider argues that the public/private paradigm is "at best," a "limited" and perhaps a "fatally flawed" heuristic instrument because the boundary between the public and the private is "infinitely permeable," making a separate and stable definition of either one impossible. Dykstal disagrees, stating that if the boundary between private and public is so "infinitely permeable," then "why do we nevertheless, talk [and write], however casually, as if they were separate?"¹⁶ While I agree with Backscheider that the boundary between the public and the private is "permeable," I disagree with her that it is so permeable that no definitive boundary can exist at all between them. Likewise, although I agree with Dykstal that a distinguishable boundary does seem to exist between a writer's private and public writing, I do not limit myself to the public/private dichotomy he discusses, but include a third sphere, the social.

Jurgen Habermas posits that the social sphere functions as a transition point between the private and public spheres. It is here

¹⁶ Paula Backscheider and Timothy Dykstal, "Introduction," "The Intersections of the Public and Private Spheres in Early Modern England," Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism 18.3 (1995) 1-40.

that one's private beliefs are organized and defined; and those that gain the impetus of social sanction eventually become a part of public discourse.¹⁷ The social sphere is rife with contention because this is where one presents one's private view of oneself, of others, and of the world—in essence the views that make up one's private reality—to other human beings for validation or refutation. In her letters to Johnson, Thrale presented her private vision of her friendship with Johnson. However, Johnson rejected this image early on in their friendship, and substituted his own restricted vision of it in his letters to her. From this point on, Thrale's social writing to him, and her private and public writing about him are a response to Johnson's continual refusal to respond to their private friendship as Thrale hoped he would. In this light, a modified picture of Thrale as Johnson's friend emerges: one that is significantly different from the "flawed friend" that Clifford assumed Thrale to be in his otherwise favorable biography of her. In this dissertation, I attempt to correct the distorted image of Thrale as a woman who was intentionally ungrateful and traitorously unjust to Johnson by marrying Gabriel Piozzi against his wishes, and by criticizing him in public after his death.

In tracing the development of Thrale's readings of Johnson, I have consulted The Letters of Samuel Johnson edited by Bruce Redford; The Piozzi Letters: Correspondence of Hester Lynch Piozzi, 1784-1821 (formerly Thrale-Piozzi) edited by Edward and Lillian Bloom; The Letters of Samuel Johnson with Thrale-Piozzi's Genuine Letters to Him edited by R. W. Chapman; Thraliana (1776-1809) edited by Katherine C. Balderston; and Thrale's Children's Book (1763-1778) edited by Mary Hyde. I have

¹⁷ Jurgen Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society (Boston: Cambridge, UP, 1979).

augmented these sources with the journals Thrale kept of her travels with Johnson to Wales (1774) and to France (1775) as edited by Moses Tyson and Henry Guppy. In addition, I have examined several other Thrale diaries and journals: the Italian and German Journals (1784-1787) edited by Herbert Barrows; Scotch Journey (June 1789 to Dec. 1789); Minced Meat for Pyes (1796-1821) edited by Edward Mangin; and the Commonplace Book (1809-1820) begun at the conclusion of Thraliana in 1809. I have also examined Thrale's daily diaries from 1808 to 1821. Finally, I have analyzed several memoirs that Thrale wrote in the early nineteenth century as well as her published works on Johnson--Anecdotes (1786) and Letters to and from the late Samuel Johnson, LL.D. (1788)--to show how she continued to read, construct, and re-construct her view of him in the more than thirty years that she lived after his death.

1.

Disorder and Early Sorrow: Thrale's Failure to Cross from the Social to the Private Sphere in her Early Friendship with Johnson.

Hester Lynch Salusbury, later Hester Thrale, viewed herself from a very early age as a talented writer and scholar. This early image of herself helped to determine the horizon of expectations within which she first viewed Johnson. This self-image also explains her initial desire to meet Johnson. Moreover, Thrale believed that she had illustrious aristocratic origins. She viewed herself as a descendant of Henry VII, which helps to explain her early confidence in pursuing a friendship with Johnson.¹⁸

¹⁸ That Thrale made Johnson aware of her aristocratic origins is certain: notations in Johnson's hand appear in documents belonging to the Thrale family and serve as proof that Thrale had enlisted Johnson's aid in her lifelong interest to firmly establish her aristocratic blood line. That she read Johnson as a member of a lower class is also certain: after having known Johnson for eleven years, she plainly and assuredly described Johnson privately in her Thraliana as "a Man of mean Birth" in beginning a biography of him in 1776 (159). In his book, Dr. Johnson's 'Own Dear Master': The Life of Henry Thrale (Boston: University of America Press, 1998), Lee Morgan writes of Thrale as being "obsessed" by Henry Thrale's "'low' extraction" and that she "harped" on this difference between her own and her husband's background during and after her marriage to Henry. However, she traced aristocratic lineage back to Adam Saltsburg, the son of the "Duke and Prince of Bavaria," whom she described as one of the "many adventurers who followed William the Norman to the conquest of England." She wrote of how Salusbury men had taken part in the Wars of the Roses--one had served as Governor of Denbigh for Henry II, and another had fought bravely for Charles I during the Civil War (Thraliana 274). The eldest son of this last-mentioned Salusbury married "Catherine Tudor," who, Thrale believed, was a "relation & ward of Queen Elizabeth" and the legitimate great-granddaughter of Owen Tudor and dowager Queen Katherine, widow of Henry V, and granddaughter to Sir Richard Velville, son of Henry VII (Thraliana 275). Catherine Tudor married successively into four of the most influential families in North Wales, the first of which was the Salusburys. Because this family eventually split into two main groups--the Salusburys and the Salusbury-Cottons--Thrale traced her royal lineage through both of her parents (John Salusbury and Hester Maria Cotton), through Catherine Tudor to Henry VII.

In the two most complete autobiographical accounts that she ever wrote, when she was thirty-two and seventy-four years old, Thrale wrote of her early, advanced, and by her own account, "masculine" education. She studied languages, particularly Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish. She also studied literature, rhetoric, mathematics and astronomy—subjects which, along with Latin, were traditionally regarded as suitable only for the education of men. She described herself privately in Thraliana as having been a precocious child, whose education had been of paramount importance to her parents: "Although Education was a Word then unknown, as applied to Females," she recalled, her parents had taught her to "read, & speak, & think; & translate from the French, till I was half a Prodigy."¹⁹

Thrale's view of herself as "half a Prodigy" is not illusory.²⁰ At the age of four, she was given a copy of the translation of Homer by John Ogilby (1600-76) and before the age of seven, she was reading French books which included translations of Livy and Plutarch, as well as Paul de Rapin's Histoire d'Angleterre (1724). By 1756, the fifteen-year-old Hester Lynch Salusbury was translating the romantic lyrics and epic verse of Torquato Tasso (1544-95) from the Italian, and had added Spanish to her French and Italian. At her father's request, she translated from Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote.²¹ From age fifteen to twenty-two, Thrale studied advanced French literature with Dr. William Parker (later chaplain to George III). She was also tutored in Latin, classical literature, logic, rhetoric, and metaphysics by Dr. Arthur

¹⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 6.

²⁰ For a more detailed discussion of Thrale's early and advanced education, see James Clifford's, Piozzi, 2nd ed. (1987), and William McCarthy's Hester Thrale-Piozzi: Portrait of a Literary Woman (1985).

²¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 155.

Collier (1707-77), with whom she kept up a vigorous correspondence in Latin. Collier's impact on Thrale's intellectual development was profound. Thrale later wrote privately that Collier, rather than Johnson, had "formed my mind to resemble his."²²

In private, in Thraliana, Thrale also vividly recalled her early public, although anonymous, role as a writer. Writing when she was thirty-five years old, Thrale described herself as having, more than twenty years earlier, taken "an odd Whim of writing in the Newspapers," and was one for whom there was "no Controversy about a Bridge, an Exhibition, or any such bauble but Miss Salusbury's Letters on the Occasion were printed under various Names & Signatures; so various, that She has long ago forgot them all." Her first political epistolary essay on, as she described it, the "dismission" of the Duke of Newcastle at the beginning of King George III's reign was, she recalled, "answered & buffeted about very comically; & being first inserted in the St. James's Chronicle, was reprinted in a Pamphlet call'd the Political Magazine with the Answer signed John by whom was meant my Lord Bute." As a teenager, Thrale also wrote what she called an "American Eclogue—imitating the Style of Fingal," and related that it was well received. Her translation "from the French of Mademoiselle Bernard" was "admired, & printed in the Magazines of the Month, from whence I have seen it," she recalled much later in Thraliana, "in Boarding Schools given to girls for a Copy" At age nineteen, she read Joseph Warton's Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope (1756), a work which she credited with having "made" of her "a Writer & a Critic."²³

²² Autobiography, Letters and Literary remains of Mrs. Piozzi (Thrale) ed. A. Hayward, Vol. II (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1861) 183.

²³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 322-323.

However, shortly before her marriage to Henry Thrale and only a few years before she met Johnson, Thrale suddenly became bereft of the people who had been instrumental in helping her to see herself as a writer, critic and scholar. Her father, John Salusbury, had encouraged his daughter's intellectual precocity and literary aspirations, and had acted as her protector by refusing to consent to his wife's and his wealthy brother's desire that she become the wife of the well-to-do brewer, Henry Thrale.²⁴ But when her father died suddenly in December 1762, Thrale obeyed her mother's command to marry Henry Thrale because her wealthy uncle would settle 10,000 pounds on her if she did. In addition, Henry Thrale's money would lift both mother and daughter out of the financial debt they now assumed after the death of John Salusbury. Indeed, Thrale wrote of her "courtship" with Henry that "except for one five minutes only by mere Accident, I never had had a Teste a Teste [sic] with my Husband in my whole Life till quite the Evening of the Wedding Day."²⁵

Furthermore, shortly before she married, Thrale lost Arthur Collier, her most intimate older male friend and intellectual mentor, when he suddenly and completely dropped his long-standing and vehement opposition to his protégé's compelled marriage to Henry Thrale. Collier wrote to the then unwed Hester Lynch Salusbury in the late summer of 1763: "Don't let your aspiring ambitious spirit be allways thinking of a Garret, I think a good nine Hundred pounds a year . . . may serve you and your mother pretty well till something better falls".²⁶ Despite

²⁴ Thrale, *Thraliana*, ed. Balderston I: 300-301.

²⁵ Thrale, *Thraliana*, ed. Balderston I: 306.

²⁶ Clifford, *Piozzi* 43. Thrale would later write that her mother "had begun to grow tired" of Dr. Collier, "as He rather opposed my marrying anybody" much as Thrale's father had. She [Thrale's mother] grew jealous of [Collier's] Influence over me," Thrale wrote of her

these misfortunes, Thrale continued to view herself privately, socially, and publicly as a writer before her marriage to Henry Thrale in October 1763.²⁷ She acted on these beliefs by publishing several verse and prose works in the Saint James Chronicle: in February 1762, "The Lamentation of Samoset, A Chief of the Oneydoes, over his Son, who fell in Battle. An Indian Fragment," and in July of the same year, a "Letter concerning 'Albion Manor,' signed Thomas _____." Only a month before her marriage to Henry Thrale, she published "Imagination's Search After Happiness: An Allegorical Fable" in the Chronicle.²⁸ But her private, social and public identities as a writer, scholar and critic were almost obliterated by her marriage to Henry Thrale in 1763 when she was confronted with her new roles as wife and mother. She wrote privately of the first years of her marriage that Henry Thrale "repress'd as Impertinent, or rejected as superfluous" the same kind of verse that she had written which had delighted her parents, her uncle, and, on occasion, the public before her marriage. But Henry's indifference toward her writing did not daunt her. She wrote that "it was Natural to try, & try again" to write verse that would please him, and added that "Instead of Dressing showily, or behaving usefully—I sate at home &

mother, "which as he had now been long my Tutour in the Classicks, did grow pretty strong to be sure, and operate upon my Mind on almost every Occasion. Well! She knew her power, & resolved to exert it; fomented a trifling Quarrel between the Dr. & me, so as to keep us at a Distance a while; and in the mean Time encouraging Mr. Thrale's Visits, doubted not of settling everything very soon to her Satisfaction, & so She did" (Thraliana, I: 305-6).

Thrale annotated this passage in the margins of Thraliana: "After which we [Thrale and Collier] never more renewd our Intimacy--Married Women should have no Friends my Mother said besides their Husbands--and so I sate and lost a most disinterested and deserving Friend:--but I pleas'd my Mother & that was . . . all my Care" (Thraliana 305 n.4).

²⁸ McCarthy, Mrs. Thrale-Piozzi: Portrait of a Literary Lady, 286.

wrote Verses."²⁹ Thrale's self-awareness here is at once serious and self-mocking. That she could view herself objectively to the point of self-deprecation makes it difficult to agree with James Clifford's view that Thrale had a "tendency. . . to colour and sentimentalize everything she wrote," and that "it was impossible for Mrs. Thrale to be objective about anything" in her private writing.³⁰

It was certainly practical and realistic of her to try to recapture her social and public identities as a writer and scholar when she began her friendship with Johnson in 1765. Thrale wrote of having been "zealous . . . to be acquainted with" Dr. Johnson, "having heard his moral and Literary Character described in the most exalted terms."³¹ She saw Johnson in 1765 as England saw him: as a poet for his London (1738) and The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749); as a journalist for his work in the Gentleman's Magazine; as a biographer of The Life of Savage; as the eminent moralist and philosopher of the Rambler (1750-52) and of the Idler (1758-60) essays, as well as the oriental tale Rasselas (1759); and, of course, as the prodigiously learned lexicographer of the Dictionary (1755), an achievement for which King George III had granted him a pension in 1762.

In addition to seeing Johnson as a literary celebrity, Thrale also saw in him the possibility of another literary mentor. At the beginning of their relationship in 1765, Thrale was twenty-five and Johnson was fifty-seven years old. Soon after they met, she began translating passages from Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy at Johnson's suggestion, and upon his request, she provided him with a poem for the collection of poetry that Johnson arranged to have published: Anna

²⁹ Clifford, Piozzi, 51.

³⁰ Clifford, Piozzi, 50, n. 1.

Williams' Miscellanies in Prose and Verse (1766). Johnson even provided the title for this poem, "The Three Warnings. A Tale."

Soon Thrale was inviting Johnson to dine with her and her family on the Thursday of each week that she was in her London residence at Southwark, and she began corresponding with him as well. Her eagerness to establish a friendship with Johnson is apparent in the fact that only months after having met him, she invited him to her summer home in Brighton. This she did despite writing privately that her pregnancy with her second child (in little more than two years of marriage) had not given her "a day's health during the whole gestation."³² Johnson appeared just as eager for Thrale's friendship.³³ He responded to her invitation: "When business is done what remains but pleasure? and where should pleasure be sought but under Mrs. Thrale's influence?"³⁴

However, the social relationship that Thrale was in the midst of establishing with Johnson was suddenly overwhelmed by personal crisis. Johnson suffered a nervous breakdown in the summer of 1766, and Thrale took him to Streatham to nurse him back to health from June to October. A strong private bond was forged between them at this time.³⁵ Thrale described privately how shortly after his illness, "our Stern Philosopher Johnson trusted me . . . with a Secret far dearer to him

³¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I:159.

³² Mary Hyde, The Thrales of Streatham Park (Mass.: Harvard UP, 1977) 22. This entry appeared in Thrale's private journal, The Family Book (1766-78).

³³ See Walter Jackson Bates' biography of Johnson, Samuel Johnson (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), and John Wain's biography Samuel Johnson (New York: Viking Press, 1975) for accounts of the Thrale/Johnson friendship as, for the most part, a reciprocal one.

³⁴ The Letters of Samuel Johnson, ed. Bruce Redford (Princeton NJ: Princeton UP, 1992) I: 250.

than his Life"—a secret later argued by Katharine Balderston to be either that of Johnson's masochistic proclivities, or his fear of madness, or both.³⁶ Indeed, thirty-seven years after Johnson's death, Thrale had in her possession at the time of her death the "manacles" that Johnson had given to her for safekeeping. Moreover, eleven years after Johnson's breakdown, Thrale could still vividly recall in Thraliana how she had felt "excessively affected with grief" at her discovery of Johnson in 1766 in the throes of a nervous breakdown at his home in Johnson's Court, London, and how her husband had "involuntarily lifted up one hand to shut his [Johnson's] mouth, from provocation at hearing a man so wildly proclaim what he could at last persuade no one to believe; and what, if true, would have been so very unfit to reveal."³⁷

After he had recovered from his nervous breakdown in 1766, Johnson had become a regular visitor at Thrale's Southwark and Streatham homes. Thrale later wrote that Johnson "soon became something like a regular Inmate of the House" at Southwark, where Mr. Thrale fitted him up "an Apartment over the Counting House Two Pair of Stairs high--& called it

³⁵ In his book, Samuel Johnson: A Personality in Conflict (New York: Oxford UP, 1971), George Irwin writes that Johnson attached to Thrale the "maternal feelings he never had for his own mother" (127-30).

³⁶ Katharine C. Balderston, "Johnson's Vile Melancholy" The Age of Johnson, ed. Frederick W. Hilles (New Haven: Yale UP, 1949) 1: 3-14. See also Balderston's edition of Thraliana, I: 384, 415. For a refutation of Balderston's view, see Donald Greene, "'A Secret Far Dearer to Him than His Life,': Johnson's 'Vile Melancholy' Reconsidered," Age of Johnson ed. Paul J. Korshin (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990) 3:1-34. Greene argues that Boswell's memory of Johnson's occasional negative statements regarding women cannot be trusted. He goes as far as to suggest that rather than question Johnson's mental health by evaluating his sexual proclivities, we should evaluate the mental health of, and the reasons why, Balderston and Thrale would write about Johnson's bouts of madness and masochism.

³⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 127-8.

the 'Round Tower.'" ³⁸ Johnson was even more at "home" in the Thrale's Streatham Park residence. Johnson's visits with the Thrales, which extended from weeks to months, were interrupted chiefly by his annual journeys to Lichfield, Oxford, and Ashbourne, which lasted anywhere from three to nine months.

After she had helped Johnson to recover his health, and after Johnson had revealed so much of himself to her, Thrale may have assumed that their new private friendship would continue, in some capacity, in their social correspondence. This presumably became an integral part of her early horizon of expectations in reading Johnson both privately and socially. However, judging from Johnson's letters to Thrale immediately after his breakdown (unfortunately, Thrale's letters to Johnson from 1767 to 1769 are lost), Thrale read Johnson distrustfully. The earliest indication of this is in Johnson's often dilatory and unsatisfactory responses to her letters soon after the birth of her third child, Henry, on February 15, 1767. In April 1767, Johnson was in Oxford helping his friend, Robert Chambers, the Vinerian Professor of Law, prepare lectures. After spending a month at Oxford, Johnson traveled to Lichfield in May, and he wrote to Thrale that he would return to her "as soon as I can." In response to a letter from Thrale in which she must have inquired why he remained away from her, Johnson wrote: "I have found nothing that withdraws my affections from the friends whom I left behind, or which makes me less desirous of reposing in that place which your kindness and Mr. Thrale's allows me to call my home"³⁹.⁴⁰ Yet Johnson remained away for six months and delayed his return to Streatham

³⁸ Clifford, *Piozzi* 68; n. 4.

³⁹ The italics are Johnson's.

⁴⁰ Johnson, *Letters*, ed. Redford I: 284-285.

until late October.⁴¹ Thrale must have been perplexed and hurt by Johnson's behavior. Only half a year before, she had helped him to recover from a nervous breakdown over the course of three months. During this time, they had quickly become intimate friends. Indeed, Johnson was already calling Streatham "home" in his letters to her. Yet he seemed unwilling to return. Since no existing evidence suggests that there was a pressing reason for Johnson to travel to Lichfield from Oxford and to stay there for so long, it appears that he did it purely for pleasure or diversion. It is possible that Johnson stayed away from Thrale because he felt uncomfortable with how much he had revealed to her about himself so soon after they met. However, events that occurred in early 1768, suggest that this seems not to have been the case.

After having spent Christmas and New Year's with the Thrales at the end of 1767, Johnson left for Oxford in February 1768 to help his friend Robert Chambers with the Vinerian Lectures once again. But before he left London, Thrale must have asked him for help with her husband's campaign to become a Member of Parliament, and she must have complained that she was displeased with the "complacent" manner in which Johnson was responding to her and her husband in their time of need. Johnson wrote defensively to her in January 1768 while still in London, "Though I do not perceive that there is any need of help, I shall yet write another advertisement [for Henry Thrale's election campaign], lest you might suspect that my complaisance had more of idleness than sincerity."⁴² Then he left for Oxford. From there, Johnson was compelled to write to Thrale that he would "leave nothing undone" to

⁴¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 282.

⁴² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 293.

help her husband.⁴³ However, she must have remained angry with him and must have continued to express that he was not taking seriously enough a matter of great importance to her and her husband. After all, he had just spent the holidays with them, and instead of returning to them to help with Henry Thrale's election campaign, Johnson had gone to another friend's home and stayed there. Indeed, two weeks after the foregoing letter, Johnson wrote apologetically to Thrale: "My last letter came a day after its time, by being carried too late to the post. This I mention, that you may not suspect me of negligence."⁴⁴

However, Thrale continued to be dissatisfied with Johnson's responses to her regarding her husband's political campaign. This is evident in a letter that Johnson wrote to her on March 24, 1768, where it seems that Thrale, most likely angry with the insufficient help that Johnson offered from Oxford, had stopped writing to him about her husband's election campaign. To this, Johnson angrily responded four days before the election: "You serve me very sorrily. You may write every day to this place and yet I do not know what is the event of the Southwark Election. I am sure you ought to believe that I am very far from indifference about it. Do; Let me know as soon as you can."⁴⁵ Although Henry Thrale was "returned" as a Member of Parliament on March 28, Johnson did not return to London until April 30.

Thrale's anger at and disappointment in Johnson early in their friendship can also be seen in 1768, when she refused to call her fourth child, Anna Maria, who was born on April 1, "Bessy" even though Johnson had expressly requested this in a letter to her. Johnson wished for the child to be named in remembrance of his late wife Elizabeth. In June

⁴³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 295.

⁴⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 296.

1769, however, Thrale partially granted Johnson his wish when she named her fifth child Lucy Elizabeth, and made Johnson a godfather to the child. However, in a definite rebuke to Johnson, she made sure that the child was called "Lucy."

Thrale must have continued to be unsure of Johnson's stated friendship for her. In May 1768, Johnson wrote to reassure her that he highly regarded her friendship:

Though I propose to come home tomorrow I would not omit even so long to tell you how much I think myself favoured by your notice. Every man is desirous to keep those friends whom he is proud to have gained, and I count the friendship of your house among the felicities of life.⁴⁶

However, even his return "home" did not seem to reassure Thrale of his friendship for her. For when he went again away from her, Johnson felt the need to reassure Thrale once more of his friendship for her. He wrote to her lyrically and devotedly, probably not wanting to appear ungrateful to her and remembering how she had helped him to recover from his nervous breakdown at Streatham:

whithersoever I may wander, I shall not, I hope, leave behind me that gratitude and respect, with which your attention to my health and tenderness for my weakness have impressed my heart. May you be long before you want the kindness which you have shown to,
Madam, Your most obliged and most humble servant⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 299.

⁴⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 307.

⁴⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 316-317.

Likewise in December 1768, Johnson wrote to Thrale that when he failed to write to her, he suffered the "mortification of paining that mind which I would most wish to please."⁴⁸

But although Johnson wrote to her in this soothing manner, Thrale continued to read him distrustfully. Late in 1768, once again in Oxford to help his friend Robert Chambers, Johnson wrote in response to Thrale, who must have written to him of his neglect of her: "That I should forget you there is no danger, for I have time enough to think both by night and day, and he that has leisure for any thing that is not present, always turns his mind to that which he likes best."⁴⁹ Despite letters like this one, however, Thrale must have remained unsure of how to read Johnson and thus continued to question him regarding whether or not he was eager to return to Streatham. A half year later, in June 1769, Johnson, once again with Chambers in Oxford, found it necessary to assure her of his friendship yet again: "I have not yet found any place from which I shall not willingly depart, to come back to you."⁵⁰

It is clear by 1770 that Thrale's early experiences in reading Johnson had made her uncertain of his friendship. He was not the close friend that she had assumed he would be after she had helped him to recover from a nervous breakdown, after she had continued to extend her hospitality to him for weeks or months at a time in her Southwark and Streatham homes, and after she had regarded him as a member of her family. Indeed, Thrale had not yet seen Johnson "willingly depart" from Chambers, or from any of the family and friends he visited on his journeys to the Midlands. What she had seen instead was that Johnson

⁴⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 319.
⁴⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 322.
⁵⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 325.

often remained away from her despite her complaints and contrary to his protestations of friendship for her.

It proved difficult for Thrale to continue her private relationship with Johnson when he was away. She faced both personal and social problems in pursuing this relationship through written correspondence. She wanted to write to him of private matters, yet she also knew that her letters might fall into the wrong hands and become public at any time. This could have serious consequences on her marriage and reputation since Johnson often wrote to her endearingly, using language that was more appropriate for a lover than a friend. Additionally, she did not know if she could trust Johnson to be discreet and not make the private contents of her letters to him known to his large circle of friends and colleagues.⁵¹ Finally, a further complication for Thrale was that Johnson addressed his letters for her to Henry Thrale. Johnson displayed proper social etiquette in doing this since he was an older man and a widower writing to a young married woman who was thirty-two years his junior.⁵² However, this observance

⁵¹ In his essay, "Dr. Johnson in his Letters: The Public Guise of Private Matter," which appears in The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century, eds. Howard Anderson, Philip B. Daghljan, and Irvin Ehrenpreis (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1966), Daghljan states that "Johnson's letters are an ideal source for a direct view of the man." I believe this is as true for the letters of Thrale. However, I disagree with Daghljan that "there is nothing compulsive" about Johnson's "desire to put pen to paper" (109). The Thrale/Johnson correspondence shows that Johnson wrote compulsively to Thrale because he sought in her an ideal reader. Rather, I concur with Bruce Redford who concludes that Johnson "never hesitated to stress the intensity of his attachment" to Thrale in his letters to her. For example, Johnson wrote to Thrale on one occasion, "on my part, I find it very pleasing to write; and what is pleasing is very willingly continued" (The Letters of Samuel Johnson, with Mrs. Thrale's Genuine Letters to Him, 3 vols., ed. R. W. Chapman, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 2.206-7. See also Bruce Redford, The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter, 208-210.

⁵² Also, after Henry Thrale became a Member of Parliament for Southwark, he could receive mail for free. Johnson took advantage of

of decorum meant that Henry Thrale often read Johnson's letters *before* Thrale had. Therefore, if she wished to continue her private relationship with Johnson when he was away from her, Thrale had to find an epistolary voice with which she could write of private matters to Johnson. In other words, she had to cross from the social to the private sphere in her correspondence with Johnson.

Complicating matters further for Thrale was that she had learned to distrust Johnson's epistolary voice by 1770. In her earliest extant letter to Johnson for May 1770, Thrale reported that she was physically exhausted after having given birth to her sixth child in seven years, Susanna Arabella was born on May 23, and having endured a recovery complicated by what she had described to Johnson as "an odious sore throat which few escape."⁵³ In response, Johnson began sending letters to her, on average, once every three days. Johnson wrote some of his most devoted and loving letters to Thrale at this time. He began one letter to her, "I hope your complaint . . . is without danger, for your danger involves us all, when you <were> ill before, it was agreed that if you were lost, hope would be lost with you, for such another there was no expectation of finding."⁵⁴ He not only wrote often to Thrale, but let her know that he expected her to respond in kind to him.⁵⁵ Surely Thrale appreciated Johnson's concern and attention, but she was also vexed by the pressure Johnson was putting on her to correspond with him

this so as not to inconvenience Mrs. Thrale or make her pay for his many letters to her.

⁵³ Johnson and Thrale, The Letters of Samuel Johnson With Mrs. Thrale's Genuine Letters to Him, edited by R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952) I: 242.

⁵⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 347.

⁵⁵ Bruce Redford, The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter (1989). I agree with Redford who

during this time of crisis in her life. She responded to these letters on one occasion: "It is unlucky enough that my power of acknowledging and returning civility should fail just now, when you are daily giving me occasion to exert it; unmercifully indeed, & I fear with some wicked intention to wear it quite out."⁵⁶ Thrale teased Johnson here, but she must have noticed that Johnson did not take her hint and continued to write to her as frequently as before. Most importantly, she must have noticed how although Johnson wrote endearingly and often to her, he still did not come to see her.

Despite her uneasiness with Johnson's professions of friendship and the many obstacles to continuing her private relationship with him, Thrale did not cease in her efforts to have a private epistolary dialogue with Johnson. In June 1770, she seemed to assume that a private space already existed in her correspondence with him, one in which she could write comfortably to him of her private domestic situation:

I am at length safely housed at Streatham and cannot help telling you with what delight I feel myself escaped from confinement in London. My Master [Thrale's husband] is kind and makes no Objections, though nothing is in order; My Children are all well and running upon the Lawn . . . I am now scarce without feeling some sickness or some pain; but all is well compensated by a State of Security.⁵⁷

writes, "letter-writing is not merely a stopgap enterprise, but rather a campaign for intimacy with the other" (10).

⁵⁶ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 241-2.

⁵⁷ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 237.

In late June, from Lichfield, Johnson did respond to the general news of her household. However, when Thrale wrote to him about her private self, Johnson did not respond.

This pattern continued. Late in giving birth to her seventh child, Sophia Thrale, born on July 23, 1771, Thrale expressed some of her anxiety on July 1, to Johnson, who was on an extended visit with his friend, Dr. Taylor, in Ashbourne: "Something must happen soon and then you shall hear of me by another hand."⁵⁸ Sixteen days later, now seriously overdue, Thrale wrote to Johnson in her most "private" letter to date about her fear that she might die during childbirth, and that should she survive, she might be engulfed by the many roles she now played in life: "Be assur'd of my best care of her Daughter," [her mother's daughter, or herself] of "Harry's Mother" [Harry was her only son at this time] Mr. Thrale's Wife, and Mr. Johnson's Friend."⁵⁹ But these were roles separate from the private self to which she wished to have Johnson respond. Johnson seemed not to sense that Thrale was writing to him outside of her social roles as a wife, mother, and daughter, or he chose not to recognize it. When he next wrote to her, he simply acknowledged her primary role as his epistolary correspondent: "I hope to hear from Streatham . . . that a new Being is born that shall in time write such letters as this, and that another Being is safe, that she may continue to write such."⁶⁰ Rather than respond to her sense of isolation within her own family and to her scared, private "self" (separate from all of the identities society had placed upon her as a

⁵⁸ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 256.

Taylor was senior prebendary of Westminster and had "his choice of the livings that are in the gift of the Chapter" (See Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford, 3:259 n. 9).

⁵⁹ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 263.

⁶⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 364-5.

wife and mother), Johnson read Thrale in the role she played that was most important *to him*: her role as his correspondent.

Thrale must have viewed Johnson's lack of a response to her private fears as "indifference" and made this clear to Johnson. Indeed, Johnson wrote cautiously to her from Ashbourne in early July: "I hope you do not think me indifferent about you, and therefore will take care to have me informed."⁶¹ He then opened another letter to her in mid-July writing defensively: "Do not say that I never write to you, and do not think that I expected to find any friends here that could make me wish to prolong my stay." Indeed, it seems that Thrale complained of Johnson's neglect to the extent that he became angry with her. In response to her questioning his use of the word "indifference" in a previous letter, Johnson wrote gruffly to Thrale from Ashbourne: "Indifference is indeed a strange word in a Letter from me to you. Which way could it possibly creep in? I do not remember any moment for a very long time past, when I could use it without contradiction from my own thoughts."⁶² Nevertheless, despite her complaints, Thrale continued to find that Johnson remained "indifferent" to her at times.

In late July 1771, now a month overdue in her seventh pregnancy, Thrale wrote to Johnson of her own "uneasiness" in thinking of her own survival while caring now also for her mother (who had become ill with cancer):

I would [my mother's] complaint was such as my most grateful duty could alleviate, and yet such is my present situation that even

⁶¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 366-367.

⁶² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 368.

her uneasiness cannot withhold my mind from too frequent recurrences to self, and a poor Puss I am.⁶³

Thrale was clearly looking for a sympathetic response to her own situation in this letter. However, after she had survived giving birth to Sophia, who was born on July 23, she must have been disappointed to receive a letter from Johnson in which he first complained of his own health: "I am miserably harrassed." In this same letter, Johnson also wrote lyrically about Thrale's recent danger by comparing it to the death of one of a pair of swans on the country estate of his friend Dr. Taylor of Ashbourne, where he was again a guest: "The other swan swims about solitary, as Mr. Thrale, and I, and others should do, if we lost our Mistress."⁶⁴ However, immediately after this, he wrote of Dr. Taylor's livestock, in particular of his "Great Bull," and then asked Thrale in her role as the "Mistress of Streatham" to save "loose bricks" for him for an oven he wished to construct at Streatham to conduct chemistry experiments: "I can at present think of no better place for Chimistry in fair weather," he wrote to her, "than the pump side in the kitchen Garden."⁶⁵

When Thrale responded to Johnson six days later, her disappointment in him was apparent in the way she sought to remind him of how ill she had been:

This day Week I took to my bed, and this day I sit up four Hours and I write to Mr. Johnson: I am God be praised far better in my health than I have been for this last Month and hope to gain Strength every day.⁶⁶

⁶³ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 255-256.

⁶⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 375.

⁶⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 375-376.

⁶⁶ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 269.

Indeed, perhaps hoping for a more sympathetic response from him in person, Thrale wrote to Johnson on July 31, 1771 suggesting that he ought to "make haste to come home."⁶⁷ But Johnson had gone on to Lichfield despite writing to Thrale of how sick he was at Ashbourne. She must have despaired of finding in Johnson's presence the sympathy that was absent in his recent letters when he wrote to her, self-absorbedly, on August 5, 1771 from Lichfield: "Do you think after all this roving you shall be able to manage me again?" When he added, "I suppose . . . that you are thinking how to reduce me," he seems to assume that concerns about him were uppermost in Thrale's mind even though she was still recovering from what had been a most difficult and life-threatening pregnancy.⁶⁸ In The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century (1966), Philip Daghljan writes that Johnson was "always sincerely solicitous about illness of any kind," in his letters to Thrale, including her pregnancies. However, as one can see from the Thrale/Johnson correspondence cited above, Johnson was not always "solicitous" in his letters to Thrale.⁶⁹

Johnson's reading of himself in relation to Thrale is problematic for us, and must have seemed particularly so for Thrale. Johnson feared being read by Thrale as a disloyal friend, yet at the same time, he seemed to resist writing sympathetically to her in accordance with her expressed private needs, but wrote in accordance only with what he needed. Most noticeable in their early correspondence is the fact that he ignored her repeated attempts to engage him on a more personal and

⁶⁷ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 269.

⁶⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 380-381.

⁶⁹ See "Daghljan's essay, "Dr. Johnson in his Letters: The Public Guise of Private Matter," in The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century, eds. Howard Anderson, Philip B. Daghljan and Irvin Ehrenpreis (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1966: 119.

supportive level in their correspondence, despite the intimacy they must have shared during his nervous breakdown. After six years of friendship with Johnson, Thrale was a more informed and more experienced reader of Johnson, but she still faced a resistant reader in him. She had failed thus far to find a way to have a continuous and an extended dialogue with Johnson in their correspondence about her private self as an individual, separate from her social and public roles as dutiful wife, mother and daughter, and the doyenne of the literary salon that she was now creating around herself in her role as the "Mistress of Streatham."

2.

**Thrale's Narrowing Horizon of Expectations Regarding Johnson's
Friendship for Her.**

Thrale expressed her anger both directly and indirectly to Johnson when he failed to read and respond to her as an intimate friend and confidant. One method she used to do this was to inject suddenly an emotional distance into her letters to him by excessively flattering him. When she did this, she wrote to Johnson as a much less informed or inexperienced reader of him than she was in 1772, after having known him for seven years. She wrote as any total stranger or fawning admirer might, rather than as a dear friend would. For this reason, her "praise" never failed to arouse Johnson's suspicions and fears. On one occasion, soon after she began expressing her anger at him in her letters in this way, Johnson responded by writing tersely to her: "I thought you would in time compliment your compliments away."⁷⁰

Furthermore, Thrale had to deal not only with the lack of a private dialogue with Johnson when he was away from her, but also with the paradoxical readings that he made of her, himself, and their friendship during the summer of 1772. This becomes particularly noticeable when the failure of several of Henry Thrale's ill-advised business ventures brought the Thrales to the brink of bankruptcy, and Henry, suffering from shock and a deep depression, became unable to manage the brewery. Although Thrale was in the late stages of her eighth pregnancy at this time, she had to arrange quickly for loans to keep the brewery from bankruptcy. Thrale had never managed the brewery before, and now she suddenly had to take control at a time in England's

⁷⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 346.

history when doing so would have been a challenge to the most experienced businessman, for England was suffering from high grain prices and was in a national financial panic. The Fordyce Bank had failed, making credit extremely scarce.⁷¹ Yet Thrale was able, by her own skill and persistence, to secure loans to save the brewery. In addition, she not only had to manage the brewery, but also to care for both her husband's mental health and her mother's fragile physical health (Lady Salusbury would die in less than a year from cancer). Thrale also had to endure at this time the shameful fact that her husband's philandering, about which she had long been cognizant, had become public knowledge through reports in the newspapers. These multiple pressures finally took their toll when on September 15, 1772, she gave birth to a girl, whom she named Penelope, and who lived only ten hours. Indeed, she wrote privately in her "Family Book," "this has been a sad Lying in: my Mother dying--& every thing going wrong."⁷²

Johnson helped Thrale manage the affairs of the failing brewery, but he soon had to leave her side to complete the fourth edition of the Dictionary of the English Language (1755). Upon completing this work in early October, Johnson immediately left for Lichfield. He wrote to Thrale from there on October 24, 1772, as if her problems were his own: "the first consequence of our late trouble ought to be, an endeavour to brew at a cheaper rate. . . . Unless this can be done nothing can help us, and if this be done, we shall not want help."⁷³ However, while Johnson wrote in this concerned manner to her, he traveled from Lichfield to Ashbourne to visit his friend Dr. Taylor. On November 4,

⁷¹ I am indebted to James Clifford for this information. See Hester Lynch Piozzi (Mrs. Thrale) 93, n.2.

⁷² Mary Hyde, The Thrales of Streatham Park (Cambridge: Harvard P, 1977) 55.

Thrale wrote to him eager for his return to London: "We shall all be glad when the Time of Separation is over . . . the period is now not far distant." She wrote a few days later on November 7 to express how she and her family were "wishing" for Johnson to come home now that Henry was recovered from his shock and depression.⁷⁴ But Johnson remained in Ashbourne with Taylor. At some point, most likely out of resentment for his continued absence, Thrale stopped writing to Johnson about matters regarding the brewery, which prompted Johnson to complain from Ashbourne on November: "I wish I could know how you brew, and how you go on; but you tell me nothing."⁷⁵ Although he wrote in this way to Thrale, Johnson continued to stay away. Indeed, from Ashbourne Johnson returned to Lichfield and lingered there.⁷⁶

Thrale's epistolary silence regarding the brewery probably had as much to do with her anger at Johnson as it did with her indecision about whether to write to Johnson about private matters once again or not. As Henry Thrale recovered from his depression, he regained his interest in managing the brewery. But Thrale, fearing that her husband had not fully recovered his business acumen, believed that Henry might return to bankrupting the brewery. Having failed to elicit the desired empathy from Johnson previously (when she had attempted to write about her "private self" separate from her social roles as wife and mother in section 1), Thrale hesitated for months to write to Johnson again about private matters. Instead, she chose to write to him solely from the perspective of the social sphere, that is, as Henry Thrale's "wife" describing her husband's condition and as a "businesswoman" describing

⁷³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 401.

⁷⁴ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 238a; 289.

⁷⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 406.

⁷⁶ Indeed, Johnson did not return to London until December 11.

affairs at the brewery. But her private distresses overpowered her caution. In the same letter above for November 7, 1772, she crossed over the border from the social to the private sphere once again when she wrote to Johnson at Ashbourne that she was "wishing" for him to come "home," because her husband would "not stir now he is in Town, nor can all the influence I have over him make him speak a kind word to a Customer when he knows it would save him a house."⁷⁷ In her next letter to Johnson, Thrale explicitly requested private intimacy:

You see this is a *private letter*.⁷⁸ He [Henry Thrale] dined abroad yesterday & I had like to have had some private Talk with Perkins [the Chief Clerk at the brewery] but I missed the opportunity, & somehow was not sorry for the accident that hindered me, one's whole heart so entirely resists a clandestine Conversation and if I ask leave I am *so* sure to be refused: but one Virtue must be violated I suppose to save another, and if I cannot do any good without, I'll try that experiment.⁷⁹

It must have troubled Thrale that after seven years of friendship with Johnson she still had to define certain letters to him as "private." In other words, she still had to define for Johnson the private space that she expected to have in her friendship with him, a space that Johnson would not acknowledge. Indeed, her need to define this letter as "private" to him indicates that Johnson must have given her cause in the past to question his discretion.

Thrale wrote to Johnson on this occasion calling him "a friend truly matchless." However, Johnson responded two days later from

⁷⁷ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 289.

⁷⁸ The italics here are Thrale's.

⁷⁹ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 289-90.

Ashbourne: "I am much obliged to you for your desire of my return." Although he wrote that he would make his way home, he would not be hurried in his journey. He wrote to instruct her: "Be pleased to direct your next letter to Lichfield; for I shall, I think, be contriving to find my way back."⁸⁰ But in fact, he remained in Ashbourne. Indeed, he left Ashbourne in late November to return to Lichfield, where he remained until December 7, and only after visits to friends in Birmingham and Oxford did he return to London arriving there on December 11.

After experiencing Johnson's delay in returning to her from Ashbourne and then Lichfield, Birmingham and Oxford, Thrale's horizon of expectations regarding his friendship for her was clearly starting to narrow. Most likely she understood but did not approve of or trust Johnson's unswerving obedience, which, at times, amounted to his obeisance, to her husband. As much as Johnson wrote to Thrale that his friendship for her was sincere, he knew that the favors he received from the Thrale household would only continue as long as his relationship with Henry Thrale remained sound. Clifford was clear in his biography of Thrale that Johnson recognized and respected that Henry's "word was law in the household."⁸¹ Johnson was not anxious, therefore, to have his host think him *in any way* an ally of his wife in the management of the brewery, or in any other matter. It must have been even harder for her to accept that Johnson also put the friendship of others, for example, Robert Chambers and Dr. Taylor, before his friendship with her. Indeed, in a letter to Thrale on November 14, 1772, Johnson weakly excused himself for not interrupting his stay at Ashbourne to help her manage

⁸⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 407.

⁸¹ Clifford, Piozzi 68.

Henry Thrale's renewed exuberant and irresponsible spending proclivities: "It was my intention to have <made> more haste home than will be easily permitted. I talked to Dr. Taylor of going away this week, and he is moody and serious and says I promised to stay with him a month. I know not how to get away." Johnson promised Thrale in this same letter, "If I am wanted . . . I will immediately come," appearing to ignore her previous and explicit pleas for him to come to her.⁸² Moreover, Thrale must have been hurt and perplexed that Johnson simply avoided responding to the fears she expressed in her "private" letter to him. On November 19, 1772, Johnson wrote to ask Thrale about the affairs of the brewery, but he did not respond to her fears about her husband's behavior. Thrale must have realized the obvious: Johnson would not write to her about her husband's management of the brewery because he feared Henry's wrath. Indeed, in this same letter to Thrale, Johnson contradictorily expressed a strong desire to come to her while also asserting the "impossibility" of his being able to leave Dr. Taylor—and this for reasons that had not yet even occurred(!):

I longed for your letter to-day; for till that came I could not make any promises, or form any determinations. You need not doubt my readiness to return, but it is impossible to foresee all occasions of interruption [by Dr. Taylor], or all necessities of compliance.⁸³

What must have particularly hurt and infuriated Thrale was a letter that she received two days later from Johnson in which he wrote: "Since I came into the country we have had no considerable occurrences. The Doctor [Taylor] stays at home and I stay with him, sometimes reading,

⁸² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 408.

⁸³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 408.

and sometimes talking."⁸⁴ Upon reading this letter, Thrale must have felt the sting of Johnson's indifference toward her. Even Clifford, who views Johnson favorably in his biography of Thrale, describes Johnson as having "lingered on in Ashbourne with Dr. Taylor" rather than returning to Thrale during this time of crisis in her life.⁸⁵ Clifford goes on to state that Johnson "never failed to give comfort and encouragement" to Thrale.⁸⁶ But, as we have seen, this is clearly not the case when one reads the Thrale/Johnson correspondence.

As she had done previously, Thrale responded to Johnson's lack of concern for her private problems as if she were an uninformed and inexperienced reader of him. She injected a cold social civility into her letters to him by praising him excessively as a stranger might who had met him for the first time. Johnson reacted immediately to this with suspicion and anger on November 23, 1772: "Every thing else in your letter pleased me very well, except that when I come, I entreat I may not be flattered, as your letters flatter me. You have read of heroes and princes ruined by flattery, and I question if any of them had a flatterer as dangerous as you." On the one hand, Johnson did not want Thrale to praise him; yet, on the other hand, he did not treat her as his equal: his friendship for her husband and for his other friends always seemed to come before his friendship to her. Furthermore, he demanded that Thrale serve, without restriction, as his confessor although he did not feel obligated to be one for her. In addition, he wanted her to behave toward him as a mother or a lover who had a certain kind of womanly "power" over him as his "governess." She was to direct and regulate the hours he kept, the food he ate, and the amount of

⁸⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 409-410.

⁸⁵ Clifford, Piozzi, 95.

exercise he took when he was with her just as she had done when she had cared for him at Streatham after his nervous breakdown in 1766. Indeed, in the same letter cited above, Johnson commanded Thrale: "Pray keep strictly to your character of governess."⁸⁷ Rather than write to her private self, Johnson wrote to Thrale rigidly in her social roles as an obedient daughter to her mother, a dutiful wife to her husband, a conscientious mother to her children, and, most importantly for him, as a dutiful and loyal friend to him. She was the "Mistress of Streatham" to Johnson, and a friend who kept him entertained with letters filled with "chat" when he was away from "home."⁸⁸

Nevertheless, Thrale continued to hope for a more complete friendship with Johnson, one that included a private as well as a social relationship with him. Certainly, Thrale needed to have such a friend for both emotional and practical reasons. Who else but Johnson, who was now, for all intents and purposes, a member of the Thrale household, could understand her financial problems with her husband? Thrale knew that Henry would not listen to her ideas on how to manage the brewery, but he might listen to Johnson. In a letter on November 30, 1772, Thrale explained to Johnson her private concerns that her husband was excluding her from knowing about his future plans for the brewery. She described how when a rival brewer, Felix Calvert, arrived at Streatham and "begged" her "not to leave the room as he was sure I could throw some light upon the subject of Conversation . . . Mr. Thrale was—I think for the first Time—quite pressing for me to retire. I therefore moved off,

⁸⁶ Clifford, Piozzi 99.

⁸⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 410.

⁸⁸ Johnson's reading of Thrale here clearly is guided by a gender bias.

as soon as I decently could, making it apparently my Choice."⁸⁹

Thrale's curiosity about her husband's dealings with Calvert was well founded: Henry often attempted to brew more beer than his rivals, which, on more than one occasion, had plunged the Thrale brewery into financial difficulties. Her apprehension that Johnson might not support her side in disputes with Henry was also reasonable. Indeed, at around this time, Johnson fretted openly in a letter to her in response to Thrale's having teasingly mentioned in a previous letter that Henry Thrale suspected that Johnson had "concerted" with her on an idea regarding the brewery:

Why should Mr. Thrale suppose what I took the liberty of suggesting was concerted with you? He does not know how much I revolve his affairs, and how honestly I desire his prosperity. I hope he has let the hint take some hold of his mind.⁹⁰

Johnson's panic must have made Thrale wonder if she could rely on him as a friend to back her up in matters pertaining to sound business practice. In a letter on December 2, 1772, Thrale went so far as to delineate for Johnson how he could be a helpful friend to her in the matter of her husband's reckless management of the brewery:

My master [Henry] hopes you will not loiter at Oxford, as he has much to consult you about; my advice is already g<iven> and sadly would it fret me if yours should n<ot> agree, much would it delight me though, if y<ou> could confirm my Opinion.⁹¹

This was not an unreasonable request. Certainly, Johnson wrote much more often to Thrale than to her husband and in his letters to her, Johnson frequently declared his sincere friendship for her. However, Johnson

⁸⁹ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 295.
⁹⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 231.

responded with great displeasure to her request for loyalty: "When one parts from friends it is uncertain when one shall come back, and when one comes back it is not very certain how long one shall stay."⁹² Denying her request, Johnson implied that he would not support her opinion if it disagreed with Henry Thrale's.⁹³ Moreover, Johnson read Thrale only as Henry Thrale's "wife" and not as her husband's business partner, disregarding the identity she had assumed the day she saved the brewery from bankruptcy with no help from her husband. To further impose his limited view on her, Johnson wrote to her two days later as his "governess," hoping soon to "lye in my old habitation, under your government." Finally, rather than helping Thrale, Johnson wished to avoid any trouble and minimized his role in coming to her at this time: "It pains me to think that my coming can be of any consequence," he wrote to her, "We will set all our understandings to work, and surely we have no insuperable difficulties."⁹⁴ In other words, although Johnson would respond to Thrale in her friendly role as "governess," he was unwilling to support her position in serious personal and business matters, especially if it meant going against Henry Thrale.

When Johnson finally returned to London in mid-December 1772, he did not act as Thrale had asked him to when dealing with her husband. Thrale must have realized that after seven years of friendship, Johnson did not value his friendship with her above that he had with Henry. More importantly, Johnson did not respond to Thrale's overtures of

⁹¹ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, Chapman I: 296.

⁹² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 413.

⁹³ In "Dr. Johnson in his letters: The Public Guise of Private Matter" in The Familiar Letter in the Eighteenth Century, 119, Philip Daghlion writes that "personal and family loyalty" were always present in Johnson's character. But such loyalty is clearly not in evidence here with regard to Thrale, who was Johnson's most intimate friend.

⁹⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford I: 415.

friendship as if they had a relationship that was different and separate from his friendship with Henry. This was a bitter repetition of her past friendships with men. Thrale had known what it was like to be the sole focus and care of her father, and then of Collier. Collier had initially supported Thrale's ambitions to write, and sought to protect her from being forced to marry Henry Thrale. However, he had succumbed to Mrs. Salusbury's, Thrale's mother's command to encourage her to marry Henry Thrale. Thrale now sought in Johnson an ally to protect her from her husband's poor mental health and foolhardy fiscal policies; in other words, she sought a friend who would be as loyal to her as her father had been. But now she saw that Johnson, like Collier, would abandon her because of his fear of someone else. So she watched helplessly as Johnson deserted her for fear of displeasing her husband.⁹⁵ It must have made her even more frustrated and angry to realize that after all her care of Johnson, she was not, nor was probably ever likely to be, the main focus of his attention in his relationship with her family. Ironically, in her friendships with both Johnson and Collier, Thrale experienced how each of these men, whom she had loved and respected, held her marriage to Henry Thrale as more important than her personal friendship with them. In other words, they were willing to forgo a private relationship with her so as not to jeopardize their social and public reputations by alienating someone else.

⁹⁵ Johnson's behavior here makes one unable to totally agree with Greene's and Basker's conclusions that the possibility of Johnson's misogyny is a "myth." See James Basker, "Dancing Dogs, Women Preachers, and the Myth of Johnson's Misogyny," Age of Johnson ed. Paul Korshin (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990) 3:63-90. See also Donald Greene, "'A Secret Far Dearer to Him than his Life': Johnson's 'Vile Melancholy' Reconsidered," Age of Johnson, ed. Paul Korshin (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992) 4: 1-40; and Donald Greene, "Johnson's Misogyny: Some Addenda," South Central Review Vol. 9, no. 4 (Winter 1992), 3-80.

Despite what she might understandably regard as Johnson's latest betrayal of her, Thrale wrote to Johnson on March 9, 1773: "Do I forbear to tell you all that is in my heart?" She seemed to be in disbelief that Johnson would not be partial to her after his many heartfelt declarations of friendship for her in his letters. Perhaps she still hoped that she could bring the private into the social sphere of her letters to him. Thus, despite Johnson's resistance in responding to her private woes, Thrale continued to write to Johnson of her continuing problems with Henry Thrale, plans for the brewery, and the lawsuit with Mr. Alexander and Mr. Eyles—two men who were suing Henry over matters pertaining to the brewery.⁹⁶ Johnson expected Thrale to keep him informed on how the negotiations with Alexander and Eyles were proceeding. Johnson wrote to her from Johnson's Court in London on March 9, 1773: "You will not let me burst in ignorance of your transaction with Alexander."⁹⁷ Yet, on the other hand, he did not put himself under the same obligation of sharing any information with Thrale that he gathered about her husband's negotiations with these men. Indeed, Johnson wrote to Thrale glibly on March 16, 1773 of a recent meeting between her husband, Alexander, and Eyles: "My Master [Henry Thrale] did not wish my stay, so I soon went away . . . we totally forgot Eyles and Alexander as if they were out of Being."⁹⁸

Thrale was stunned and hurt by Johnson's rather cavalier disregard for her in this matter.⁹⁹ This is clear in an angry expostulation she

⁹⁶ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 309.

⁹⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 17.

⁹⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 19-20.

⁹⁹ In the Converse of the Pen (1989), Bruce Redford writes that Johnson "was never in any danger of forgetting her [Thrale] but might not the opposite prove true?" 211. Clearly Thrale could not be expected to trust Johnson to remember her after such incidents as the one cited here.

wrote to him three days later on March 19: "I can now think of Eyles or Alexander or any of them, and wish you had not forgot them when you was at Southwark."¹⁰⁰ She expressed her fury at her husband's efforts to exclude her from the brewery business in this same letter to Johnson: "My dear cruel master is more tyger-hearted than the worst among the set, you saw the leave we took, & he has never sent me a scrap since to ask or tell me anything; nor would I firmly believe if I remain'd here, or in Siberia six Russian winters."¹⁰¹ Thrale had good reason to be furious at her husband. Henry Thrale had brought the brewery to the brink of bankruptcy and then suffered an emotional and intellectual collapse under the weight of the enormous mistakes he had made. There would have been no brewery for him to return to if his wife had not acted to save it from bankruptcy. Now, this same man was excluding his wife from the business she had saved from dissolution. This situation and Johnson's flippant response to her serious inquiry regarding Alexander and Eyles must have made her feel that Johnson, along with her husband, was unwilling to acknowledge the new identity she had recently acquired as an effective businesswoman. Although there is no direct evidence that Johnson withheld information about the negotiations with Alexander and Eyles from her, Thrale must have realized that even if Johnson had such information, he would probably not share it with her for fear of endangering his friendship with her husband. What must have particularly hurt and vexed Thrale was the knowledge that Johnson remained silent regarding her husband's future plans for the brewery even though he had seen Henry make ruinous speculative investment decisions in the recent past.

¹⁰⁰ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 313-314.

¹⁰¹ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 314

Thus, by 1773, Thrale's horizon of expectations with regard to her friendship with Johnson had narrowed. She could no longer assume that Johnson would be more her friend than her husband's. Furthermore, she must have noticed that although Johnson had written to her as an equal about the management of the brewery and her involvement in it during the time of Henry's severe depression, Johnson had stopped doing so after Henry had recovered.

Despite this setback, however, Thrale did not give up attempting to establish a private dialogue with Johnson in her letters to him. This might seem surprising at first. But it is reasonable when one considers that she did not have much choice but to attempt to strengthen Johnson's friendship for and loyalty to her. Indeed, her lack of confidence in her husband's ability to manage the family fortune overrode her new sense of sorrow over Johnson's failure as an epistolary confidant and loyal friend. Thrale was aware that her husband listened, at times, to Johnson's opinions and advice, but never to her own. She still hoped that should Henry begin to act recklessly again in his management of the brewery, Johnson could bring him back to his senses, or at least, prevent him from making the situation worse.

Getting nowhere in her letters to him in this regard, Thrale invited Johnson to meet her in London so that they could talk. But Johnson's response must have quashed any hopes she had that he would act differently in person than he had in his recent letters. With respect to her husband's plans for the brewery, Johnson responded to her invitation: "On Tuesday Morning I hope to see you. I have not much to tell you, but will gather what little I can."¹⁰² In other words, Johnson

¹⁰² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 22.

would behave as unhelpfully in Thrale's presence as he had in his letters to her regarding Henry Thrale and the brewery.

In addition to financial considerations, Thrale had a more pressing reason to continue to try to alter her relationship with Johnson. Upon Thrale's marriage to Henry, her mother had demanded that Thrale end all communication with Collier as her confidant. In response, Thrale had returned to depending on her mother to be her most intimate and longtime confidante. But as Thrale's mother lay dying in early 1773 of cancer (she died in June 1773 after a long and painful struggle with the disease), Thrale still hoped that Johnson's friendship would, in some way, compensate her for the loss of her private dialogue with her mother. Thrale wrote in desperation to Johnson as she watched her mother die slowly and agonizingly. She idealized her friendship with him now as if to compensate for the imminent loss of her mother and her continuing disappointment in him. Indeed, she wrote to Johnson on April 4, 1773, of what she hoped his friendship would come to mean to her. She did this by describing how her mother had been "returning Thanks . . . to God that She shall leave her Daughter happy in a Friend who has more Power and Will to benefit her by advice and Consolation than any Man can have except himself, and she hoped I would ever deserve his Friendship." She closed this letter by describing Johnson as the kind of friend she hoped he would become for her rather than the kind of friend he had of late proven himself to be: "Are not friends somewhere called *Participes Curarum*?¹⁰³ Such as you have ever been."¹⁰⁴ A day later, she wrote to Johnson that her mother spoke of him "always with kindness, sometimes with Tears; says you will be a friend to her Child when She is gone, and

¹⁰³ The italics here are Thrale's.

so you will I am sure." She closed this same letter to him, "at Times I am quite fretful, and do so hate to be alone."^{105/106} Thrale wrote as much here about her present loneliness as about how lonely she would be in the future without her mother. She wrote to Johnson about the "comments" her mother made about him to encourage him to *fulfill* the image of the friend her mother described in their future relationship.

In any case, there is no evidence that Johnson flew to her side during this terrible time in her life. Now Johnson seemed to direct all of his attention not to Thrale but to James Boswell, who had come to London for April and May of 1773. Johnson and Boswell visited many mutual friends, including the Thrales on two occasions. These visits in particular must have made Thrale feel that now Boswell's needs, in addition to her husband's, Chambers' and Dr. Taylors', came before hers in her friendship with Johnson.¹⁰⁷ Her disappointment in Johnson can surely be felt in how Thrale continued to read him as the kind of friend she wished him to be for her. On April 10, 1773, Thrale praised Johnson for his attention to a problem concerning Henry Thrale and an employee of the Streatham household. She optimistically interpreted Johnson's desire to hear of such trivia as a special token of his friendship for her: "Oh My dear Mr Johnson! and is it really possible that a Mind like yours can by the mere impulse of friendship be made to take interest in such trumpery Stuff—for the sake of the importance it is to—H.L.

¹⁰⁴ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I:318-319.
¹⁰⁵ Thrale's italics.

¹⁰⁶ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 319.

¹⁰⁷ Thrale could not be more forthrightly confronted with the gender bias of Johnson's friendship. It is worth noting that this conclusion can be reached without Boswell's "masculine" portrait of Johnson. See Annette Wheeler Cafarelli, "Johnson and Women: Demasculinizing Literary History," The Age of Johnson ed. Paul J. Korshin (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991) 5: 61-114.

Thrale." She wrote in her social role as Henry's wife, "Can we do anything without you?" and "can the earnestness of our friendship at all compensate for the trouble you have with us all?" She concluded immediately after this about her own friendship with Johnson: "& chiefly with your ever faithful Servant

. . . H: L: T."¹⁰⁸ Indeed, in late April 1773, Thrale wrote to Johnson: "I shall see you at dinner tomorrow in the Borough, can I help Rejoycing! when to see you is connected with every pleasing Idea."¹⁰⁹

Johnson's response to Thrale's praise was positive, but mixed with suspicion for her praise of him as her friend. He wrote to her on April 27, 1773: "Is it a good or an evil to me that she [Thrale's mother] now loves me? (Johnson and Lady Salusbury had initially disliked each other.) It is surely a good for you will love me better, and we shall have a new principle of concord."¹¹⁰ Johnson could not, nor did he want to, pay the price of friendship that Thrale's positive readings of him implied. Indeed, Johnson responded to Thrale's invitation to come to dinner at Southwark by warning her: "What we shall tell each other I know not, but I hope we shall say nothing that can make us have less respect or kindness for one another than we have."¹¹¹

Thrale continued to express her satisfaction with Johnson in the social sphere of her letters to him, but her private dissatisfaction with Johnson was growing dramatically. Lacking a reciprocal private relationship with Johnson, she slowly began to create an impermeable barrier between the private and social aspects of her friendship with him. For the first time that we know of in their relationship, she

¹⁰⁸ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 320.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 321-322.

¹¹⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 28.

¹¹¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 29.

denied Johnson's request to be cared for by her at Streatham. In the early summer of 1773, Johnson was in London and he was ill. He wrote in June to Thrale of how his "nights" had "grown again very uneasy and troublesome," and how he hoped that her "company" would "mend" his "days." He seemed to understand her predicament when he wrote to her:

Though I cannot now expect much attention, and would not wish for more, than can be expected from the poor dear Lady [Thrale's dying mother], yet I shall see you and hear you every now and then, and to see and hear you, is always to hear wit, and to see virtue I shall, I hope, see you to morrow, and a little on the two next days, and with that little I must for the present try to be contented.¹¹²

But instead of inviting Johnson to Streatham, Thrale continued to flatter him in her letters. Infuriated by this, and unsatisfied with her response to the news of his illness, Johnson responded with an angry outburst in a letter to Thrale in July: "Still Flatter flatter? Why should the poor be flattered?" He closed this same letter: "Write to me when you can, but do not flatter me. I am sorry you can think, it pleases me."¹¹³ The next day, still fuming over her flattery of him, Johnson interrupted the social banter of his letter to her to write condescendingly to her on the difference between praise and flattery: "The difference between praise and flattery, is the same as between that hospitality that sets wine enough before the guest, and that which forces him to be drunk." In addition, Johnson went on to tell her how he felt she had failed him as friend in persisting to praise him so: "If

¹¹² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 32-33.

¹¹³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 34-35.

you love me, and surely I hope you do, why should you vitiate my mind with a false opinion of its own merit?"¹¹⁴

On the one hand, Johnson clearly felt Thrale emotionally distance herself from him with excessive social flattery. Furthermore, she reflected back to him an image of himself as a man who enjoyed such praise, an image that disgusted Johnson and he would have none of this from her. On the other hand, Thrale could not be blamed for reacting to what must have been obvious to her: that as soon as Boswell had returned to Scotland, Johnson turned to her for care.

At some point, probably in mid-July 1773, Thrale relented to Johnson's requests to be cared for by her at Streatham. Understandably, she did so with great reluctance and trepidation. Her invitation to Johnson to come to Streatham must have been a weak one because Johnson chided her in the same letter: "I shall not, I think, go into the country till you are so kind as to fetch me, unless some stronger invitation should be offered, than I have yet found." But although he expressed displeasure with her invitation, Johnson did not refuse it. Aware of her predicament with her mother's illness at Streatham, he wrote kindly to her: "Your task at present is heavy, and yet you purpose to take me . . . but I hope I shall take from it one way what I add another." Johnson was so appreciative of Thrale's invitation that he even offered what he had long denied her—to advise Henry Thrale to be more prudent regarding how he spent his wealth: "I purpose to talk as occasions offer, to my Master. I think he will, by degrees, calculate his expences, and by his calculations, regulate his privations."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 36-37.

¹¹⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 36-7.

However, as much as Johnson's statement of intent concerning her husband must have pleased her, Thrale must have been chagrined that it had been so long in coming, and that it had been offered only in recompense for her having invited him to Streatham during a most trying time in her life. She did not value Johnson's quid pro quo offer and immediately regretted her invitation. She wrote in her next letter to him: "Adieu! I am hurried out of my Life; it will be Calamity Thrale in good earnest by & by with yours &c." as if to dissuade him from coming to Streatham; and implying that she would have no time to care for him. Three days later, on May 28, 1773, she went so far as to paint a grim, uninviting picture of her life at Streatham: "My Mother has had another sad Struggle. . . indeed we lead a sad Life," again as if to prompt Johnson not to come to such a dire and depressing situation.¹¹⁶

However, on or about May 20, 1773, no doubt encouraged by Johnson's show of friendship in promising to advise her husband, Thrale again tried to open a more private dialogue with Johnson, in this case, about her husband. She wrote to him: "So many things happening all at once oppress me, & I cannot judge rightly of any—'tis therefore I beg Counsel from you." In this same letter, she also wrote conspiratorially: "don't tell my Master that I write lowspirited, the Cold Bath will refresh me before he comes."¹¹⁷ In another letter to Johnson soon after this one, she wrote on a serious and more confidential note: "I have not seen Mr. Thrale this Week, & if he knew all I suppose we should not see him for a fortnight but I dare say he is making good Use of his Time in Town the while, and that will make me

¹¹⁶ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 330-1.

¹¹⁷ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 327.

good amends."¹¹⁸ Perhaps Thrale wrote this to Johnson wondering if Johnson had any information about her husband that she did not.

In any case, Thrale seemed to prefer *writing* to Johnson of her problems during this time of crisis rather than *seeing* him. However, Johnson had other ideas. Despite her hesitation in having her visit him, Johnson wished only to be in her presence at Streatham rather than to offer her comfort by mail:

I wish you could fetch me on Wednesday. I long to be in my own room. Have you got your key? I hope I shall not add much to your trouble, and will wish at least to give you some little solace or amusement. I long to be under your care.¹¹⁹

Johnson's stay with Thrale at Streatham took place late in May and early June 1773. It constituted a major turning point in their private friendship. Thrale quickly discovered that she could no longer expect Johnson to be a grateful and accommodating guest. Just as rapidly, Johnson discovered that he could no longer expect Thrale to be his doting "governess" who would help him recover from serious illness as she had seven years earlier during his nervous breakdown in 1766. Their constricted horizons of expectation in reading each other become dramatically clear when, at one point during his stay at Streatham, Johnson complained in an extremely private letter to Thrale that she was neglecting him. Writing in French and in the hyperbolic language and conceits of the French romance, Johnson began by addressing Thrale in her role as governess by asking if during "the several hours a day" that he must spend in "profound solitude" during his visit she would have him wander alone "quite freely" or "quite neglected" and whether or not he

¹¹⁸ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 331.

¹¹⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 37.

should "limit" himself to "prescribed boundaries." What, he was asking her, were the boundaries of their friendship? How much of a part of her attention would she allow him to have?

Although at first one might be led to believe that Johnson was trying to amuse Thrale by writing in the language and style of a French romance, one soon sees that Johnson was deeply angry with her. In this same letter, Johnson reassessed his past friendship with Thrale and asked if her behavior to him on this visit indicated the future direction of their friendship. He inquired pitifully if she still considered him to be as "worthy, as in earlier times." Johnson also used words that, in their extreme submissiveness, must have convinced Thrale that he was in the throes of yet another nervous breakdown: "spare [me] . . . the necessity of constraining myself by taking from me the power to leave from where you want me to be." He needs her help to constrain himself from wandering where he should not at Streatham, and, by implication, he needs her to prevent him from injuring himself. Johnson followed this comment by immediately imploring Thrale to "act entirely as mistress so that your judgment and your vigilance will come to the aid of my weakness."

But following this desperate appeal, he harshly condemned Thrale for how she currently treated him as his "mistress," and reminded her how she had "promise[d]" kindness to him in the past:

Is it too much to ask of a soul like yours that she become mistress of herself, and that she overcome that inconstancy which has so often made her neglect the execution of her own laws, forget so many promises, and condemn me to so many repeated solicitations that remembering them horrifies me. One must either grant or refuse; one must remember what one has granted.

That Johnson was not in complete control of his rhetoric or his emotions here becomes apparent when he follows his sharp rebuke of his mistress above with a submissive plea to Thrale as his "patroness":

I hope, dear patroness, that I will always feel grateful for your power and that you will hold me in that slavery with which you know so well to make me happy. Permit me the honor, madam, to be your most obedient servant.¹²⁰

Upon receiving this letter, Thrale must have been alarmed by the uncontrolled pathos of Johnson's writing, for he was by turns submissive and contrite and then commanding and dictatorial, only to become submissive once again in what was clearly his most personal and private letter to Thrale to date. More importantly, he was not only out of control of his rhetorical performance here, but he did not seem to want to be in control of it. Thrale must have felt Johnson expressing both his rage at and his vulnerability to her as he wrote from a tangle of the private, social, and public identities in which he saw himself in relation to her. He veered from being her intimate friend in this letter to being her "governable" subject, and from being her elder, intellectual mentor to her childlike dependent.¹²¹ Moreover, Thrale must have noticed the gap in Johnson's perception of his friendship with her between how Johnson actually behaved as her friend, and how he wrote to her now as if he envisioned himself as having been a much more intimate friend to her than she had found him to be.

¹²⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 37-9.

¹²¹ One could reasonably conclude that Thrale sensed Johnson's hatred of her in this letter. Certainly the uncharacteristically crude and complex ways in which he expressed himself here were prompted by his fear of losing her. But this does not exclude that part of his anger here could be misogynistic in nature.

Clearly angry at and perplexed by his letter, and probably apprehensive of his mental condition (for his erratic and desperate behavior must have reminded her of his nervous breakdown seven years earlier), Thrale responded in a rational and detached manner. She tried to be as careful and clear as she could, and had the distinct intent of separating herself from him immediately. Ignoring the romantic idiom in which he had written to her in French, Thrale replied to Johnson in a letter written in plain, unadorned English. She began: "You were saying but on Sunday that of all the unhappy you was the happiest, in consequence of my attention to your Complaint; and to day I have been reproached by you for neglect." Thrale then apologized, in a measured way, for having invited him to Streatham: "I am sorry you are obliged to be so much alone. I foresaw some ill Consequences of your being here while my mother was dying thus," adding "yet [I] could not resist the temptation of having you near me." In having Johnson "near" her, she clearly had hoped that he would not just seek her help at Streatham, but would support *her* in her time of need. However, after this conciliatory apology, Thrale quickly abdicated her role as Johnson's caregiver by pressing him to go on his long-planned trip to the Hebrides with Boswell: "Dissipation is to you, a glorious Medicine, and I believe Mr. Boswell will be at last your best Physician." Indeed, as if to ensure that Johnson would go, she read herself to him once again as his "governess" commanding Johnson to go with Boswell to the Hebrides. She was both recommending a remedy for his ill health and expressing a desire for Johnson to leave Streatham. She could no longer act as his governess, and would not wait for a response from Johnson. Ironically, she adopted the voice of a governess and preemptively wrote to Johnson in this same letter as if *she* had already made the decision for him to

go to Scotland: "I will detain you no longer, so farewell and be good; and do not quarrel with your Governess for not using the rod enough."¹²²

Examining Thrale's letter to Johnson, Martine Watson-Brownley interprets Thrale's direction to him to travel to stave off melancholy as evidence of her having "mothered" him.¹²³ However, instead of "mothering" Johnson's mind, Thrale was actually rejecting it and Johnson with greater resolve than ever before. On the day of her mother's death, June 18, 1773, Thrale wrote in her "Family Book" of how she felt "destitute of every real every natural Friend." Rather than regarding Johnson as a close and "natural" friend, Thrale wrote that he had become for her just one of the "mere Acquisitions of Chance; which chance, or change of Behaviour, or Intervention of new Objects or twenty Things besides Death can rob me of."¹²⁴

¹²² Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 331-32.

¹²³ Martine Watson Brownley, "'Under the Dominion of Some Woman': The Friendship of Samuel Johnson and Hester Thrale," Mothering the Mind, eds. Ruth Perry and Martine Watson Brownley (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1984) 73.

¹²⁴ Hyde, The Thrales of Streatham Park 65.

3.

**The Increasing Impermeability of Thrale's Private Sphere in Her
Friendship with Johnson**

Johnson apparently felt the rising barriers to the private sphere that Thrale was now constructing for herself in their relationship, signified most recently by her sending him away to the Hebrides. On August 12, 1773, only six days after he had gone to Scotland with Boswell, Johnson closed a long letter to Thrale imploring her, "wherever you be do not forget, Madam, Your most humble Servant."¹²⁵ On August 25, he opened a letter by informing her, "I am perpetually thinking on you." He then closed this letter by writing of an acquaintance he met whom he had not seen in "many years," which caused him to write to her insecurely, "I hope We shall never try the effect of so long an absence."¹²⁶ In his Hebridean letters to Thrale, Johnson even went so far as to imagine how it would be if she were with them in Scotland:

We should have excited the attention, and enlarged the observation of each other, and obtained many pleasing topicks of future conversation. As it is I travel with my mind too much at home.¹²⁷

He tried to erase the emotional distance she had put between them by sending him away from Streatham.

While in the Hebrides, Johnson also tried to close the breach between himself and Thrale by requesting that she keep a diary of all that had happened to her while he was away. It was as if he feared that time and distance might further estrange her from him:

¹²⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 51.

¹²⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 54-60.

¹²⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 73.

I hope, dearest Madam, you are equally careful to reposit proper memorials of all that happens to you and your family and then when we meet, we shall tell our stories.¹²⁸

Johnson's letters to Thrale from the Hebrides were quite different from the awkward, emotional ones that he had written to her while in London and at Streatham. The Hebrides letters were filled with factual information about the lands and the people of Scotland, but not devoid of endearing passages written expressly for her. However, as if not trusting that she would read his letters with the appreciation that he thought they deserved for their insights on the lands and the people of the Hebrides, Johnson explained the value of his letters to her in another way: "I hope my mistress keeps all my very long letters, longer than I ever wrote before."¹²⁹ In response, Thrale wrote letters of thanks and appreciation, and she copied out each of the letters that Johnson had sent to her from Scotland. But on the last day of 1773, well after Johnson had returned from the Hebrides and renewed his friendship with her, Thrale wrote privately in her "Family Book" in the aftermath of her mother's recent death: "I have now no soothing friend to tell my grief to." Then, she immediately added: "Dr. Johnson is very kind as can be," as if to say that although she knew Johnson could be kind to her, she no longer saw him as a "soothing friend."¹³⁰

On a subsequent trip to Wales in 1774, Thrale continued to regard Johnson in her private writing as less than a "soothing friend." She now included him among the "gentlemen" (Johnson and a few of Henry Thrale's friends traveled with the Thrales to Wales), about whom she wrote privately in her Welsh Journal, "before whom every thing is to be

¹²⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 95.

¹²⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 100.

commended or censured." To her mind, Johnson and the other men on this journey had "too much philosophy." Most importantly, Thrale felt that with Johnson and the others, "one cannot disburthen one's mind to people who are watchful to cavil, or acute to contradict before the sentence is finished."¹³¹

Her increasing disappointment with Johnson did not mean, however, that Thrale stopped sincerely praising him in her private writings about him. A month later, still in Wales, she wrote privately of her social interactions with Johnson, "he is on every occasion so very kind, feels friendship so acutely and expresses it so delicately that it is wonderfully flattering to me to have his company."¹³² Yet when the trip to Wales abruptly ended on September 30, 1774 because of the sudden dissolution of Parliament (an event which required Thrale to return to her London residence to help with her husband's reelection campaign), she wrote in private in her Welsh Journal as she never had before of Johnson:

I must be shut up in that odious dungeon, where nobody will come near me . . . and I am never to see a face but Mr. Johnson's. Oh what a life that is! and how truly do I abhor it!¹³³

Compared to the Parliamentary election in 1768, Thrale relied less on Johnson's help during the election campaign of 1774. On October 4, 1774, she wrote to Johnson to tell him that she had little time to see him: "We lead a wild Life Do not think of seeing us till the Storm is over, unless you can call for half an hour & hear News & tell

¹³⁰ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham Park 86.

¹³¹ A. M. Broadley, Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale (London: John Lane, 1910) 131-3.

¹³² Broadley, Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale 202-3.

¹³³ Broadley, Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale 219.

some. I write surrounded by people making a noise & scarce know what I say but that I am very busy."¹³⁴ Similarly, she had begun to see Johnson as a serious encumbrance in her private and domestic life in late November 1774, when she wrote privately in her journal:

Here I am well paid for my Presumption. The Child [Ralph] is vastly ill indeed—dying I think . . . Oh Lord Oh Lord! What shall I do? Johnson and Barette try to comfort me, they only plague me—Up every Night and all Night long again!--well if this don't kill me & the Child I carry, sure we are made of Iron.¹³⁵

Thrale wrote this while recovering from her husband's exhausting election campaign, enduring her tenth pregnancy in eleven years, recuperating from a serious fall from a horse, and worrying that her ninth child, a son, Ralph, whom she had given birth to a year earlier on November 8, 1773, was dying. (Ralph would succumb to this same illness twenty months later.)

By the end of 1774, Thrale seemed to accept the increasing mutual impermeability of the private and social spheres of her relationship with Johnson. In December she sent Johnson a light-hearted "private letter" as if she had given up trying to send him serious ones: "Here is a private Letter to you unknown to my Husband, & I promise you it shall be as kind as I can make it that you may grant my Request."¹³⁶ Her "request" involved another's benefit and thus was purely social. Indeed, early in 1775, it appeared that Thrale wished to avoid any future conflict with Johnson. In February 1775, she wrote to him: "I like . . . that you should always know where I go & what I do that you may either approve me or scold me which is the next best as the one

¹³⁴ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman I: 413.

¹³⁵ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham Park 110.

shews your Partiality the other your Friendship for Dear Sir / Your most Obliged & faithful Servant H: L: T."¹³⁷

While at times Thrale seemed pleased just to please Johnson in her letters to him, at other times she seemed unable to contain her growing disillusionment and increasing emotional independence of him. On March 1, 1775, Thrale opened a letter to Johnson: "Nothing has gone well since your Absence yet I have not wished for you."¹³⁸ At this time, she was ill and her eldest daughter, Hester Maria, was seriously ill. Thrale's tone of detachment must have alarmed Johnson. When a disruption in the mail service occurred while Johnson was in Oxford in March of 1775, he wrote frantically to Thrale: "I am afraid that something has happened to occupy your mind disagreeably, and hinder you from writing to me, or thinking about me."¹³⁹ On another occasion, when two separate letters that Thrale had written to Johnson arrived later than expected, he wrote back insecurely: "I received from you two letters, of March 1 and March 4 . . . I wondered why you forgot me, and did not know but you were angry."¹⁴⁰

Johnson's fear of Thrale's increasing emotional independence of him must have risen to new heights when Thrale once again refused his request to come to Streatham to be cared for by her in May 1775. For the first time in his extant letters to her, Johnson felt it necessary to explain why he had the right to expect Thrale to care for him. Upon offering to help find a position at Oxford for her indigent riding master, Charles Carter, Johnson wrote, "when I have done this thing, or find that I cannot do it, I wish to live a while under your care and

¹³⁶ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, Chapman 1: 423.

¹³⁷ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 6.

¹³⁸ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 10.

¹³⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 187.

protection."¹⁴¹ Johnson was so intent on seeing Thrale that after she gave birth to her tenth child, a daughter, Frances Anna, on May 4, 1775, Johnson wrote to her immediately to ask if he could come to see her. In the past, Thrale had heard nothing but weak excuses from him for not coming to see her after she had survived yet another pregnancy, even though several deliveries had been life threatening. Now, in a complete reversal, instead of wanting him there, she criticized Johnson for his precipitousness and lack of consideration in making his request only eight days after she had given birth. This can be seen in how Johnson wrote to her on May 12, 1775: "And so, my dearest Mistress, you lie a bed hatching suspicions. I did not mean to reproach you, nor meant any thing but respect and impatience to know how you did."¹⁴²

Although Thrale was gradually closing the boundary of her private life against intrusion by Johnson, occasionally she still accorded him access. She wrote to him on May 12, 1775: "I could pout myself for a Penny to see my Master never come near me but on those Days that he would come if I had never been born—Saturday Sunday & Monday, & to see him delight in keeping me distressed for the Sight of him, which now I am confined he knows I cannot get at."¹⁴³ But instead of responding to her private thoughts on her husband, Johnson was more interested in discovering what Thrale was thinking privately about him. Thrale had begun the same letter for May 12 by briefly commenting on Boswell's unpublished manuscript of his trip to the Hebrides with Johnson: "Our friends Journal has half blinded me."¹⁴⁴ But she made no further comment on what would become Boswell's Tour to the Hebrides (1785) in her

¹⁴⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 189.

¹⁴¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 187.

¹⁴² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 204.

¹⁴³ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 30.

letters to Johnson, prompting Johnson to write to her ten days later: "I am not sorry that you read Boswell's Journal. Is it not a merry piece? There is much in it about poor me."¹⁴⁵ Thrale must have continued to ignore Johnson's hints and queries for, by June 1775, Johnson wrote to her: "You never told me, and I omitted to enquire, how you were entertained by Boswell's Journal. One would think the man had been hired to be a spy upon me. He was very diligent, and caught opportunities of writing from time to time. You may now conceive yourself tolerably well acquainted with the expedition."¹⁴⁶ When Thrale again did not respond to his prodding, Johnson wrote to her on June 19, 1775: "Do you read Boswell's Journals?" Furthermore, he praised Boswell because he had "never made any scruple of showing it [Boswell's journal] to me," adding immediately after this, "He is a very fine fellow."¹⁴⁷

By praising Boswell for revealing what he wrote privately about him, Johnson attempted in an indirect way to have Thrale divulge what she wrote about him privately. But Johnson's tactic proved futile as Thrale simply responded on June 29: "When will you come home? I shall be wondrous glad to see you—though I write every thing so I shall have nothing to tell."¹⁴⁸ In other words, she now refused to write on certain topics to him as he had done with her. In response, in a July 6, 1775 letter to Thrale, Johnson diminished the importance he had previously attached to knowing her opinion of Boswell's hebridean journal and gave up trying to find out what she was thinking about him privately by this indirect line of questioning. However, Johnson made clear in this same letter that he expected her to discuss the Journal with him when he next

¹⁴⁴ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 30.

¹⁴⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 209.

¹⁴⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 223.

¹⁴⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 228.

saw her: "I am glad you have read Boswell's journal because it is something for us to talk about."¹⁴⁹ One result of becoming a more informed reader of Johnson was that Thrale was also becoming a more competent reader of Johnson as well. Indeed, she was beginning to adopt some of Johnson's reading strategies for herself. She, too, could withhold information from her letters even if

Although Thrale curtailed writing about her private self to Johnson, she continued to write to him about the private details of her domestic life, especially about her role as a mother to her children. On July 11, 1775, as she watched her son Ralph slowly die, she wrote frantically to Johnson of her "horrible Apprehension of losing" her other children "by the same cruel Disease that haunts my affrighted Imagination & makes me look upon them with an Anxiety scarce to be endured."¹⁵⁰ (This fear of hers was not exaggerated or unfounded. She had suffered through the deaths of four of her children before Ralph's fatal illness: her daughter Frances in 1765, Anna Maria in 1770, Penelope in 1772, Lucy in 1773. Ralph would die in July 1775, Frances Anna in December 1775, and six months later, her only remaining son, nine-year-old Henry would die as well.)

Johnson had spent most of June 1775 in Lichfield. In July, as Ralph lay dying, Johnson was at Dr. Taylor's in Ashbourne. He wrote frequently and sympathetically to Thrale about Ralph during the boy's illness and after his death on July 13. However, he also wrote to her: "I cannot yet fix the time of coming home. Dr. Taylor and I spend little time together, yet he will not be persuaded to hear of

¹⁴⁸ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 54.
¹⁴⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 239.
¹⁵⁰ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 61.

parting."¹⁵¹ It is clear from this letter that Thrale must have been asking Johnson to return "home." Thrale must have felt particularly mistreated and undervalued by Johnson's refusal to come to comfort her on this occasion. This was, after all, the death of one of her two sons, and not a matter of disagreement with Henry Thrale, yet Johnson still remained with his friend Dr. Taylor in Ashbourne. Indeed, on July 25, Johnson returned to Lichfield and stayed there until mid-August. Thrale's hurt and her fury at Johnson were only thinly masked by a letter in which she thanked him for his almost daily letters of consolation in mid-July, while at the same time she bluntly criticized their inadequate length and subject matter. "The Letters are all come, & very kind Letters they are," she wrote to Johnson, adding immediately after this, "I only wish them longer and less frequent . . . when you write less than 20 Lines at once 'tis only a Scrap sent from the next Week's Chat."¹⁵²

When she next wrote to Johnson of private matters between herself and her husband, she did so as if her horizon of expectations for Johnson's friendship had become even narrower. She wrote as if she now realized that Johnson would never understand the loneliness and abandonment that she felt as a wife to Henry Thrale, as a mother, and as his friend. On July 20, 1775, a week after her son Ralph died and she returned to Streatham from Brighton, she wrote to Johnson (who was still in Ashbourne): "Mr. Thrale has been in Town ever since I was gone and would not come home to me last Night but went to Ranelagh I hear." But this time, she immediately followed her complaint by writing, "however I

¹⁵¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 247.

¹⁵² Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 65.

will not be peevish any more, for it torments nobody but myself."¹⁵³ Instead of complaining to Johnson about his latest absence as her friend, she wrote resignedly: "Farewell My Dear Sir and let us see you sometime; I think you shall never run away so again: I lost a Child the last Time you were at a distance."¹⁵⁴ But in response to her touching letter, Johnson replied from Ashbourne, "The Doctor has no great mind to let me go," adding that even if he should manage to leave Ashbourne, "I shall be expected by all my Ladies to return through Lichfield, and to stay there awhile." Moreover, as he made excuses, he offered her the familiar hollow promise: "but if I thought you wanted me, I hope, you know what would be done."¹⁵⁵ By the end of 1775, after he had failed to return to her on two occasions of great importance to her, Thrale no longer knew "what would be done" by Johnson if she desired his return at a moment of crisis.

The estrangement that Thrale felt from Johnson on this occasion must have been profound. In response to Johnson's self-imposed emotional and geographical distance from her, Thrale wrote to him now as if he were an infrequent social correspondent. Indeed, she wrote as if she were surprised to discover that he even enjoyed her letters to him: "I am very glad you find me diligent in writing every Post; it is so exceedingly pleasing to have any one care whether one writes or no, that it would be a sign of a sad Spirit to forbear giving that Pleasure for the sake of momentary Indulgence."¹⁵⁶ But the more Thrale pulled away from Johnson emotionally in her letters to him, the more Johnson wrote to her wanting to know why. However, Johnson wrote to Thrale in a way

¹⁵³ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 69.

¹⁵⁴ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 70.

¹⁵⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 70-71.

¹⁵⁶ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 71.

that must have only reminded her that in his reading of their friendship, Johnson saw himself as deigning to correspond with her. On July 20, 1775, he wrote: "You have two or three of my Letters to answer, and I hope you will be very copious and distinct, and tell me a great deal of your mind." Then, immediately after this statement, he added most condescendingly, "a dear little mind it is, and I hope always to love it better, as I know it more."¹⁵⁷ Thrale knew by 1775 that Johnson wanted to know "more" of her "dear little mind," but only within certain proscribed boundaries that he alone determined. Indeed, Boswell quotes Johnson as having said when comparing Thrale to her husband Henry: "It is a great mistake to suppose that she is above him in literary attainments. She is more flippant; but he has ten times her learning: he is a regular scholar; but her learning is that of a school-boy in one of the lower forms."¹⁵⁸

By August 1775, Thrale retaliated against Johnson's assumption that he was superior to her, by disagreeing with Johnson about the value of their correspondence. In response to what must have been a negative view by Thrale of their correspondence, Johnson wrote to her on August 7: "I am not of your opinion that I shall not like to read them [their letters to each other] hereafter." He then added that he hoped his letters to her would "in some hours of languour and sadness . . . revive the memory of more cheerful times."¹⁵⁹ Johnson was so upset at Thrale's negative evaluation of their letters, and what this implied about her evaluation of their friendship, that on August 29, 1775, he complained

¹⁵⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 252.

¹⁵⁸ James Boswell, Boswell's Life of Johnson, eds. G. B. Hill and L. F. Powell. Vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950) 468-469. One must keep in mind Boswell's motives here; after all, he had a distinct dislike of Thrale.

¹⁵⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 260-61.

directly to her in a letter, "we are of late never together."¹⁶⁰
 However, Johnson's complaint was soon remedied when the Thrales took him with them to France from September to November 1775.

For all of the disappointments that Thrale suffered in her friendship with Johnson, she still enjoyed his company. She wrote privately in her "French Journal" of how, at the "king of France's theatre" at Versailles, she and Johnson had joked of performing "Harry the fifth" on stage; of how they had laughed at the books of fairy tales in the closet of a Lady D'Argencon until she shut the closet to prevent their further exploration of it¹⁶¹; of how one night when Thrale, as she wrote, "was not well enough to venture" out to see a French play, "Mr. Johnson sat at home by me, & we criticized & talked & were happy in one another—he in huffing me, & I in being huff'd"¹⁶²; and of how Johnson had, as she wrote privately, "talked her out of" her fear that because she stumbled when entering a church dedicated to the Guardian Angel of Children, something disastrous might happen to her remaining children.¹⁶³ In contrast to the end of the Welsh trip in 1774 in which Thrale wrote of not being able to bear seeing only Johnson's face upon her return to London, at the end of the French trip she wrote more favorably of him: "The road is said to be bad but we have been so frightened with false formidabilities that I begin to laugh at them now as Mr. Johnson has done all this while."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 268.

¹⁶¹ Hester Thrale and Samuel Johnson, The French Journals of Mrs. Thrale and Dr. Johnson, eds. Moses Tyson and Henry Guppy (Manchester, England: Manchester UP, 1932) 117-18.

¹⁶² Thrale and Johnson, French Journals, eds. Tyson and Guppy 143.

¹⁶³ Thrale and Johnson, French Journals, eds. Tyson and Guppy 131-133.

¹⁶⁴ Thrale and Johnson, French Journals, eds. Tyson and Guppy 164.

However, Thrale's enjoyment of Johnson was interrupted on this journey by her growing intellectual disagreements with him that marked her increasing intellectual independence of him. She wrote privately of her dismay at how Johnson had criticized her before company for her use of aesthetic terms in her evaluation of an exhibition of paintings. She recorded how she had argued about these terms with Johnson until Henry Thrale felt it was necessary to end the argument.¹⁶⁵

Furthermore, at the end of the journey through France, she wrote that Johnson "had a mind to dispute with me." Johnson had criticized how Thrale expressed her religious beliefs in France. He rebuked her specifically for her inclination to kneel at the elevation of the host at a Catholic High Mass. Thrale wrote privately that she was "not in a humour to argue at that moment" with Johnson for she "felt a fear lest his force of reasoning might destroy my quiet." But at the same time, she persisted in her own beliefs and practices and followed her own inclinations. Regardless of Johnson's criticism, she wrote privately that she had "kneeled two or three times or more at the elevation since I have been upon the Continent," and that she was "firmly perswaded that in so doing I was not displeasing to God."¹⁶⁶

Upon their return from France in November 1775, the Thrales immediately began to plan to go to Italy in the spring, and intended to take Johnson with them. On December 11, 1775, however, Thrale's eight-month-old daughter, Frances, died, a victim of an epidemic of influenza. Then, on March 23, 1776, the Thrales' only living son, Harry, died suddenly at age nine and just as suddenly their eldest child, Hester Maria, became seriously ill. Hester Maria would recover, but the death

¹⁶⁵ Thrale and Johnson, French Journals, eds. Tyson and Guppy 133.

of Harry overwhelmed Thrale. She had now lost three children in less than a year's time. In total, six of her ten children had died.

When Johnson learned of Harry's death, he was once again in Lichfield, this time with Boswell. He heard of Harry's death in a letter from John Perkins, the Chief Clerk at the Thrale brewery. Perkins concluded his letter to Johnson: "I need not say how much they wish to see you in London."¹⁶⁷ Upon hearing this news, Johnson, for the first time as recorded in the Thrale-Johnson correspondence, made haste to return directly to Streatham to attend to Thrale at a time of personal crisis. Johnson even wrote letters of consolation and advice to her while on his return journey to Streatham. However, he arrived just in time to learn that she was leaving for Bath, where, she believed, a change of place would save Hester Maria's, as well as her own, physical and mental health.

Boswell wrote in the Life of having been surprised to find Johnson at home on the evening he had returned to Streatham to be with Thrale.¹⁶⁸ Boswell reported that he found Johnson "not in a very good humour" on the day of Thrale's departure for Bath. He attributed Johnson's mood to the fact that Johnson had returned to Streatham thinking that Thrale was "very anxious for his return," but had done so only to discover that she was going to Bath without him.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, Thrale did not request Johnson's presence at Bath, nor did Henry Thrale, who remained in London, desire his company at Southwark or Streatham.

¹⁶⁶ Thrale and Johnson, French Journals, eds. Tyson and Guppy 156-157.

¹⁶⁷ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 117, n. 1.

¹⁶⁸ James Boswell, Boswell's Life of Johnson, eds. G. B. Hill and L. F. Powell, Vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950) 468-469.

¹⁶⁹ Boswell, Life, iii, 6.

Johnson seemed as concerned about the Thrales not requesting his presence on a private or social level as he was about Harry's death. When he opened a letter to Thrale on April 1, 1776, he was hurt and complained: "When You were gone Mr. Thrale soon sent me away. I came next day, and was made to understand that when I was wanted I should be sent for; and therefore I have not gone yesterday or to day, but I will soon go again whether invited or not."¹⁷⁰ On April 4, Johnson complained even more bitterly to Thrale: "Mr. Thrale, when he dismissed me, promised to call on me; he has never called, and I have never seen him. He said that he would go to the house, and I hope he has found something that laid hold on his attention."¹⁷¹ Although Thrale had written to Johnson the same day that she left for Bath about how his friendship had "long been the best Cordial to my Heart" and how "it is now almost the only one," she responded to Johnson's April 4, 1776 letter with a combination of gratitude and irritation. She wrote on April 9, "Every day every hour makes me more happy in your Friendship," but then she demonstrated that she, too, could place his friendship firmly in the background of her life as Johnson had done to her friendship in the past: "it [the friendship] ought to take up a larger part of my Mind than I can just now afford it."¹⁷²

Rather than being cruel or cold to Johnson, Thrale was only responding to him with the same level of brusqueness with which he had treated her appeals in the past. Her response is understandable when one remembers that Johnson always made a point of demonstrating his loyalty to Henry Thrale, Chambers, Taylor, and Boswell rather than to her, and of valuing their friendship over hers. This was especially true

¹⁷⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 314.

¹⁷¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford II: 317.

regarding Henry Thrale. Ironically, Johnson was now writing letters of complaint about Henry Thrale's treatment of him and expected a sympathetic response from her. Furthermore, Johnson expected comfort from Thrale, whom he had not comforted when she had complained to him about Henry's indifference in the past.¹⁷³ Finally, at the same time that Johnson wrote letters of consolation and advice to Thrale, who was overwhelmed, as was her husband, by the recent deaths of their children, Johnson also complained to her about Henry's neglect of him. In response, Thrale did not explain Henry's behavior. She wrote to Johnson in his role as his "correspondent," rather than as an aggrieved friend in much the way he had answered her letters of complaint about Henry in the past. Indeed, her anger at Johnson's self-absorption is palpable in a letter she wrote to him on May 27, 1776. In this letter she reflected back to Johnson his selfish insistence on receiving letters from her at this terrible time in her life: "It is so much better that this Letter should be useless, than that you should be disappointed of a Letter when you want one."¹⁷⁴ As she became a more experienced reader of Johnson, Thrale became more aware of the gap between her ideal image of him as her friend and the reality of his friendship for her. She also became increasingly confident in expressing her dissatisfaction with Johnson's friendship in both the private and social spheres of her friendship with him.

¹⁷² Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 123.

¹⁷³ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 121.

¹⁷⁴ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 134-5.

4.

Thrale's Increasing Criticism of Johnson in her Private Writing about**Him. Or,****Thrale Reads Herself Anew as a Woman, a Writer, and a Thinker.**

In the summer of 1776, Thrale underwent what can only be called an identity crisis that accelerated her changing views of Johnson. She wrote privately in the "Family Book" on July 1, 1776: "I have been dangerously ill since I came home—of a Cholera Morbus the Physicians call it." She recovered her health but desperately searched for a new role in her life, a new identity: "Oh Lord who hast restored me to Life, give me I beseech thee something to live for!" She feared, with good reason, that should she become pregnant for an eleventh time, she would not "remain here long enough to rear" another child.¹⁷⁵ With this realization, she began to look beyond her role as a mother. On July 23, 1776, she wrote privately in the "Family Book" that she no longer had the heart to assiduously attend to the instruction of her three remaining daughters, whom she now called "the thin remains of my ruin'd family":

The Thing is—I have really listened to Babies Learning till I am half stupefied--& all my pains have answered so poorly. The Instructions I labor'd to give them—what did they end in? The Grave--& every recollection brings only new Regret. . . at Present I can not begin battling with Babies—I have already spent my whole Youth at it & lost my Reward at last.¹⁷⁶

Most importantly, she no longer saw herself as a woman who was surrounded by family and friends, but rather as a woman alone. Indeed,

¹⁷⁵ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 160, 163.

¹⁷⁶ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 163.

she wrote privately of herself in the "Family Book" as a woman who would now "begin the world anew".¹⁷⁷

Thrale's desire to begin "the world anew" appears most dramatically in Thraliana, a private journal, diary, and ana which she began writing on September 15, 1776. Thraliana was the main repository for her private writing from 1776-1809. She would write in it "all the . . . 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 fine ev'ry thing which struck me at the Time".¹⁷⁸ In doing this, she wrote as an autobiographer and a biographer, a literary critic and a poet, an historian and a linguist, a cosmologist and natural philosopher, and an anecdotalist. While for another two years she continued to write of herself primarily as a wife and a mother in the "Family Book," she used Thraliana to begin to live life again as a writer, a scholar, and an intellectual as she had hoped to do before her marriage to Henry Thrale.

Thrale combined the old and the new in Thraliana, not only in relation to herself but also in how she continued to read Johnson. When she began writing Thraliana, she had known and written about Johnson privately for eleven years. Yet even after she reviewed her past and present views of Johnson for inclusion in her ana, she let stand a comparison she made of him with Arthur Collier in which she found Johnson wanting in significant ways. She observed that it was not Johnson, but *Collier* who had a "general Tenor of behaviour beyond any Man I ever knew." Indeed, she had "not yet seen a Man so free from

¹⁷⁷ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 162.

¹⁷⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 1.

Malice or Rancour" as Collier.¹⁷⁹ Although Johnson had lived with her and her family for extended periods of time over the course of eleven years, Thrale wrote that it was Collier who "was a Person of a most assimilating Temper, could live in any Family, conform to any Hours, & take his Share in any Conversation." Most critically, in comparison with Johnson, she wrote that Collier "was no melancholy Man, no Hypochondriack and made less Bustle about real Calamities, than the people I have since lived amongst, do with imaginary ones."¹⁸⁰

To her credit, Thrale also wrote about Collier with as keen a critical eye as she wrote about Johnson. Collier "loved to talk better than to hear" she wrote, and with "his Superiority in Logic, & constant Exercise in all the Arts of Ratiocination . . . he delighted to drive" others into "Absurdities they were desirous to keep clear of, & then laugh at the ridiculous Figures they made".¹⁸¹ However, in Thrale's eyes, Collier *unintentionally* discomfited others—a statement she would never make about Johnson. Moreover, according to Thrale, Collier had the "charity" to forgive all whom he had offended as well as the "Benevolence to assist" his detractors—laudatory observations that Thrale never made about Johnson.¹⁸² Furthermore, Thrale criticized herself privately for having treated Collier poorly: "I also used him ill; and repaid the long and diligent Care he paid to my Improvement, with Sights & Coldness." However, after eleven years of friendship with Johnson (indeed, during the whole of her twenty-year friendship with him), Thrale never accused herself of having "used him ill."¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 16-17.
¹⁸⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 16.
¹⁸¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 16.
¹⁸² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 17.
¹⁸³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 17.

Most importantly, although Thrale criticized Collier, she never dreaded him with the same sense of menace with which she feared Johnson. When she learned of Collier's death in 1777, she wrote privately: "I will recollect a few of his Sayings before I resolve to mention him no more." Yet she did write of Collier again thirty-eight years later in 1815 in a private and unpublished MS, the "New Common Place Book" (1809-20): "Never have I failed remembering *him* [Collier] with a preference as completely distinct from the veneration solicitude which hung heavily over my whole soul whilst connected with Dr. Johnson." Immediately after this she added: "My first friend [Collier] formed my mind to resemble *his*. It never *did* resemble that of either of my husbands." With characteristic honesty about herself, Thrale goes on to declare that by contrast her mind was "swallowed up and lost" in that of "Doctor Johnson's."¹⁸⁴

Thrale's private writing during and after the summer of 1776 reveals how she also began to live her life "anew" as a wife to Henry Thrale by looking more candidly than ever before at her role as a wife, at her husband, and at her marriage. In the "Family Book" for September 1776, Thrale concluded privately that her husband's "Confidence & Kindness are absolutely unattainable by me" when he had suddenly discovered to her "an Ailment" which she believed to be caused by a venereal infection.¹⁸⁵ She wrote privately late in 1776 of how Henry "shewed me a Testicle swelled to an immense Size."¹⁸⁶ He claimed the cause was a fall from a carriage that Thrale had seen him suffer when they were in France. But she believed her husband's illness to be a

¹⁸⁴ Autobiography, Letters and Literary Remains of Mrs. Piozzi (Thrale) ed. A. Hayward, Vol. II (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1861) 183.

¹⁸⁵ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 167.

"Consequence" of his whoring or, as she wrote privately, "of Folly & Vice." She had good reason to distrust him: she had nursed him through a venereal infection that he had contracted seven years earlier in 1769 and had kept "his Secret," she wrote privately, "inviolable even from my Mother," her most intimate confidante. Now in 1776, she wrote ruefully in the "Family Book":

I now began to understand where I was, and to perceive that my poor Father's Prophecy was verified who said If you marry that Scoundrel he will catch the Pox/ & / for your Amusement set you to make his Pultices. This is now literally made out; & I am preparing Pultices as he said, and Fomenting this elegant Ailment every Night & Morning for an Hour together on my Knees, & receiving for my Reward such Impatient Expressions as disagreeable Confinement happens to dictate. However tis well tis no worse—he has I am pretty sure not given it me, and I am now pregnant & may bring a healthy Boy who knows?¹⁸⁷

Never above self-scrutiny, however, Thrale reprimanded herself privately in the "Family Book" in late October 1776: "I have wronged my poor husband grossly with my wicked Suspicions. . . it was undoubtedly the leaping from the Chaise in France so long ago that produced the Tumor." She ascribed her husband's hesitancy in telling her of the problem to his having been "afraid of my being frightened, perhaps of my suspecting his being tainted with the bad Distemper."¹⁸⁸ But eventually, big with her eleventh child, (Cecilia Margareta was born on February 8, 1777), she wrote in her last entry to the "Family Book" for 1776: "Mr. Thrale's Complaint was venereal at last." To this she added angrily:

¹⁸⁶ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 165.
¹⁸⁷ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 166.

"What need of so many Lyes about it! I'm sure I care not, so he recovers to hold us all together."¹⁸⁹ Indeed, on January 7, 1777, Thrale privately concluded in the "Family Book" that should she not survive her eleventh pregnancy, her "Loss" would "not break" her husband's "Heart."¹⁹⁰

Feeling betrayed and abandoned by her husband, who had failed her as a husband and lover and as a confidant and friend, Thrale now idealized her friendship with Johnson (as she had after her mother's death) to compensate her for the loss of her husband's love and trust: "Poor Mr. Johnson would have the greatest Loss of me," she wrote privately in the "Family Book," "and he would be the most sensible of his Loss."¹⁹¹ However, her attempt to idealize Johnson's friendship was immediately shattered once again by the reality of how Johnson actually behaved toward her. On January 12, 1777, Thrale requested that Johnson come home:

I am always pleased when you are busy and bustling in the World: when you have fulfilled all your Engagements and are tired with rattling about, it will be time enough to come home to your Mistress whom Pain makes peevish of late, and whose Nights are growing very insupportable.¹⁹²

Johnson, who was in London, residing at Bolt Court now, responded to her news of ill health by writing to her that he was once again ill and wished her to care for him: "I beg that you will fetch me away on Fryday. I do not know but clearer air may do me good; but whether the

¹⁸⁸ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 170.

¹⁸⁹ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 174.

¹⁹⁰ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 175.

¹⁹¹ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 174.

¹⁹² Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 158.

air be clear or dark, let me come to you."¹⁹³ Indeed, he wished urgently to come to her for nursing and attention; the next day Johnson wrote to her: "I long to come to Streatham Let me come to you tomorrow."¹⁹⁴ No doubt stunned by Johnson's request after she had just informed him of her own ill health, Thrale refused Johnson more directly than ever before: "Oh sad! Oh sad! Indeed I am very sorry; and I unable to nurse You" Instead, sensibly looking out for her own welfare, she admonished Johnson "be well before you come home."¹⁹⁵

Thrale had reasons other than Johnson's illness to keep herself at a distance from Johnson. In the course of looking at herself anew in 1776, Thrale was also taking a new, more critical, look at Johnson both as a literary critic and as a man. In May 1776, after having shown him verses that she had written soon after her marriage, Thrale privately recorded Johnson's condescending response: "Mr. Johnson says the verses are very pretty, & much in Lord Lyttelton's style, a good one says he for a lady." Johnson's jibe was at the expense of Lyttelton, but it must have reminded Thrale once again that as much as Johnson expressed how highly he regarded her, he still thought of her intellect as a "dear little mind."¹⁹⁶ Moreover, after writing that William Pepys was "one of" her "great favourites," Thrale immediately adds of Johnson: "I am very sorry Johnson hates him so."¹⁹⁷ Although she did agree with Johnson that Pepys' "manner" was "artificial," she rejected Johnson's overall opinion of Pepys; she thought Pepys "a man of virtue, a Man of learning, a man pious, frugal, charitable and kind." She concluded her character of

¹⁹³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 4-5.

¹⁹⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 5.

¹⁹⁵ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 160.

¹⁹⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 54-55.

¹⁹⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 56.

Pepys by writing that she loved him for these "good qualities"—qualities that she clearly did not always find in Johnson.¹⁹⁸

Thrale also observed privately that Johnson's views were, on occasion, completely disregarded by other important figures such as the painter Joshua Reynolds. This awareness may have helped Thrale realize that now she could do the same. Late in 1776, she wrote in Thraliana that Johnson "thinks somethings wrong" with Sir Joshua Reynolds because he "delights" in friends whom Johnson regards as "infidels," and added immediately, "but Sir Joshua is now quite above caring what he [Johnson] thinks of the matter."¹⁹⁹ On another occasion, Thrale proudly recorded how when Johnson had likened her to a rattlesnake, "'I am sure you have its Attractions, its Venom too, and all the world knows you have its Rattle,'" she had responded with equal facility and aplomb that he "most resembled an Elephant: whose weight could crush the crocodile, & whose proboscis could from its force and ductility either lift up the buffalo, or pick up the pin."²⁰⁰

Furthermore, by 1777, Thrale seemed more comfortable than she had in the past with Johnson's extended absences from her, as in his annual journeys to Lichfield, Ashbourne and Oxford. In August 1777, while in Oxford researching his Lives of the Poets, Johnson wrote to Henry Thrale, "I am of a great mind to come back home again," although Johnson had originally planned to go further north to meet with Boswell after visiting Lichfield and Ashbourne.²⁰¹ When Thrale became aware of Johnson's change of plans, she advised him to continue his journey rather than return to Streatham. On August 2, 1777, she wrote to him:

¹⁹⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 56-61.

¹⁹⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 80-84.

²⁰⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 169-70.

²⁰¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 45.

"What can make you so lowspirited; and lowspirited for nothing as I hope & believe . . . it would be better for you to go on now you are half way, or the people who expect to see you will think you whimsical." This time, rather than complain as she had in the past about how long Johnson would linger at Dr. Taylor's at Ashbourne, Thrale encouraged Johnson to stay with Taylor *longer* rather than return "home": "Perhaps the bad state of our affairs abroad lowers your spirits, but go to Dr. Taylor and he'll tell you 'tis all a trick, and that we let the Americans torment us on purpose."²⁰²

Thrale's new willingness to share Johnson with Taylor, Boswell, his friends at Oxford and Ashbourne, and his family at Lichfield, clearly made Johnson insecure regarding how she was now reading him. Indeed, he wrote plaintively to her on August 23, 1777, from Oxford: "Do not lose, nor let Master lose, the kindness that you have for me. Nobody will ever love you both better . . .".²⁰³ Four days later, Johnson wrote somberly: "Our Correspondence is not so vigorous as it used to be."²⁰⁴ But rather than appease Johnson by writing to him more often, Thrale blamed him for the lack of "vigor" in their correspondence. On September 2, 1777, Thrale wrote: "I begin to be angry, uneasy at least in good earnest; you are used to be so punctual in writing even though there was nothing to be said." Thrale sought to resolve this latest impasse in their friendship by inviting Johnson "home" to Streatham: "Sure it is Time to come home almost is it not?" adding, "So here's a whole Week without a Line." Then she balanced her praise with criticism of Johnson's character when she closed this same letter with: "whether Kindness or Caprice Good humour to us, or Ill humour to anyone else,

²⁰² Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 188.

²⁰³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 54.

brings you back, you will be welcomed with the warmest Affection and sincerest Esteem."²⁰⁵ Johnson must have been displeased by this letter. He did not hurry home to her, but instead traveled further north to Ashbourne, from where he wrote to Thrale on September 6 to criticize her for not paying enough attention to him: "Do not neglect to write to me, for when a post comes empty, I am really disappointed."²⁰⁶ Once again, Thrale faced Johnson's paradoxical behavior: instead of accepting her invitation to return to Streatham for the attention he craved from her, Johnson traveled farther from Thrale by going from Lichfield to Ashbourne to remain with Dr. Taylor. Then, from Ashbourne, he wrote to complain to Thrale about her lack of attention to him.

In addition to responding insecurely to her more confident readings of herself and of him in their friendship, Johnson also feared Thrale's re-emerging identity as a writer. She was now developing in earnest a private world in Thraliana, one in which she did not want Johnson's participation as her editor. He opened a letter to her for September 15, 1777, from Ashbourne complaining: "Do you call this punctual correspondence? Instead of writing to me you are writing the Thraliana," and he closed it warning her, "Do not let me be forgotten before I am gone, for you will never have such another."²⁰⁷ Thrale responded by reassuring Johnson in a letter on September 18 that Thraliana was not a threat to their friendship: "If I do not write to you, and if I do work at the Book with the foolish name You are not the more out of my Head for that."²⁰⁸ Implicit in this statement is that she

²⁰⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 56.

²⁰⁵ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 203.

²⁰⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 61-2.

²⁰⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 66.

²⁰⁸ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 209.

was thinking about him in her private writings, and that she would not let her correspondence with him interfere with her identity as a writer.

Thrale's identity as a writer was very much on her mind when she began the second volume of *Thraliana* in September 1777. She opened this volume by writing of how her identity as a mother had interfered with her identity as a writer: "All my Friends reproach me with neglecting to write down such Things as drop from him [Johnson] almost perpetually" and "often say how much I shall some time to regret that I have not done it with diligence ever since the commencement of our Acquaintance."²⁰⁹ Immediately after this, she wrote in her own defense, "little do these wise Men know or feel, that the Crying of a young Child, or the Perverseness of an elder, or the Danger however trifling of any one . . . will soon drive out of a female Parent's head a Conversation concerning Wit, Science or Sentiment, however She may appear to be impressed with it at the moment." She observed that for the "Mere de famille . . . doing something is more necessary & suitable than even hearing something; and if one is to listen all Eveng and write all Morning what one has heard; where will be the Time for tutoring, caressing, or what is still more useful, for having one's Children about one." Then, clearly regretting the past intrusion of motherhood into her life as a writer, she stated: "I therefore charge all my Neglect to my young ones Account, and feel myself at this moment very miserable that I have at last, after being married fourteen Years and bringing eleven children, leisure to write a *Thraliana* forsooth."²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ It is interesting to note Thrale's restricted sense of herself as a writer here, one that was reinforced by her friends. She was to be a recorder of Johnson's conversation.

²¹⁰ Thrale, *Thraliana*, ed. Balderston I: 158.

In addition to seeing herself anew as a writer more than as a mother, Thrale looked at herself anew as Henry Thrale's wife as well. She felt her husband's neglect of her as his wife and as the mother of their children more than ever before in the fall of 1777 when she wrote privately on September 20 1777 in the "Family Book":

I think myself once again pregnant, and am astonished ay & disgusted too to find Mr. Thrale not at all rejoiced at it: I confess I am as glad as possible, & I thought he would have wished for a Son but no, he seems rather offended than delighted, so indeed he is commonly with all I do.²¹¹

She not only felt bereft as Henry Thrale's wife but helpless to stop her husband from once again jeopardizing the family fortune. Immediately after expressing her sadness and anger at her husband's response to her latest pregnancy, she wrote in the "Family Book":

Mr. Thrale's Affairs are now so very prosperous, that he thinks of nothing but to plan future Expences: and rejects Counsel as Insult, and Restraint as Injury—long may his Affairs be prosperous! though while they are so, he never plainly will lay up a Shilling, or admit the possibility of a cloudy Day:--When his profusion has incur'd Distress—tis my Duty to assist, it is now my Duty to look on only, & throw in a gentle Warning when it will be accepted, & that is seldom. neither am I likely to try very often God knows, tho' I approve not of these Ponds, Hothouses &c. Surely less ado might serve!²¹²

Fearing that her husband was again behaving recklessly with the family's finances, Thrale wrote to Johnson: "My Master has Prosperity in Sight, &

²¹¹ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 189-90.

²¹² Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 190.

in Possession; and lets no Cares for the future disturb his golden Dreams." She complained again to him, as she had in the past, that her husband told her nothing of his future plans: "everybody tells me of some new Plan of Expence, he tells me nothing himself, but I hear it on all Sides, & shall I suppose see it anon." Desperate, she closed this letter attempting, once again, to ask Johnson to intervene as her friend: "My Master's Bridle must be held by a stronger hand than that of Your most faithful & Obedient/ H. L. Thrale."²¹³ While it might seem contradictory that Thrale still desired to have Johnson at Streatham after his recent negligent and paradoxical behavior toward her, she was a practical thinker especially in matters pertaining to the brewery and her husband. She had to be. She knew that even though Henry would not listen to her, Johnson could give Henry Thrale advice on how to be more prudent with money.

However, Johnson was once again in Ashbourne as the guest of Dr. Taylor. Moreover, Boswell had joined him there. It must have disturbed Thrale that although Johnson knew about the danger of Henry Thrale's erratic, depressive behavior to her and her family's future Johnson still did not come to her aid. Instead, he merely moralized to her from a distance in Ashbourne: "Make your most of these golden years and buy liberally what will now be liberally all[o]wed" lest late in life she should find herself "wondering what is become of all the past."²¹⁴ Once again, Johnson was valuing Dr. Taylor's and Boswell's needs above her own.

There was nothing for Thrale to do but comfort herself in private. In the "Family Book" for September 29, 1777, she retreated into her role

²¹³ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 212.

²¹⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 73.

as a mother as if to console herself for her husband's and Johnson's failure to recognize her growing sense of her own individual identity: "Thank God," she wrote, "the four Girls are all well now & I am breeding again--what would I have!"²¹⁵ In the wake of his refusal to help her, however, Thrale described Johnson coolly in Thraliana on September 1777 first as "our constant Acquaintance" and "Visitor," and then as a "Companion and Friend."²¹⁶ Johnson wrote to her on September 27, 1777: "I wish I were with you but I cannot come yet."²¹⁷ He would remain in Ashbourne until late in October.

Even though he had just refused to come to her assistance, Johnson continued to press Thrale for a favor: to write to him more often. Yet Thrale could not have missed Johnson's condescension when describing her letters to him at this time only as "pretty" and "kind." But now as a more experienced reader of Johnson, she let this comment pass. Instead, she wrote diplomatically to him on October 11, 1777: "If you love my Letters I am sure I love yours better, so there we are quit."²¹⁸

By the end of 1777, through her private and social interaction with him over twelve years, Thrale had become an informed reader of Johnson to the extent that in her private writing in Thraliana from September to December 1777, she began to balance her praise with criticism of him. For example, she wrote that he "loved to abuse the Scotch," and then added, "& indeed be abused by them in return."²¹⁹ Similarly, she abhorred Johnson's rabid nationalism and the fact that he was "indeed willing enough at all Times to express his hatred & Contempt of our Rival Nation [France]," but she quickly balanced this negative

²¹⁵ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 191-2.

²¹⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 159.

²¹⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 83.

²¹⁸ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 221.

comment by adding that in more "serious" moments Johnson would commend France's philosophers.²²⁰ She gave Johnson praise for being "just in every Thing" and "scrupulously so in giving Characters of living People," but she immediately attenuated this praise by pointing out Johnson's personal limitations as an observer of other people: "He had not great Opportunities of knowing them; few would expose their Passions or their Oddities before so universal a Censor, and his want of Sight or hearing often made him liable to lose such Traits as would have changed his Opinions had they come within his reach."²²¹ But, immediately after this, she graciously wrote that Johnson's "little Strokes" of character writing were "sometimes" "worth more than the finish'd Pictures of inferior hands."²²² Likewise, she proudly recorded Johnson's answer when Boswell asked whether or not he should educate his daughters: Women, Johnson replied, should "learn all they can learn . . . it is a Paltry trick indeed to deny Women the cultivation of their mental Powers, and I think it is partly a proof we are afraid of them—if we endeavour to keep them unarmed." But she also acknowledged Johnson's restricted view of women: The "Delicacy of the [Female] Sex shou'd always be inviolably preserved," Johnson had said, "in eating, in Exercise, in Dress, in every thing."²²³ Likewise, she noted, no doubt based on her own personal experiences with him, that "Mr. Johnson was always of the Men's Side when there was a domestick Dispute." Most importantly, she observed that Johnson "had indeed a very ill opinion of the [Female] Sex in general, 'A Woman,' says he, 'is the proper Person to do Business, the

²¹⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 165.
²²⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 165.
²²¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 168.
²²² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 168.
²²³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 172.

Men smooth the way for her as they would not for each other, and besides She never stops for Integrity.'" ²²⁴

Similarly, although she often praised Johnson as a wise philosopher of human nature, Thrale also criticized the narrowness of his philosophic reasoning regarding the human condition:

The vacuity of Life had at some early Period of his Life perhaps so stuck upon the Mind of Mr. Johnson, that it became by repeated Impression his favourite hypothesis, & the general Tenor of his reasonings commonly ended in that. the Things therefore which other Philosophers attribute to various & contradictory Causes, appeared to him uniform enough; all was done to fill up the Time upon his Principle. ²²⁵

Moreover, she recorded the selfishness and self-absorption in his behavior. Johnson, Thrale wrote, "was in some Respects a very good

²²⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 179. Johnson's denigratory statements about women have fueled a debate regarding whether or not Johnson was a misogynist. See Donald Greene, "The Myth of Johnson's Misogyny: Some Addenda," in "Special Issue: Johnson and Gender" South Central Review (The Journal of the South Central Modern Language Association) Vol. 9, no. 4 (Winter 1992) 3-80. In this same special edition of the South Central Review, Carole McAllister and Bonnie Hain agree with Greene's distrust of Boswell's negative portrayals of Johnson's views of women. They see a significant difference between Boswell's Johnson who, according to Boswell, uttered statements about women that could be viewed as misogynist, and the Johnson who enjoyed close and supportive relationships with women. See Carole McAllister and Bonnie Hain, "James Boswell's Ms. Perceptions and Samuel Johnson's Ms. Placed Friends," pages 59-70. See also Isobel Grundy, "Samuel Johnson as a Patron of Women," The Age of Johnson ed. Paul J. Korshin (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990) 1: 59-77; James Basker, "Dancing Dogs, Women Preachers and the Myth of Johnson's Misogyny," The Age of Johnson ed. Paul J. Korshin (New Haven: Yale UP, 1990) 63-90; and Annette Wheeler Cafarelli, "Johnson and Women: Demasculinizing Literary History," The Age of Johnson ed. Paul J. Korshin (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991) 5: 61-114. Basker bases his argument on Johnson's positive statements about, and fictional representations of, women. Cafarelli argues that the Life (1791) suffers from a gender bias in that Boswell is determined in it to "masculinize" Johnson.

Travelling Companion: The Rain, & the Sun, the night and the Day were the same to him, and he had no Care about Food, Hours or Accomodations." However, immediately after this she wrote:

but then he expected that nobody else should have any neither, and felt no sort of Compassion for one's Fatigue, or uneasiness, or Confinement in the Carriage—'for nobody ever talks of such Stuff,' says he, 'except the People who have nothing else to say,' & if one said nothing—'why 'tis because you feel nothing to be sure,' says he.²²⁵

As one reads this balancing act in Thrale's writing on Johnson, one begins to realize that underlying this "balance" is Thrale's increasing inability to praise Johnson without introducing some points of criticism about him as well. More and more frequently in Thraliana, Thrale's private criticism of Johnson overwhelms her praise of him. For example, drawing upon her knowledge of his behavior in the social sphere, she observed that complimenting someone in Johnson's presence was a difficult task. She wrote that if "any one, or even himself had bestowed more Praise on a Person or Thing than he thought they deserved, he would instantly rough them and that in a Manner brutal enough to be sure."²²⁷ She added that Johnson's vanity was not immune to the flattery of others: "Nothing indeed seem[s] to flatter him [Johnson] more than to observe a Person struck with his Conversation whom he did not expect to be so."²²⁸ In particular, Thrale noticed that Johnson enjoyed being flattered for his good breeding: "no Flattery was so welcome to him as that which told him he had the Mind or Manners of a Gentleman, which he

²²⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 179.

²²⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 187.

²²⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 167.

²²⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 168.

always said was the most complete & the most difficult to obtain." Moreover, as time went on, she became surer of her own critical readings of him. She began to record Johnson's lapses in his own self-awareness: "Although Mr. Johnson would say the roughest, and the most cruel Things, he always wished for the Praise of good Breeding."²²⁹ Thrale also criticized Johnson's character and his lack of self-perspective. She wrote down, privately, that "Johnson always said he was more attentive to others than any body was to him--& yet,' says he, 'People call me rude.'"²³⁰

Similarly, after relating an incident in which Johnson had harshly criticized a mutual friend, Dr. Delap, for complaining about his own health, Thrale observed: "Mr. Johnson was however exceedingly attentive to his own health, and having studied Medicine pretty regularly I believe at some Period of his Life he was tempted no little to the sin of Quackery."²³¹

In addition, viewing Johnson more critically in the social sphere than ever before, Thrale wrote that of "all his [Johnson's] intimates and Friends, I think I never could find any who much loved him Boswell & Burney excepted—Mr. Murphy too loved him as he loves People—when he sees them—All the others would rather not have seen him than seen him as far as I have been able to observe." She immediately followed this observation by crediting her own skills as a hostess in facilitating the continuing friendship between Johnson and Charles Burney:

& as to Burney had they been more together, they would have liked each other less; but I who delighted greatly in them both, used to keep those Parts of their Characters out of Sight which would have

²²⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 186, 182.

²³⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 187.

offended the other. This was a mighty easy Operation to me; & I grew skilful [sic] in it by long Practice; nor was it in itself difficult, as Mr. Johnson's great Deficiency both in Sight & Hearing put him so far in one's power.²³²

Thus by late 1777, Thrale read Johnson with the complexity of an experienced and informed reader. She read him from multiple perspectives as a friend, as a critic of himself and others, as well as the object of both praise and criticism by others. This greater sophistication and confidence in her reading of Johnson is reflected in the increasing distance that Thrale put between the private self that she presented in her letters to him and the private self that she reserved for her eyes only in Thraliana. In response to these dual private selves, Johnson began to be unsure about who Thrale was as a reader of him. We can see this especially in his letters to her. Indeed, one result of Johnson's insecurity and confusion regarding Thrale's reading of him was that Johnson suddenly devalued the worth of his letters to her. In late October 1777, he wrote to her: "It is really now a long time that we have been writing and writing, and yet how small a part of our minds have we written?" Johnson was suspicious of what she held back from him for her Thraliana, and, at the same time, he wanted her to know that he, in turn, did not put all of himself in his letters to her. As if no longer trusting the truthfulness of her letters to him on this subject, he wrote immediately after this: "We shall meet, I hope, soon, and talk it out."²³³

But Johnson was so perturbed that he could not even wait to see Thrale to "talk it out." Two days later, he wrote again of "how small a

²³¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 197.

²³² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 182.

part" of one's mind can be put into one's letters; however, he used the same mix of irony and anger that characterized his letter in French to Thrale in the summer of 1773 when he was in the throes of a depression at Streatham. Johnson began by chiding Thrale in a seemingly humorous vein: "You talk of writing and writing as if you had all the writing to yourself." Then, as if trying to determine how much she appreciated his letters and desired him as her correspondent, he continued: "If our Correspondence were printed I am sure Posterity, for Posterity is always the authours favourite, would say that I am a good writer too." But Johnson's joviality could not hide the insecurity he felt about Thrale as his correspondent, or as his reader. This is manifest in the brief epistolary essay that he sent to her in which he disavowed the importance of his letters to her. Johnson began: "Some when they write to their friends are all affection, some are wise and sententious, some strain their powers for efforts of gayety, some write news, and some write secrets, but to make a letter without affection, without wisdom, without gayety, without news, and without a secret is, doubtless, the great epistolick art." He then continued ironically, "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." Using this letter to illustrate the point, he added, "Of this great truth sounded by the knowing to the ignorant, and so echoed by the ignorant to the knowing, what evidence have you now before you. Is not my soul laid open in these veracious pages? Do not you see me reduced

²³³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 88.

to my first principles?"²³⁴ Then, sarcastically and with a more biting irony, Johnson continued:

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.²³⁵

Johnson's growing distrust of Thrale as his reader is evident in the conclusion of this epistolary essay when Johnson wrote: "I have indeed concealed nothing from you, nor do I expect ever to repent of having thus opened my heart." However, he disarmingly continued to put much of his personal self into his letters to Thrale, although he was not willing to respond truthfully or reciprocally to Thrale's attempts to discuss her private self separate from her roles as wife and mother in her letters to him.²³⁶ Two days later, Johnson wrote to Thrale: "Let me continue to keep the part which I have had so long in your kindness and my Master's, for if that should grow less I know not where to find

²³⁴ In his Life of Pope, Johnson writes, "There is . . . 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 genuine 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" (Lives of the Poets III. 206-8).

²³⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 88-89.

²³⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 89-90.

that which may supply the dimunition . . . I hope what I have been so happy as to gain, I shall have the happiness of keeping."²³⁷

In response to these appeals, Thrale took Johnson somewhat back into her confidence, enough to write to him on November 8, 1777: "we spend our Money merrily I know, I fret sometimes about it, but I never grumble." She still acknowledged, but did not fully accept, that her friendship with Johnson was limited by his fear of displeasing Henry Thrale. This is evident in this same letter when she specifically directed Johnson not to respond to her comments about the Thrale household finances: "[I] desire you will make no Answer to this part of my Letter."²³⁸

Thus, at the end of 1777, the intimacy and trust that she had once hoped for from Johnson and his friendship were rapidly disappearing. Her disappointment can be seen in her vacillation between praise and criticism of Johnson in her private writing, and in the increasing distance that she continued to put between her private self and Johnson in her social writing. Realizing that Johnson would not be her intimate friend and confidant, Thrale, three months pregnant with her twelfth child and fearing that the baby would be stillborn, wrote privately in the "Family Book": "I have nobody to tell my Uneasiness to . . . so I must eat up my own Heart & be quiet."²³⁹

²³⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 91.

²³⁸ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 232-33.

²³⁹ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 198. The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989) 10

5.

**From the Social to the Private: The Increasing Emotional and
Intellectual Distance between Thrale and Johnson. Or, Thrale's New
Private Space as an Informed Reader.**

One of the consequences of having become a more experienced and informed reader of both her husband and Johnson, and being able to read them with greater confidence, independence, and accuracy, was that Thrale felt more isolated from them than ever before. In the winter of 1777, Henry brought the brewery to the brink of bankruptcy again. Thrale wrote in the "Family Book": "Here is a new Agony—My Master dispirited & almost in Despair about pecuniary Matters looks like Death." Surely she remembered how her husband had gone into shock and a deep depression in 1772 during a similar situation. At the time, she had bemoaned her husband's condition. However, this time, she wrote with greater self-assurance and equanimity about the difference between her "Spirits" and his in a time of crisis: "if any Disorder would seize [him] he is likely to dye himself instead of me, whose Spirits always rise on an Exigence whereas his sink." Remembering the previous financial debacle at the brewery, she wrote: "I'm sure that he may say—'Graviora tuli' ["I have borne worse things"] & so may I when I recollect the Year 1772." She went on to doubt that "Money or kindness could quiet the mind of Mr. Thrale," but she hoped that it would so that she would "still have a happy Lying in."²⁴⁰

Seven months pregnant with her twelfth child, Thrale attempted to give her husband both money and kindness as she had in 1772. She borrowed money for her husband once again and even sold what remained of her beloved stand of trees on her small estate in Wales even though she

had promised herself that she would never do this. But to her dismay, her actions did nothing to lift her husband's spirits or to soften his behavior toward her. In her "Family Book" in March 1778, Thrale observed:

How differently does one feel when one is wanted & when one is not. I used to say nothing should make me cut my Trees down in Wales & now I offered them Yesterday to pacify My Masters Uneasiness; but he . . . would at any Time rather suffer Misery in a slight degree than receive Consolation or Kindness from me, which I have long known, but cannot help.²⁴¹

In May 1778, just as she had in 1772, Thrale confided some of her concern about Henry's depressive behavior to Johnson. She wrote to him: "I sometimes think my Master will never recover so as to enjoy himself again, there is so settled a Gloom—so total a Self Desertion impressed upon his Countenance & Mind." However, unlike in 1772, Thrale wrote to Johnson in 1778 fully realizing Johnson's greater loyalty to her husband. She tried to turn Johnson's loyalty to her husband to good account by writing: "If . . . you see my Master before I do—conjure him not to fret so." She was wisely aware that she needed an ally in Johnson to help her control her husband's self-destructiveness which had the potential to ultimately destroy the entire Thrale family. She invited Johnson to Streatham, writing to him "glad at heart shall I be to have you with us—for we grind sadly else."²⁴²

Although on a social level Thrale appeared to be becoming more intimate again with Johnson, on a private level she wrote about him in a more objective and dispassionate manner. She now understood how the

²⁴⁰ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 201.

²⁴¹ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 201-202.

harsher aspects of his character and thinking limited the friendship he could extend to her. She wrote in Thraliana for April 1778 that Johnson was "more a Man of Imagination than Passion," adding to this that "Lear's cursing his Daughter which makes so many People shudder, took no hold of him at all I think."²⁴³ She must have found no comfort in her knowledge of Johnson's cold practicality and his dismal view of the emotions of life when she wrote privately:

Johnson, who thinks the vacuity of Life the source of all the Passions, says it is certainly so both with regard to Love & Friendship: In the Hurry of a Battle or the Distresses of a Siege, the Pressure of Poverty or the invasions of Pain, a Mistress or a Friend have certainly small Chance to be remembered; & even in the lesser Tumults of Amusement & Dissipation there is but little Leisure for Attachment and of Course for Reflexion."²⁴⁴

Having to deal with the difficulties affecting her husband and her household, in addition to being pregnant, Thrale now became convinced that she would not survive her twelfth pregnancy. For this reason, she began an autobiography in Thraliana: "I will now in the Year 1778 write out a life of my self; at least a little Epitome of whence I came, who I am &c. before I go hence and am no more seen."²⁴⁵ From the beginning of her autobiography Thrale's disappointment with Johnson as her confidant and friend is evident in how she describes Dr. Collier, and not Johnson, as "my friend from whom I concealed nothing."²⁴⁶ Certainly she did not have this kind of a relationship with Johnson in 1778. Indeed, she

²⁴² Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 248.

²⁴³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 249.

²⁴⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 254.

²⁴⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 274.

²⁴⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 297, n.1.

addressed Johnson in letters more often now as a friend of her husband's, rather than as her own friend. In June 1778, shortly before she was to give birth to her twelfth child, Henrietta Sophia, who was born on June 21, 1778, Thrale requested of Johnson:

Do huff my Master & comfort him by Turns according to your own Dear Discretion: he has consulted you now, & given you a Right to talk with Him about his ill Tim'd Melancholy and do keep your Influence over him for all our Sakes.²⁴⁷

As long as Thrale presented herself to Johnson as Henry's "concerned wife," she knew Johnson would respond to her. On this occasion Johnson responded in person. On July 18, 1778, Thrale recorded in Thraliana how he had supported her effort to convince Henry not to brew too much beer: "Johnson seconded me by earnest and pathetic Entreaties & we at length extorted from him [Henry] a Promise that he would brew no more than 80,000 Barrels a Year—for five Years to come." Furthermore, Thrale reported that Johnson said that Henry had "hanged himself" and allowed his creditors had "cut" him "down."²⁴⁸

On a social level, in her letters to him, Thrale was ecstatic over Johnson's recent support of her. In a letter to Johnson on October 28, 1788, she exclaimed: "Next to my Husband & Children whom should I love best but . . . my best friend [Johnson]."²⁴⁹ However, on a private level, she knew that Johnson had responded to her not as an individual but in the role in which he had always predominantly regarded her: the wife of his friend Henry Thrale. Johnson was unable to look at her "anew." Privately, she wrote angrily in Thraliana that Johnson seemed

²⁴⁷ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 249.

²⁴⁸ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 205-6.

unable to accept or believe in new ideas, especially ones that she, his friend, proposed to him. She was furious that Johnson would not believe that she had seen "a large Bottle full of Spirits . . . explode into fire during a thunder and lightning storm" although she had insisted with him that "at the moment I was there, so I saw it." She wrote that she "could not make Mr. Johnson believe the Fact." Soon after this incident she wrote of Johnson privately:

Mr. Johnson's Incredulity amounts almost to Disease; he will not believe that a Haystack was ever burned, or a Waggon ever set on Fire by the Friction of the one I mean, or the Fermentation of the other: he is a sad Mortal to carry a Wonder to, for, says he, 'I am of poor Dr. Goldsmith's Mind—he looked for new Thoughts a while but was at last convinced as he told me—that whatever was new was false.'²⁵⁰

Johnson's "incredulity" was important to Thrale because of the narrow way in which Johnson read her as his friend, especially with regard to her marriage to Henry Thrale. In November 1778, Thrale wrote in the "Family Book": "Mr. Thrale is recover'd from his Anxiety & Depression."²⁵¹ When Johnson heard this news, he wrote to her that he hoped she and her husband would be "as You are used to be," as if he had forgotten, or had chosen to not acknowledge, all of the complaints she had ever made to him about her marriage to Henry Thrale.²⁵² Johnson valued the institution of marriage over Thrale's actual role in and her feelings about her marriage to Henry. Certainly, Johnson's response reminded Thrale that he did not see her as a private, separate and

²⁴⁹ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 262.

²⁵⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 345.

²⁵¹ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 213.

²⁵² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 143.

individual friend, but rather in her social, institutional role as Henry Thrale's wife.

Although Thrale was now reading Johnson with greater independence and a surer sense of self, she was not yet indifferent to Johnson's condescension and the lash of his disapproval. In Thraliana for December 1778, Thrale wrote "For true love of one's Mother & real preference of her to all human Kind, I believe I am a singular Example," but she immediately added to this: "Johnson says it was not right though!"²⁵³

But if becoming a skilled reader of Johnson during fourteen years of friendship with him had not made Thrale completely insensitive to Johnson's opinions of her, it had trained her to recognize the extreme contradictions in his temperament. On February 10, 1779, she wrote:

Johnson is admirable at giving Counsel—no Man sees his Way better, but he will not stir to do anything—'His Pride in Reas'ning not in Acting lies'²⁵⁴-- besides that he has Principles of Laziness and can be indolent by Rule: to hinder your Death or procure you a Dinner;--I mean if starving—he will set about most vigorously, and do it with all possible Effect; but to obtain a Vote in a Society, repay a Compliment which would be of future Utility, write a letter requesting a Favour from a distant Friend --or such things; no Force moves him, nor no Tenderness can induce.—'What good will it do the Man,' says he? 'Dearest Lady let's have no more on't.'²⁵⁵

Moreover, Thrale no longer responded to Johnson's epistolary silences or his criticism of her epistolary hiatuses with anger. Instead she

²⁵³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 355.

²⁵⁴ Alexander Pope, Epistle to Cobham I. 118.

negotiated them with humor so as to avoid making the problems they produced even worse. On one occasion, Johnson ended a particularly long epistolary silence between himself and Thrale by writing to her from Bolt Court in London on March 10, 1779: "And so, dear Madam, it is a Mumm to see who will speak first."²⁵⁶ Thrale replied brassily from Streatham, "how indulgent to the Caprices of your saucy Mistress!" Then she wrote triumphantly: "I had a mind you should write first sure enough."²⁵⁷

Although she had become an informed reader of Johnson, Thrale still idolized him at times in Thraliana. In May 1779, she praised him privately as an "incomparable mortal" whose mind was "uniformly great." She added to this, "Well does he contradict the Maxim of Rochefoucault that no Man is a Hero to his Valet de Chambre. Johnson is more a Hero to me than to any one."²⁵⁸ But her veneration of him after fourteen years of friendship in Thraliana appears to be inspired more by the remembrance of her past assistance to him rather than her present relationship with him. She wrote, "I have been more to him for Intimacy, than ever was any Man's Valet de Chambre."²⁵⁹ In addition, after stating that "no Man" could "live his Life quite thro', without being at some period of it under the Dominion of some Woman—Wife Mistress or Friend," Thrale cast herself in the role of a woman who had enjoyed "dominion" over Johnson in the *past*, but did so no longer: "Pope and Swift were softened by the Smiles of a Patty Blount & Stella . . . our stern Philosopher Johnson trusted me about the Years 1767 or 1768

²⁵⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 365.

²⁵⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 155.

²⁵⁷ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 281.

²⁵⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 384.

²⁵⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 384-85.

. . . with a Secret far dearer to him than his Life." Most likely, this was the secret that Johnson's feared that he was going mad, as he had disclosed this to her during or soon after she helped him recover from a nervous breakdown in 1766.²⁶⁰ Thrale also wrote of Johnson's decision to tell her this secret, "I sincerely believe he has never since that Day regretted his Confidence," but she completed this sentence in the past tense, "or ever looked with less kind Affection on her who had him in her Power."²⁶¹ Thrale must have been bitterly reminded of her loss of intimacy with and power over Johnson soon after her husband suffered a stroke on June 8, 1779.

Johnson, enjoying an extended visit at Dr. Taylor's in Ashbourne, did not learn of Henry Thrale's stroke until June 12. When Johnson heard the news, he wrote these lines of "comfort" from Ashbourne to Thrale: "Your account of Mr. Thrales 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 frightened. The seizure was, I think, not apoplectical, but hysterical, and therefore not dangerous to life."²⁶² Thrale must have been taken aback by Johnson's unconcern after reading her account of her husband's stroke—a description that Johnson himself had called her "terrible" account of her husband's illness. Johnson seemed indifferent not only to Henry, whose friendship Johnson valued over hers, but also by extension, to her own plight. Indeed, she had written an account of her husband's stroke in Thraliana on June 11: "Here is a dreadful Event

²⁶⁰ For an in-depth discussion of Johnson's depressive fits and belief that he was going mad, see Walter Bate's biography of Johnson: Samuel Johnson (New York: Viking Press, 1975).

²⁶¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 384. My italics and underlining.

indeed to record in the Thraliana!" Clearly in shock, she wrote that after having been married to Thrale for "sixteen Years and eight Months," he had been "brought home to me apparently Paralytick." She desperately attempted to comfort herself by writing privately that she was "confident" that her fifty-year-old husband would "recover, [for] he has Youth and Strength and general Health on his Side." However, she knew how real the danger was and immediately after this statement wrote, "his Temper is strangely altered: so vigilant, so jealous, so careful lest one should watch him, & so unfit to be left unwatched."²⁶³ Pregnant for the thirteenth time (Thrale would give birth to a stillborn boy on August 10), she then burst into lamentation: "Oh Lord have mercy on us! this is a horrible Business indeed. five little Girls too, & breeding again."²⁶⁴

Thrale must have written to Johnson again to explain the seriousness of the situation and her dismay at his response. On June 14, 1779, Johnson wrote apologetically: "The case as you now describe it is worse than I conceived it when I read your fi[r]st letter . . . I am glad that you have Heberden [a leading physician of the time], and hope We are all safer."

But despite his sympathetic commiseration, Johnson did not go to Henry Thrale and his wife. Instead, he requested from Ashbourne that Thrale write to him often: "Do, dear Madam, let me know every post, how he goes on." In this same letter, Johnson did promise to come to her: "If my coming can either assist or divert, or be useful to any purpose, let me but know. I will soon be with you." However, he also let Thrale know that he would not interrupt his annual ramble to the Midlands nor

²⁶² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 168.

²⁶³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 389.

hurry home after having learned of Henry's stroke; he closed his letter to her with instructions for Thrale to direct her next letter to him at Lichfield.²⁶⁵ Although she knew it was useless to ask Johnson to come back for her sake, she must have made it clear to him that she expected him to return at least for Henry Thrale, whose friendship Johnson had claimed to value. Thrale wrote privately on June 11 in Thraliana: "Johnson is away—down at Lichfield or Derby, or God knows where, something always happens when he is away"²⁶⁶; and she expressed her desire for Johnson's return directly to him in her next letter on June 17, 1779: "we shall now soon meet again: something always does happen though when you leave us for long."²⁶⁷

Johnson clearly felt the need to apologize to Thrale. On June 20, 1779, he wrote to her: "Whether it was that your description of dear Mr. Thrale's disorder was indistinct, or that I am not ready at guessing calamity, I certainly did not know our danger, for sure I have a part in it, till that danger was abated." Johnson wrote from Lichfield as if he were at Streatham with Thrale: "We will watch him [Henry] as well as we can." He also wrote more cautiously, "I hope we have now nothing to fear" and promised that "It will not be long before I shall be among you." Perhaps Johnson realized the inappropriateness of his delayed and cavalier response to Henry Thrale's stroke. For immediately after the foregoing statement, Johnson wrote, "and it is a very great degree of pleasure to hope that I shall be welcome."²⁶⁸

Furthermore, Thrale must have noticed that the closer Johnson got to Streatham, the more concerned he seemed with how Henry Thrale was

²⁶⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 389.

²⁶⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 169-70.

²⁶⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 389-90.

²⁶⁷ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 294.

seeing him rather than with how *she* was viewing him. Johnson wrote to Henry Thrale from Lichfield:

Though I wrote yesterday to my Mistress, I cannot forbear writing immediately to you, my sincere congratulation upon your recovery from so much disorder, and your escape from so much danger. I should have had a very heavy part in the misfortune of losing you, for it is not likely that I should ever find such another friend, and proportionate at least to my Fear must be my pleasure I can only wish it sincerely, that you may live long and happily, and long count among those that love you best, Dear Sir, your most humble servant.²⁶⁹

Johnson apparently mistrusted how Thrale was representing him to her husband. On June 23, 1779, he wrote to Henry: "My wicked Mistress talks as if she thought it possible for me to be indifferent or negligent about your health or hers." He added defensively, "If I could have done any good, I had not delayed an hour to come to you, and I will come very soon to try if my advice can be of any use, or my Company of any entertainment." Trying further to excuse his absence, Johnson exhorted Henry: "What can be done, You must do for yourself," and closed this letter with "think on such things as may please without too much agitation, among which, I hope, is, Dear Sir, your most obliged and most humble servant/ Sam. Johnson."²⁷⁰ Then, the next day, Johnson chastised Thrale directly in a letter to her: "You really do not use me well in thinking that I am in less pain on this occasion than I ought to be." With some impatience, he wrote to her that he hoped "this will be the last letter, for I am coming up as fast as I can," but then rather

²⁶⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 172-73.

²⁶⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 173-74.

tactlessly added, "to go down [to Ashbourne] cost me seven guineas, and I am loth to come back at the same charge." Johnson's matter-of-fact parsimoniousness over the cost of the fare must have stunned Thrale, given all the past hospitality he had received at her hands.

Furthermore, Johnson closed this letter to Thrale in a way that must have reminded her of his condescension to her in the past. For instead of writing to her on an equal basis as her friend in this time of personal crisis, Johnson wrote "keep yourself airy, and be a funny little thing."²⁷¹

Thrale must have concluded from Johnson's remark that he seemed not fully to appreciate the effect on her of her pain and fear regarding her husband's health. Thrale's biographer, James Clifford, noted Johnson's delay in coming to Streatham to comfort Thrale after her husband's stroke as well when he wrote that Johnson did not "appear to her [Thrale] to be in any hurry to return, a lack of consideration for which he was soundly berated."²⁷² Clifford then concludes that after Henry Thrale had recovered his health, "Mrs. Thrale was mollified," and "admitted" that Johnson had been "exceedingly kind" and she had been "exceedingly cross" in her letters to him regarding her husband's stroke.

Clifford presented Thrale here as if she was still grateful to Johnson for any kindness he showed her in her role as his acolyte looking for approval from her master. But he misunderstands Thrale's "mollification," which, instead, was a perfunctory apology from her: "You have been exceedingly kind," she wrote, "and I have been exceedingly cross; & now my Master is got well, & my Wrath over, I ask

²⁷⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 175.

²⁷¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 175-6.

your Pardon sincerely."²⁷³ In reality, Thrale had received a major shock from seeing her husband suffer and recover from a stroke. Uncertain of the continuation of Henry's good health and of his ability to manage the brewery, Thrale now more than ever needed to have Johnson as an ally who had the kind of influence over Henry Thrale that she lacked. Although she wrote privately on June 22, 1779, that "Mr. Thrale has recovered his paralytick Stroke . . . his Head is as good as ever, his Spirits are indeed low, but they will mend," she also believed: "I think he will have another of these Strokes sometime." Moreover, she wrote forebodingly of the future: "here is my mad Master going to build at the boro' House again: --new Store Cellars, Casks, & God knows what."²⁷⁴ Thus while she certainly had good reason to remain incensed over Johnson's behavior during her most recent personal crisis, she had more compelling reasons to keep Johnson as an ally for her own sake as well as for that of her family.

Furthermore, by this time in her friendship with Johnson, Thrale understood that if Johnson suspected she was upset with him, he would avoid coming to Streatham. But her considerable experience in reading him was now employed to get Johnson to respond in more predictable and satisfying ways to her entreaties. On June 26, 1779, Johnson responded to her apology: "Now that I find that You are pacified, I can more cheerfully tell You that I shall leave this place next Monday, to find from Birmingham the easiest way home." But even as he did this, Johnson must have sensed the increasingly complex ways in which Thrale was reading him. Indeed, he continued to distrust her representations of their relationship. This is clear when in the same letter Johnson

²⁷² Clifford, Piozzi 176.

²⁷³ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 298.

wrote: "I hope to be welcome at Streatham," and immediately after added even more warily, "and hope nothing will make Streatham less pleasing to me."²⁷⁵

Johnson's insecurity about how Thrale was reading and responding to him was caused in part by how she was living her life "anew." In addition to writing to Johnson as Henry Thrale's wife, as a mother, and as the "Mistress of Streatham," she now wrote confidently to him as a businesswoman. In the same letter of apology cited above, Thrale wrote with reference to the brewery, "I have not been inattentive to Compting House Business [since] Mr. Thrale's Illness, though I do not live there; I drove however a Parcel of Workmen off yesterday with a high hand."²⁷⁶ She also made reference to the men around her who might seize control of the brewery from her: "My dear Master is easily subdued just now," and "I fear no Subalterns" at the brewery.²⁷⁷

In addition, Thrale's increasing confidence as an intellectual in her relationship with Johnson must have made him uneasy about her reading of him. In the above-mentioned letter, Thrale forcefully disagreed with Johnson over the issue of the national economy and its effect on the individual: "it is not true that Individuals perceive no difference between living in a prosperous & in a sinking State, we all do feel the difference, & tis a folly to deny it."²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 391.

²⁷⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 176-77.

²⁷⁶ Privately, at this time, Thrale wrote of the daily worries of running the brewery--of the rising prices of sugar and coal and the government taxes arising from "this cursed American War"--and she compared this year's expenses with the previous year's (Thraliana 395-96).

²⁷⁷ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 298.

²⁷⁸ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 298-99.

Thrale also seemed to be more self-assured in writing about Johnson as a literary critic. Privately, in Thraliana, she wrote that "Johnson has an agreeable Talent of imitating people's Verses, but he will always render them too ridiculous; Hawkins Browne has been so long & justly admired only because he knew where to stop."²⁷⁹

As Thrale predicted privately in her journal, Henry suffered another stroke at the end of July 1779. On August 1, she recorded in Thraliana that her husband had been "sadly shook t'other day." To make matters worse, as she confided in Thraliana, she discovered that she had been lied to by her husband's physician, who had told another privately that "he [Henry] never would wholly recover." She continued to fear, quite sensibly, that her thirteenth pregnancy (she was thirty-eight years old) would end in a miscarriage and her death. She worried to herself in Thraliana:

& now here is me, who never have had such an Accident these thirteen Years, am under Threats of a Miscarriage which will probably kill me, or leave me at least so weak as to render Recovery doubtful. Abortions and Profluvia are not easily got through at my Age, & after having had twelve Children.²⁸⁰

Thrale was partially correct. Her thirteenth and last pregnancy ended on August 10, 1779, when she delivered a stillborn boy. She responded to this event with both sadness and relief, which indicated her readiness to move beyond her role as a mother: "Tis less a Miscarriage after all than a dead Child: a Boy quite formed & perfect; once I wished for such a Blessing--now if my Life is left me no matter for the rest."²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 398.

²⁸⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 399.

²⁸¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 400.

Nor were her pains in this last miscarriage alleviated by the solicitude of her husband. She recorded, in private, Henry's severe callousness during the event: "after long continued Threats of a Miscarriage had confined me to the House & even to my Chamber," Henry "wished me to go [to the brewery with him], nay insisted on it" to deal with "some Mismanagement among the Borough Clerks." She then observed that although Henry seemed "somewhat concern'd . . . as he was well apprized of the Risque I should run," when she had gone as he wished, she then "beg'd him to make haste home." She recalled that even though she "was apprehensive bad Consequences might very quickly arise from the Joulting &c.," her husband "would not be hurried." Then she described what happened:

the probable Consequences did begin to arise, I pressed him to order the Coach—he could not be hurried—I told his Valet my Danger, & begged him to hasten his Master; no Pain, no Entreaties of mind could make him set out one Moment before the appointed hour—so I lay along in the Coach all the way from London to Streatham in a state not to be described, nor endured;--but by me:--& being carried to my Chamber the Instant I got home, miscarried in the utmost Agony before they could get me into Bed, after fainting five times.

Thrale concluded this passage with an objective reading of her actual relationship with Henry, and a firm conviction of his lack of basic human compassion:

Now tho' Mr. Thrale's heart never much run over with Tenderness towards me God knows—yet common Humanity might have had a place

here; no Feelings however, no Shame could induce him to put himself in a hurry!²⁸²

Ill and frightened by her husband's "inhumanity," Thrale must have felt more isolated in her marriage than ever before. Unable to turn to her husband for solace, Thrale tried again to read Johnson as an epistolary confidant and intimate friend. Surely her pain was emotional as well as physical when she wrote to Johnson on August 17, 1779: "With a trembling hand do I acknowledge your last kind letter which I received in my Bed;--and till today have not been able to sit up long enough to thank you for it--Ah Dear Sir how very, very Ill I have been!" She continued, tenderly, "though I have lost the little Companion entrusted to my Care, though I have lost my Strength, my Appetite &c., you have not lost your Friend."²⁸³ As disappointed as she had been in her relationship with Johnson, she seemed sure of her friendship for him, but remained unsure of his friendship for her. Furthermore, certainly included in "&c." was the loss she had suffered when she realized that she would have no true kindness or consideration from her husband.

From her past experience as a reader of Johnson, Thrale knew that he did not want to hear her complain about Henry. Thus, instead of writing about the estrangement she felt in her marriage to Henry and from her role as a mother, as she had done in the past, she wrote instead to Johnson in the social role of Henry's "concerned wife:" "Poor Mr. Thrale looks like Death again, & Dr. Bromfield was obliged to repeat some Specifics to prevent further Mischief, but this I have told no Creature--not his Sister--& my master himself either has forgotten it, or thinks I don't know." Furthermore, at first, Thrale attempted to have

²⁸² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 401.

²⁸³ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman, 301.

Johnson identify with her feelings by writing to him as a "comrade-in-arms":

See how we all stand as in a Battle, somebody dropping at every Moment, yet each hoping to escape that Stroke so likely to destroy his Neighbour! for my own part I lately fancied my Campaign quite over I shall receive my Summons with a trembling yet strong Hope of unconcluding Happiness . . . believe me . . . whatever of good I wish for myself, I wish with equal Earnestness for You, as I am with the purest and most perfect Friendship Your ever Faithful & Obedient Servant H: L: T.²⁸⁴

But bereft as she was, Thrale did not continue to try to gain Johnson's sympathy. Indeed, she seems to have stopped writing to Johnson altogether. On October 8, 1779, Johnson wrote to her: "I begin to be frightened at your omission to write, do not torment me any longer, but let me know where You are, how you got thither, how you live there and every thing else, that one friend loves to know of another." Johnson's distress must have been extreme because he even attempted to give Thrale some encouragement by writing a one-sentence paragraph with a "messianic" tone: "I will show you the way."²⁸⁵

However, the "way" that Johnson projected for their relationship in this letter was becoming increasingly at odds with the "way" Thrale wanted to go. In any case, at age thirty-eight, Thrale no longer needed Johnson to show her "the way." Indeed, she marveled in Thraliana for December 1779: "How many Times has this great, this formidable Doctor Johnson kissed my hand, ay & my foot too upon his knees!"²⁸⁶ But now, as an informed reader of Johnson, Thrale was aware that any attraction that

²⁸⁴ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 301-302.

²⁸⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 186.

she held for him did not mean that he would behave toward her as the kind of friend she wanted him to be. This is evident immediately following her observation on his fondness for her when Thrale wrote: "Strange Connections there are in this odd World! his with me is mere Interest tho . . ." that is, self-interest. Indeed, Thrale underlined the word "Interest" and annotated this passage writing that Johnson's real "interest" in her continued, in part, because she was in possession of his secret fear that he would succumb to madness. This is clear when Thrale wrote: "a dreadful & little suspected Reason for ours [for Thrale's and Johnson's 'connection'] God knows—but the Fetters & Padlocks will tell Posterity the Truth."²⁸⁷

Although she was seeing with greater clarity the limitations of Johnson's friendship for her, Thrale did not stop loving Johnson. Thus she continued to vacillate in her criticism and praise of Johnson, in both her private writing about him and in her social writing, or her letters, to him. Although she wrote that Johnson was her friend only out of "interest" rather than true friendship, on January 12, 1780, she observed privately: "Nobody loves me as Johnson does at last—but then nobody has as much Soul to love one with."

At this time, Thrale's horizon of expectations regarding Johnson's friendship and how he read her continued to contract. By 1780, she had become more assured in her roles as a wife, mother and businesswoman. Moreover, Thrale now entertained not just male intellectuals and writers, but also women scholars, writers, and wits, some of whom were members of the "Bluestocking Circle," such as Hannah More, Elizabeth Carter, Hester Chapone, and Elizabeth Montagu. Her dearest friend at

²⁸⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 415

²⁸⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 415, n.4.

this time was the novelist Frances Burney (1752-1840), who from 1779 was often in residence at Streatham. From 1780, Thrale also exhibits increasing confidence as a writer, critic, and intellectual in her writing to and about Johnson.

As Thrale explored her new private and social identities, Johnson became increasingly insecure about her friendship for him. He responded jealously to the attention Thrale lavished on her new friends. On April 6, 1780, he wrote to her, "Do not let new friends supplant the old," and immediately after this he added, "they who first distinguished you have the best claim to your attention." Johnson continued, "those who flock about you now take your excellence upon credit, and may hope to gain upon the world by your countenance."²⁸⁸ This train of thought continued: on April 11, Johnson wrote to Thrale that "perhaps" she would be "made too proud to heed" him when he was next at Streatham and reminded her "as I have often told you, it will not be easy for you to find such another."²⁸⁹ Moreover, with a curious blend of humor and seriousness, Johnson criticized Thrale for writing to him "about nothing":

Now you think yourself the first Writer in the world for a letter about nothing. Can you write such a letter as this? So miscellaneous, with such noble disdain of regularity, like Shakespears works, such graceful negligence of transition like the ancient enthusiasts. The pure voice of nature and of Friendship.²⁹⁰

In addition to fearing the change in her private and social identities, Johnson read Thrale's fledgling forays into the public sphere

²⁸⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 228.

²⁸⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 235-6.

²⁹⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 237.

restrictively. In April 1780, Thrale wrote proudly to Johnson about having been recognized as a writer in public. She had attended a public reading of her poem, "The Three Warnings." But Johnson responded to her news in a way that must have been anti-climatic for Thrale: "Pray of what wonders do you tell me?" he wrote to her in what she must have regarded as a condescending tone; "You make verses, and they are read in publick, and I know nothing about them."²⁹¹ Thrale's irritation at Johnson's light banter is evident when she wrote to Johnson self-denigatorily on April 20: "The Verses that were publickly read was only The Old Tale of the three Warnings: a Man who gave publick Lectures upon Reading gave that as one of the Specimens. No Breach of Confidence there, except in suffering any body to tell on't except myself."²⁹²

Rather than encouraging Thrale to enter the public sphere as a writer, Johnson wrote enthusiastically to her about playing a subservient public role as a campaigner for her husband in the upcoming general parliamentary election to be held in September 1780. When rumors circulated that Henry Thrale was no longer fit to hold office (the effects of two strokes had exacted both a physical and intellectual toll on him), Johnson wrote to advise Thrale to leave Bath and go to London and appear before her husband's constituents to "fix your friends" and to "frighten your enemies." However, Thrale feared that Henry was not healthy enough to campaign again. She dutifully circulated a letter to quash rumors that her husband was too ill to serve as a Member of Parliament for Southwark, but she would not campaign for him. She wrote to Johnson on April 28 of her husband's voracious and life-threatening appetite (Henry could not refrain from eating and drinking

²⁹¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 240.

²⁹² Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman III: 346-7.

excessively and had become dangerously obese for a man who had already suffered two strokes):

He [Henry Thrale] looks well enough, but I have no notion of health for a man whose mouth cannot be sewed up—Burney and I and Queeney teize him every meal he eats, and Mrs. Montague is quite serious with him; but what can one do? he will eat I think, and if he does eat I know he will not live. It makes me very unhappy, but I must bear it.²⁹³

On May 3, 1780, she wrote to Johnson from Bath about her husband's listless and morose behavior, "here's not an Apothecary's Prentice in this Town, but what can see that he's [Henry is] knockt down like a Cock at Shrove."²⁹⁴ But Johnson replied by reprimanding Thrale for not wanting to return to London to campaign for her husband and attributing her decision solely to her dislike of living near the brewery at the Thrale house on Deadman's Place in Southwark. Indeed, Johnson ignored that Thrale had legitimate reasons for not returning to London, the primary one she had already written to him about: her concern for her husband's ill health. She must also have felt that Johnson was once again thinking only of Henry Thrale. Johnson seemed to have completely forgotten, or had decided to ignore, or had regarded as inconsequential, her previous statements to him about the coldness and isolation she felt in her marriage to Henry Thrale. If Johnson had considered her complaints about Henry seriously, perhaps Johnson would have realized: 1) that she probably felt, with good reason, that she had simply done enough for her husband over the years to help him to get elected as M.P. for Southwark; or 2) that she took into consideration Henry's perilous

²⁹³ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 349-350.

health and thought it would be best if her husband did not run for office again; or, finally, 3) that she hesitated to help her husband on this occasion because she feared that she would receive only Henry Thrale's indifference or criticism for her trouble—as she had earlier when she had offered to sell the remaining woods of her small Welsh estate the second time Henry brought the brewery close to financial ruin.²⁹⁵

Whatever the case, on May 4, 1780, stung by Johnson's apparent disregard for the complexity of her predicament, Thrale wrote to him: "The Borough people want my Master among them, but he must not come: Southwark is a Scene of Riot and Bustle and it would soon petrify him even to see & hear the Confusion, if he took no active part in it." To this she added directly and angrily: "Now if you think I say this to keep away from my own house, you wrong me, & wrong me cruelly: Mr. Thrale is but too willing to get me a fine House in the finest part of the Town, but he is not safe from another Apoplexy, he is not indeed, his Mind if it does not actually wander is enough disposed to do so."²⁹⁶ As if to offset her vehemence on this point, Thrale affectionately closed this letter of May 4: "I hope you live on . . . so as to benefit your Health & delight your Friends. You have none however that love & honour you as does Your poor Mistress." However, still desiring the sympathy that she clearly needed from Johnson as her friend, but which she was not receiving from him during yet another crisis in her life, she continued, "--Ah Sir! but I am very lowspirited for all I flash away

²⁹⁴ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 352.

²⁹⁵ Eventually Thrale's beloved Welsh wood, diminished by thieves and a corrupt tenant, was sold for what money it could provide the Thrales.

²⁹⁶ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 353.

so"²⁹⁷ For this time, not only was Johnson asking Thrale to sacrifice herself for her husband, but he was also doing so with seemingly little regard for her assessment of the situation.

Rather than respecting Thrale's decision, Johnson quickly took a different tack to get her to come to London in place of her husband: he appealed to her as a businesswoman. In other words, Johnson chose to recognize and praise her skills in business only when it benefited Henry. Johnson wrote to Thrale on May 7, 1780 that it would be a prudent financial move if she were in London to oversee how the Thrale money was spent for Henry's re-election campaign:

Mr. Perkins, [the Chief Clerk at the Thrale brewery] has just been with me, and has talked much talk, of which the result is, that he thinks your presence necessary for a few days. I have not the same fulness of conviction; but your appearance would certainly operate in your favour, and you will judge better what measures of diligence and of expence are necessary. Money, Mr. P--- says, must be spent; and is right in wishing that you be made able to judge how far it is spent properly.²⁹⁸

Johnson also added in this letter that he wished for Thrale to come to London "perhaps" from "some desire that I have of seeing you." However, financial and personal justifications were put aside again a day later when Johnson wrote again, this time much more urgently, to press her now to come to London immediately to campaign for her husband:

My opinion is that You should come for a week, and show yourself, and talk in high terms, for it will certainly be propagated with

²⁹⁷ Thrale used the word "flash" for "wit." Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 353.

²⁹⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 251.

great diligence that you despair and desist, and to those that declare the contrary, it will be answered why then do they not appear? To this no reply can be made that will keep your Friends in countenance. A little bustle, and a little ostentation will put a stop to clamours, and whispers, and suspicions of your friends, and calumnies of your opponents.

Indeed, Johnson wrote to Thrale about the need for her to step beyond her private and social spheres and "be publick," but not as a writer and not for her own sake, but for the welfare of her husband: "Be brisk, and be splendid, and be publick," Johnson advised her. He added to this social pressure: "Your friends solícite [sic] you to come, if you do not come, you make them less your friends by disregarding their advice. Nobody will persist long in helping those that will do nothing for themselves." Then he warned her of social ostracism: "If You are proud, they can be sullen." Finally, Johnson wrote in almost a command to Thrale: "Such is the call for your presence; what is there to withhold you. I see no pretence for hesitation."²⁹⁹ Keeping up the pressure the next day, Johnson wrote to Thrale even more forcefully:

the more I reflect, and the more I hear, the more I am convinced of the necessity of your presence. Your adversaries will be for ever saying, that you despair success, or disdain to obtain it by the usual solícitation. Either of these suppositions generally received ruins your interest, and your appearance confutes both. . . . While you stay away your friends have no answer to give.³⁰⁰

This last sentence implies that Johnson's greatest fear was that he would look worse, by association, if the Thrales did not campaign.

²⁹⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 253.

Thrale returned to London to campaign for her husband from May 9 to May 19, 1780, and Johnson lived with her at the Thrale residence in Southwark during this time. On May 19, Johnson wrote playfully to Thrale's eldest daughter Hester Maria of how he had risen early to see her mother off for her return to Bath: "I am up first in the house; though my Mistress threatened last night how she would go away this morning without being seen or heard, yet I shall catch her."³⁰¹ But Thrale was not feeling as jovial as Johnson was about having campaigned for Henry Thrale. Indeed, she wrote in private about her decision to return to London for the campaign: "I am come from Bath to canvass the Borough for my Husband, he will be elected and not pleased, I shall be fatigued and never thanked." To her credit, however, she added most conscientiously, "-no matter-it is fit he who is ill should rest, & fit that I who am well should work."³⁰² Thrale accepted the situation and plunged into the exhausting work of campaigning for her husband. On the day she was to leave London, she wrote privately, "I came from Bath post in 14 hours & have worked hard at Electioneering 10 Days."³⁰³ Johnson wrote to Hester Maria of how her mother campaigned frenetically: "She has been very busy, and has run about the Borough like a Tigress seizing upon every thing that she found in her way."³⁰⁴ Thrale wrote privately, "I shewed my Consequence, frightened my Antagonists, got Mr. Thrale many Promises, & shall return to Bath on Fryday 19: May 1780." Making the best of a difficult situation, she continued optimistically, "if I can keep up my Master's Spirits, & detain him at a Distance from this noisy

³⁰⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 253-4.

³⁰¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 256.

³⁰² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 436.

³⁰³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 436. n.2.

³⁰⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 256.

place, he may do well yet; and enjoy his seat in Parliament for ought I know these next seven Years."³⁰⁵

But Thrale paid a price for her zealous campaigning for her husband. She wrote to Johnson from Bath that the campaign had exhausted her and made her very ill: "I was quite ill when I wrote to you last" In addition, although in this same letter she wrote to Johnson, "My Master is chearful from the Hopes of Success in his Borough, & I am more & more perswaded that my Journey was right, by seeing him so much happier since he thought there was less Danger of failing in his Election," she made sure to remind Johnson once more of "the fatigue" that she "had undergone" during the campaign, and how it had, as she described it, "really lower[ed] my Spirits & Health"³⁰⁶ Indeed, she became so depressed at times, during and after the campaign, that she began to fear that she would die, or, as she put it in Thraliana, that her own "Campaign" would soon come to an end.³⁰⁷

But despite all of her worries over her own and her husband's health, and over Johnson's inconsistent friendship for her, Thrale continued to pursue her growing identity as a writer. She composed "Three Dialogues on the Death of Hester Lynch Thrale," inspired by Jonathan Swift's poem, "On the Death of Dr. Swift." In addition, she began writing verse characters for the portraits by Joshua Reynolds of her prominent friends that adorned the walls of the library at Streatham: "I have it in my Head," she wrote in Thraliana, "to write the Characters of all the People whose Pictures are putting up in our

³⁰⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 436.

³⁰⁶ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 360.

³⁰⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston, I: 444.

Library at Streatham, but I will not write them out until they are complete."³⁰⁸

Thrale also wrote privately at this time that Johnson was among the "men [she] loved best in the world."³⁰⁹ However, by 1780 it is clear that although she sought and greatly appreciated Johnson's help and advice, she would no longer accept his criticism and condescension without question. Shortly after her return to Bath, she became infuriated at Johnson for belittling her campaign efforts for her husband, the very efforts he had encouraged her to make and which she had performed despite her better judgment. Thrale's letter to Johnson is lost, but she must have responded angrily to him because Johnson wrote on May 25, 1780: "You seem to suspect that I think you too earnest about the success of your solicitation; if I gave you any reason for that suspicion it was without intention." Although Johnson wrote to apologize to her, Thrale must have noticed how he also continued to subsume her life to her husband's, especially when in the same letter Johnson wrote: "Keep Mr. Thrale well, and make him keep himself well, and put all other care out of your dear head." To make matters worse, Johnson then suggested that she should again go to London to campaign for her husband: "It will, I fancy, be necessary for you to come up once again a[t] least, to fix your friends, and terrify your enemies."³¹⁰ But this time she refused to read herself as Johnson read her. Although she did return to London and did see Johnson briefly while she was there, her primary reason for going was to inspect the brewery and to overlook improvements being made at Streatham, not to campaign again for her husband as Johnson insinuated.

³⁰⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 445.

³⁰⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 444 n.4.

In addition to rejecting Johnson's reading of her private, social and public lives as the dutiful and long-suffering wife, Thrale was gaining greater confidence as an intellectual. This is clear on July 14, 1780, when she described herself in Thraliana as sharing a "community of ideas" with Johnson. She wrote of how the "mutual regard" she and Johnson shared should never end because it was "founded on the truest Principles of Religion, Virtue, & Community of Ideas." Immediately after writing this, she chastised herself, "—saucy Soul! Community of Ideas with Doctor Johnson." But then, as if realizing that she had long been a member of Johnson's community of ideas, she wrote that she had "fastened" many of Johnson's "own Notions so on my Mind before this Time, that I am not sure whether they grew there originally or no." Upon having this insight, Thrale confidently exclaimed, "Why not?" But perhaps fearing that she was being too prideful, she quickly added, "of this I am sure, that they [Johnson's ideas] are the best & wisest Notions I possess; & that I love the Author of them with a firm Affection."³¹¹

When Thrale wrote that she shared a "community of ideas" with Johnson, she did not mean that her ideas always agreed with his. In particular, she disagreed with Johnson about what one should "put into" one's letters. She wrote privately that Johnson's warning not to "put herself" into her letters to him was a "vain Exhortation!" adding that, "I cannot live without Confidence if he can; and am much more solicitous to think no harm, than to conceal the Thoughts I permit."³¹² Indeed, she criticized Johnson further: "This Letter writing Business is the only narrow Passage in Johnson's Heart I think--& perhaps 'tis only my

³¹⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 262-3.

³¹¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 445.

Imprudence to think it such—but in this respect we have no Community of Ideas." Thrale even used Johnson's own words and beliefs to prove her point:

tis surely sufficient in the Sight of God if one resolves to comply with no criminal desires: those merely silly, one may indulge! at one's peril, and I will indulge them—there are vexations enough in this World without making voluntary ones: & as I have often heard Johnson say—'Scruples make many People miserable, & seldom make any People good.'³¹³

Perhaps the most significant proof of her increasing intellectual and emotional independence in her friendship with Johnson was that Thrale acknowledged privately in Thraliana that she had "Temptations" to "act contrary" to Johnson's opinion: "though my Mind goes with his perhaps, yet my Temptations to act contrary to it are so strong--& one must be happy in some things."³¹⁴ Her increasing confidence in herself extended to her role as a critic of Johnson's writing as well. On July 14, 1780, she wrote of Johnson's Lives of the Poets:

Johnson's newly written Lives are delightful, but he is too hard on Prior's Alma. . . . [He] should have been more sparing of Praise to the Fair Penitent I think, because the Characters are from Massinger—I care not how much good is said of the Language; but Old Phil: has the Merit of that Contrast, more happy perhaps than any on our Stage, of the Gay Rake, and the virtuous dependent Gentleman.—I used to say I would be buried by old Massinger when I lived in St. Saviour's Southwark.³¹⁵

³¹² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 445.

³¹³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 445-46.

³¹⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 446.

³¹⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 448.

As Thrale's horizon of expectations for her relationship with Johnson narrowed and crystallized, her own expectations for herself grew. Since Johnson could not be the emotional and intellectual soulmate she craved, she became willing to look elsewhere for that support.

6.

**Thrale's Discovery of a New "Community of Ideas" in a New Receptive
Reader, Gabriel Piozzi.**

Thrale's failure to find intimacy and trust in her relationship with Johnson must only have intensified the emotional isolation she felt in her marriage. Moreover, the failure of the two most important men in her life, Henry Thrale and Johnson, to respond positively to her new ways of reading herself privately, socially and publicly must have made Thrale eager to find a more receptive reader, one with whom she could fully live in her new identities as a woman as well as a writer and thinker.³¹⁶ Thrale found such a reader in the Italian singer, musician, composer, and teacher Gabriel Piozzi. Her relationship with Piozzi began inauspiciously: she had comically mimicked the tenor behind his back when Piozzi had sung at Streatham in December 1779. However, in July 1780, while at Brighton, Thrale wrote privately: "I have picked up Piozzi here, the great Italian Singer; he shall teach Hester."³¹⁷ And by August 8, Thrale wrote privately in Thraliana: "Piozzi is become a prodigious Favourite with me." That she was beginning to fall in love with him became evident very quickly as she continued:

. . . he is so intelligent a Creature, so discerning, one can't help wishing for his good Opinion: his Singing surpasses every body's for Taste, Tenderness, and true Elegance; his Hand on the Forte Piano too is so soft, so sweet, so delicate, the very Tone

³¹⁶ Thrale had written in Thraliana as early as December 1777 that in her marriage, "As My Peace has never been disturbed by the soft Passion," or love, "so it seldom comes in my head to talk of it" (181).

³¹⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 448.

goes to one's heart I think; and fills the Mind with Emotions one would not be without, though inconvenient enough sometimes.³¹⁸

Moreover, Thrale had found a reader in Piozzi who was more readily pleased with her identities as a writer and scholar than Henry Thrale or Johnson had ever been. Instead of the indifference of her husband to her intellect, or the student/mentor relationship she had with Johnson, Thrale saw Piozzi as her intellectual equal. In fact, following the passage cited above, she copied into Thraliana verses that Piozzi had sung to her, which, she wrote, she had "instantly translated . . . for him" and had made him sing in English thus "all'Improviso":

'For Love—I can't abide it,
The treacherous Rogue I know;
Distrust!--I never tried it
Whether t'would sting or no:
For Flavia many Sighs are, Sent up by sad Despair:
And yet poor Simple I Sir
Am hasting to the Snare'³¹⁹

As the summer of 1780 progressed, Thrale increasingly involved herself in Piozzi's life, and Piozzi graciously and gratefully accepted her help with his endeavors as a singer, composer, and teacher. Thrale wrote privately: "Lady Shelley & I shall get him a pretty little Benefit, & he will have ten Guineas from me beside, for teaching Hester to sing: his Journey to Brighton will be a lucky one, he has lost some of his Voice by relaxation—the Sea will restore it."³²⁰ Thrale had with Piozzi a respectful meeting of minds to an extent far beyond that which she had experienced with her husband or with Johnson. She also wrote

³¹⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 452.
³¹⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 452.

affectionately and proudly of Piozzi: "He wants nothing from us, he comes for his health he says; I see nothing ails the Man—but Pride."³²¹ Thrale did not hesitate to write of Piozzi socially, as well as privately. She wrote of him to a friend, Mrs. Lambart:

Piozzi the famous singer comes here every Morning [to a bookstore in Brighton] and plays on a Publick Instrument which stands ready: his Taste is so exquisite, his Manner so fine we have never done adoring him; and I have secured his Instructions for my eldest daughter while he stays here to bathe.³²²

The excitement that Thrale expressed privately and socially about her relationship with Piozzi was in sharp contrast to the caution and dismay with which she wrote privately about her husband on August 13, 1780: "My Master has got into most riotous Spirits somehow; he will go here & there, & has a hundred Projects in his Head, so gay, so wild; I wish no harm may come of on't."³²³ Likewise, socially, in another letter to Mrs. Lambart, Thrale expressed her alarm at how Henry Thrale's spirits were "so increased that he is all on Fire for a Journey to Italy."³²⁴ In comparison, Piozzi was both a relief and a comfort to her. In this same letter, she wrote, "I am glad to see Piozzi coming towards us that his Voice may dissipate the Cloud of Care which gathers round me at this Moment."

Thrale seemed now to look to Piozzi for the comfort, attention, and reassurance that she had learned not to expect from her husband and

³²⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 452.

³²¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 452, n.2.

³²² Clifford, Piozzi 187.

³²³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 453.

³²⁴ Clifford, Piozzi 187.

Johnson.³²⁵ Certainly she must have felt that Johnson continued to read her narrowly when, writing from Lichfield, he interpreted her letters simply as an "inexhaustible" stream of "sentiment." For, as we have seen, Thrale's letters to Johnson were much more than this, especially when she wrote in response to his personal problems or wrote about her own. Furthermore, she must have been stunned when Johnson responded in part to her worries about her husband's sudden and frenetic plans to go to Italy by writing, "I hope you have no design of stealing away to Italy before the election nor of leaving me behind you."³²⁶ Johnson's implication that she would consider putting a trip to Italy ahead of the election or Johnson's feelings seems to be condescension on his part.

Whether she was angry at or had been hurt by Johnson, or was worried about her husband's health, or was excited and disturbed by her

³²⁵ The contrast between Piozzi's and Johnson's reactions to Thrale's fears that her husband would die could not have been more sharply drawn for Thrale. She wrote privately of how on one occasion when she was feeling fearful that her husband would die, she depended upon Piozzi for sympathy:

When I came home to dress—Piozzi—who was always admitted to the Toilette . . . sate in the next Room teaching Hester to sing . . . I gave him the Money I had collected for his Benefit 35 pounds I remember . . . and I burst out o'crying & said I was sure I should not go to it: the Man was shocked, & wondered what I meant; 'Nay,'—says I—'tis mere lowness of Spirits, for Mr. Thrale is well now, & gone out in his Carriage to spit Cards,' as I call'd it Just then came a Letter from Dr. Pepys, insisting to speak with me in the Afternoon; & tho' there was nothing very particular in the Letter considering our Intimacy—I burst out o'crying again, read the Letter to Piozzi who could not understand it, & threw myself into an Agony, saying I was sure Mr. Thrale would dye. The tenderhearted Italian was affected, bid me not despair so, but recollect some precepts he had heard Dr. Johnson give me one Day; He then turn'd to me with a good deal of Expression his Manner, rather too much—it affected me—and sung *Rasserena il tuo bel Ciglio &c &c*"

Thrale annotated this passage, "'I suppose' (says Mrs. Byron who saw & heard him), 'that you Know that Man is in Love with You.' 'I am,' replied I, 'too miserable to care who is in Love with me.' She remembers it" (*Thraliana*, 488).

³²⁶ Johnson, *Letters*, ed. Redford III: 299.

new feelings for Piozzi, or it was a combination of all of these, Thrale wrote less frequently to Johnson in the summer of 1780. He complained to her from Lichfield in June: "If we cannot live together let us hear, when I have no letter from Brighthelmston, think how I fret, and write oftener." Johnson continued by reminding her, "you write to this body and t' other body, and nobody loves you like, Your humble Servant, Sam. Johnson."³²⁷ On August 18, 1780, Johnson wrote from Ashbourne in an attempt to have her both write to and pity him:

You write of late very seldom. I wish You would write upon subjects, any thing to keep alive. You have your Beaux, and your flatterers, and here am poor I forced to flatter myself, and any good of myself I am not very easy to believe, so that I really live but a sorry life.³²⁸

After Henry Thrale suffered yet another stroke in September 1780, Johnson closed a long letter of advice to her regarding her husband's health and added forlornly to this: "I will not tell you, nor Master, nor Queeney how I long to be among You."³²⁹ In another letter he wrote beseechingly, "I wish you or Queeney would write to me every post while the danger lasts," and he promised her once again, "I will come if I can do any good, or prevent any evil." Then he redeclared his love for her: "I tell you, nobody loves you so well." But Johnson's love for Thrale seemed to be based on the premise that she would not change. Quoting from Abraham Cowley's poem, "Inconstancy," Johnson wrote to Thrale in the same letter, "never think of changing like the moon, being constant only in your inconstancy."³³⁰

³²⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 300.

³²⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 301.

³²⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 306-7.

³³⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 308.

But what Johnson saw negatively as her "inconstancy" was actually Thrale's response to him as a more informed, experienced, and skillful reader. Moreover, as she continued to view herself in new ways, she thought and wrote in new ways. Certainly Thrale continued to view Johnson's attentions to her as lacking both sincerity and emotional depth. On October 5, 1780, she wrote privately that her husband's last election campaign had "hurt" her "Health radically & seriously." Then she wrote angrily about Johnson in private:

I will however say nothing about it . . . Mr. Johnson, who thinks no body poor till they want a dinner, or sick till they want breath, would only suppose I was calling for Attention, & shewing Consequence by bringing Physicians about me.³³¹

In addition, in her private writing, she disagreed with Johnson as a literary critic regarding the appropriateness of reading the "foul copy" of "Pope's Homer": "Johnson says 'tis pleasant to see the progress of such a Mind': true"; however, she quoted from Pope's "Rape of the Lock" to assert that such a literary activity was "a malicious Pleasure, Such as Men feel when they watch a Woman at her Toilet to see 'by Degrees a purer Blush arise. &c.'"³³²

On December 29, 1780, Thrale also criticized Johnson on a personal level in Thraliana for despising scruples in others, while being controlled by them himself, often to the detriment of himself and others: "Mr. Johnson has such an Aversion to the Liberties taken by sick People with their surrounding Friends that it has greatly blunted his Compassion." Furthermore, she criticized Johnson for his lack of empathy or sympathy for the problems of others. She wrote that Johnson

³³¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 459.

³³² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 466.

"seems to have a steady Resolution not to believe any thing dismal or shocking . . . he seldom thinks anyone sick, [and] never has a notion they will die."³³³ She called Johnson's adherence to such dogmatic beliefs another "mode" of his "making Enemies" and wrote further: "What Sport is there in flinging People's Opinions back upon them so? Mr. Sharp the Surgeon was quite shocked today at Dr. Johnson's persisting in the Falsehood of a Calamity [a hurricane in Barbados] that shocked every one else."³³⁴

Thrale's observations of Johnson, though harsh, are understandable. After her husband's second stroke, Thrale had written to Johnson about her fear that her husband would soon die. She was clearly looking for emotional support. But Johnson responded to her fears by quoting a line from Jonathan Swift's poem, "On the Death of Dr. Swift": "Some dire Misfortune to portend/No enemy can match a friend."³³⁵ Stunned, hurt, and angry at Johnson's insinuation, Thrale responded privately to Johnson's charge, "surely, surely I cannot be charged with wishing his [Henry's] Death, whose happiness has been my constant Care for 17 years together." To her credit, Thrale took this comment as an opportunity to examine her conscience and to question whether Johnson's charge was just. She wrote a brief defense of herself in Thraliana as a "true & humble Wife" to Henry Thrale and concluded it, understandably with anger and disbelief, "& yet, Mr. Johnson thinks—I see he does—that I wish my Husbands death, only because I say he will die." Thrale must have felt hurt and been appalled by Johnson's negative reading of her in this instance. As a result, she began seriously to question the quality and the logic of Johnson's thinking:

³³³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 468.

³³⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 468.

If I was to tell Mr. Johnson that Jersey was taken by the French he would not believe me, if I was to tell him I saw my Mother or my Grandmother last Night he would believe . . . Surely the taking Jersey is more probable than the reappearance of a dead Friend.³³⁶

Thrale's private disappointment with Johnson was so intense that it intruded upon her social and semi-public writing on Johnson. Significantly, she could not keep her private disappointment with him out of the verse character she wrote of him to accompany his portrait in the library at Streatham. This verse character begins on a predominantly laudatory note. She begins by equating Johnson with Ancient Greek heroes: "Gigantick in Knowledge, in Virtue, in Strength, / Our Company closes with Johnson at length; / So the Greeks from the Cavern of Polypheme past, / When wisest and greatest, Ulysses came last." However, as she continues, Thrale includes the disagreeable and the crude aspects of Johnson's intellect and his social and public demeanor: "To his Comrades contemptuous, we see him look down, / On their Wit & their Worth with a general Frown: / While from Science proud Tree the rich Fruit he receives, / Who could shake the whole Trunk, while they turn'd a few leaves." Then, becoming more specific, Thrale directly depicts the unpleasantness involved with, or the price one pays for, learning from Johnson:

The inflammable Temper—the positive Tongue,
Too conscious of right for endurance of Wrong;
We suffer from Johnson—contented to find,
That some notice we gain from so noble a Mind;

³³⁵ Swift, On the Death of . . . II. 119-20.

³³⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 468-9.

And pardon our hurts, since so often we've found,
The Balm of Instruction pour'd into the Wound ³³⁷

Furthermore, despite her continued admiration for Johnson as a writer, moralist, and philosopher, by 1781 Thrale began to disparage what she used to praise in Johnson's temperament. With respect to the trip to Italy that her severely ill husband was planning in great haste, Thrale wrote privately about how oblivious Johnson was likely to be about the possibility of Henry's demise during the trip:

& who must go with us on this Expedition? Mr. Johnson! he will indeed be the only happy Person of the party: he values nothing under heaven but his own Mind, which is a Spark from Heaven; & that will be invigorated by the addition of new Ideas—if Mr. Thrale dies on the Road, Johnson will console himself by learning how it is to travel with a Corpse--& after all, such Reasoning is the true Philosophy—one's heart is a mere incumbrance—Would I could leave mine behind. ³³⁸

She was so worried about how to manage Johnson on this trip that she made plans to ask her daughter's former language tutor, Giuseppe Baretti, a man whom she described privately as "the man in the World I think whom I most abhor, and who hates, & professes to hate me the most," to accompany them because she believed "there is no Man who . . . can manage so well with Johnson."³³⁹ But the trip to Italy ended before it began; Henry Thrale died at Streatham on April 4, 1781.

Only days after Henry's death, Thrale must have felt disbelief and resentment at the past, present, and future images of her that Johnson

³³⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 476.
³³⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 486.
³³⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 486.

now presented to her. For although she had written often to Johnson of her multiple problems with her husband in the past, Johnson wrote to her now expressing his belief that Henry had given her "happiness in marriage to a degree of which without personal knowledge, I should have thought the description fabulous."³⁴⁰ Moreover, Johnson had the temerity to admonish Thrale regarding how she should view her present situation. On April 9, 1781, he wrote:

Do not represent life as darker than it is. Your loss has been very great, but You (sic) retain more than almost any other can hope to possess. You are high in the opinion of mankind; You (sic) have children from whom much pleasure may be expected, and that you will find many friends You have no reason to doubt.³⁴¹

Furthermore, even after Henry's death, Johnson still inconsiderately placed the importance of his friendship with Henry above his friendship for her. In the same letter, Johnson wrote about Henry Thrale: "I am afraid of thinking of what I have lost. I never had such a friend before," and importuned the widow of five days, "Let me have your prayers." It must have seemed to Thrale that Johnson was now focusing on her primarily as the one who should carry on the work of his late friend, Henry Thrale. Furthermore, in the same letter of April 9, Johnson praised her for the "prudence and resolution" of her "design to return so soon to your business," meaning her husband's business at the brewery. Johnson referred to this as Thrale's "duty" to her husband as well as to her daughters, and he felt that her adherence to "duty" deserved "great praise."

³⁴⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 330.

³⁴¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 330.

However, Johnson now also acknowledged Thrale's new public "civil character": "You are in your civil character a man. You may sue and be sued."³⁴² But Thrale must have found it a rather backhanded compliment when Johnson wrote to her regarding the brewery: "If you apply to business perhaps half the mind which You have exercised upon knowledge and elegance, you will need little help." Johnson treated her as if she had never before assumed her husband's role in managing the brewery and in securing loans to guarantee its future existence.³⁴³

Thus, instead of drawing Thrale and Johnson closer together, Henry Thrale's death seemed only to accelerate the growing distance between them, especially since both Thrale and Johnson thought of themselves as beginning a "new life" after Henry's death. On April 11, 1781, Johnson wrote to Thrale: "I feel myself like a man beginning a new course of life. I had interwoven myself with my dear Friend."³⁴⁴ Likewise, after her husband's death, Thrale wrote of her time spent in Brighton: "There I had Time to collect my scattered Thoughts, to revise my past Life, & resolve upon a new one."³⁴⁵

She was now a forty-one-year-old widow, who had five daughters and a shrinking income. More importantly, Thrale had different ideas than Johnson did about how she should live privately, socially, and publicly in the future. James Clifford writes of the period from June 1781 to September 1784 that Thrale, in having been "released from bondage to a sick, morose husband and to an unfashionable business," was "unable

³⁴² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 332-3.

³⁴³ Quoting from The Lawes Respecting Women (1977), Bruce Redford informs us that as a wife Hester Thrale had been "technically 'in potestate viri,' and therefore disabled to make any bargain or contract, without her husband's 'consent or privity.'" As a widow she was a 'feme sole, an independent legal agent' (117).

³⁴⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 333-4.

³⁴⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 487.

alone to cope with practical everyday problems." He also depicted Thrale as "torn between the lure of new experiences and respect for old conventions," and immediately followed this observation with: she was "tossed like a broken reed by every adverse wind." Clifford concluded that the "story of [Henry] Thrale's widow was a tragicomedy of frustration and exasperation."³⁴⁶

But, as we have seen, Thrale was not the kind of woman who was "unable alone to cope with practical everyday problems," or who would be "tossed like a broken reed by every adverse wind." The death of Henry provided Thrale with a real opportunity to fulfill her long-held wish: to live independently as a woman and as a writer, and to break with her past as the obedient daughter, dutiful wife and mother, and adoring admirer of Dr. Samuel Johnson. As a first step, Thrale refused to follow Johnson's advice to stay in the brewery business. Having been through near-bankruptcy of the brewery on two separate occasions, Thrale did not wish to continually expose herself and her children's money, as she wrote privately, to further "hazard."³⁴⁷ Ironically, Thrale found her "friend" Johnson to be the most obstinate of the four men who had been appointed legal guardians to Thrale's children and who, as coadjutors of Henry Thrale's will, could refuse any decision Thrale made regarding the brewery and the money that Henry had left to his daughters.³⁴⁸ When Thrale decided to sell the brewery, all of the coadjutors to Henry's will, except Johnson, agreed with her conclusion that this would be in the best interest of her and her daughters. She wrote in Thraliana for May 1781: "Mr. Scrase says 'tis Madness to try at

³⁴⁶ Clifford, Piozzi 203.

³⁴⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 492.

³⁴⁸ The other three men were Charles Scrase, John Cator and Jeremiah Crutcheley.

carrying such a Trade with only five Girls; so says Cator, so says Crutcheley. But Johnson, she recorded, "did wish my Continuance in Business."³⁴⁹ She recounted how Johnson tried to persuade her to stay in business despite the negative effect that running the brewery on a day-to-day basis would have on her social and public reputation.

Now, as an experienced and informed reader of Johnson, Thrale was able to write with some humor about the intensity with which Johnson tried to convince her to keep the brewery. When she tried to express the unsavoriness of continuing the business, for example, being "obliged . . . to go & court a dirty Goaler to suffer our Brewhouse to serve his Tap", she noted that "when I complained even with Tears to Mr. Johnson of the Indignity; 'Dearest Lady, says he, 'your Character is exalted by it; I tell you it advances in Heighth.' 'Yes,' replied I, 'it advances indeed, & rises from the Side Box to the upper Gallery.'"³⁵⁰ Clearly, Thrale must have felt that after Henry's death, Johnson considered his own interests over hers. Indeed, she wrote privately of how it had been "difficult" to "win" Johnson "from the dirty Delight of seeing his Name in a new Character flaming away at the bottom of Bonds & Leases."³⁵¹ Similarly, on May 1, 1781, she wrote that Johnson was "but too happy with his present Employment" overseeing accounts at the brewery. She then portrayed Johnson in an unflattering light, one quite different from the wise philosopher who warned in his writings against man's insatiable desire for wealth and power and who had written the poem "The Vanity of Human Wishes."³⁵² Thrale wrote that it was because of Johnson's masculine desire to avoid "mediocrity," and "partly" for

³⁴⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 491.
³⁵⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 493.
³⁵¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 492.

"worse" reasons (possibly Johnson's attraction to the power of wealth), that "dear Mr. Johnson [was] something unwilling . . . to give up a Trade by which in some Years 15 or 16000 pounds had undoubtedly been got, but by which in some Years it's Possessor had suffered Agonies of Terror, & totter'd twice upon the Verge of Bankruptcy."³⁵³ Thrale seems to be suggesting that Johnson almost wished her ill to satisfy his own desires.

When Thrale sold the brewery, after she had convinced Johnson that this was for the best, she described the having done so in Thraliana on May 17, 1781 as "the greatest Event" in her life. It certainly was an extremely important event in her quest for independence in both her life and her friendship with Johnson. Thrale wrote privately with confidence and a hard-won sense of independence about her decision: "Well! if thy own Conscience acquit—who shall condemn thee?"³⁵⁴ She added to this:

Few people will object to my Management, but Doctor Burney; he had set his heart on my Continuing in Business--I never knew why--but he thought it an exertion of Talents I believe & a proof of Superiority, Seward was urgent with me to quit, & the Attorney General, Wallace came over one Evening on purpose to perswade me. . . . Tis over now though, & I'll clear my Head of it, & all that belongs to it. I will go to Church, give God Thanks, receive the Sacrament, & forget the Frauds Follies & Inconveniences of a Commercial Life this day/ Whitsunday 3: June 1781.³⁵⁵

³⁵² Lee Morgan, Dr. Johnson's 'Own Dear Master': The Life of Henry Thrale (Boston: University of America Press, 1998): 5.

³⁵³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 499.

³⁵⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 498-499.

³⁵⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 500.

Thrale's confidence in managing the affairs of her own life and in persuading others to her point-of-view is clearly evident in an annotation that she made to the passage cited above:

The great Difficulty was in perswading my Coadjutors & Joint Executors to be all of my Mind at the first; but the retirement to Brighthelmston gave them time to do all they could do without me, & gave me time to feel my way to their Hearts when I should return to Streatham--like King William who lay by during all their Deliberations, & appeared in his own Cause at the critical Moment:--a conduct I always admired, but little expected an Opportunity of imitating. Johnson was hardest to gain over to my Intentions of quitting, but the small quantity of Cash, the immensity of the Capital, the Consciousness that the Risques we run were ours, the Profits--if Profits--were not to be ours--frighted & convinced him, while the united opinions of Scrase & Cator two Men whom he highly esteems--settled his Opinion to part with what had flattered his Imagination in the keeping most earnestly. Crutcheley--a tim'rous Character, was soon perswaded to a State whence Trouble & Hazard were excluded; Cator had no Heart of continuing a Business He did not understand, & Smith a ductile Minded Creature took no Interest in the Affair I think--so all ended happily, without quarrel or dispute; & I & my Executors are the dearest Friends alive--I much feared we should sadly disagree--but a little Management!--and a Woman to manage will always do, & as old Dr. Fitzpatrick used to say--You may rely on it.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 499.

With the sale of the brewery, Thrale consigned it and her old identity as a brewer's wife to her past, and she reveled in her new financial and intellectual freedom. She wrote privately:

The power of emptying one's head of a great Thing, and filling it with little ones to amuse Care, is no small Power; & I am proud of being able to write Italian Verses while I am bargaining for 150,000 pounds--& settling an Event of the highest Consequence to my own and my Children's Welfare. . . . My heart palpitates with hope & fear, my Head is bursting with Anxiety & Calculation; yet I can listen to a Singer, and translate Verses about a knife.³⁵⁷

The sale of the brewery also meant a return to a life for Thrale befitting her aristocratic lineage.³⁵⁸ When the sale of the brewery was completed in June 1781, she wrote in Thraliana:

Well! here have I with the Grace of God, and the Assistance of good Friends, compleated—I really think very happily—the greatest Event of my Life:--I have sold my Brewhouse to Barclay I have by this Bargain purchased Peace & a stable Fortune; Restoration to my original Rank in Life, and a Situation undisturbed by Commercial Jargon, unpolluted by Commercial Frauds; undisgraced by Commercial Connections. . . . I have secured the Improbability of being made Poor by the Flights of the Fairy Speculation.³⁵⁹

In addition to the sale of the brewery, Thrale's discovery of a new, sensitive, and respectful reader in Gabriel Piozzi (a man the same age as herself) would have a most important effect on how she viewed herself and the future of her friendship with Johnson. Surely, her

³⁵⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 494.

³⁵⁸ See page 11 n. 188 above.

decision to involve herself with Piozzi was the result of her reading herself anew in the private, social and public spheres of herself as a woman, a writer, and an intellectual. She now had a friend and confidant in Piozzi that she had long desired but had lacked in Johnson. In July 1781, when Piozzi was leaving for Italy to see his parents, Thrale wrote privately that she "insisted" that he spend his last day in England with her. She gave him a copy of Johnson's Rasselas, and he gave her "an Italian partenza full of tender expressions of devotion."³⁶⁰ Upon Piozzi's departure, Thrale wrote in Thraliana: "Dear Piozzi is gone to Italy . . . To France first"³⁶¹; and in contemporaneous letters to a friend, she worried that she was not receiving letters from him.³⁶² At the end of October 1781, Thrale wrote privately, "I am growing excessively uneasy about Piozzi, I have not heard from him so long."³⁶³ Soon after this, Thrale attempted to define the pain she felt in her new love for Piozzi by writing privately:

Concealed Fire burns very fatally 'Tis this Avarice of mental Enjoyment, this Hoarded Folly; which now & then so blazes out of a sudden under the Name of Love; & I think the Reason of the Furor being more violent among the Female Sex is chiefly because being less tolerated to declare their Passion, it preys upon the Mind till it bursts all Reserve, & makes itself amends for the long Concealment.³⁶⁴

When she finally received a letter from Piozzi, she wrote to her dear friend Frances Burney (who had become her closest confidante soon after

³⁵⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 498-99.

³⁶⁰ Clifford, Piozzi 205.

³⁶¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 503.

³⁶² Clifford informs us as well that none of Piozzi's letters "to his future wife has survived" (Clifford, Piozzi 206 n.2).

³⁶³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 515.

they met in the summer of 1778), that Thrale's heart had been "pacified by a Paris letter" from Piozzi.³⁶⁵

In addition to seeing herself afresh as a woman in love with Piozzi, Thrale suddenly faced a drastic change in her social and financial status: her annual income dropped from a projected 3,000 to 1,600, and finally to 1,200 pounds a year. Occasionally, she complained in letters to Johnson about living on this reduced income. James Clifford cites her complaints as one of the indications of her "inability to cope with everyday life" after the death of her husband and after the sale of the brewery. But Thrale's complaints simply reflect her adjustment to a substantial and unexpected change in her life. Her letters to Johnson actually show that she was successfully adapting to her new straitened financial circumstances. She wrote to Johnson on October 17, 1781, "My Income will . . . be a good deal less than I thought, in Consequence of which I shall lay down a Pair of my Horses in the first Place, for I will not run out."³⁶⁶

The next day she wrote to Johnson, who was in Oxford: "I find my possessions in Oxfordshire diminish upon close Inspection from 450 pounds to 300 pounds."³⁶⁷ But what Johnson wrote to her on October 23, 1781 must have provided little comfort: "The dimunition of the Estate though unpleasing and unexpected must be borne, because it cannot be helped."³⁶⁸

In any case, Thrale's recent problems did not affect Johnson's annual journeys to the Midlands. He traveled from Oxford to Lichfield

³⁶⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 517.

³⁶⁵ Frances Burney, Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay, ed. Austin Dobson (London: Macmillan, 1904-5) ii: 53.

³⁶⁶ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 438-9.

³⁶⁷ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 439.

³⁶⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 364.

and was there when Thrale wrote to "remind" him of "home" on November 3, 1781. Johnson responded a bit chidingly, "You very kindly remind me of the dear home which I have left, but I need none of your aids to recollection." However, as usual, he excused himself from coming to Thrale and wrote that he was ill: "I am here gasping for breath, and yet am better than those whom I came to visit. . . . I am so visibly disordered that a medical man who only saw me at Church sent me some pills." Moreover, for the first time in his extant correspondence with Thrale, Johnson blamed "the time of year" for his not being able to come to her: "The time of the year is not very favourable to excursions. I thought myself above assistance or obstruction from the seasons, but find the autumnal blasts sharp and nipping and the fading world an uncomfortable prospect." It must have irritated Thrale when Johnson added petulantly, "To those whom I love here I can give no help, and from those that love me, none can I receive. Do You think that I need to be reminded of Home and You?"³⁶⁹ She must have noticed that Johnson felt well enough to travel further north to Ashbourne after his stay at Lichfield. However, it was from Ashbourne that Johnson wrote more pleasantly to Thrale on November 10: "Since I came into this quarter of the earth I have had a very sorry time, and I hope to be better when I come back."³⁷⁰ More kindly still, on November 14 he wrote to her: "There is no danger of very long delay. There is nothing in this part of the world that can counteract your attention."³⁷¹ Still, as he had many times before, Johnson promised to come yet remained in Ashbourne. Moreover, while he remained there, Thrale could not have missed the new proprietary tone of his letters to her. In the letter quoted above he

³⁶⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 367-68.

³⁷⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 370.

wrote: "I have a mind to look on Queeny [Hester Maria, Thrale's eldest daughter] as my own dear Girl."³⁷² On November 18, Thrale replied from a polite social distance: "What honour you do my Queeney! taking her for your own indeed, & writing her such sweet Letters!" and closed this same letter to Johnson, "Please accept my truest and tenderest Thanks for all your Friendship and Kindness."³⁷³ Johnson once again responded suspiciously to the polite social formality of her letter, especially now that he was conscious of Piozzi's presence in Thrale's life.

Johnson wrote to Thrale on November 24, 1781:

Piozzi, I find, is coming in spite of Miss Harriet's prediction, or second sight, and when he comes and I come, you will have two about you that love you; and I question if either of us heartily care how few more you have. But how many soever they may be, I hope you keep your kindness for me, and I have a great mind to have Queeney's kindness too.

Indeed, knowing that Piozzi was once again at Streatham, Johnson suddenly wrote in this same letter about coming "home" with greater resolution. He wanted Thrale to care for him again:

I shall leave this place about the beginning of next week, and shall leave every place as fast as I decently can, till I get back to you, whose kindness is one of my great comforts. I am not well, but have a mind every now and then to think myself better, and I now hope to be better under your care.³⁷⁴

In the meantime, as she had once translated verses for Johnson, Thrale now translated them for Piozzi, who, in a completely different

³⁷¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 373-4.

³⁷² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 371-2.

³⁷³ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman II: 451.

³⁷⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 375.

manner from her husband and Johnson, always received her translations, as well as her poetry, with heartfelt gratitude. Thrale was also grateful that Piozzi was genuinely concerned about the effect his attentions toward her might have on her social and public reputation in England. She wrote privately on November 25, 1781:

I have got my Piozzi home at last, he looks thin & battered, but always kindly upon me I think—he brought me an Italian Sonnet written in his praise by Marco Capello, which I instantly translated of course; but He prudent Creature, insisted on my burning it, as he said it would inevitably get about the Town how he was Praised, & how Mrs. Thrale translated & echoed his Praises, so that says he I shall be torn in Pieces, & you will have some Infamita said of you that will make you hate the Sight of me. he was so earnest with me that I could not resist, so burnt my Sonnet which was actually very pretty, & now I repent I did not first write it into the Thraliana.³⁷⁵

Just as Johnson had long been covetous of Thrale's attention to himself, Thrale was becoming equally desirous of Piozzi's attentions to her. In the same entry in Thraliana, Thrale wrote of Piozzi, "if he does not fix himself for Life here, he will settle to lay his Bones at Milan; the Marquis d'Araciel his Friend & Patron who resides there; divides and disputes his Heart with me, I shall be loth to resign it."³⁷⁶ On the one hand, Thrale had new aspirations and was "loth to resign" Piozzi's heart, but on the other hand, she had Johnson, who, while still with his friend Dr. Taylor in Ashbourne, wrote to her on December 3, 1781, that he wished for her care again and to "hold all together." In other

³⁷⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 519.
³⁷⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 520.

words, although Thrale was beginning to have opportunities for great change, Johnson wanted her to stay exactly the same.

The gap between her reading of their relationship and Johnson's interpretation of it was great by the winter of 1781. Thrale clearly wanted Piozzi, a man whom she loved and who would be a constant source of loyalty, devotion, and support in her life—exactly what she had failed to find with Collier, Henry Thrale, and finally, Johnson. Instead, she read from Johnson in the same letter for December 3: "if any thing makes me love You more, it is going from You."³⁷⁷ Johnson was simply stating what he understood to be a primary condition of their friendship—he would always leave her and would return only when he so desired.³⁷⁸ Indeed, while he remained in Ashbourne, Johnson wrote to Thrale on December 8, 1781, "my affection for You is not diminished, and my expectation from you is encreased. Do not neglect me, nor relinquish me. Nobody will ever love You better, or honour You more than, Madam, Your most obliged and most humble Servant."³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 378.

³⁷⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 367-68.

³⁷⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford III: 379.

7.

**Thrale Reads Herself Anew across the Borders of the Private, the Social
and the Public Spheres of Her Life as a Woman, a Widow, a Mother, and a
Friend to Johnson.**

On January 1, 1782, Thrale wrote privately: "I am beginning a new Year in a new Character, may it be worne decently yet lightly!"³⁸⁰ James Clifford writes of this period in Thrale's life that her "own bad health, Johnson's illness, her interest in Piozzi, a wish to see Italy, dread of scandal, everything combined to keep her uncertain and vacillating."³⁸¹ However, rather than "uncertain" and "vacillating," Thrale made definite and bold moves in making the transition from her old life to her new. Indeed, in Thraliana for January 1, 1782, she envisioned leaving England, no matter what happened, to see what the "World could shew me":

if for my Sins God should take from me my Monitor, my Friend, my Inmate, my Dear Mr. Johnson; if neither I should marry, nor the Brewhouse People break; if the ruin of the Nation should not change the Situation of Affairs so that One could not receive regular Remittances from England: and if Piozzi should not pick him up a Wife, and fix his abode in this Country—If therefore & If & If & If again—All should conspire to keep my present Resolution warm; I certainly would at the close of the four Years from the Sale of the Southwark Estate, set out for Italy with my two or three eldest Girls; and see what the World could shew me.³⁸²

But Thrale was not yet ready to completely abandon her old life to embrace her dreams of a new one. Despite her disappointment in Johnson

³⁸⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 523-4.

³⁸¹ Clifford, Piozzi 208.

and her increasing independence of him, Thrale still regarded Johnson as an important factor in the decisions she made about her future. This is clear when she wrote immediately after the passage quoted above:

"Travelling with Mr. Johnson I cannot bear, & leaving him behind he could not bear; so his Life or Death must determine the Execution or laying aside of my Schemes:--I wish it were within Reason to hope he could live four Years."³⁸³

Thus, when she rented a house in Harley Street for January, February and March of 1782, Thrale was both maintaining her old relationship with Johnson and beginning her new life as a widow with financial independence. However, she was doing this in the private, social and public confines of her previous life as "Mrs. Thrale," the brewer's wife and mother to the Thrale children, and as the "Mistress of Streatham," the intimate friend of Dr. Johnson. That she lived with the consciousness of this is clear when she wrote privately on January 4, 1782: "The World will watch me at first, & think I come o' husband hunting for myself or my fair Daughter: but when I have behaved prettily for a while, they will change their Mind."³⁸⁴

Thrale keenly felt the perils of the changes she contemplated for herself in the private, social and public spheres of her life. This is manifest in her response to her first invitation to a social gathering in London upon her move to Harley Street:

The first Seduction came from Pepys; I had a Letter today, desiring me to dine in Wimpole Street, & meet Mrs. Montagu & a whole Army of Blues: to whom I trust my Refusal will afford very

³⁸² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 525.

³⁸³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 525.

³⁸⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 526.

pretty Speculation--& they may settle my character & future Conduct at their Leisure.³⁸⁵

The price of attempting to change, Thrale soon learned, would be betrayal and isolation: "Pepys is a worthless Fellow at last," she wrote privately,

he & his Brother run about the Town spying & enquiring what Mrs. Thrale is to do this Winter; what Friends She is to see, What Men are in her Confidence, how soon She will be married &c. the Brother Dr. the Medico as we call Him, lays Wagers about me I find—God forgive me, but they'll make me hate them both; & they are no better than two Fools for their Pains, for I was willing to have taken them to my heart."³⁸⁶

Thrale also had to cope with these new changes in her social and public life with her old friend Dr. Johnson, who refused to admit change into their relationship. Johnson, back in London in his residence at Bolt Court, and ill once again, wrote to Thrale on January 28, 1782: "Do not add to my other distresses any diminution of kindness for, Madam, Your most humble servant."³⁸⁷ Certainly Johnson was feeling and fearing Piozzi's increased presence in Thrale's life. But rather than abandoning him for a new life with Piozzi, Thrale wrote privately about Johnson on February 1: "If I lose him I am more than undone: Friend, Father, Guardian, Confident! God give me Health & Patience—what shall I do?"³⁸⁸ Judging from Johnson's letters to her, Thrale also responded to Johnson's plea to write to him more often. Her letters to him are lost; but Johnson wrote to her on February 17, 1782: "Sure such letters would

³⁸⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I:528.

³⁸⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 526-7.

³⁸⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 8.

³⁸⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 528.

make any man well. I will let them have their full operation upon me."³⁸⁹ However, sensing that she was changing and seeing herself "anew," and that her new life included Piozzi, Johnson was not comforted by her letters to him. Four days later he wrote to her, "let me be always sure of your kindness."³⁹⁰

By mid-March 1782, Johnson's health had improved, but Thrale was ill. She went to Bath hoping to find the "change of air" invigorating as well as to escape the negative social and public scrutiny that she was receiving in London. But even after having mourned her husband publicly for a year in London, she faced social and public scrutiny in Bath as well. On April 13, 1782, she wrote privately:

when I took off my Mourning the watchers watched me very exactly, 'but they whose Hands were mightiest have found nothing:' so I shall leave the Town I hope in a good Disposition towards me tho' I am sullen enough with the Town, for fancying me such an amorous Ideot that I am dying to enjoy every filthy Fellow. God knows how distant such dispositions are, both from the Heart & Constitution of H: L: T."³⁹¹

In particular, Thrale wrote of the social and public censure of her continuing relationship with Piozzi:

I have got Piozzi a gallant Benefit . . . may my Fortune and Talents be ever devoted to Charity and Friendship! & may I have Strength & Courage to despise them who would hinder its Current, by trying to make each other believe that its Source was only Desire!³⁹²

³⁸⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 12-13.

³⁹⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 13.

³⁹¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 530.

³⁹² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 530.

She continued: "Ld Loughboro', Sr Richd Jebb, Mr. Piozzi, Mr. Selwin, Dr Johnson, every Man who comes to the House is put in the Papers for me to marry—in good Time," (indeed several of these "suitors" did propose marriage to her). But tired of being the subject of scurrilous gossip, Thrale acted to defend herself: "I wrote today to beg the Morning Herald would say no more about me good or bad."³⁹³

However, despite the quite unflattering social and public speculation about her future, Thrale seemed confident privately as a woman. On April 17, 1782, she wrote about herself in Thraliana: "I am returned to Streatham, pretty well in Health, & very sound of Heart, notwi[th]standing the watchers & the Wagerlayers: who think more of the Charms of their Sex by half than I who know them better." Immediately after this, she discoursed on the differences between love and friendship: "Love & Friendship are distinct things; & I would go through Fire to serve many a Man, whom nothing less than Fire would force me to go to Bed to."³⁹⁴ Furthermore, now that her year of mourning for Henry Thrale had ended, Thrale spoke quite well of herself as a potential bride. She recalled telling Johnson of the "imaginary matches" made for her in the press: "I suppose Sir said I, they think they are doing me honour with these imaginary Matches, when perhaps the Man does not exist, who would do me honour by marrying me." In addition, she described herself as "a Woman of passable Person, ancient Family, respectable Character, uncommon Talents" and who was financially independent and, therefore, had "a Right to think of herself any Man's equal; & has nothing to seek but return of Affection from whatever Partner She pitches on." Most importantly, Thrale thought quite

³⁹³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 530.

courageously and independently for a woman of her time that "to marry for Love would therefore be rational in me, who want no Advancement of Birth or Fortune, and till I am in Love, I will not marry—nor perhaps then."³⁹⁵

The more Thrale's thoughts turned to her new self-image and her new life, the more Johnson continued to feel neglected by her. Indeed, on one occasion in April 1782, he wrote to her peevishly: "I have been very much out of order since You sent me away, but why should I tell You, who do not care, nor desire to know." In the same letter, unable to control his anger at her, Johnson suddenly interrupted a series of social pleasantries to Thrale to accuse her of neglect: "and then—what care You, what then." Johnson was not writing in jest. This is clear when he closed this same letter referring to the effect of Piozzi's presence in her life: "Do not let Mr. Piozzi nor any body else put me quite out of your head, and do not think that any body will love You like, Your humble servant."³⁹⁶

Having expressed his concerns regarding Piozzi's presence in her life, Johnson then proceeded to write to Thrale on an almost daily basis, giving her detailed descriptions of his various illnesses and reading her in her old role as his caregiver at Streatham. On April 30, 1782, Johnson wrote to her, "I have had a fresh cold and been very poorly . . . I wish I was at Streatham."³⁹⁷; on May 2, "I am very bad. Last night I bled 16 ounces. To day more is talked of."³⁹⁸ Two days later Johnson wrote to Thrale: "I had a quiet night without opium but am not better. Something more is to be done . . . and then I hope to be

³⁹⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 530.

³⁹⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 531.

³⁹⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 31-32.

³⁹⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 33-34.

well, and come soon to Streatham.³⁹⁹ Three days after this, Johnson wrote to Thrale, who had visited him at Bolt Court: "When You left me You knew how I was, and, I hope, You do not think that by leaving me You made me better I think myself upon the whole so much better, that I hope to be soon sur le pave. And then will I try to find Streatham."⁴⁰⁰ Johnson wrote again to Thrale of his health on May 8 and 9, 1782: "Since bleeding and a weak opiate I am more at ease, and my present Scheme is to go to the warm bath to morrow, and to Streatham on Saturday."⁴⁰¹

The litany of Johnson's medical complaints had the desired effect. Thrale was still willing to care for Johnson as a nurse. On May 11, Thrale brought Johnson to Streatham and wrote privately, "Today I bring home to Streatham my poor Dr. Johnson; he went to Town a Week ago by the way of amusing himself, & got so very ill that I thought I should never get him home alive—such Spasms on his Breath; sure enough one would have believed on Thursday that he could not have lived till now."⁴⁰² But her new life was quickly encroaching upon her old friendship with Johnson. On May 18, the day after Johnson returned to London, Thrale returned to Thraliana to write not about Johnson, but about her worries over her new role as a widow:

Nothing happens that one expects, & every thing happens that one does not expect: here's a proposal of Marriage to me from a Man I scarcely know—a Mr. Swale of good Family & Fortune in Suffolk—very odd tho' of the Man to want to marry me of all People—I sent him an immediate & steady Refusal.

³⁹⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 34-35.

³⁹⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 35.

⁴⁰⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 37.

⁴⁰¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 39.

Seward & Selwin being both disposed to offer their Persons and Fortunes is less odd, tho' not less silly.⁴⁰³

Johnson continued writing to Thrale about his health, which improved in May 1782. However, on the one hand, Johnson wrote to her on May 21, "My disorder is, I think, conquered, but it has with the help of its remedies left me in dismal dejection," but on the other hand, Thrale must have been surprised to read immediately after this, "I have however not totally succumbed . . . for yesterday I visited" ⁴⁰⁴ Indeed, Johnson proceeded to list several people whom he had seen and dined with recently. Then, in early June 1782, after having already written for months of coming to Streatham to recover his health and then having done so, Johnson had the audacity to write to Thrale: "Though Streatham supplies many things which I know not where to find in any other place, you well know it does not answer to change of air" ⁴⁰⁵ Thrale must have expressed some anger at his ingratitude in her next letter because three days later Johnson wrote to her of his travel plans and of her "unfeeling irony" for him: "I have this day taken a passage to Oxford for Monday. Not to frisk as you express it with very unfeeling irony, but to catch at the hope of better health. The change of place may do something." ⁴⁰⁶ Johnson's actions here must have only reminded Thrale that, as ill as he said he was and as dependent on her for care and happiness as he described himself to be, Johnson was still of a mind to do what he thought was best for himself, regardless of the effect his decisions had on her.

⁴⁰² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 535.

⁴⁰³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 535.

⁴⁰⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 41-42.

⁴⁰⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 48.

⁴⁰⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 49-50.

Thrale remained at Streatham where, rather than reading herself in terms of her relationship with Johnson, she was being continually confronted with a new and public reading of herself. She continued to be humiliated publicly by marriage proposals. On July 5, 1782, Thrale wrote in Thraliana:

'Tis now Sir Philip Jennings Clerke's Turn to torment me; he makes Love to me now quite openly & seriously; says he shall marry me for that his Wife is Ill. Oh! what variety, what change of Torments from all but my Dear, my delicate, my disinterested Piozzi!⁴⁰⁷

In the meantime, Johnson remained in Oxford from June 10 to June 19. Before his return to London, he wrote to Thrale expecting her attention as he always did when he returned from his travels, and even more than Thrale had already given him recently in caring for him. On June 17, he wrote from Oxford: "Oxford has done, I think, what for the present it can do." He then added that through "change of place, succession of company, and necessity of talking, much of the terrour that had seized me, seems to be dispelled."⁴⁰⁸ However, this observation must have made Thrale think that when Johnson returned home, perhaps his fears would return with him, as well as his expectations that their friendship would continue in the same way it had for eighteen years. Johnson's horizon of expectations for his friendship with Thrale was evidently broader than Thrale perceived it to be. The significant gap between her reading of their friendship and his is manifest in Johnson's presumption and self-absorption in his postscript to this letter: "When I come back to retirement, it will be great charity in You to let me

⁴⁰⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 538.

come back to something else."⁴⁰⁹ Indeed, by August 22, 1782, the wide gap between her conception of their friendship and Johnson's drove Thrale to tell him of her plans to leave England to live in Italy. She was determined now not to live as she had in the past with Johnson. Significantly, in this written account of her talk with Johnson about her move to Italy, Thrale no longer considered traveling abroad impossible even though Johnson lived and was too ill for such a journey:

I must go abroad & save Money. To shew Italy to my Girls, & be shewed it by Piozzi, has long been my dearest wish; but to leave Mr. Johnson shocked me, & to take him appear'd impossible. His Recovery however from an Illness we all thought dangerous, gave me Courage to speak to him on the Subject; & this day (after having been let blood) I mustered up resolution to tell him the Necessity of changing a Way of Life I had long been displeas'd with.⁴¹⁰

Thrale had decided to read Johnson as part of her past life in England. However, she made this decision with mixed feelings. She wrote privately with great surprise at Johnson's response to her decision to live abroad: "Mr. Johnson thought well of the Project & wished me to put it early in Execution." She added sadly that he "seemed even less concerned at parting with me" than she was with leaving him, and Johnson "seemed to entertain no doubt of living to see us return rich & happy in two or three Years Time." Stunned, she noted as well that Johnson had vehemently "told Hester [Thrale's eldest daughter] in my Absence that he would not go with me if I asked him."⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁸ Johnson, *Letters*, ed. Redford IV: 55.

⁴⁰⁹ Johnson, *Letters*, ed. Redford IV: 55-56.

⁴¹⁰ Thrale, *Thraliana*, ed. Balderston I: 540.

⁴¹¹ Thrale, *Thraliana*, ed. Balderston I: 540.

Quite understandably, Thrale came to see Johnson's calm detachment as another proof of his lack of consideration for her: "See the Importance of a Person to himself!" she wrote furiously in private, and upbraided herself for her pride: "I fancied Mr. Johnson could not have existed without me forsooth, as we have now lived together above 18 Years, & I have so fondled and waited on him in Sickness & in Health—Not a bit on't! he feels nothing in parting with me, nothing in the least; but thinks it a prudent Scheme, & goes to his Book as usual." More importantly, immediately after this, Thrale realized about Johnson: "This is Philosophy & Truth; he always said he hated a Feeler! (I begin to see now every thing shews it) that Johnson's Connection with me is merely an interested one—he loved Mr. Thrale I believe, but only wish'd to find in me a careful Nurse & humble Friend for his sick and his lounging hours." Thrale grimaced at her gullibility in the past: "yet I really thought he could not have existed without my Conversation forsooth. He cares more for my roast Beef & plumb Pudden which he now devours too dirtily for endurance: and since he is glad to get rid of me, I'm sure I have good Cause to desire the getting Rid of him."⁴¹²

James Clifford wrote that Thrale's reaction to Johnson was "typically feminine, for she was now very much annoyed that he appeared so willing to allow her to go."⁴¹³ However, Thrale's angry reaction to Johnson was much more complex than this. She had very practical and pressing reasons for wanting to leave England: "The Persecution I endure from Men too who want to marry me," she wrote in Thraliana, "is another Reason for my desiring to be gone; I wish to marry none of them, and Sir Philip's teizing me completed my Mortification." Thrale wrote privately

⁴¹² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 541.

⁴¹³ Clifford, Piozzi 211.

as well that "the Expences of this House [at Streatham] . . . are quite past my Power to check," and that this was "the true & rational Cause of our Departure. In Italy we shall live with twice the Respect, & at half the Expence we do here." Moreover, she continued, "the language is familiar to me, & I love the Italians." Finally, Thrale must have felt betrayed by her friends who, she knew, would not support her decision to move to Italy nor approve of her love for Piozzi. Most importantly as to the future of her friendship with Johnson and her plans to go to Italy, Thrale wrote grimly:

since Mr. Johnson cares nothing for the Loss of my personal Friendship & Company, there is no Danger of any body else breaking their Hearts. my sweet Burney, & Mrs. Byron will perhaps think they are sorry; but my Consciousness that no one can have the Cause of Concern that Johnson has, & my Conviction that he has no Concern at all, shall cure me of lamenting for Friends left behind.⁴¹⁴

Thrale then made plans to rent Streatham. Clifford wrote that Thrale "intended no drastic, no sudden or spectacular severance of former ties"; however, Clifford was incorrect in considering Thrale's relinquishment of Streatham as "the first move" she made to sever ties to Johnson and her past.⁴¹⁵ As we have already seen, Thrale had already made definite moves to part ways with Johnson.

By September 20, 1782, Thrale had rented Streatham to Lord Shelburne, who had become Prime Minister in July. She would vacate it by October 7. She wrote privately of her past life at Streatham: "I am going to leave Stretham for three Years, where I lived—never happily

⁴¹⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 541.

⁴¹⁵ Clifford, Piozzi 211-12.

indeed, but always easily: the more so perhaps from the total Absence of Love and of Ambition." Evidently, she believed that life at Streatham had not only deprived her of love, but also had thwarted her ambitions. Indeed, she would now pursue in earnest her own "ambitions": one of which was to live privately, socially, and publicly as the wife of Piozzi, and the other was to be a writer. Only after this important personal realization did she write of the more practical reason for leaving Streatham by annotating the passage above: "I have let the House & Grounds to Ld Shelburne the Expencc of it eat me up."⁴¹⁶

Other friends were also disapproving of her relationship with Piozzi. Thrale wrote privately in late September 1782 that her dearest confidante, Frances Burney, had accused her of being in love with Piozzi. In Thraliana for September 20, Thrale wrote: "Now! that little dear discerning Creature Fanny Burney says I'm in love with Piozzi—very likely! he is so amiable, so honourable, so much above his Situation by his Abilities . . . but if he is ever so worthy, ever so lovely, he is below me forsooth."⁴¹⁷ Imbedded in her private response to this conjecture are the objections to her love for Piozzi that Thrale must have heard from Burney and Hester Maria, and knew she would also hear from Johnson and the other coadjutors to Henry Thrale's will. One major objection was that Piozzi came from a lower social class than Thrale. This problem prompted Thrale into making a private and thorough assessment of the impediments and objections to her relationship with Piozzi. Immediately following the above passage, Thrale began with a in-depth consideration of who was "below" whom in the relationship:

⁴¹⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 544.

⁴¹⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 544.

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 Oeconomy; the Spirit of a Gentleman with the Talents of Professor? how shall any Man deserve Fortune if he does not?⁴¹⁸

However, Thrale was also aware of the larger social sphere and wrote after this, "but I am the Guardian of five Daughters by Mr. Thrale, and must not disgrace their Name & Family." But she immediately answered this concern by writing, "Was then the Man my Mother chose for me of higher Extraction than him I have chose for myself? No.—but his Fortune was higher—I wanted Fortune then perhaps, do I want it now? Not at all." Then Thrale's intense anger surfaced at the injustice of "sacrificing" her "own Choice" and her love for Piozzi solely for the sake of social and public approval:

. . . but I am not to think about myself, 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 myself from my Situation in Life.⁴¹⁹

Thrale turned this last point to her own favor and again demonstrated her resolve to lead her own life and to love Piozzi when she continued:

⁴¹⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 544.

⁴¹⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 544.

but if I have superior Understanding, let me at least make use of it for once; & rise to the Rank of a 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.⁴²⁰

Thrale then considered the objection that to marry Piozzi would be an irresponsible act on her part as "Guardian" and one that could possibly injure her daughters. She, however, confidently refuted this:

but once again I am Guardian to five Girls; agreed—will this Connection prejudice their Bodies, Souls, or Purse? my Marriage may assist my Health, but I suppose it will not injure theirs;-- will his [Piozzi's] Company or Companions corrupt their [Thrale's daughters'] Morals; God forbid, if I did not believe him one of the best of our Fellow Beings I would reject him instantly. Can it injure their Fortunes? and could he impoverish (if he would) five Women to whom their Father left 20,000 pounds each— independent almost of Possibilities?⁴²¹

Indeed, rather than seeing her daughters as captives over whom she wielded power, Thrale saw herself as the captive if she chose not to marry Piozzi and instead governed her life by her daughter's whimsy: "To what then am I Guardian?" she asked herself, and immediately answered, "to their Pride and Prejudice? & is anything else affected by the Alliance?" Following this, Thrale anticipated the objections to her love of a foreigner (objections that Johnson would later raise in a well-known letter of condemnation that he wrote to her when he learned that she had married Piozzi):

⁴²⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 544.

⁴²¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 545.

Now for more solid Objections. Is not the Man of whom I desire Protection a Foreigner? unskilled in the Laws and Language of our Country certainly. Is he not as the French say Arbitre de mon sort? & from the Hour he possesses my person & Fortune have I any power of decision how or where I may continue or end my Life?⁴²²

In addition, Thrale asked herself whether she should marry again at her age and whether or not she should place her "happiness" on the "continuance" of a "Man's Affection":

Is not the man upon the Continuance of whose Affection my whole Happiness depends—younger than myself⁴²³ & is it wise to place one's Happiness on the Continuance of any Man's Affection?—would it not be painful to owe his appearance of Regard more to his Honour than his Love? & is not my Person already faded, likelier to fade sooner than his? on the other hand is his Life a good one? & would it not be Lunacy even to risque the Wretchedness of losing all Situation in the World for the sake of living with a Man one loves, and then to lose both Companion & Consolation. When I lost Mr. Thrale, every one was officious to comfort & soothe me: but which of my Children or quondam friends would look with Kindness upon Piozzi's Widow? if I bring Children by him must they not be Catholicks, & must not I live among People, the ritual part of whose Religion I disapprove?⁴²⁴

Clifford interprets Thrale's writing here as showing that she was "not too certain of herself" and that she was "torn between two

⁴²² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 545.

⁴²³ Thrale annotated this statement: "he was 1/2 a Year older when our Registers were both examined."

⁴²⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 545.

irreconcilable positions."⁴²⁵ However, Thrale knew that she would not live a "happy" life by restricting herself to a life within the constraints of these objections to her love for Piozzi. Indeed, she seemed definite about the need to change her life:

These Objections would increase in Strength too, if my present State was a happy one. but it really is not: I live a quiet Life, but not a pleasant one: My Children govern without loving me, my Servants devour & despise me, my Friends caress and censure me, my Money wastes in Expences I do not enjoy, and my Time in Trifles I do not approve. every one is made Insolent, & no one Comfortable. my Reputation unprotected, my Heart unsatisfied, my Health unsettled.⁴²⁶

Immediately after this, Thrale courageously declared: "These are my Objections, these my Fears: not those of being censured by the World as it is called—a Composition of Vice & Folly." Thrale wrote this even though she knew that she would face social and public censure if she married Piozzi, adding "though 'tis surely no good Joke to be talked of."⁴²⁷

Therefore, Thrale was certain of her love for Piozzi, and she even had a plan for the future. Although at first she wrote, "I will however resolve on nothing," immediately after this she wrote definitively: "I will take a Voyage to the Continent in the Spring; enlarge my Knowledge, & repose my Purse: Change of Place may turn the course of these Ideas, and external Objects supply the room of internal Felicity."⁴²⁸ On her eldest daughter's objections to Thrale's possible marriage with Piozzi,

⁴²⁵ Clifford, Piozzi 213-14.

⁴²⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 545-46.

⁴²⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 546.

⁴²⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 546.

Thrale wrote privately, "I would really wish to marry no more without the Consent of my Children, (such I mean as are qualified to give their Opinions:) & how should Miss Thrale approve of my marrying Mr Piozzi?" Thrale then wrote that she would "rest," and "torment" her "Mind no longer." Indeed, as if confident that she would finally be united with Piozzi and that this event was pre-ordained because of Piozzi's "Virtue," she concluded this long soul-searching passage in Thraliana writing:

I will commit myself as he [Piozzi] advises to the Hand of Providence, & all will end all 'ottima Perfezzione,' & if I am blest with obtaining the Man—the only Man I ever could have loved, I verily believe it will be only because the Almighty will not leave such Virtue as his—unrewarded.⁴²⁹

Surrounded by resistant readers, Thrale read herself anew privately and with determination in the pages of Thraliana.

Meanwhile, having by now heard the rumors about Thrale and Piozzi, Johnson acted out his severe displeasure with Thrale in a social setting. After she had vacated Streatham, Thrale invited Johnson to accompany her to Brighton, where Johnson proceeded to behave miserably to her. On October 26, 1782, Frances Burney wrote to her father from Brighton that Johnson had "raised such a general alarm that he is now omitted in all cards of invitation sent to the rest of us."⁴³⁰ Most importantly, Burney wrote privately in her Diary in November 1782 that Thrale "fares worse than anybody" with Johnson:

Mr. Metcalf is now the only person out of this house that voluntarily communicates with the Doctor. He has been in a

⁴²⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 546.

terrible severe humour of late, and has really frightened all the people, till they almost ran from him. To me only I think he is now kind, for Mrs. Thrale fares worse than anybody.⁴³¹

In addition to having to endure Johnson's ungentlemanly, unfair, socially embarrassing, and harsh treatment of her, Thrale had to endure the endless and erroneous stories about her upcoming nuptials with *Dr. Johnson* (!), among others, in the press. She wrote privately on October 7, 1782:

There is no Mercy for me in this Island—I am more and more disposed to try the Continent. One Day the paper rings with my Marriage to Johnson, one Day to Crutchley; one Day to Seward. I give no Reason for such Impertinence, but cannot deliver myself from it. Whitbread the rich Brewer is in Love with me too; Oh I would rather as Ann Page says—be set breast deep in the Earth, & bowled to death with Turneps.⁴³²

For example, the Morning Post for October 15, 1782, reported that Thrale and Johnson would soon be married. It printed this "announcement" again on October 16, and then mockingly reported on October 18 the "stipulations" of the Thrale/Johnson marriage:

We hear, that in the marriage articles preparing for Dr. Johnson and Mrs. T----e, it is stipulated on the part of the Lady, that the Doctor shall instantly discard his frightful bush-wig, and substitute a small cue, with tidy curls, and a toupee (sic) of the first fashion; that he shall wear a clean shirt every day, and be shaved as often as he shifts himself; that in future no snuff

⁴³⁰ Burney, Frances, Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay, ed. Dobson III: 125.

⁴³¹ Burney, Frances, Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay, ed. Dobson II: 122.

shall be taken, unless to clear his head in a cold. The Doctor is likewise enjoined to eat vermicelli twice a day, and to leave off his red flannel night caps.

At the same time, actual and unwelcome marriage proposals continued to harass Thrale. On November 4, 1782, Thrale wrote privately in Thraliana: "Sir Richard Musgrave has sent me proposals of Marriage from Ireland. His Wife is dying at least if not dead, & he is in haste for a better—He will get me to be sure!! a likely matter! when My Head is full of nothing but my Children—my Heart of my beloved Piozzi!"⁴³³ Thrale's plans for the future and her dealings with Johnson were also assiduously reported on in the Morning Herald. For example, on November 8, 1782, the Herald announced that Thrale continued to rent Streatham to Lord Shelburne and that, "Mrs. Thrale means to stay on the Continent, chiefly France and Italy, where she goes for the education of her children. Dr. Johnson, it is said, accompanies Mrs. Thrale, at least part of the way."⁴³⁴

Above the din of so many insulting and hostile readers, Thrale began asserting her own reading of herself into the social sphere with respect to her plans for her future. She describes how she "told the Truth" of her love for Piozzi to Hester Maria because her "heart was bursting," and from an "instinctive Desire of unloading" her secret, and, she added, "partly I hope from principle too":

⁴³² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 547.

⁴³³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 549.

⁴³⁴ "In succeeding months," Clifford writes, "the papers continued with similar remarks. In the circumstances these quips were particularly inept and did not help to calm the cross-currents in West Street, Brighton. Mrs. Thrale was considering matrimony, but the newspapers, unaware of her romantic disposition, had suggested the wrong man" (Clifford, Piozzi 212; 213 n.2).

I called her [Hester Maria] into my Room & fairly told her the Truth: told her the Strength of my Passion for Piozzi, the Impracticability of my living without him; the opinion I had of his Merit, & the Resolution I had taken to marry him. of all this She could not have been ignorant before; I confessed my Attachment to him & her together, with many Tears & Agonies one Day at Streatham; told them both that I wished I had two hearts for their Sakes; but having only one I would break it between them, & give them ciascheduno la Meta.⁴³⁵

Immediately after this passage above, Thrale wrote of how she had spoken to Hester Maria at Brighton:

After that Conversation She consented to go abroad with me, & even appointed the Place, (Lyons), to which Piozzi meant to follow us: He & She talked long together on the Subject; yet her never mentioning it again, made me fear She was not fully apprized of my Intent; & though her Concurrence might have been more easily attained when left only to my Influence in a distant country, where She would have had no Friend to support her different Opinion—yet I scorned to take such mean Advantages; & told her my Story now with the Winter before her in which to take her Measures, her Guardians at hand—all displeased at the Journey.⁴³⁶

Thus contrary to Clifford's description of her as "uncertain" and as "vacillating between two irreconcilable positions," Thrale was making definite decisions and plans regarding her future and Piozzi. In November 1782, Thrale wrote privately of her ardent love for Piozzi:

⁴³⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 549.

⁴³⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 549.

yet I should not deserve the Union I desire, with the most disinterested of all human Hearts; had I behaved with less Generosity, or endeavoured to gain by Cunning what is withheld only by Prejudice, had I set my Heart upon a Scoundrel, I might have done virtuously to break it & get loose: but the Man I love, I love for his Honesty; for his Tenderness of Heart, his Dignity of Mind, his Piety to God, his Duty to his Mother, & his Delicacy to me.⁴³⁷

Indeed, she wrote immediately after this: "in being united to this Man only can I be happy in this World; & short will be my Stay in it, if it is not passed with him."⁴³⁸ She also wrote of how for Piozzi she was "contented to reverse the Laws of Nature, and request of my child that Concurrence which at my Age (and a Widow) I am not required either by divine or human Institutions to ask even of a Parent."⁴³⁹ On November 27, 1782, Thrale wrote privately of Piozzi, "for Rectitude of Mind, and native Dignity of Soul I never saw his Fellow!" She annotated this passage writing frantically: "Tis Time to be in earnest now, I have trifled too much with his Health & my own; I am ashamed of such poor Shifts & Tricks as I have used to ward off an honourable Passion for a worthy Object;--yet how, how! shall I ever manage to obtain him!--Oh how indeed!"⁴⁴⁰

At the same time, Thrale continued plans to put her trip to Italy in motion. In December, 1782, in her house in Argyll Street, Thrale wrote privately of her daughters' court-appointed guardians: "Nobody much applauds my Resolution in going; but Johnson & Cator said they

⁴³⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 549.

⁴³⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 549-50.

⁴³⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 550.

⁴⁴⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 551.

would not concur in Stopping me by Violence." To her credit, she was boldly forthright and bluntly honest with herself as to why she was leaving for Italy:

Cator said I had a right to say that going to Italy would benefit the Children as much as they had to say it would not, but I replied that as I really did not mean any thing but my own private Gratification by my Voyage, nothing should make me say I meant their Good by it: & that it would be like saying I eat Roast Beef to mend my Daughter's Complexions.⁴⁴¹

In the end, Thrale wrote of her projected trip to Italy, "we certainly do go." Once there, she planned to "divert myself & perhaps my Compagno fedele in distant Climes and future Times, with the Recollection of England & its Inhabitants: all which I shall be happy and content to leave for him."⁴⁴² Moreover, in December 1782, Thrale was willing to admit to herself the love that she felt for Piozzi, "the Man of my Heart": "Oh how my Soul loves his Soul! & how happy am I since the hour in which I confessed my Affection for him, to myself & my Daughter who appears every day more & more reconciled to his Merit and my partiality.

⁴⁴¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 552. Thrale approved of the court-appointed Guardians' move to put her daughters in Chancery so that if something should happen to her in Italy they would be provided for. Thrale annotated this passage: "(Cator said likewise that the Attorney's Bill ought to be paid by the Ladies as a Bill of Mr. Thrale's--but I replied that perhaps I might marry, & give my Estate away--if so, it would be unjust that they should pay the Bill which related to that Estate only--besides if I should leave it to Hester says I--why should Susan & Sophy & Cecilia & Harriet pay the Lawyer's Bill for their Sister's Land? he agreed to this Plea, & I will live on Bread & Water but I will pay Norris myself--'Tis but being a better Huswife in Pins" Mrs. Thrale)." Thraliana, 552, n.4.

⁴⁴² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 552.

All will go well at last; and I shall once in my Life, (I think I shall)--be happy in my own Way."⁴⁴³

In the midst of her intense ruminations about her future life, however, Johnson, using illness, still beckoned for her attention. He wrote to Thrale on December 11, "I have very sorry nights, and therefore but cheerless days,"⁴⁴⁴ and on December 16, "a very dreadful night has intervened, and as want of sleep has made me very sleepy, it remains for me to dream if I can of Argyle Street."⁴⁴⁵ Two days later, Johnson wrote pessimistically: "perhaps to be worse and better, and never to be well, is what now remains. Perhaps yet a little more. . . . I may perhaps not be long before I come and see you. Dum spiro, spero [While I breathe, I hope]. That's my maxim, what d'ye say to that now?"⁴⁴⁶

Johnson's habitual melancholy was in stark contrast to Thrale's optimism at this time. Thrale seemed to enjoy life once again after having admitted her love for Piozzi to herself, to Hester Maria, and to Frances Burney. At the beginning of December, she wrote privately:

I am all the Mode this Winter; no Parties are thought highly of, except Mrs. Thrale makes one of them: my Wit, & even my Beauty--God help me!! is celebrated; and I have three or four Engagements of a Night among the very first Company this great Town can produce. I come home always comparing my own private Choice with every one I see Like the Pump Girl at Bath, I hear all their Fadaises with an Ear pre engaged,--a Heart pre-occupied. my Piozzi runs no

⁴⁴³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 553.

⁴⁴⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 95-96.

⁴⁴⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 97.

⁴⁴⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 98.

Risque in turning me loose to the World, where I shall never see any one I can love but him.”⁴⁴⁷

But Johnson was jealous of her happiness, and wrote to her on December 20, “You can hardly think how bad I have been, while you were in all your altitudes, at the opera, and all the fine places, and thinking little of me I hope however to be with you again in a short time and show You a man again.”⁴⁴⁸ Johnson came to Argyll Street on December 26, 1782, but two days later he left for Bolt Court writing churlishly to Thrale: “I am very poorly, and am going home. When I get a little better, I will be with You again, in the mean time think of me a little, and be certain that You will think on nobody, who thinks oftener on You.”⁴⁴⁹ Johnson was reading Thrale as he had in the past, as if forgetting or attempting to deny the changes that he had noticed in her life. However, Thrale continued to read herself as a new being. She was getting a second chance to marry, to choose her mate instead of being matched, and to marry for love rather than for fortune. She wrote privately and with deep satisfaction on December 26:

Lady Fanny Burgoyne would like I should marry Lord Hinchingbroke I see, She is in the right on't; I wouldn't have had him had my Heart been free: but to betray my Love, and break my Rest for ever, that I might be Countess of Sandwich!! far be such Conduct from this fida Galesina, my noble spirited, my grateful Piozzi.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 553-4.

⁴⁴⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 99.

⁴⁴⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 101.

⁴⁵⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 555.

8.

**A Woman Alone: Thrale Reading Against Herself. Or, Thrale Reading
Herself as Others Wish to See Her.**

In 1783, Thrale dramatically changed her plans for the future. On January 12, 1783, she wrote privately, "While My Heart is penetrated by its passion for Piozzi, my head confounded by various schemes of future Life; my Purse pulled at on every Side unmercifully . . . my Friends treating me ungenerously, and every thing going most perversely: I have still Spirit to keep me from being frightened out of my Wits at least."⁴⁵¹ She wrote in Thraliana of being told on January 25, 1783, of rumors "by means next to miraculous" that were circulating in London about her plan to go to Italy. The next day, she wrote: "Fanny Burney came, said I must marry him [Piozzi] instantly, or give him up; that my Reputation would be lost else—I actually groaned with Anguish, threw myself on the Bed in an Agony--which My fair Daughter beheld with frigid Indifference."⁴⁵²

James Clifford described this incident: "As usual in times of stress, Mrs. Thrale became hysterical and threw herself on the bed, groaning with anguish, while Queeney stood by regarding this childish weakness with complete disapproval."⁴⁵³ But this is clearly an inaccurate portrayal of Thrale. On numerous occasions, as we have seen, Thrale performed ably under pressure and, at times, better than either her husband or Johnson, both of whom treated her with condescension regardless of the help she provided them. Clifford also claims that Thrale's private writings at this time with respect to her love for Piozzi "resemble a distorted, overacted melodrama."⁴⁵⁴ But this is

⁴⁵¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 556.

⁴⁵² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 559.

⁴⁵³ Clifford, Piozzi 217.

⁴⁵⁴ Clifford, Piozzi 217.

unfair. Thrale was writing about the possibility of a future life of happiness with a man she truly loved and the fulfillment of an abiding wish to live independently as a writer and intellectual, a wish she had held long before she was matched with Henry Thrale for money. However, the people who were dearest to her were attempting to dissuade her from pursuing the path to her own happiness. Thrale wrote privately of her eldest daughter's behavior:

She had indeed never by one tender Word endeavoured to dissuade me from the Match; but said coldly that if I would abandon my Children, I must: that their Father had not deserved such Treatment from me; that I should be punished by Piozzi's neglect, for that She knew he hated me, & that I turned out my Offspring to Chance for his Sake like Puppies in a Pond to swim or drown according as Providence pleased: that for her Part She must look herself out a Place like the other Servants, for my Face would She never see more—nor write to me said I? I shall not Madam replied She with a cold Sneer—easily find out your addresse: for you are going you know not whither I believe.⁴⁵⁵

Thrale added that her older daughters had "taught" the youngest in the family "to cry": "'Where are you going Mama? Will you leave us, and die as our poor papa did?'" But Thrale chafed at the disapproval of her daughters and wrote: "there was no standing that, so I wrote my Lover word that my Mind was all distraction, and bid him come to me the next Morning my Birthday. 27 Jan."⁴⁵⁶ However, she records that she spent that night "in Torture not to be described":

⁴⁵⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 559.

⁴⁵⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 559

my Falsehood to my Piozzi, my strong Affection for him; the Incapacity I felt in myself to resign the Man I so adored, the Hopes I had so cherished, inclined me strongly to set them all at Defiance, and go with him to Church to sanctifie the Promises I had so often made him—while the Idea of abandoning the Children of my first Husband, who left me so nobly provided for, and who depended on my Attachment to his Offspring, awakened the Voice of Conscience, and threw me on my Knees to pray for his Direction who was hereafter to judge my Conduct.⁴⁵⁷

Clearly, Thrale understood the seriousness of the conflicting loyalties of her past and future life. "His Grace," she continued in Thraliana immediately following the foregoing statement, "illuminated me, His Power strengthened me; and I flew to my Daughter's bed in the morning & told her my resolution to resign my own; my dear, my favourite purposes; and to prefer my Children's Interest to my Love."⁴⁵⁸ It is significant that Thrale made her decision based on her concern for her children rather than because of a fear of losing her reputation. She was willing to sacrifice, for her children and for her remembrance of Henry Thrale, her love for Piozzi.

Of her meeting with Piozzi on her birthday, January 27, 1783, she wrote privately:

I pleaded Attachment to Miss Thrale, and Entanglement in my Money-Matters--& beg'd him stay Two Years till She should come of Age. No, No; he was in Earnest & he would himself speak to Miss Thrale. . . . I called her—said I had but one heart for both him & Her—but that I would break it between them, & give Ciascheduno la

⁴⁵⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 559.

⁴⁵⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 559.

Meta. After some Conversation I left them in my Dressing room together; whence both of them came out with altered Looks. She had as I discovered afterwards, touch'd on the Magic String, by telling him My Honour was concerned in our immediate Separation: that strange Stories were got about, & were finding their Way into Newspapers (where our Enemies & their Emissaries were daily putting them), that our Connection would be the ruin of their Family forsooth.⁴⁵⁹

Thrale then continued that Piozzi "went home to Wigmore Street at her [Hester Maria's] Command; brought all my Letters Promises of Marriage & put them into her Hand--& flinging mine from him; cried 'Take your Mama--and make it of her a Countess--It shall kill me never mind--but it shall kill her too!'"⁴⁶⁰ On January 29, 1783, Thrale wrote inconsolably in Thraliana: "Adieu to all that's dear, to all that's lovely. I am parted from my Life, my Soul! my Piozzi."⁴⁶¹

But making this decision gave Thrale little satisfaction. She soon realized that she had made the wrong decision by reading herself primarily as the wife of Henry Thrale and a mother rather than as a woman in love with Piozzi. She must have felt bereft of both family and friends since their advice led only to separation from Piozzi. Desperately unhappy, she would not go abroad, nor would she remain in London where, she wrote, "I have not been treated to my Mind." She wrote privately that she had informed Johnson that she was "greatly in Debt, & somewhat like Distress'd," having spent money lavishly while she was living in London, and recorded how Johnson had "made little or no

⁴⁵⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 557

⁴⁶⁰ Clifford, Piozzi 217-18 n. 1.

⁴⁶¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 557.

Reply" when she told him of her resolution to "retire" to Bath where she would "live in a little way" to save money and pay off her debts.⁴⁶² With respect to this period, Clifford observes, "Just how much Johnson knew of all this turmoil is not certain, since she [Mrs. Thrale] would scarcely have confided to him her feeling for Piozzi. But spending much of his time with the family, he cannot have been oblivious to what was going on."⁴⁶³ As proof of Johnson's awareness, Clifford quotes from Boswell's Private Papers for March 21, 1783, that Johnson had told Boswell that Thrale was "going to Bath" because "they had driven her out of London by attacks upon her which She had provoked by attacking every body."⁴⁶⁴ More importantly, this statement also shows that Johnson blamed Thrale for her own problems and remained unsympathetic to her plight and her wish for future happiness.

Although she and Piozzi had parted, rumors continued to circulate in the Morning Herald, the Morning Post, and the European Magazine. Clifford remarks that "the newspapers delighted in coupling her name with sly, obscene remarks about Italian sopranos."⁴⁶⁵ In early March 1783, it was reported in the Morning Herald that "the match between Piozzi and Mrs. _____" was a rumor, and that Thrale would leave for the Continent with Johnson. Another story stated that Thrale had gone to the Continent without her daughters (who remained in Bath).⁴⁶⁶ Since her decision to part ways with Piozzi had not lessened the social and public opprobrium about her marriage plans, this must have given Thrale an even

⁴⁶² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 560.

⁴⁶³ Clifford, Piozzi 218.

⁴⁶⁴ Boswell: The Applause of the Jury: 1782-1785, eds. Irma S. Lustig and Frederick A. Pottle (New York: Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1981) 74.

⁴⁶⁵ Clifford, Piozzi 218.

⁴⁶⁶ Clifford, Piozzi 218.

greater impetus to go ahead and be with Piozzi as his wife, his lover, or his friend:

I will draw in my Expences, lay by ev'ry Shilling I can to pay off Debts & Mortgages, and perhaps; who knows! I may in six or seven Years be freed from all Incumbrances; and carry a clear Income of 2500 pounds a Year, and an Estate of 500 pounds in Land to the Man of my Heart. May I but live to discharge my Obligations to those who hate me; it will be Paradise to discharge them to him who loves me: The Time indeed will be past in which I could have brought him Children—a Happiness I now must not hope for!--I may yet however bring him a useful and an entertaining Companion, and if my Person is too much faded for his Endurance, I will live at the next Door to him as Brother, Friend,--or in Honour what he pleases. My Heart is his and we will only be parted by absolute Necessity.--All This on a Supposition of his Mind continuing the same; for whenever he marries my Projects are of Course destroyed, and my Mind must take a Turn less Romantick."⁴⁶⁷

This passage also demonstrates that Thrale was aware that the realization of her plans was also contingent on what Piozzi desired.

Although they had agreed to see each other no more, Piozzi remained in England. But then, in an attempt to end the negative speculation about Thrale, he decided to return to Italy. In part, Thrale was relieved by his decision. She wrote privately on March 28, 1783: "The Newspapers have been Insolent about me & Piozzi, but nobody gave Credit to them; so the Report I think died away, & his Absence, (for he is going to Italy) will confirm the World in an Opinion that all

⁴⁶⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 560.

was Invention."⁴⁶⁸ More importantly, she admired Piozzi for the sacrifice that he was making for her. She understood that his decision to return to Italy to save her from further private, social, and public criticism was an example of his true love for her. Now, more than ever before, she dreaded sacrificing Piozzi and the possibility of a new and happy life. On April 6, 1783, she wrote of her parting with Piozzi:

my Daughters deserve no Thanks from my Tenderness—and they want no pecuniary Help from my Purse. Let me provide in some Measure for my Dear, my absent Husband—such I consider l'adorato mio Piozzi.— God give me Strength to part with him courageously; I expect him every Instant to breakfast with me for the last Time. Gracious Heaven what words are these! Oh No, for Mercy: may we but meet again! and without diminished Kindness—Oh my Love! my Love!

We did meet and part courageously:--I perswaded him to bring his old Friend Mecci . . . his Presence was a Restraint on our Conduct, and a Witness of our Vows; which we renewed with Fervour and will keep sacred in Absence, Adversity, and Age.⁴⁶⁹

Most importantly, Thrale realized that *only she* would be hurt by the decision she had made for the sake of others:

I will go to Bath Nor Health nor Strength, nor my Childrens Affections have I. Poor Poor H: L: T!! Mr. Crutcheley bid me make a Curtsy to my Daughters for keeping me out of a Gaol & the News Papers insolent as he! how shall I get thro? how shall I get thro? I have not deserved it of any of them: as God knows, and the Thraliana.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 560.

⁴⁶⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 561.

⁴⁷⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 561.

Amidst these problems, Thrale received a letter from Johnson on March 30, 1783 in which he thinly veiled his uneasiness with and his anger at her: "Such a sleep I had as I wish You to have, whenever you are in good humour with, Your humble servant."⁴⁷¹ Although Thrale took leave of Johnson on April 5, 1783, to go to Bath, she made no mention of it in Thraliana. Her thoughts were with Piozzi. On the same day, Johnson wrote in his Prayers and Meditations that upon parting with Thrale, he had had "expostulations" with her, or, as Johnson defined them in his Dictionary, "altercations . . . without an open rupture":⁴⁷²

I took leave of Mrs. Thrale. I was much moved. I had some expostulations with her. She said that she was likewise affected. I commended the Thrales with great good-will to God; may my petition have been heard.⁴⁷³

But Thrale must have decided not to expose herself any more to Johnson's veiled and open bouts of anger and criticism of her. After April 5, 1783, she would never again have Johnson live with her.

Moreover, she was reassured on a daily basis that she made the wrong decision in sacrificing the love of her life for her daughters—who were now acting ungratefully, distrustfully, and coldly to her in Bath. Ironically, what had given Thrale the strength to live alone at Bath was her hope for a remote future with Piozzi even though she had ended her relationship with him for the present time. On April 14, 1783, she wrote privately:

⁴⁷¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 119.

⁴⁷² Samuel Johnson, Dictionary of the English Language, Abridged Edition, ed. Alexander Chalmers (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1994) 258.

⁴⁷³ Samuel Johnson, Diaries, Prayers, Annals (The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson Vol. 1, New Haven: Yale UP, 1986) 358-9.

Here I am settled in my Plan of Oeconomy, with three Daughters, three Maids and a Man: my Lover is in England, and I wait here patiently for my own Release: living if possible on 1000 pounds Per Ann that I may save Money enough to pay my Debts, and fly to the Man of my Heart. . . .

She added to this:

My daughter [Hester Maria] does not I suppose much delight in this Scheme [of economy] but why would I lead a Life of delighting her who would not lose a shilling of Interest, or an Ounce of Pleasure to save my Life from perishing? when I was near losing my Existence from the Contention of Mind, and was seized with a temporary Delirium in Argyll Street, She & her two eldest Sisters laughed at my distress, and observed to dear Fanny Burney—that it was monstrous droll: She could scarcely suppress her Indignation.⁴⁷⁴

The fact that Thrale felt isolated and alone, despite living with three of her daughters, is evident when she wrote privately: "Would some happy Event might send her [Frances Burney] hither, for 'tis dismal to have no one to speak to." More specifically, she wrote about how her daughters now behaved toward her: "my Misses . . . [have] destroyed all friendly Commerce between them and me, who live more on Terms of Politeness than Affection." Immediately after this, Thrale noted, "I cannot accuse them of desiring to engross my mind, for never when they can avoid it do they come into my sight."⁴⁷⁵

In addition to these problems, on April 18, 1783, Thrale's five-year-old daughter Henrietta Sophia died of what Thrale described as the

⁴⁷⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 562.

"hooping cough." Having never had this disease, Thrale could not attend to Henrietta personally in London and, therefore, had remained in Bath.⁴⁷⁶ Exhausted by the death of yet another of her children—by April 1783, eight of her twelve children had died—Thrale worried that her six-year-old daughter Cicely would die of the same illness that had killed Henrietta. Thrale wrote privately of the callousness of the three daughters who lived with her: "Harriet [Henrietta] is dead, my other Girls Fortunes increased, their Insolence extream, and their hardness of Heart astonishing: When the Baby was to be moved to Streatham for the Air—'it will kill her,' said I—'She will be nearer the Church Yard,' replies the eldest."⁴⁷⁷

When Johnson wrote to Thrale from London that Henrietta had died, he requested that Thrale come to London. She responded on April 19, 1783:

My Children, my Income (of course) and my health are coming to an end Dear Sir—not my vexations. Harriet is dead, and Cicely is dying; and Mr. Cator writes me word I mustn't sit philosophically at Bath, but come to London--(I cannot guess for what) to see them buried I believe.⁴⁷⁸

R. W. Chapman describes this as an "undignified letter," while Katherine Balderston wrote that Thrale "softened the asperity" of this letter when rewriting it for publication in her Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D. (1788) and filled it "with pious reflections."⁴⁷⁹ But Thrale's response to Henrietta's death is one of emotional exhaustion rather than the "undignified" outburst that Chapman calls it. Likewise,

⁴⁷⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 563.

⁴⁷⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 565.

⁴⁷⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 563.

⁴⁷⁸ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman III: 14.

Balderston mistakes Thrale's "asperity" for frustration and resignation in having endured the deaths of so many of her children. Longing for Piozzi, grieving over the illness and death of Henrietta, and worrying that Cecily would die next, Thrale wrote to Johnson in the aforementioned letter: "I am already so altered that the people here don't know me." She closed this letter writing regretfully, "I am sorry for you dear Sir with all the Grief I can spare from your much distressed Servant H.L.T." However, rallying herself, she wrote in a postscript to Johnson: "I will set out the first Moment I am able."⁴⁸⁰

Thrale did go to London, where, to her great relief, she discovered that Cecily would live. But upon her return to Bath on April 23, 1783, she wrote privately that "not one of my three eldest Daughters said even how do you do?"⁴⁸¹ She continued to feel that although she had made a great sacrifice in giving up Piozzi, her daughters still mistreated her. Hester Maria did not hide her strong objection to her mother's love for Piozzi. Indeed, upon hearing that Piozzi was ill with a sore throat (which Thrale described as having "four Ulcers in it" and which had to be "lanced"), Hester Maria's replied brutally as recorded in Thraliana: "Has he cut his own Throat? says Miss Thrale in her quiet Manner." Moreover, Thrale added that the other daughters who lived with her were neither "kind" nor "wise": they "all swear by her [Hester Maria, the eldest] I believe, and follow her Footsteps exactly." Then, as if finally calling an end to all idealization of her past marriage to Henry, Thrale wrote about her daughters and their father: "Mr. Thrale had not much heart, but his fair Daughters have none at all."⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 563.

⁴⁸⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 563, n.2.

⁴⁸¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 564-65.

⁴⁸² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 564.

Although life in Bath with her daughters was anything but tranquil, Thrale wrote to Johnson as if she were content with her new mode of life. But then, what other choice did she have with him? She knew that if she complained of her straitened finances, Johnson would say the situation could not be helped. She knew that Johnson expected her to be faithful to her deceased husband by selflessly caring for the children that he left behind. She also knew that Johnson doted on her daughters and that she therefore could not complain to him about how they behaved. She knew that Johnson regarded her primary role in life to be a mother to her children, not a lover to Piozzi. She knew that if she were to write to Johnson of her heartbreak over Piozzi, she would be severely rebuked by him. Finally, Johnson might not restrain himself from severely censuring her in conversations with other people and might encourage his friends to condemn her as the great Dr. Johnson did.

Thus Thrale suppressed the most important private details of her life from the social discourse of her letters to him. On June 5, 1783, Johnson opened a letter to Thrale reproachfully: "Why do you write so seldom? . . . You were used formerly to write more when I know not why You should have had much more to say." Then he added sharply: "Do not please yourself with showing me that You can forget me, who do not forget you." Looking for pity, Johnson closed the same letter: "You give a cheerful account of your way of life, I hope You will settle into Tranquillity. When I can repay You with a narrative of my felicity, You shall see the description."⁴⁸³

Thrale was writing of her private life, but in Thraliana rather than to Johnson. On June 8, she wrote privately: "Most sincerely do I

⁴⁸³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 145-46.

regret the Sacrifice I have made of health Happiness, & the Society of a worthy and amiable Companion to the pride & prejudice of three insolent sensible Girls who would see Nature perish with Concern—were their Gratification the Cause.”⁴⁸⁴ In addition, she described her life at Bath in the following way: “I sate reading at home, or went wearying heav’n with Prayers [for Piozzi] to all the Churches & Chapels in town—watching the Post too [for Piozzi’s letters], & carrying my own long Letters [for Piozzi] to the Office.”⁴⁸⁵

Although Thrale was now excluding Johnson from the most important part of her private life, she continued her epistolary friendship with him as best she could. On June 13, 1783, Johnson wrote to her appreciatively, “Your last letter was very pleasing, it expressed [such] kindness to me, and some degree of placid acquiescence in your present mode of life, which is, I think, the best, which is at present within your reach.” Understandably, however, Thrale did not go to Johnson nor did she invite him to Bath when Johnson wrote to her that “solitude is very tedious,” perhaps wanting her to care for him again.⁴⁸⁶

Evidence that Thrale had, out of necessity, restricted her communication with Johnson in her letters to him becomes especially clear after Johnson became seriously ill on June 17, 1783. A mutual friend, Tom Davies, wrote to Thrale that Johnson had had a stroke: “He [Johnson] is really much to be pitied, He has no female friend in his House that can do him any service on this occasion.”⁴⁸⁷ Clifford is correct in reading this statement as “an obvious hint that her presence on the scene was desired.” However, Thrale’s own health was

⁴⁸⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 568.

⁴⁸⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 565.

⁴⁸⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 146-48.

⁴⁸⁷ Clifford, Piozzi 221.

deteriorating and she was in no condition to undertake the arduous task of nursing Johnson back to health, or to endure seeing him suffer from the same disease that had killed her husband in the recent past. Moreover, as she was already severely restricting her communication with Johnson about her love for Piozzi and her future plans, she surely was not going to put herself in Johnson's presence for an extended period of time by caring for him in London. Clifford noted that, "under ordinary circumstances Mrs. Thrale would have flown to help him," but that Thrale was "in the grip of a severe hypochondria." To this he adds bluntly and quite vituperatively for an otherwise fairly impartial biographer of Thrale: "Her need was for a psychiatrist, not a physician."⁴⁸⁸

But the Thrale-Johnson correspondence and Thrale's private writing on Johnson reveal that the "normal circumstances" Clifford referred to here belonged to Thrale's past relationship with Johnson—a past well before Henry Thrale's death and Thrale's attraction to Gabriel Piozzi, and one from which Johnson continued to read Thrale. Indeed, as we have seen, Johnson continued to read Thrale's marriage to Henry Thrale as a happy one, even though her letters to Johnson and her private writings show that it was actually a much more care-laden and cold relationship that lacked mutual trust and caring. Moreover, Clifford does not take into account that over time, Thrale had valid reasons to view Johnson as a suspicious friend, a naysayer, and one who continued to view her from the perspective of their past friendship. Johnson was unwilling to see her as a woman who wished to pursue happiness and live a new life. Looked at in this light, her decision not to rush to Johnson's aid after he suffered a stroke is understandable. However, Clifford produces an extremely Freudian and

⁴⁸⁸ Clifford, Piozzi 221.

negative assessment of Thrale at this time in her life as if vengefully attacking her for what he viewed as her mistreatment and betrayal of Johnson:

The active, generous woman of the seventies had been warped by the last years into a listless, psychopathic bundle of nerves. Frustrated, as she was though, in her craving for love, and afflicted by a host of imaginary physical ills, she had developed an exaggerated case of self-pity. Coupled with this was a persecution complex, which kept her convinced that her daughters and friends were cruelly uniting on all sides to thwart her.⁴⁸⁹

Furthermore, Clifford seems to have forgotten his own prior observation on Thrale that she "flew from death." Only a few years earlier, Thrale had watched her husband become increasingly debilitated by strokes and finally die of one. Clifford does not take into consideration that upon hearing of Johnson's stroke, Thrale might have been reminded of her husband's dreadful strokes and she might have feared that Johnson's death was imminent, a fact that Clifford had already cited as reason enough to make her stay away.

Clifford even takes the side of Thrale's daughters against their mother when he writes: "Having lost interest in everything except her own misery, [Thrale] refused to take any part in Bath society, much to the annoyance of her daughters, who were completely bored by their dull existence." But Thrale's lack of attention to her daughters is also understandable. As we have seen, she felt her daughters were treating her cruelly by not acknowledging her pain over the loss of Piozzi, or the greatness of the sacrifice that she had made for them. Indeed, she

⁴⁸⁹ Clifford, Piozzi 222.

had recorded previously in Thraliana that if her daughters, especially Hester Maria, had shown more compassion and understanding about her sadness at parting with Piozzi, Thrale would have felt recompensed for acting in accordance with her eldest daughter's wishes that she remain apart from Piozzi forever.⁴⁹⁰ Thrale noted that even after Piozzi had given all of his letters to Hester Maria and had left England for Italy to protect Thrale and her daughters' social and public reputations, Hester Maria gave Piozzi no respect for his actions. Moreover, Hester Maria remained adamantly against her mother's love for him.

Thus, it is not difficult to understand why Thrale was not eager to spend time with her daughters. However, Clifford attributes Thrale's behavior to both an "exaggerated case of self-pity" and a "persecution complex . . . which kept her convinced" that in addition to her daughters, her "friends were cruelly uniting on all sides to thwart her." But, in reality, everyone around Thrale was against her pursuit of her own happiness. Thrale had been publicly embarrassed in the newspapers of the day. Socially, her daughters and friends, including Frances Burney and Johnson, were wholeheartedly against her desire to live differently. Burney and Hester Maria had repeatedly attempted to persuade Thrale to part with Piozzi. Johnson wrote to Thrale that she should focus on living economically and keeping her family together in Bath rather than engaging in visions of future happiness, an oblique allusion to her plans to marry Piozzi and live in Italy. Johnson even wrote to Hester Maria to complain about her mother's behavior toward him.

Other friends also proved unreliable. Thrale had told her longtime friend William Seward of her love for Piozzi. She wrote

⁴⁹⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 588.

privately that Seward had "at length persuaded me to trust him with the Secret of my Love for Piozzi." She had believed that Seward's intentions were good: "he will assist us I am sure, & smooth the Difficulties in our Passage to each other." However, Seward immediately betrayed Thrale by telling her daughters all that she had said to him. Thrale wrote in Thraliana:

Seward has behaved with unprovoked Cruelty and Treachery: worming me out of a Confession of my Passion for Piozzi by promising faithfully to keep my Secret from the Girls to whom he instantly ran with the News, & now helps them to hoot & ridicule me; tells me he is at the Bear Inn at Bath to fright me, & then laughs at my Distress with the Girls. I went into a Fit on the parade to day. I could not have believed Mr. Seward was so hard-hearted—but I must bear all; may I but live to see my Piozzi come home & fetch me away—far, far from these open Enemies & pretended Friends.⁴⁹¹

Finally, by late 1783, Hester Maria and Frances Burney were keeping a secret correspondence from Thrale. These letters confirm that Seward had been persuaded to act in concert with Queeney and Frances Burney to have Thrale give up Piozzi.⁴⁹² Indeed, by late November 1783, Thrale wrote in Thraliana, "I am sometimes ready to think Fanny Burney treacherous, but tis a sinful thought & must not be indulged—yet I could have sworn for Mr. Seward too; & his Behaviour amazes while it disgusts me. Now am I sure enough become—a Tale, a Sport for Fools. Oh

⁴⁹¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 576.

⁴⁹² Thrale, Hester Maria (Queeney), The Queeney Letters: Being Letters Addressed to Hester Maria Thrale by Dr. Johnson, Fanny Burney, and Mrs. Thrale-Piozzi ed. Marquis of Lansdowne (London: Cassell, 1934) 70.

insupportable Torment!"⁴⁹³ Likewise, she wrote privately of the people who had advised and counseled her, a group which included Johnson:

I . . . have paid pretty dearly for Counsel God help me . . . Oh how I long to free myself from the triumphs of the Adviser, the Contempts of the Consoler, the Officiousness of the Assister, and the disgusting Insolence of all. . . . Seward's ill Usage has hurt me the worst among them—he is so kind & charitable to every suffering Wretch but me: Well! Patienza!⁴⁹⁴

Thus it was neither unreasonable nor "paranoid" (as Clifford would have us believe) for Thrale to think that her children and her dearest friends might continue to devise ways to keep her from Piozzi. Thrale was sensing correctly the incessant plot against her reunion with Piozzi. In fact, Thrale was acutely perceptive.

Mary Hyde also condemned Thrale for not going to Johnson immediately after she heard of his stroke, for making "no effort to go to London" to "nurse" Johnson. However, Thrale did write a letter to Johnson stating that she would come to him if he thought it necessary. Clifford called her offer to come to Johnson "half-hearted."⁴⁹⁵ But this offer was surely no more "half-hearted" than Johnson's own identical offers to come to Thrale in the past. Clifford also wrote that after his stroke, "Johnson had to content himself with writing frequent accounts of his condition to his distant, callous Mistress."⁴⁹⁶ Again, Thrale was no more "callous" than Johnson had been during her several crises. Mary Hyde wrote that Johnson sent Thrale "long, pathetic letters, a virtual diary of his illness, but even these did not move

⁴⁹³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 581.

⁴⁹⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 579-80.

⁴⁹⁵ Clifford, Piozzi 222.

⁴⁹⁶ Clifford, Piozzi 222.

her."⁴⁹⁷ How could "pathetic" letters from Johnson about his health be any more moving than Thrale's own past letters about the misery of two bankruptcies, the numerous deaths of children, and the illness and death of her husband? Thus, neither Clifford nor Hyde notes that by writing to Johnson instead of going immediately to him, Thrale was behaving the same way as Johnson had treated her at times of crisis in the past.

Indeed, Thrale could not be blamed for avoiding Johnson when, in a fit of pique, he refused her offer to come: "Your offer, dear Madam, of coming to me, is charmingly kind; but I will lay up for future use, and then let it not be considered as obsolete."⁴⁹⁸ Furthermore, it seems that neither Clifford nor Hyde takes into account that Thrale was probably soon reassured that Johnson was safe, for the time being, by his quick recovery from the stroke. Clifford writes that by June 19, 1783, only two days after having a stroke, Johnson "was so far recovered that he could write her [Thrale] a long account of his seizure."⁴⁹⁹ Certainly, Johnson appeared in his full powers in this June 19 letter to Thrale in which he several times accused her of neglect:

I am sitting down in no chearful solitude to write a narrative which would once have affected you with tenderness and sorrow, but which You will perhaps pass over now with the careless glance of frigid indifference. For this dimunition of regard however, I know not whether I ought to blame You, who may have reasons which I cannot know, and I do not blame myself who have for a great part of human life done You what good I could, and have never done you evil.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁷ Mary Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 157.

⁴⁹⁸ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman III: 38.

⁴⁹⁹ Clifford, Piozzi 221.

⁵⁰⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 150-151.

Furthermore, after writing a long and detailed letter about the state of his health, Johnson wrote, "How this will be received by You, I know not, I hope You will sympathise with me," and quoting from Jonathan Swift's On the Death of Dr. Swift (just as Thrale had quoted years before), Johnson wrote "but perhaps, 'My Mistress gracious, mild, and good,/ Cries, Is he dumb? tis time he shou'd.'"⁵⁰¹ Johnson immediately followed these lines with a direct plea for Thrale's sympathy while, at the same time, he accused her of being an ungrateful friend:

But can this be possible, I hope it cannot. I hope that what, when I could speak, I spoke of You, and to You, will be in a sober and serious hour remembred by You, and surely it cannot be remembered but with some degree of kindness. I have loved you with virtuous affection, I have honoured You with sincere Esteem.

Let not all our endearment be forgotten, but let me have in this great distress your pity and your prayers. You see I yet turn to You with my complaints as a settled and unalienable friend, do not, do not drive me from You, for I have not deserved either neglect nor hatred.⁵⁰²

Then Johnson wrote to her somewhat contemptuously, "I suppose you may wish to know how my disease is treated by the physicians."

Although Mary Hyde castigates Thrale for not going to Johnson when he was "critically ill and without proper care," Johnson had reported his quick (two-day) recovery to Thrale in the same June 18 letter. In addition, this letter, which was an eloquent yet belligerent indictment of Thrale, was in no way inferior, in style or content, to how Johnson

⁵⁰¹ "The Queen, so Gracious, Mild and Good,/Cries, 'Is he gone? 'Tis time he shou'd'" (Swift, Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, ll, 181-2).

had written to her before his stroke. Therefore, Thrale must have been reassured that Johnson was well again. She knew he was receiving good care, especially when Johnson reported to her that he had two doctors come to him immediately after he suffered the stroke and that "what can be done, is done for me." In addition, because Thrale had predicted and then witnessed the dramatic and debilitating changes in her husband's personality immediately after his first stroke, Johnson's sudden recovery must have comforted her. Thrale summed up her complex feelings in Thraliana on June 24: "A Stroke of the Palsy has robbed Johnson of his Speech I hear, dreadful Event! & I at a Distance—poor Fellow! a Letter from himself in his usual Style convinces me that none other of his Faculties have fail'd him, & his Physicians say that all present Danger is over."⁵⁰³

Finally, even Johnson must have sensed that the emotional demands and pressure he was putting on Thrale in his June 19 letter were unreasonable and unfair. He closed his letter to her writing, "I am almost ashamed of this querulous letter," but he chose to communicate his disapproval to Thrale anyway by adding: "but now it is written, let it go."⁵⁰⁴

It was not callousness that was keeping Thrale from Johnson, but an ever-widening gap between how Johnson was reading her and how she was reading herself. A day later, on June 20, 1783, Johnson wrote to Thrale reading her in her past role as his caregiver once again: "I think to send you for some time a regular diary. You will forgive the gross images which disease must necessarily present."⁵⁰⁵ Neither Clifford nor

⁵⁰² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 153.

⁵⁰³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 568.

⁵⁰⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 153.

⁵⁰⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 155.

Hyde consider that despite her own problems, Thrale must have written to Johnson in the interim and reassured him of her friendship—enough for Johnson to write a “diary” of his illnesses to her in his letters. On June 21, Johnson began a letter to Thrale, “I continue my Journal” before writing a long letter about his symptoms and the care he was receiving.⁵⁰⁶ On June 23 Johnson opened a letter to her, “I thank you for your kind letter, and will continue my [medical] diary,” as if he were writing to her from the Hebrides again. But this time Johnson was writing to her from the strange, new land of being a stroke survivor. Surely his writing to her of his condition must have caused Thrale much discomfort by prompting her to relive Henry Thrale’s slow death from a series of strokes. Moreover, in this same letter, although thanking Thrale for her offer to come to him, Johnson wrote how he expected her to act in the future as his friend: “A time of dereliction may come, when I may have hardly any other friend.” Johnson then added, “but in the present exigency, I cannot name one who has been deficient in activity or attention,” as if also attempting to erase the accusations he had hurled at Thrale when he had written to her previously. In this same letter, Johnson assured Thrale once again, “What man can do for man, has been done for me,” and closed his letter to her commanding her to “Write to me very often.”⁵⁰⁷ By June 24, Johnson could write to her: “Less and less is done, and, I thank God, less and less is suffered every day Both Queeny’s letters and Yours gave me to day great pleasure.”⁵⁰⁸

But Thrale had not failed to notice, as she had earlier in their relationship after Henry’s death, the proprietary and critical nature of

⁵⁰⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 155-6.

⁵⁰⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 157.

Johnson's letters to her. Hurt by and angry at his unchanged readings of her, she responded to them by once again injecting an emotional distance into her letters. An infuriated Johnson wrote in his next extant letter to her: "Think as well and as kindly of me as You can, but do not flatter me. Cool reciprocations of esteem are the great comforts of life, hyperbolical praise only corrupts the tongue of one, and the ear of another."⁵⁰⁹ Moreover, Johnson continued closely to monitor how Thrale wrote to him, and he even attempted to instruct her on how he would like her to write to him in a June 28 letter praising her most recent letter: "Your letter is such as I desire, and as from You I hope always to deserve."

In addition to receiving Johnson's directions about how she should write to him and how Johnson wanted her to read him as a friend, Thrale once again faced Johnson's paradoxical moods in his letters to her. For in the same letter in which he complained about her, he also wrote, "I have had no reason to complain of indifference or neglect." Likewise, in several letters, after having documented the seriousness of his various illnesses to Thrale, Johnson suddenly wrote of making a visit to his dear friend Bennett Langton: "I am going next week to Rochester where I expect not to stay long. Eight children in a small house will probably make a chorus not very diverting. . . ."⁵¹⁰ Indeed, judging from Johnson's letters to Thrale, a steady stream of friends visited him, and feted him with food. One gentleman even offered to pay all of Johnson's medical bills, an offer Johnson saw fit to refuse, and declared in a letter to Thrale that he "did not need it." However, Johnson still eagerly sought Thrale's sympathy and wrote to her

⁵⁰⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 158.

⁵⁰⁹ Johnson, Letters, Redford IV: 158.

pathetically about his recent stroke, "Would You not have been very [sorry] for me, when I could scarcely speak?" Johnson closed this letter arguing why he deserved even greater sympathy from Thrale while, at the same time, continuing to instruct her regarding how she should view him: "Let me have your kindness and your prayers and think on me, as on a man who for a very great portion of Your life, has done You all the good he could, and desires still to be considered as, Madam, Your most humble servant."⁵¹¹ In early July 1783, Johnson again explained to Thrale how he read himself in his relationship with her and asked her to directly affirm or deny his depiction:

I . . . have in this still scene of life great comfort in reflecting that I have given very few reason[s] to hate me; I hope scar[c]ely any man has known me closely but to his benefit, or cursorily, but to his innocent entertainment. Tell me You that know me best, whether this be true, that according to your answer I may continue my practice, or try to mend it.⁵¹²

However, judging from her writings on and to Johnson in the private and social spheres of her life, Thrale could no longer see Johnson as he wished her to see him. In early July 1783, when Thrale wrote to Johnson of her intention to go to Weymouth, Johnson responded suspiciously, "When do you go [to] Weymouth? and why do you go? only I suppose to a new place, and the reason is sufficient to those who have no reason to withhold them."⁵¹³ "Mrs. Thrale went to Weymouth," she wrote privately, to "repair" her "lost Health by Sea bathing."⁵¹⁴ Johnson's statement that she had "no reason to withhold" going to Weymouth must

⁵¹⁰ Johnson, Letters, Redford IV: 168-69.

⁵¹¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 161-62.

⁵¹² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 165-66.

⁵¹³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 165-66.

have only further confirmed for Thrale that Johnson was aware of her involvement with Piozzi. On July 8, 1783, when Johnson wrote to Thrale about visiting Langton, he commented bitterly that Langton was a friend "among those who wish me well, and would exert what power he has to do me good." Johnson wrote soon after this of how he thought "a short succession of trifles may contribute to my reestablishment," as if he were looking to diversify his journey with a trip to Weymouth to see Thrale. Indeed, he had already written to her of the inconvenience he would face in visiting Bennett Langton, who had eight children and a small house and who, according to Johnson, was hesitant to have Johnson as his guest.⁵¹⁵

For all of his interest in her journey to Weymouth, however, Johnson suddenly stopped writing to her during the two weeks he was in Rochester. Thrale could not have failed to notice this. However, despite her feeling increasingly bereft of love, emotional support, and understanding among her family and friends, she seemed no longer to fret over Johnson's paradoxical behavior, or his sudden shows of attention and then inattention to her. Thrale wrote privately in Thraliana on July 27, 1783:

Six Months have this Day elapsed since I suffered the inexpressible Agony of telling my Piozzi that we must absolutely part—and here I am alive though greatly shaken in my health surrounded by Companions to whom I am morally certain my Death would be welcome . . . I really strive to make them chearfully spend with me that Time they have insisted on my passing with them; nothing however makes the Injurer forgive, & knowing

⁵¹⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 569.

⁵¹⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 171-72.

themselves the Cause of my Unhappiness, they love not the Sight of me. Would I dress & flash about, and receive Men's Addresses it might please them, but they saw me studiously Avoid Lord Musgrave's Visits,--nay forbid them; & since that, their Hopes of my forgetting my Lover has been at an End.--Vain Imagination & worthy of their own Hearts not of mine, where his Image is engraved, his Merit recorded:--breaking my Heart will not do, 'tis like breaking a Looking Glass,--the Figure still lives in every broken Piece, & will continue to Annihilation."⁵¹⁶

On the same day, Thrale wrote to Johnson calmly, "I received your kind letter yesterday, and was very glad to see it, for though I guessed why you were so long in writing, yet we all began to wonder that you never wrote at all."⁵¹⁷

Mary Hyde criticized Thrale for not inviting Johnson to "rejoin the family" at Weymouth, especially since, as she wrote, "Johnson was better and able to travel."⁵¹⁸ But Thrale was ill both physically and emotionally. Indeed, on August 12, 1783, she wrote privately of her decision to go to Weymouth: "I am come here chiefly on my own Account to repair my lost Health by Sea bathing." Two days later she wrote in Thraliana: "Oh me! what a World this is! yet I wish not to quit it till I have finally settled Matters with my Piozzi. I shall be grown too hideous for his Endurance by the Time I see him again perhaps--Oh God forbid!"⁵¹⁹ In traveling to Weymouth, Thrale needed to remove herself even further from the former social and public spheres that she had inhabited at London and Bath, spheres in which Johnson figured

⁵¹⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 569.

⁵¹⁷ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman III: 58.

⁵¹⁸ Hyde, Thrales of Streatham 238.

⁵¹⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 569-70.

prominently, and to remove herself further from public scrutiny as well. Thus she went to Weymouth to contemplate her future in private as well as to recover her health.

From Weymouth, still hoping to avoid a complete break with Johnson over her love for Piozzi, Thrale focused on Johnson's best qualities in her letters to him. She read him as a man who was not only surviving his various illnesses but who was now enjoying life again. In fact, Johnson had written to Thrale about how he was able to go to church and of the visits he was now making to friends. However, on August 13, 1783, Johnson resisted this reading of himself and rebuked Thrale for portraying him so positively in her letters to him:

Of this world in [which] You represent me as delighting to live, I can say little. . . . I am now broken with disease, without the alleviation of familiar friendship, or domestick society; I have no middle state between clamour and silence, between general conversation and self tormenting solitude. Levet is dead, and poor Williams is making haste to dye. I know not if She will ever more come out of her Chamber. I am now quite alone, but let me turn my thoughts another way.⁵²⁰

Moreover, on August 20, 1783, Johnson wrote bitterly to Thrale, "I read your last kind letter with great delight, but when I came to love and honour, what sprang in my Mind?--How lov'd, how honour'd once, avails thee not"⁵²¹

Thus, once again, Thrale was confronted with how Johnson wanted to be read by her. He was not satisfied with her polite and positive

⁵²⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 186.

⁵²¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 187-88. "'How lov'd, how honour'd once, avails thee not'" (Pope, Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady. l.71).

letters to him, but Thrale was in no position to resume the tiring and time-consuming task of being responsible for nursing Johnson back to health. Moreover, she could no longer belong to Johnson's "community of ideas" on how she should read him and how she should live her life. She and Johnson had arrived at an impasse in their relationship once again.

On August 26, 1783, Johnson wrote to her: "I have determined to pass some time with Mr. Bowles near Salisbury, and have taken a place for Thursday." This meant Johnson would be within easy traveling distance of Weymouth. On September 3, rather than complain directly to Thrale, Johnson wrote to Hester Maria: "life in a new house is a kind of restraint, bothe [sic] to the guest and to the master, and how long we shall bothe like it, I cannot tell." In the same letter he added, "My Mistress, I am afraid, forgets me," and then, barely disguising his anger, Johnson wrote as politely as he could, "but if she is got well, she may entertain Mr. Burke and his Brother, who have just past by in their way to Weymouth."⁵²² Moreover, on September 9, Johnson wrote to Susanna Thrale, "Pray shew Mamma this passage of a letter from Dr. Brocklesby."⁵²³ This passage announced the death of Anna Williams, who had been a member of Johnson's household for decades.

Thrale could not have failed to notice that Johnson wrote to her daughters now about matters which, in the past, he would have communicated directly to her. It must only have made her feel more isolated to have Johnson appealing to her unfeeling daughters. But Thrale now drew on inner resources that reflected her confidence in herself as an intellectual, a writer, and as the "spouse" of her honorable lover, Piozzi. Indeed, when she returned to Bath in September

⁵²² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 195.

⁵²³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 196.

1783, she identified Piozzi in her private writing as her "Sposo separato," and wrote of how she lived "surrounded by his [Piozzi's] Enemies, and my Tormentors." She continued, "I live a Life of Vigilance & Constraint, ill suiting a liberal & expanded Mind; which conscious of no Ill ought to fear no Inspection." Of her daughters, she wrote, "The hardness of my Companions Hearts . . . increases my Willingness to leave them," and she exclaimed privately in Thraliana: "But Oh that I had Wings like a Dove . . . and then would I flee away & be at rest!"⁵²⁴ She wrote of her private life at Bath:

I do nothing but write to him I think; nothing but think of him I'm sure: every Study, every Improvement of My own Mind has his Entertainment in View, every Love! return and bless me with your Sight once more; I cannot bear these Agonies of Absence, what Madness to part when our Souls were so fondly united! to hope Happiness from future Union, and delay the hour of Bliss.⁵²⁵

In this same passage she called Piozzi, "the only Man my Soul ever delighted in," and wrote a prayer to restrain herself from going to Piozzi:

May God grant me . . . Health & peace to wait here quietly and pay my Debts—the Winter will pass over as the Summer has past, perhaps with less Anguish; and I shall once more see, once more hear the only Man my Soul ever delighted in.—Oh gracious Lord hear my Prayer, & have pity on my Affliction!⁵²⁶

Nevertheless, it is clear that despite her own problems, Thrale continued to be concerned about Johnson's health and asked about it in her letters to him. On September 23, Johnson answered: "You will not

⁵²⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 572-3.
⁵²⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 573.

much wonder that my own state of body is much in my thoughts, or that since You enquired about it, I should [write] what intelligence I obtain." Similarly, on September 25, 1783, Thrale wrote to Johnson of an operation that he might have to undergo to remove a hydrocele: "may that Courage you have always so eminently exerted, be of Use to you now: but I grieve for the sharp Pain my poor dear Mr. Johnson must go through." She even recommended a surgeon, and wrote modestly to Johnson, "but my likings are of little Consequence in such serious Matters." She then wrote sensitively to him:

Somebody tells me that you went in a rough Carriage from Salisbury to London, but you probably found any Carriage rough. God give you Strength & Patience, I think the Constitution is equal to all that is required of it.⁵²⁷

If one were just to read Johnson's complaints of Thrale's neglect, and certainly Johnson's letters are much more widely read and better known than Thrale's, one would conclude that Thrale was being cold and unfair to the ailing Johnson. However, when one looks at Thrale's letters to Johnson and at her private writing about him, one can see that she continued to care deeply about him despite his frequent criticism of her and his efforts to control how she was reading him. But the gap between how Johnson read himself in his friendship with Thrale and how she read him had become too large. Johnson closed the foregoing letter instructing Thrale to "Consider [me] as one that has loved You much, and loved you long," something that Thrale had found it necessary to stop doing herself years earlier.⁵²⁸ With her health and her hopes for the future seriously compromised, Thrale was

⁵²⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 573.

⁵²⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 207.

understandably wary of Johnson's complaints about his health and his desire for her to nurse him. Perhaps, better than anyone else, Thrale remembered Johnson's nervous breakdowns and his ever-present fear of holding madness at bay. This is evident when, in writing to Johnson to express her concern about his health, Thrale also made a distinction between his "real" and "imagined" fears: "Every body is solidly, and sincerely concerned for all Danger that may beset and all real Evil that may befall you but none either are, or ought to be as much concerned as my Daughters or myself: relieve us soon Dear Sir in saying you are safe." She closed this letter, "After such a Word I can really add no more but that I am most Affectionately Your Obliged Servant."⁵²⁹

Likewise, on September 28, 1783, Thrale wrote privately: "Johnson is dying . . . I believe; poor Soul! I shall be very sorry," and she wrote immediately after this, thinking of Piozzi and Johnson respectively: "My Lovers and my Friends hast thou put away from me (as King David says) and hid mine Acquaintance out of my Sight."⁵³⁰

Thus Thrale still cared for Johnson, but she had come to admire Piozzi's character and his friendship for her above the esteem of Johnson. This is clear when she wrote privately:

I have got me a Ticket in the new State Lottery: who knows but a Prize there may perfect our Felicity? is Happiness impossible? No, No; his astonishing Virtue & Merit must be rewarded: his every Look, his every Action, his every Line deserves from me all that can be done. God give me but the Power to reward him!⁵³¹

⁵²⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 207.

⁵²⁹ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, Chapman III: 77.

⁵³⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston 573-4.

⁵³¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 574.

That Thrale continued to write to Johnson about his health is evident in his letters to her. Johnson clearly regarded Thrale's concern for him as sincere and he continued to send her a quite detailed medical diary of his symptoms and treatment. Moreover, Thrale must have inquired into the possible causes of his illnesses, for Johnson wrote on October 9, 1783:

Many reasons hinder me from believing that opium had any part in my late disorder. I had a long time forborn it. I never used in any quantity comparable to what is taken by those that habitually indulge themselves with it. It never produces palsies by the utmost excess. My Physicians had so little suspicion of it, though they know my practice, that they made use of it to obviate some effects of the blisters.

It was the paralytick affection which I mentioned sixteen year[s] ago to Dr. Laurence, when he allowed my fears to be reasonable. It appeared afterward as an asthma, from which since its invasion of another part I have been almost wholly free, and which in its paroxysms was relieved by opium.⁵³²

Thrale must have also asked about a hydrocele that had been troubling Johnson for some time, for Johnson continued in this same letter:

The state of the tumour is now changed. When the Surgeons visited me, they thought it upon examination a sarcocele, but I was willing to hope something better, and was likewise desirous of knowledge rather than conjecture; I therefore proposed an exploration by puncture; the operation was performed, and the unwelcome opinion was confirmed. The breach made in the integuments closed, but the internal wound never healed. The

tumour increased with great encumbrance and very frequent pain, so tender as scarcely to endure any bandage, and so much inflamed as to threaten great mischief.

Such was my misery when I consulted Mr. Mudge, and was driven back to town. Mr. Pot found the danger not immediate but seemed to think excision unavoidable; but being to take a journey delayed it. While he was away the external wound burst open, and by very frequent effusions the tension is eased, the inflammation abated, and the protuberance so diminished as to incommode me very little, and scarcely to remind me of my disease by any pain . . . the operation is therefore at least suspended, but the tumour is found not scirrous, and therefore not likely to corrupt any other part .

. . . ⁵³³

Although Thrale continued to write with concern to Johnson, she still had to endure Johnson's slights in his letters to her. In the above letter, although Johnson wrote that he was "pleased to find" that she "desired" an account of his health, and continued, "I hope, You will be glad to hear that from such a complication of miseries I am now at ease," he also added condescendingly, "When You write Latin to any body but me, take care to spell it right."⁵³⁴ Indeed, Johnson continued to complain to Thrale about the style and the content of her letters to him. On October 21, he wrote to her:

When in your letter of the eleventh, you told me that my two letters had obliged, consoled, and delighted you, I was much elevated, and longed for a larger answer; but when the answer of the nineteenth came, I found that obliging, consolatory, and

⁵³² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 216-17.

⁵³³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 216-17.

delightful paragraphs had made so little impression, that you want again to be told what those papers were written to tell you, and of what I can now tell you nothing new.⁵³⁵

In this letter, Johnson instructed Thrale: "Endeavour to reform that instability of attention which your last letter has happened to betray." Johnson also gave Thrale advice on how to live her life at Bath: "You are now retired, and have nothing to impede self-examination or self-improvement." But at the same time, he told her about the dangers of idealizing her past, especially with regard to Piozzi, whom Johnson did not mention by name and whom Thrale had not seen now for eight months: "Perhaps it is natural for those that have much within to think little on things without; but whoever lives heedlessly lives but in a mist, perpetually deceived by false appearances of the past, without any certain reliance on recollection."⁵³⁶

At times, Johnson did seem aware, if only momentarily, that he was rather self-absorbed in his letters to Thrale. On October 27, 1783, he wrote to her: "You may be very reasonably weary of sickness; it is neither pleasant to talk nor to hear of it. I hope soon to lose the disgusting topick" (4:232). However, immediately after this Johnson wrote once again of his ill health. Likewise, when Thrale chided Johnson for his anger at her inattention in a previous letter, she could not have been pleased when Johnson responded as if to justify his behavior rather than apologize for it: "If I was a little cross, would it not have made patient Grisel cross, to find that you had forgotten the letter that you was answering?" Johnson added to this, "But what did I care, if I did not love you?" Furthermore, Johnson wrote to

⁵³⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 219-22.

⁵³⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 219-22.

Thrale that she could not "throw away" his "kindness" to her if she "tried," adding, "while you desire to keep it," as if it would be her own fault if she lost his "kindness."

Additionally, Thrale must have found Johnson's way of thinking about life and death in his letters depressing, especially since she was suffering from poor health and wondering if she would ever see Piozzi again. In the letter mentioned above, Johnson had written: "I have formerly heard, what you perhaps have heard too, that—The wheel of life is daily turning round,/ And nothing in this world of certainty is found." Sentiments like these must have frightened Thrale as she anxiously awaited Piozzi's letters from Italy. She was expecting Piozzi to write of his plans to come to England. On October 23, Thrale wrote in Thraliana: "a long, long Fortnight has elapsed again, & no Letters come from Italy; My Health sinks under so many Miseries."⁵³⁷

Although Thrale was writing to Johnson as he wished, with concern about his health, his response was to try to insist on *his reading* of their friendship based on what it was in the past. On November 13, 1783, he wrote: "Since you have written to me with the attention and tenderness of ancient time, your letters give me a great part of the pleasure which a life of Solitude admits." Thrale, however, could not have been pleased when Johnson pridefully told her immediately after this statement: "You will never bestow any share of your good will on one who deserves better," and then proceeded to lecture her on the value of old friends over new ones:

Those that have loved longest, love best. A sudden blaze of kindness, may by a single blast of coldness be extinguished, but

⁵³⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 228-30.
⁵³⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 574.

that fondness which length of time has connected with many circumstances and occasions, though it may for a while [be] suppressed by disgust or resentment with or without a cause, is hourly revived by accidental recollection. To those that have lived long together every thing heard and every thing seen recalls some pleasure communicated, or some benefit conferred, some petty quarrel or some slight endearment. Esteem of great powers or amiable qualities newly discovered may embroider a day or a week, but a friendship of twenty years is interwoven with the texture of life. A friend may be often found and lost, but an old Friend never can be found, and Nature has provided that he cannot easily be lost. . . .⁵³⁸

Johnson closed this letter gloomily, "whom I have lost—let me not now remember. Let not your loss be added to the mournful catalogue. Write soon again" ⁵³⁹

Although Thrale appreciated that Johnson wrote endearingly to her, the vigilant watch that Johnson kept over their friendship was rarely, if at all, relaxed. Moreover, in addition to writing to Hester Maria, Johnson also wrote to Thrale's thirteen-year-old daughter, Susanna, instructing her to "tell" her mother: "that I hearken every day after a letter from her." On one occasion he made a pointed reference to that arch enemy of Thrale's, Giuseppe Baretta, when he wrote to Susanna in a letter he must have known would be shown to her mother: "Here is a whole week and nothing heard from your house. Baretta said what a wicked house it would be, and a wicked house it is."⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 238-40.
⁵³⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 238-40.
⁵⁴⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 240-42.

Even though he complained about Thrale's inattention to him, Johnson seemed to adjust quite easily to Thrale's physical absence in his life. He now called Frances Burney to his side in the way he had once called Thrale. On November 19, 1783, Johnson wrote to Frances Burney, "You have been at home a long time and I have never seen you nor heard from You. Have we quarreled? . . . pray let me sometime have the honour of telling You, how much I am, Madam, Your most humble servant . . ."⁵⁴¹ Burney cited "bad weather alone" as an excuse for not visiting Johnson, and on the bottom margin of Johnson's letter to her she wrote, "F.B. flew to him instantly and most gratefully"—something Thrale could no longer do when Johnson requested to see her.⁵⁴²

Indeed, Thrale may have avoided Johnson in part because she simply could no longer predict how he would behave with her. At the same time, she probably did not want to be lectured to by Johnson on how to be a good friend to him. In late November 1783, when Thrale's daughter Sophia became seriously ill, Johnson even used this occasion to write to Thrale about the damage "incommunicative taciturnity" did to friendship. Upon learning of Sophia's illness, Johnson wrote to Thrale:

That frigid stillness with which my pretty Sophy melts away, exhibits a temper very incommodious in sickness, and by no means amiable in the tenour of life. Incommunicative taciturnity neither imparts nor invites friendship, but reposes on a stubborn sufficiency self-centered, and neglects the interchange of that social officiousness by which we are habitually endeared to one another. They that mean to make no use of friends, will be at little trouble to gain them; and to be without friendship, is to

⁵⁴¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 242.

⁵⁴² Burney, Letters, ed. Dobson II. 228.

be without one of the first comforts of our present state. To have no assistance from other minds, in resolving doubts, in appeasing scruples, in balancing deliberations, is a very wretched destitution. If therefore my loves have this silence by temper, do not let them have it by principle; show them that it is a perverse and inordinate disposition, which must be counteracted and reformed.⁵⁴³

Immediately after this Johnson wrote, "Have I said enough?" Clearly, he wrote this for Thrale's instruction as well. In the meantime, Thrale wrote privately in Thraliana in late November 1783:

Heavens! a new Distress! my Child, my Sophia will dye: arrested by the hand of God—apparently so: She will die without a Disease— Fits, sudden, unaccountable, unprovoked Apoplectic, lethargic like her Father. . . . I saved her in the first Attack, by a Dram of fine Old Usquebough given at the proper Moment—it reviv'd her, but She only lives I see to expire with fresh Struggles.

Oh spare my Darling, oh spare her gracious heaven--& take in Exchange the life of her wretched Mother!⁵⁴⁴

Predictably, Johnson opened a letter to Thrale for November 24 writing, "I have much consolation from the maternal and domestick character of your dear letters."⁵⁴⁵ Thrale must have noticed that Johnson continued to read her primarily as Thrale's widow and a mother, and not as she now read herself as an independent woman of a "liberal & expanded mind" who desired the love of an intellectual and emotional equal in Piozzi.

⁵⁴³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 245-6.

⁵⁴⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 581.

⁵⁴⁵ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 246.

The physical and mental collapse that Thrale suffered in sending Piozzi away was exacerbated by her becoming ill as a consequence of having to nurse Sophia back to health. Thrale became so ill that Hester Maria, who had been adamant that her mother should have nothing to do with Piozzi, became convinced that Piozzi should be brought back from Italy to save her mother's life.⁵⁴⁶ On November 30, 1783, Thrale wrote privately,

I have saved my Daughter sure enough, perhaps obtained a Friend: they are weary of seeing me suffer so, and the eldest beg'd me Yesterday not to sacrifice my Life to her Convenience; She now saw my Love of Piozzi was incurable She said, Absence had no Effect on it, and my Health was going so fast She found, that I should soon be useless either to her or him.—It was the hand of God & irresistible She added, & begged me not to endure any longer such unnecessary Misery.⁵⁴⁷

She added privately,

I wrote my Lover word that he might come & fetch me, but the Alps are covered with Snow, & if his Prudence is not greater than his Affection—my Life will yet be lost, for it depends upon his Safety: Should he come at my Call, & meet with any Misfortune on

⁵⁴⁶ Katherine Balderston states: "On December 15 Fanny Burney wrote to Queeney: 'What a Night was that you described!--between her & your sister, what must you have gone through!. . . If Mrs. Thrale is so all alive to the danger of any of you now, what will she be when she feels she has deserted you! . . . I quite applaud your spirited speech upon her encreasing misery, without any encreasing occasion, & congratulate you upon its effect'" See also Queeney Letters, 82. Thraliana, I: 582, n.1.

⁵⁴⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 582.

the road—Death with accumulated Agonies would end me—May Heaven avert such insupportable Distress!⁵⁴⁸

On November 29, 1783, after expressing his joy and thanks for Sophia's recovery, Johnson responded to the news in his old role as advisor to Thrale: "Now she is recovered, she must write me a little history of her sufferings. And impart her schemes of study and improvement. . . . She will go back to her arithmetick again."⁵⁴⁹ Furthermore, on December 1, 1783, Johnson complained once again of Thrale's "short" letters to him: "If you can be short, I can be as short as you."⁵⁵⁰ On December 13, Johnson wrote insecurely to Thrale, "I think it long since I wrote, and sometimes venture to hope that You think it long too," and he instructed her, again most probably in reference to Piozzi, "compose your mind."⁵⁵¹ But this must have been difficult for Thrale, who feared that Piozzi might not return to her. Her fears were not totally unfounded: Piozzi delayed his return to England until July 1784.

At the end of 1783, Johnson continued to write his medical diary to Thrale and to complain of "the wearisome solitude of the long evenings." However, as before, he wrote frequently to her about the people whom he had visited and who had visited him. This prompted Thrale, in a letter that is lost, to question his depiction of himself as "solitary." On December 27, 1783, Johnson wrote to Thrale:

You have more than once wondered at my complaint of solitude, when you hear that I am crowded with visits. . . . Visitors are no proper companions in the chamber of sickness. They come when I

⁵⁴⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 582.

⁵⁴⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 254-55.

⁵⁵⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 255.

⁵⁵¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 259.

could sleep, or read, they stay till I am weary, they force me to attend, when my mind calls for relaxation, and to speak when my powers will hardly actuate my tongue.

Then, as if looking again to be cared for by Thrale over the Christmas holiday, Johnson wrote dolefully,

The amusements and consolations of languor and depression are conferred by familiar and domestick companions . . . who do not obstruct accommodation by ceremony, or destroy indolence by awakening effort. . . . Such society I had with Levet and Williams, such I had where I am never likely to have it more.

I wish, dear Lady, to you and my dear Girls, many a cheerful and pious Christmas.⁵⁵²

On New Year's Eve 1783, Johnson wrote to Thrale as if to forgive her for her continued neglect of him, and as if to prompt her future regard: "Attention and respect give pleasure, however late, or however useless. But they are not useless, when they are late." Of himself, Johnson wrote: "it is reasonable to rejoice as the day declines, to find that [it] has been spent with the approbation of mankind."⁵⁵³ The "approbation" of mankind was of great importance to Johnson, but not to Thrale, who no longer read Johnson with complete "approbation," and who no longer sought such approval from him or from mankind.

⁵⁵² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 264-65.

⁵⁵³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 266-67.

9.

**Thrale No Longer Reading Herself as a Woman Alone but as Piozzi's Wife
and Johnson's Friend.**

While Johnson was thinking of his public reputation at the close of the year, Thrale was contemplating her future private happiness in marrying Piozzi, placing it above her considerations of the consequences to her social and public reputations. On New Year's Day 1784, Thrale wrote privately in Thraliana:

Here is a new Year begun! may it prove more happy than the last was! can it be more miserable? Is there on Earth a Pang like what I suffer'd when torn from the Man of my Heart?

God grant that this Year may smile upon our Union; if I have obtained the Consent of my Family by the Agonies of my Soul, they have not been endured for nothing.

They will however spoyl my Person so, it will not be worth his Acceptance for whom alone I would wish to be as handsome as Helen.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston 583. Thrale was aware that she often wrote exuberantly about herself and indulged her imagination. This is clear when she continued to write in Thraliana for January 1, 1784, "I have saved my Maid too, or I fancy I have; her Labor was tight and tedious If she had not had good help, one or both would possibly have perished." Having survived thirteen pregnancies, Thrale knew well the dangers of labor. However, she was hoping now to have a child with Piozzi. She wrote privately, "Oh might I hope to be once more in that State [pregnant] by the Man my Heart doats on--how little would I value Death or Danger!" She imagined further, "What! die in my Piozzi's Arms, & leave him a Pledge of my unbounded, my true Affection!" But then immediately, she chastised herself: "No! No! let me indulge no such Dreams of fantastic Delight, contented to see him once more, and assure him of my faithful Love" (Thraliana, I: 583.) As if to record that she was not alone in noticing her need for Piozzi, Thrale wrote privately in Thraliana for January 8, 1784, "Doctor Dobson asked Sophia Thrale what ail'd me? She told him, & he said We have not Time to lose: Call the Man home, or see your Mother die." (Thraliana, I: 584). In happy anticipation of Piozzi's return, Thrale wrote privately, "Sophia has written to Piozzi to invite him back to England, Oh how grateful,

Thrale saw Piozzi as a supportive reader of her as a desirable woman and as an intellectual. Piozzi was also a constant source of inspiration for her reemerging identity as a writer. Although her writing had not interested Henry Thrale and had produced only condescension and criticism from Johnson, Thrale wrote uninhibitedly to and for a very receptive Piozzi. On January 13, 1784, she recorded that she sent more verse to him: "This old Stuff I was led to imitate and modernize, & send to my Piozzi; as I rose one morning at five o'Clock unable to sleep, and breath'd a tender Sigh towards dear Milan."⁵⁵⁵ Thrale saw herself reflected in Piozzi's letters to her as a poet, a linguist, a translator, a philosopher, a talented and well-educated companion, and as a beautiful woman who also wrote wonderful letters. By contrast, it is clear by 1784 that Johnson would not write to her or read her in these roles. Indeed, Johnson seemed unable to write to her outside her customary role in their friendship of being his caregiver or the woman whom he turned to when he felt depressed. On January 31, 1784, Johnson wrote to Thrale:

It is indeed a long time since I wrote to Bath, I may [be] allowed to be weary of telling that I am sick, and sick, and you may well be weary of hearing, but having now kept the house for seven weeks, and not being likely soon to come out, I have my want of health much in my mind, and am indeed very deeply dejected. My friends call on me much oftener, than my feebleness allows me to admit them. I am afraid some of them will be angry. This is among the other evils of Sickness.⁵⁵⁶

how kind that was in her; how grateful I ought to be for such unhop'd for Comforts." Thraliana, I: 583-84.

⁵⁵⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 587.

⁵⁵⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 278-9.

Thrale had attempted to distract Johnson from thinking about his health by requesting that he send her the names of the new club Johnson had formed, the Essex Head Club, and the rules by which the Club was governed. Johnson responded in the letter cited above: "My inability to attend the Essex head makes the club droop, but if it does not languish quite away, I hope my return to it will invigorate and establish it, and then I will transmit to you our number, our names, and our laws."⁵⁵⁷ She also wrote to Johnson about his use of opium for relief of pain and as an aid to sleep. Johnson responded on February 9, 1784, that he used it only "under the pressure of insupportable distress," and added, "I cannot live without it, and the quantity which I take is less than it once was."⁵⁵⁸

Chapman finds fault with Thrale's view of Johnson's illness and quotes from a letter that Thrale wrote to Frances Burney on February 18, 1784 that gave a "strange account of J's letters during his illness": "Johnson is in a sad way, doubtless; yet he may still with care last another twelvemonth, and every week's existence is gain to him, who, like good Hezekiah, wearies Heaven with entreaties for life. I wrote him a very serious letter the other day."⁵⁵⁹ However, Chapman does not take into account that Thrale had a much more pragmatic view of death than Johnson. As we have seen in Thraliana, Thrale had resigned herself to the possibility of her own death several times because of a dangerous pregnancy or a life-threatening illness. By contrast, Johnson intensely feared death as "oblivion" and also feared that he might suffer eternal damnation. Johnson's view of death was so different from Thrale's that in a letter for March 2, 1784, he lashed out at her:

⁵⁵⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 279-80.
⁵⁵⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 283-84.

Write to me no more about 'dying with a grace.' When You feel what I have felt in approaching Eternity—in fear of soon hearing the sentence of which there is no revocation, you will know the folly, my wish is that you may know it sooner. The distance between the grave and the remotest point of human longevity is but a very little, and of that little no part is certain.⁵⁶⁰

However, immediately after this, as if regretting his outburst, Johnson wrote, "You know all this." After all, Johnson had seen Thrale deal forthrightly in her own brushes with death on several occasions in her life. In his next letter to her on March 10, 1784, Johnson further explained his intense fear of death as if to apologise for his outburst of anger in his previous letter:

You know I never thought confidence with respect to futurity any part of the character of a brave, a wise, or a good man. Bravery has no place where it can avail of nothing. Wisdom impresses strongly the consciousness of those faults, of which it is itself perhaps an aggravation; and Goodness always wishing to be better, and imputing every deficiency to criminal negligence, and every fault to voluntary corruption, never dares to suppose the conditions of forgiveness fulfilled, nor what is wanting in the virtue supplied by Penitence.

This is the state of the best, but what must be the condition of him whose heart will not suffer him to rank himself among the best, or among the good, such must be his dread of the approaching trial, as will leave him little attention to the opinion of those

⁵⁵⁹ Burney, Letters, ed. Dobson, II. 305).

⁵⁶⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 293.

whom he is leaving for ever, and the serenity that is not felt, it can be no virtue to feign.⁵⁶¹

Despite her own pressing problems, Thrale continued to write to Johnson with concern for his health in 1784, the year of his death. However, Johnson did not always return her kindness which must have made Thrale less-than-eager to "see" Johnson. She must have felt hurt and angry when Johnson judged her letters to him rather severely at times. For example, he wrote to Thrale on March 2: "Your last letter had something of tenderness"; likewise, on March 10, 1784, Johnson wrote, "Your kind expressions gave me great pleasure," as if to inspire Thrale to continue to write to him, but in this same letter he added, "[do not] eject me from your thoughts." On March 16, Johnson implored Thrale not only to "write to me often," but to "write kindly," even though there is no evidence to suggest that she had been writing "unkindly" to him at the time.⁵⁶²

In addition, Johnson pressed for a face-to-face meeting. In the foregoing of March 10, Johnson wrote to Thrale, "Shall we ever exchange confidence by the fireside again?"⁵⁶³ Similarly, on March 16, he wrote to her, "perhaps we may sometime see each other."⁵⁶⁴ However, plagued by ill health, by her fears that Piozzi would not return, by financial problems (which had made her for a time a debtor to her children), by the unpredictability of Johnson's responses to her letters, and by her disinclination to break completely with Johnson over her desire to marry Piozzi, Thrale did not arrange to see Johnson. Instead, she chose only to correspond with him.

⁵⁶¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 294.

⁵⁶² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 297-98.

⁵⁶³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 294-95.

⁵⁶⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 297-98.

It is clear that by 1784, Thrale was certain that Johnson objected to her love for Piozzi. Thrale also knew that she could not follow Johnson's advice, but would marry Piozzi. She had also decided that she would end her relationship with Johnson if he could not show Piozzi the love and the respect she felt Piozzi deserved. Considering these factors, Thrale's avoidance of Johnson reveals that she still cared enough about Johnson to avoid a meeting that would end in an inevitable break with him. Although she knew that she could not count on Johnson's sympathy or empathy regarding her wish to marry Piozzi, she might have had some hope that when Johnson learned that her daughters had agreed to the marriage, he would, too. However, Thrale chose not to discuss Piozzi with Johnson for the same private reason she had for not discussing Piozzi with her daughters: it was "a point of Civility & Prudence never to mention what could give nothing but Offence, & cause nothing but Disquiet."⁵⁶⁵

On April 15, 1784, Johnson wrote to Thrale describing himself as afflicted by a new "disease," that of indulging an increased appetite for food.⁵⁶⁶ Two days later, Thrale responded well at first to Johnson's "voracity": "Your comical Account of your own Voracity reached me just as the Salmons came in today, pray accept this very fine one till Pipers and Dorees come in."⁵⁶⁷ But then her response darkened as she compared Johnson's condition to her own life in Bath dealing with daughters and guardians who tried to control her future:

Eat away my dear Sir & fear no Colours; you will get Strength by your Food, and then your Mind will be got Strong too, and you will scorn your food—the old Fate of those who help'd in the early

⁵⁶⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 588.

⁵⁶⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 316.

Periods of a Struggle, and are thrown away when Struggle subsists no longer. I shall live to be served so myself perhaps, by Puppets who could scarcely have play'd their little parts well, had I not pulled the Strings for them at the beginning of the Evening; but then perhaps I may live on, & see them all thrown into a dirty Basket together when the Show is quite over--& the Managers run out of the Village for fear of Debts. . . ." ⁵⁶⁸

Moreover, Thrale wrote immediately after this, "I am not well, and I am not happy," and modestly to Johnson, "my Lawsuit lost, ⁵⁶⁹ my Money borrowed to pay it with aggravations of Evil very difficult to endure even for me, who am not a bad Endurer. . . . you live on the great Mart of Society [London]. . . . Bath does very well for me; Colossal Figures must stand in large Halls, but Miniatures do best over a Chimney in some small Room." She then reflected stoically: "Vexations within should teach one to be more watchful over our Words & Actions, lest habitual peevishness the most hateful of all Tempers should take possession of one's Mind." Thrale even had the presence of mind to reassure Johnson that she did not write this statement with him in mind: "You think now all about yourself, continue to do so dear Sir, I know noone better worth thinking on." However, she also cautioned Johnson that she was aware that he was writing to her daughters: "I am sure you are very kind to your pretty Girls here, in writing to them so." ⁵⁷⁰

Although she did not see him, Thrale bestowed favors on Johnson. On April 19, 1784, Johnson thanked her for the salmon that she had sent

⁵⁶⁷ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman III: 155.

⁵⁶⁸ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman III: 156.

⁵⁶⁹ Thrale had been sued successfully by the wife of her Uncle Thomas Salusbury for a loan that her uncle had made to her father over twenty years earlier.

to him; he called it "your magnificent Fish." He wrote as well, "As you do not now use your books [the ones in the library at Streatham], be pleased to let Mr. Cator know that I may borrow what I want."⁵⁷¹

Moreover, Thrale continued to write to Johnson to inquire about his health, which had suddenly improved dramatically. Johnson wrote excitedly to her on April 21, 1784, that he had recovered "from a distemper which few in the vigor of youth are known to surmount; a recovery of which neither myself, my friends, nor my physicians had any hope."⁵⁷² On April 26, Johnson wrote to Thrale of having attended an "exhibition" of "Pictures," at which he "went up all the stairs to the Pictures without stopping to rest or to breathe." Thrale in turn must have written to Johnson about an improvement in her health, for in this same letter, Johnson congratulated her on the return of her health. This April 26 letter is important for another reason—in it Johnson indicated most clearly that he knew of Thrale's torment over her love for Piozzi: "That You regain your health, is more than a common recovery, because I infer that you regain your peace of mind. Settle your thoughts, and control your imagination, and think no more of Hesperian felicity."⁵⁷³ Bruce Redford writes that it "cannot be established conclusively how much SJ knew, or suspected, of the details of Hester Thrale's involvement with Gabriel Piozzi."⁵⁷⁴ But the evidence that Johnson knew of Thrale's continuing love for Piozzi is compelling.

As early as November 1783, Frances Burney had written to Hester Maria that Johnson "knows of this horrible affair!" Burney thought then that Johnson knew only that Thrale had once loved Piozzi but assumed

⁵⁷⁰ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman III: 155-56.

⁵⁷¹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 317-18.

⁵⁷² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 319-20.

⁵⁷³ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 320.

that the affair had ended when Piozzi left England.⁵⁷⁵ However, James Boswell recorded in his Life that on May 16, 1784, Johnson "talked of Mrs. Thrale with much concern, saying, 'Sir, she had done every thing wrong, since Thrale's bridle was off her neck,'" and Boswell added that Johnson would have continued talking about Thrale regarding "some circumstances which have since been the subject of publick discussion, when he was interrupted."⁵⁷⁶ Furthermore, on May 24 1784, Frances Burney wrote to Hester Maria, "Since I began & writ thus far, I have seen Dr. Johnson--& find that he knows the whole affair." In other words, Johnson knew the current state of Thrale's situation with Piozzi quite well.

By May 1784, Piozzi, who had exiled himself to Italy to protect Thrale's social and public reputations from further slander, was returning at her request.⁵⁷⁷ Furthermore, Burney wrote that when she met with Johnson on June 3, 1784, he had raised the subject of Thrale and Piozzi but was "much less violent" about it than she had feared he would be. Soon after this, Burney wrote to Hester Maria, "Poor Dr. Johnson was prepared, I know, for in my last visit but one he spoke to me openly upon the subject, & with a softness that much surprised me."⁵⁷⁸ It appears then that Johnson had known for some time about Thrale's love for Piozzi. It is clear from Boswell's Life that Johnson knew the story from both public discussions and newspaper gossip about Thrale's love for Piozzi, and from the social circle of friends that he shared with her. Additionally, Johnson wrote to Thrale's daughters who, no doubt, responded by writing letters to Johnson about their mother's behavior,

⁵⁷⁴ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 320; n.2.

⁵⁷⁵ Thrale, Queeney Letters, ed. Lansdowne 75.

⁵⁷⁶ Boswell, Life, iv. 277.

⁵⁷⁷ Thrale, Queeney Letters, ed. Lansdowne 97.

especially since they hoped that Johnson would intercede on their behalf.

In any case, Johnson's letters to Thrale make clear that Johnson was aware of her continuing attraction to Piozzi. For in the letter of April 26, 1784 cited above, Johnson advised Thrale on how she should now live—not as a woman in love, but as a mother to her daughters: "Gather yourself and your Children into a little system, in which each may promote the ease, the safety, and the pleasure of the rest." Indeed, in this same letter, Johnson held out the hope to Thrale that "riches" would ameliorate the pain of her separation from Piozzi: "While I am writing the post has brought your kind letter. Do not think with dejection of your own condition; a little patience will probably give You health, it will certainly give you riches, and all the accommodations that riches can procure."⁵⁷⁹

But Thrale must have been displeased with Johnson's reading of her being satisfied with the "accomodations" that "riches can procure." After all, Thrale had already enjoyed wealth during her marriage to Henry Thrale, but she had not known the happiness of truly loving a man until she met Gabriel Piozzi. Indeed, Johnson's response to Thrale must have reminded her of how her previous mentor, Arthur Collier, had advised her to marry Henry Thrale and forsake her dreams of living as a writer and thinker.⁵⁸⁰ That was in 1763. Now, in 1784, twenty-one years later, Thrale would not surrender her "aspiring ambitious spirit" to be

⁵⁷⁸ Thrale, Queeney Letters, ed. Lansdowne 100-101.

⁵⁷⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 323. Bruce Redford is of the opinion that Johnson's "anguish and astonishment" at the news of the Thrale/Piozzi marriage suggest that "he had not anticipated (or allowed himself to anticipate) the probable outcome of events (Post To Hester Maria Thrale, 1 July 1784; Post To Hester Thrale, 2 July 1784)."

Johnson, Letters IV: 323, n.7.

⁵⁸⁰ Clifford, Piozzi 42.

a writer, and she would marry for love. She would relinquish nothing. She would marry Piozzi and live privately, socially and publicly as a writer.

Thrale visited London from May 11 to May 16, 1784, to, as she later wrote, "talk over my intended--(& I hope--approaching Nuptials,) with Mr. Borghi: a Man as far as I can judge in so short an Acquaintance with him, of good Sense, and of real Honour:--who loves my Piozzi, likes my Conversation, and wishes to serve us sincerely."⁵⁸¹ Thrale was enthralled by Piozzi, but never to the extent that she could not look at herself or her closest friends with a pragmatic eye. She wrote about her visit with Burney in London:

Dear Burney who loves me kindly, but the World reverentially, was I believe equally pained as delighted with my Visit; ashamed to be seen in my Company, much of her Fondness for it must of Course be diminished; yet She had not chatted freely so long with any body but Mrs. Philips, that my coming was a Comfort to her.⁵⁸²

Furthermore, Thrale had no illusions about the effect that her decision to marry Piozzi and move to Italy would have on her reputation. This is clear when she wrote privately about her future plans: "Nobody likes my settling at Milan except myself and Piozzi." Determined to keep her life with Piozzi private, she wrote immediately after this, "but I think 'tis nobody's Affair but our own . . . it seems to me quite irrational to expose ourselves to unnecessary Insults, & by going straight to Italy all will be avoided." She even worried that Piozzi might not be equal to the challenges to their relationship that lay ahead. Thrale wrote privately to Piozzi: "Oh my dear Creature! let us be content to be happy

⁵⁸¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 593.

when God permits us--and not sit dreaming of Sorrows to come. Have we not had enough?--Oh yes! I know, I feel we shall be happy." Thrale commented on this passage with despair over the lack of support she was now receiving from people whom she had previously thought of as her friends: "Oh that I were once out of this country! & far from these dear Old Friends," a group that clearly included Johnson.⁵⁸³

From June 3 to June 16, 1784, Johnson was in Oxford. During this time, Thrale found a woman to care for her daughters for the time she would be in Italy. Piozzi had written that his return to her was imminent, and her daughters had made it clear to their mother that they would not go to Italy with her and Piozzi. That Thrale was not simply abandoning her daughters, but cared very deeply about what they thought of her, is clear when she wrote about Miss Nicholson, the woman she had employed to care for her daughters:

This sweet Miss Nicholson will make all still more smooth to me, She is a well-wisher to the Cause, and will when the Girls are parted from me keep them from hating or trampling on the Memory of a Mother who adores them: She professes to like me excessively, and if She does--Oh how happy may this Connection so accidental & so extraordinary make my poor suffering Heart! God bless her!⁵⁸⁴

During this time, she wrote determinedly of Piozzi, "may God but preserve our Hearts & Persons safe for each other, The Money Stuff will do I grant it. On the 2d of June he set out from Milan or I hope he did; Oh these Letters! I never have half enough of 'em, or half fast enough:--but he shall never so quit me again. . . ." ⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 593-4

⁵⁸³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 593-4.

⁵⁸⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 597.

⁵⁸⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 597.

On June 17, the day after Johnson returned to London from Oxford, he wrote to Thrale as if he intended to see her soon: "What I shall do next I know not, all my scheme[s] of rural pleasure have been some way or other disappointed. I have now some thought of Lichfield, and Ashbourne. Let me know, dear Madam, your destination."⁵⁸⁶

Thrale saw Johnson at some point in London, albeit briefly, during June. After this, she continued to write positively to Johnson about his health. After all, Johnson had been writing to her of his astounding recovery. However, in a letter on June 31, 1784, Johnson reproved Thrale for thinking that he was doing well: "Why you expected me to be better than I am I cannot imagine; I am better than any that saw me in my illness ever expected to have seen me again. I am however at a great distance from health, very weak and very asthmatick, and troubled with my old nocturnal distresses." Yet Johnson wrote in this same letter how he planned to travel to Oxford with Boswell: "Boswel and I have settled our resolution to go to Oxford on Thursday. How long we shall stay at Oxford, or what we shall do when we leave it, neither Bozzy nor I have yet settled." Johnson closed this letter to Thrale again instructing her on how to read him: "Think of me, if You can, with tenderness," even though the available evidence shows that Thrale had been responding to him kindly throughout this period.⁵⁸⁷

On June 28, 1784, Piozzi arrived in London, but he did not get to Bath until July 2. However, even before she saw Piozzi, Thrale wrote a letter to Johnson on June 30 in which she directly declared, for the first time, her independence of him. She did this by telling him that her decision to marry Piozzi was final regardless of Johnson's arguments

⁵⁸⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 334.

⁵⁸⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 328-29.

against it. She began her letter to Johnson, "The enclosed is a circular Letter⁵⁸⁸ which I have sent to all the Guardians," but, she allowed, "our Friendship demands somewhat more . . . that I shd beg your pardon for concealing from you a Connection which you must have heard of by many People, but I suppose never believed." The reasons that she proceeded to give for concealing her relationship with Piozzi are ones that never compromised her authority or her independence. She told Johnson that she had "concealed" her relationship with Piozzi "only to spare us both needless pain," and added immediately after this that she "could not have borne to reject" Johnson's "Counsel." To take his advice, she implied, "would have killed" her. Indeed, Thrale had decided to marry Piozzi and had no illusions about its effect on her relationship with Johnson. She knew that Johnson's resistance to this marriage would be the issue over which she was willing to end her friendship with him. She emphasized her complete independence of Johnson by informing him that she now revealed her relationship with Piozzi "because all is irrevocably settled, & out of your power to prevent." However, she did not wish to hurt Johnson and this is made clear when she wrote, "Give me leave however to say that the dread of your disapprobation has given me many an anxious moment & tho' perhaps the most independent Woman in the World—I feel as if I was acting

⁵⁸⁸ [The enclosure.] "As one of the Executors to Mr. Thrale's Will, and Guardian to his daughters, I think it my duty to acquaint you that the three eldest left Bath last Fryday for their own house at Brighthelmstone, in company with an amiable Friend Miss Nicholson, who has some time resided with us here, and in whose Society they may I think find some advantages and certainly no Disgrace: I waited on them myself as far as Salisbury, Wilton &c. and offered my Service to attend them to the Seaside; but they preferred this Lady's Company to mine, having heard that Mr. Piozzi was coming back from Italy, and judging from our past Friendship & Continued Correspondence, that his return would be succeeded by our Marriage." Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman III: 172-73.

without a parent's Consent—till you write kindly to your faithful Servt."⁵⁸⁹

Thrale had tried to appear respectful and moderate in her letter of June 30 to Johnson. However, on July 2, 1784, Johnson wrote to Thrale self-righteously, "If I interpret your letter right, You are ignominiously married, if it is yet undone, let us once talk together. If You have abandoned your children and your religion, God forgive your wickedness; if you have forfeited your Fame, and your country, may your folly do no further mischief." Thrale must have felt Johnson's condescension and how he judged and damned her as if he were a zealous preacher and she a wicked sinner. Moreover, Johnson was more concerned about her social and public reputations as a mother, a Christian, and an Englishwoman, in other words, with the "approbation" of mankind, than with her private happiness. His primary interest was how much she still valued her relationship with him. He read himself to Thrale in the way that he had long seen himself in his relationship with her: "If the last act is yet to do, I, who have loved you, esteemed you, revered you, and served you, I who long thought you the first of humankind, entreat that before your fate is irrevocable, I may once more see You." However, immediately after this appeal, Johnson closed his letter to Thrale most ominously: "I was, I once was, Madam, most truly yours, Sam. Johnson."⁵⁹⁰

On the same day that Johnson wrote this letter to Thrale, she wrote privately:

⁵⁸⁹ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, Chapman III: 172-73. See also, Hester Piozzi, The Piozzi Letters: Correspondence of Hester Lynch Piozzi, 1784-1821 (formerly Mrs. Thrale) Volume I: 1784-1791, eds. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1989): 72-73.

⁵⁹⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 338.

The happiest Day of my whole Life I think—Yes, quite the happiest; My Piozzi came home Yesterday & dined with me: but my Spirits were too much agitated, my Heart too much dilated, I was too painfully happy then, my Sensations are more quiet to day, & my Felicity less tumultuous. I have spent the Night as I ought in Prayer & Than[k]sgiving—Could I have slept I had not deserved such Blessing. May the Almighty but preserve them to me! He lodges at our old House on the South Parade . . . 'Tis all over now.⁵⁹¹

While Thrale was intently focused on her private joy, Johnson wrote behind her back to Hester Maria, considering only Thrale's social and public reputations: "In telling You that I sincerely pity You, and that I approve your Conduct I tell You only what will be said by all Mankind." In this same letter, Johnson also wrote with harshness about Thrale to Hester Maria: "What I think of your Mothers conduct I cannot express, but by words which I cannot prevail upon myself to use." Then, speaking for himself and the other guardians, Johnson informed Hester Maria: "we all compassionate and love You and your Sisters, and I hope by our Friendship, and Your own Virtue, Prudence, and Piety, You may, though thus unworthily deserted, pass a life of security, Happiness, and honour."⁵⁹²

Upon receiving Johnson's critical and judgmental letter of July 2, one which he had closed by identifying himself as having once been her friend, Thrale not surprisingly began her answer: "I have this Morning received from You so rough a Letter, in reply to one which was both tenderly & respectfully written, that I am forced to desire the

⁵⁹¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston I: 599-600.
⁵⁹² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 339.

conclusion of a Correspondence which I can bear to continue no longer."⁵⁹³ Furthermore, Thrale took control of their dialogue in turning the subject around from how Johnson viewed her to how she viewed him. Johnson's condemnatory letter had not frightened Thrale but instead emboldened her to argue against Johnson's unjust accusations, and to accuse him of basing his interpretation of her actions and the worth of her future husband on less-than-praiseworthy values:

The Birth of my second Husband is not meaner than that of my first, his sentiments are not meaner, his Profession is not meaner,--and his Superiority in what he professes—acknowledged by all Mankind.—It is want of Fortune then that is ignominious, the Character of the Man I have chose has no other Claim to such an Epithet. The Religion to which he has been always a zealous Adherent, will I hope teach him to forgive Insults he has not deserved—mine will I hope enable me to bear them at once with Dignity & Patience.⁵⁹⁴

Furthermore, she disagreed completely with Johnson's readings of her social and public reputations: "To hear that I have forfeited my Fame is indeed the greatest Insult I ever yet received, my Fame is as unsullied as Snow, or I should think it unworthy of him who must henceforward protect it." This was a particularly courageous statement by Thrale considering that she knew how much damage Johnson could do to her private, social and public reputations. To make sure that Johnson understood her deep anger with him, and to show her now complete distrust of him, Thrale replied to Johnson's request to see her: "I write by the Coach the more speedily and effectually to prevent you

⁵⁹³ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman III: 175.

⁵⁹⁴ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman III: 175.

coming hither." That Thrale was writing carefully and not just responding emotionally to Johnson is manifest in her particular interpretation of what Johnson meant by her "fame," or her public and social reputations: "Perhaps by my Fame (& I hope it is so;) you mean only that Celebrity which is a Consideration of a much lower kind." She then continued: "Farewell Dear Sir, and accept my best wishes: You have always commanded my Esteem, and long enjoy'd the Fruits of a Friendship never infringed by one harsh Expression on my Part, during twenty Years of familiar Talk." That Thrale felt Johnson's proprietary and patriarchal hand on her shoulder in his previous letter is made clear when she continued with, "never did I oppose your Will, or control your Wish." Furthermore, she graciously wrote to him, "nor can your unmerited Severity itself lessen my Regard," but then she responded to his ultimatum with one of her own: "till you have changed your Opinion of Mr. Piozzi--let us converse no more. God bless you!"⁵⁹⁵ Thrale was not asking for anything more of Johnson than to treat Piozzi and herself with the respect she had seen him accord, quite blindly at times, to Henry Thrale--a respect that Thrale herself had sorely missed in her marriage to Henry, as well as in her friendship with Johnson.

Thrale's letter appeared to have the desired effect. Johnson opened a letter for July 8, 1784, to Thrale apologetically: "What you have done, however I may lament it, I have no pretence to resent, as it has not been injurious to me. I therefore breathe out one sigh more of tenderness perhaps useless, but at least sincere."⁵⁹⁶ Johnson even went on to congratulate her: "I wish that God may grant you every blessing, that You may be happy in this world for its short continuance, and

⁵⁹⁵ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman III: 175.

⁵⁹⁶ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 343.

eternally happy in a better State. And whatever I can contribute to your happiness, I am very ready to repay for that kindness which soothed twenty years of a life radically wretched." However, Johnson could not restrain himself from advising Thrale once again:

Do not think slightly of the advice which I now presume to offer. Prevail upon Mr. Piozzi to settle in England. You may live here with more dignity than in Italy, and with more security. Your rank will be higher, and your fortune more under your own eye. I desire not to detail all my reasons; but every argument of prudence and interest is for England, and only s~~ome~~ phantoms of imagination seduce you to Italy.⁵⁹⁷

Although Johnson then wondered aloud, "I am afraid, however, that my counsel is vain, yet I have eased my heart by giving it," he warned Thrale again of her decision to go to Italy. In doing this, he clearly betrayed what amounted to his suspicions about Thrale's choice of a husband as well as a place to live:

When Queen Mary took the resolution of sheltering herself in England, the Archbishop of St. Andrew's attempting to dissuade her, attended on her journey and when they came to the irremeable Stream that separated the two kingdoms, walked by her side into the water, in the middle of which he seized her bridle, and with earnestness proportioned to her danger and his own affection, pressed her to return. The Queen went forward.—If the parallel reaches thus far; may it go no further.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁷ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 343.
⁵⁹⁸ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 343.

Johnson concluded this "parallel" writing: "The tears stand in my eyes."⁵⁹⁹

Thrale responded warmly to Johnson's apologetic letter. She opened her letter for July 15, 1784: "Not only my good Wishes but my most fervent Prayers for your Health and Consolation shall for ever attend and follow my dear Mr. Johnson. Your last Letter is sweetly kind, and I thank you for it most sincerely." She reminded Johnson of his vulnerability to "imagined fears" when she wrote, "Have no Fears for me however; no real Fears," and she assured Johnson that she would eventually settle in England with Piozzi: "My Piozzi will need few Perswasions to settle in a Country where he has succeeded so well; but he longs to shew me to his Italian Friends, & he wishes to restore my Health by treating me with a Journey to many Places I have long wished to see." In reply to Johnson's worries about her "fortune," Thrale wrote that Piozzi had a "disinterested Conduct towards me in pecuniary Matters, His Delicacy in giving me up all past Promises when we were separated last Year by great Violence in Argyll Street, are Pledges of his Affection and Honour." She also answered Johnson's suspicions about Piozzi's character by writing, "He is a religious Man, a sober Man, and a Thinking Man—he will not injure me, I am sure he will not."⁶⁰⁰

However, as kind as she was in this letter to Johnson, Thrale sternly told to him the only terms under which she would continue her friendship with him in the future. She warned Johnson to "let nobody injure him [Piozzi] in your good Opinion, which he is most solicitous to obtain & preserve." Thrale also made clear to Johnson that his behavior now only concerned her as much as it affected her new husband: she wrote

⁵⁹⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 343-44.

⁶⁰⁰ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman III: 184

how "the harsh Letter you wrote me at first grieved him [Piozzi] to the very heart." Moreover, Thrale had been hurt by how Johnson signed himself at the close of his "harsh" letter ("I was, I once was, Madam, most truly yours") which is evident in her closure on this letter to him, calling herself "the Friend whom you once honoured with your Regard and who will never cease to be/My dear Sir Your truly Affectionate and faithful Servt."⁶⁰¹ However, in a postscript to her letter, she seemed to believe that her epistolary relationship with Johnson would continue, for she wrote to him, "I hope your health is mending."

Thrale's expectation of a continuing correspondence is not unreasonable when one considers the conciliatory nature of Johnson's last letter to her. However, Johnson is not known to have ever written to Thrale again. Indeed, he seemed to actively distance himself from her. Johnson wrote to Hester Maria on August 12, "I love you, I loved your father, and I loved your Mother as long as I could." Then he advised Hester Maria, much as he had sought to counsel her mother, that she should follow the wisdom of the public's voice, rather than one's private voice: "In matters of human judgement, and prudential consideration, consider the publick voice of general opinion as always worthy of great attention; remember that such practices can very seldom be right, which all the world concluded to be wrong. "Obey God. Reverence Fame. Thus you will go safely through this life, and pass happily to the next."⁶⁰²

Thus Johnson condemned Thrale privately, socially, and publicly as a woman, as a mother, and, perhaps most importantly, as his friend for choosing to secure her own private happiness instead of respectable

⁶⁰¹ Johnson and Thrale, Letters, ed. Chapman III: 184.

⁶⁰² Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 367.

social and public reputations. He had let his friends and Thrale's know of his judgments. In November 1784, a month before Johnson's death, Frances Burney wrote privately that Johnson had said to her, "I drive her [Mrs. Thrale] quite from my mind. If I meet with one of her letters, I burn it instantly."⁶⁰³ By resisting Johnson's advice and in incurring his wrath, Thrale not only defied Johnson privately and socially as her friend, but also "Dr. Johnson" the public figure who could do great damage to her reputation. Hester Chapone paraphrased Johnson as having said about Thrale that "he did not think there had been so abandoned a Woman in the World." Worse still, letters questioning Thrale's sanity written by Chapone and others appeared in the Morning Herald.⁶⁰⁴ Many would slavishly agree with Johnson's criticism of Thrale and of her decision to read herself anew as a woman, a writer, and as an intellectual. But Thrale would prove them all wrong.

⁶⁰³ Burney, Letters, ed. Dobson II: 271.

⁶⁰⁴ Clifford, Piozzi 229-30.

10.

Thrale's New Private, Social, and Public Lives

Thrale began new private, social, and public lives by marrying Piozzi and going to Italy where she lived among her husband's friends and family, reviewed her past life in England, and planned her future as a published author. After discovering Frances Burney's secret correspondence with Hester Maria, Thrale wrote privately of Burney, her best friend in England: "It hurts me to leave London without seeing Miss Burney tho' She has played a false & cruel part towards me I find—stimulating my Daughters to resist their natural Tenderness, & continue the steady refusal of a Consent which alone could have saved my Life:-- Very severe in Miss Burney, & very unprovok'd—I would not have serv'd her so."⁶⁰⁵ She wrote privately as well that she traveled to "boldly

⁶⁰⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston 611. Katharine Balderston writes that Frances Burney "wrote to her [Thrale] after her marriage, and Mrs. Piozzi replied, reproaching her for not sending cordial congratulations and, Burney wrote, 'to inform me she [Thrale] desires to have done with all friendship in which he has not his share!' Lansdowne, Queeney Letters, 101." Balderston continued, "Burney considered this very unjust, as she did not see why she would be expected, in the name of friendship, to offer congratulations on a marriage which she had consistently and openly opposed. On August 10 she wrote a letter of firm but affectionate protest, and Mrs. Piozzi replied on the 13th: 'Give yourself no serious concern, sweetest Burney. All is well, and I am too happy myself to make a friend otherwise; quiet your kind heart immediately, and love my husband if you love his and your H.L. Piozzi.' Fanny comments, 'To this kind note, F.B. wrote the warmest and most affectionate and heartfelt reply; but never received another word! And here and thus stopped a correspondence of six years of almost unequalled partiality, and fondness on her side; and affection, gratitude, admiration, and sincerity on that of F.B., who could only conjecture the cessation to be caused by the resentment of Piozzi, when informed of her constant opposition to the union.' (D'Arblay Diary, ii. 261-2)." Thraliana, II: 612 n. 2.

In her Companions Without Vows: Relationships Among Eighteenth-Century British Women (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), Betty Rizzo argues persuasively that Burney's "conventional" and "disgusted" response to Thrale's decision to marry Gabriel Piozzi was not simply as Thrale saw it, a betrayal of her, but "probably owing at least in part to her hurt at losing first place in her friend's affections," as well as "in part to a sense that unable to

venture on those Realms unknown," and believed that the Italians "cannot use me worse, than these have done." Before she left England, Thrale described with great clarity the private and social lives that she was leaving behind. On September 5, 1784, she wrote privately that she had left her daughters "reconciled to my Choice, (all at least except the eldest who parted with me coolly, not unkindly)," and she wrote that she left her friends "well pleased with my leaving London I fancy, where my Stay perplexed 'em, and entangled their Duty with their Interest."⁶⁰⁶ That she still cared about and missed Johnson is clear when on September 18, 1784, Johnson's birthday, Thrale wrote privately:

This is Dr. Johnson's Birthday' [September 18]: may God give him many & happy returns of it; we used to spend these two Days in Mirth & Gayety at Streatham: but Pride & Prejudice hindered my longer Residence in a Place wch indeed had lost its Charms for me. I am Happier at this Moment that I have been these Two & Twenty Years.⁶⁰⁷

Thrale seemed to write now with her new role as a public writer in mind. She wrote the preface and contributed nine poems to the eight-volume Florence Miscellany in 1785.⁶⁰⁸ Then she began two new travel journals—one for France, which she visited before going to Italy, and one for her travels in Italy. She revised passages in these journals and wrote often of people and places as if she planned to publish her

annex her as a companion, Thrale married Piozzi to annex him" (94). Rizzo also convincingly shows how Burney was determined never to become a dependent member of Thrale's household, or a "companion," but rather a "friend" to Thrale, equal to her on all levels (Companions Without Vows, 86-98).

⁶⁰⁶ Clifford, Piozzi 235. See also McCarthy, Hester Thrale: Portrait of a Literary Woman (1985): 286.

⁶⁰⁷ Thrale and Johnson, French Journals, ed. Moses and Guppy 203.
⁶⁰⁸ Florence Miscellany (Florence. Printed for G. Cam, Printer to His Royal Highness. With Permission, 1785).

observations as travel writings at a later date. (Indeed, these journals formed the basis of her two-volume work Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany, which she published in 1789).

With Thrale gone from his life, Johnson wrote to Frances Burney much as he used to write to Thrale. On November 1, 1784, he wrote to Burney from Lichfield: "My heart has reproached me with my ingratitude to you, and my vanity has been mortified with the fear of being thought to want a due sense of the honour conferred on me by such a correspondence."⁶⁰⁹ He now described his illnesses to Burney: "Yet now I am enabled to write, what can I say? Only one melancholy truth, that I am very ill, and another more chearful, but, I hope, equally sincere, that I wish You, dear Madam, to be better." Predictably, Johnson asked Burney to "comfort" him when he returned to London from Lichfield: "I am now scheming to come home, but the schemes of the sick are dilatory, and then You must try what comfort you can give, to, Dear Madam, Your most humble servant."⁶¹⁰

Meanwhile, living happily with her husband in Italy, Thrale wrote privately of how she still loved Johnson and Hester Maria, but that she had been used "ill" by them: "I have got Dr Johnson's Picture here," she wrote, "& expect Miss Thrale's with Impatience; I do love them dearly still, as ill as they have used me, & always shall."⁶¹¹ Thrale even tried to explain away Johnson's untoward behavior toward her when she wrote in Thraliana, "Poor Johnson did not ever mean to use me ill, he only grew upon Indulgence, till Patience could endure no further."⁶¹² On

⁶⁰⁹ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 432.

⁶¹⁰ Johnson, Letters, ed. Redford IV: 432.

⁶¹¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 617.

⁶¹² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 617.

December 7, 1784, she urged her friend Samuel Lysons: "Do not neglect Dr. Johnson, you will never see any other Mortal either so wise or so good—I keep his Picture in my Chamber, and his Works on my Chimney."⁶¹³

Still, at this time Thrale was becoming both emotionally and intellectually independent of Johnson. Significantly, she turned a more practiced and particular critical eye to Johnson's Lives. On November 3, 1784, she noticed an anomaly in Johnson's critical acumen that showed she was re-reading his Lives with close attention:

I once mentioned to Dr. Johnson . . . the Song in the Beggars Opera beginning Fill evry Glass—as particularly excellent in that way: it has says he but one Fault, which is using the Word desirous instead of desirable—the Sense he means to express; one sees (added he) that it was only a poor Shift to help out the Rhyme. Now I was reading his Life of Waller two days ago, & found

⁶¹³ Clifford, Piozzi 238. Samuel Lysons (1763-1819) was twenty-two years younger than Thrale. She had met Lysons at Bath in January 1784, and described him in Thraliana shortly after meeting him as "a Young Man . . . of very uncommon parts" (Thraliana 586). Lysons was a lawyer, an antiquarian, and an artist, who later was a F.S.A. (1786), and a F.R.S. (1797), and Keeper of the Records of the Tower of London (1803-19). He helped Thrale collect materials for her Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D. (1786) and Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D. (1788).

Thrale's newfound independence of Johnson is evident in a letter that Thrale wrote to Lysons from Italy. Johnson had little patience for looking at a succession of plains, mountains, rivers, waterfalls, and streams. Thrale wrote:

'these four Days Journey from Pont Bon Voisin to Novalesa, would be enough I should think to make a Coxcomb of Dr. Johnson. . . . We often wished for your Company, & said how you would sit upon this Rock & that Rock, taking Views of the Country: I jumped out to the Coach myself at one Place to drink at a beautiful Cascade that came foaming down the Side of the Hill all tufted with various coloured Greens, where I followed Hyale among the Bushes (the yellow Butterfly with brown-edged Wings) but could not catch her'" (Clifford, Piozzi 238).

the very same fault there—if Fault it is—without any Temptation from the Necessity of Rhyme.⁶¹⁴

On December 7, 1784, she questioned Johnson's motives as a literary critic in his Lives of the Poets when she wrote in Thraliana:

I have been reading Dr Johnson's Life of Addison again—he serves Warton in it much as Pope served Dennis—shewing his desire of opposing the Critick rather than that of rescueing the Author; Warton says Addison was an indifferent Poet, and Johnson desirous to contradict him, only amplifies the Sentence: he could not bear to leave unoffended a contemporary Scholar—or pass without Censure the Works of a deceas'd Whig.⁶¹⁵

However, Thrale did not simply become a negative critic of Johnson once she had parted ways with him, for she also wrote in Thraliana for December 7, that in Johnson's "Works, I think is found at last, ye true Standard of English Prose." Moreover, she offered detailed refutations of those who would criticize Johnson:

When Dr Johnson published his Lives of the Poets, Mrs. Montagu and all her little Senate (not always Patricians indeed)--censured him severely for his Treatment of Lyttelton: he used to tell me that it was only because he had not flatter'd her by any notice of her three Dialogues added to my Lord's; but I long thought their Indignation genuine, as they pretended to rest their Cause on the contemptuous Expression Poor Lyttelton!⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 617.

⁶¹⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 622-23.

⁶¹⁶ Thrale annotated this passage: "reading over the Lives again however I find him saying Poor Dryden! in one passage; now if he could despise the meanness of such a writer as Dryden, whom he praises not only with Liberality but Fondness, not only with Esteem but Veneration—surely the Foibles of Ld Lyttelton have little pretence for Exemption; they could only have escaped by the same meanness in the Biographer

In addition to examining Johnson's writing, Thrale also remarked on his social behavior toward others as a literary critic:

I once heard a very rough Dispute at Streatham between Dr Johnson & Mr Pepys about this matter: Johnson behaved exceedingly ill in it—called the Man out to Battle insolently, and treated his deceased Friend with unprovoked Contempt. I fancy I have given somewhere an Account of the Controversy, which I was forced to silence at last by express Command. Mr Pepys conducted himself with much Propriety I remember.⁶¹⁷

Although she was becoming more confident as a writer and critic, Thrale never lost her pragmatic view of herself and of her limitations as a writer and intellectual. "I have half a mind to translate Johnson's Lives into Italian and present them to the Library here at Milan," she wrote in Thraliana at the end of 1784, "but I have neither Language enough yet, nor Time enough." She added, "The Circumstances that will determine my Place of Ultimate Residence, will determine me likewise as to this Intention:--I should not despair of Success in it."⁶¹⁸

which he blames with Justice in the Authors whose Life he writes" (623).⁶¹⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 622-23. Katharine Balderston writes: "In June 1781, Fanny Burney gives a vivid description of it [of Johnson's and Pepys's quarrel] (D'Arblay Diary i.497-502)." Burney, Balderston adds, "describing the affray to Mrs. Montagu in a letter wrote, '. . . such a day did we pass in disputation upon the Life of our dear friend Lord Lyttelton, as I trust it will never be my fate to pass again. . . But what hurts me all this while is, not that Johnson should go unpunished, but that our dear and respectable friend should be . . . handed down to succeeding generations under the appellation of poor Lyttelton.' Johns. Misc. ii. 416-17. See also, for a summary of the quarrel, G. B. Hill's Appendix BB to the Life of Lyttelton. Mrs. Piozzi had made their antagonism the subject of the first of her 'Dialogues upon my own Death.'" Thraliana, II: 623, n.2.

⁶¹⁸ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 621-22.

Upon learning that Johnson had died in London on December 13, 1784, Thrale exclaimed in Thraliana on January 2, 1784: "Oh poor Dr. Johnson!!!"⁶¹⁹ Her distress must have been extreme. Indeed, she did not write of Johnson again in Thraliana until twenty-three days later, and when she did, on January 25, 1785, she wrote: "I have recovered myself sufficiently to think what will be the Consequence to me of Johnson's Death."⁶²⁰ One of the "consequences" was to choose whether or not she should write about Johnson. Only weeks after his death, Thrale wrote in Thraliana: "Six People had already undertaken to write his Life I hear of which Sr. John Hawkins, Mr. Boswell, Tom Davies, and Dr. Kippis are four."⁶²¹ Moreover, immediately after this statement, Thrale also wrote about how Piozzi wished her to write a life of Johnson: "Piozzi says he would have me add to the Number." However, these circumstances did not immediately motivate Thrale to write about Johnson. Instead, she wrote, "I think my Anecdotes too few," and she was aware that her attempts to gather more of them would expose her, and her husband, to criticism: "[I] am afraid of saucy Answers if I sent to England for others [anecdotes]--the saucy Answers I should disregard, but my heart is made vulnerable by my late Marriage, and I am certain that to spite me, they would insult my Husband."⁶²²

Thrale's fear was not unreasonable; she had seen her husband, as well as herself, severely attacked privately, socially, and publicly before and after her marriage. Moreover, Thrale pitied Johnson because

⁶¹⁹ Thrale probably heard of Johnson's death on January 2, 1785. It took at least three weeks for a letter sent from London to arrive in Italy.

⁶²⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 624.

⁶²¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 624

⁶²² Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 625.

of those who raced to write biographies of him immediately after his death. She knew that much of Johnson's private life would become public, including his fear of madness. Thrale had long regarded this fear as a "secret" that Johnson had only bestowed on her, or, at the least, on a select few: "Poor Johnson!" she exclaimed, "I see they will leave nothing untold that I laboured so long to keep secret; & I was so very delicate in trying to conceal his fancied Insanity, that I retained no Proofs of it—or hardly any—nor ever mentioned it in these Books, lest by dying first they might be printed and the Secret (for such I thought it) discovered."⁶²³ Thrale had most likely read Thomas Tyer's "A Biographical Sketch" of Johnson which had appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine for December 1784, in which Tyer had divulged to the public: "'He [Johnson] was afraid of his disorder's seizing his head, and took all possible care that his understanding should not be deranged. . . . His imagination often appeared to be too mighty for the controul of his reason.'"⁶²⁴ Clearly, Thrale was *not* the first to divulge the secret of Johnson's "fancied madness" to the public. Nevertheless, as Katherine Balderston points out about Johnson's early biographers: "It is ironical to note that in the eyes of posterity Mrs. Piozzi herself has been considered the first serious offender."⁶²⁵

If anyone was "offended" after Johnson's death, it was Thrale. On January 8, 1785, in a review of Tyer's "Biographical Sketch" in the Saint James Chronicle, an anonymous reviewer, writing about Henry Thrale's gluttony which would eventually kill him, berated Thrale: "Little did he [Henry Thrale] think his Intemperance would have proven

⁶²³ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 625.

⁶²⁴ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 625, n. 4; GM, Dec. 1784, 900.

⁶²⁵ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 625, n. 4.

an Introduction to his Wife's Disgrace, by eventually raising an obscure and penniless Fiddler into sudden Wealth and awkward Notoriety."⁶²⁶ In a long entry in Thraliana for January 27, 1785, Thrale's forty-fourth birthday, she wrote: "I see the English Newspapers are full of gross Insolence to me; all burst out—as I guess'd it would—upon the Death of Dr. Johnson."⁶²⁷ Indeed, in a letter to an unidentified correspondent on December 20, 1784, Mrs. Montagu, once a close friend of Thrale's, had echoed the English gossip about Thrale: that she had been confined in a convent by her new husband, who was claiming that she was "insane," and that her marriage to Piozzi had hastened Johnson's death. "I am afraid," Montagu wrote, "Mrs. Thrale's imprudent marriage shortened his life. Her letters to Friends from abroad were full of her felicity, it is said accounts are now come that she is confined in a convent at Milan. Her husband says that she is insane. . . ."⁶²⁸

At the same time, Thrale was reading herself quite differently in Italy. On January 27, 1785, she wrote privately in Thraliana: "Here am I! with my Husband & his Friends passing my Birthday (after all past Anguish) in the Bosom of Friendship, Love, & Good humour We have a Dinner & a Concert; and I am fed with Flattery even to Repletion So passes the happiest Birthday ever yet experienced by Hester Lynch Piozzi."⁶²⁹ Moreover, in Italy Thrale was not treated as a disgrace. Piozzi's friends regarded her as a writer, although Thrale herself had no illusions about her talent and the Italians' praise. She wrote that they had responded "very prettily as can be" to her verse

⁶²⁶ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 629, n.2.

⁶²⁷ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 629.

⁶²⁸ Reginald Blunt, Mrs. Montagu, Queen of the Blues (Boston, 1924), ii. 165-6. See also Thraliana, II. 627, n. 2.

⁶²⁹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 628.

translations, and that they seemed "to envy Mr. Piozzi, but with less 'Malignity' than the English people envy'd me always." But Thrale added that she continued to be mistreated and maligned in her own country: "I hear from home that a Report is current there, how my husband has sold my Joynture, & shut me in a Convent; they should confine themselves to Truth." Thrale's anger at having to suffer this continued abuse is clearly illustrated in her next statement: "I am afraid their ill Treatment of me, & my Resentment towards them, will make it difficult for me ever to live happily in England any more—I'm afraid so!"⁶³⁰

⁶³⁰ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 627.

11.

**Making the Private, Public: Thrale's Inconclusive, or
Unconcretized, Public Reading of Johnson; Or, the Misreading of Thrale's
Intent in her Anecdotes of Johnson.**

On March 25, 1786, over a year after Johnson's death, Thrale published Anecdotes, a brief memoir of Johnson, and began her new public life as an author. The book sold quickly and well: it was in its fourth edition by May.⁶³¹ Clifford sees Anecdotes as a failed imitation, or as Thrale's "attempt, though not so successfully" to write "the same type of biographical method as Boswell" rather than as a work unique to Thrale.⁶³² Clifford states that Thrale wrote Anecdotes "with a divided purpose: to justify her treatment of Johnson, and to achieve fame as one of his biographers" and that these "cross-purposes" in Anecdotes "injured the quality of her work."⁶³³ Early on in Anecdotes, Thrale does vacillate between writing a life of Johnson and a collection of anecdotes about him. But rather than damaging her work, the tension created by her indecision enables us to see into how she struggled to formulate and to concretize, her reading of Johnson soon after his death.

Clifford also asserts that Thrale "had an abundance of genuine, accurate anecdotes of Johnson" but chose to focus on the "querulousness" of Johnson's later years rather than on the "earlier happy days at Streatham . . . because it was serviceable in explaining their final quarrel and separation." Thrale's betrayal of Johnson in this sense he

⁶³¹ Thrale, Thraliana, ed. Balderston II: 639, n.3.

⁶³² Clifford, Piozzi 265. Boswell had published his Tour to the Hebrides in 1785.

⁶³³ Clifford, Piozzi 267.

calls "the most serious blot on the Anecdotes."⁶³⁴ Clifford does acknowledge the value of Anecdotes when he writes that, "despite its deficiencies, the little volume . . . has been our chief authority for many of Johnson's poems," and that "it provides evidence of many facets in the great man's character altogether ignored by Boswell."⁶³⁵ However, while he states that Anecdotes is "filled with information which may in general be relied upon," he then cautions the reader, "if only allowance be made for Mrs. Piozzi's motives at the time"⁶³⁶

Looking for Thrale's "motives" in Anecdotes, Clifford views this work in mostly negative terms and primarily from *Johnson's* point of view. This is evident when he describes Thrale as having been for eighteen years Johnson's "confidant and inspiration."⁶³⁷ However, as I have shown, Thrale felt increasingly alienated from Johnson in her friendship with him. As for Clifford's assessment that Anecdotes is Thrale's unsuccessful attempt to write the "same type of biographical method as Boswell," certainly Thrale did not publish Anecdotes viewing it as a failed imitation of Boswell's biographical method. In other words, she did not publish Anecdotes to embarrass herself as a writer or as a friend to Johnson by criticizing him. In reality, Thrale praises Johnson copiously in Anecdotes. Indeed, in the latter half of this book she writes panegyric about Johnson. Furthermore, as we have seen, Thrale wrote critically about Johnson in her private writing and social letters long before Johnson objected to her decision to marry Piozzi. Thus the criticism she makes of Johnson in Anecdotes was

⁶³⁴ Clifford, Piozzi 267.

⁶³⁵ Clifford, Piozzi 267.

⁶³⁶ Clifford, Piozzi 272.

⁶³⁷ Clifford, Piozzi 267.

already a part of her view of him well before she parted with him over his objection to her marriage to Piozzi.

Thus, instead of a precipitous and treacherous premeditated public attack on Johnson, Anecdotes is a record of Thrale's attempt to resolve her paradoxical readings of and feelings about Johnson, a process she began privately in her "Family Book" and Thraliana, and one she conducted socially in her letters to him for twenty years.

Clifford fails to take into consideration that Thrale herself did not see Anecdotes as an attack on Johnson. Nor did she see the timing of its publication as problematic. It is true that she wrote about Johnson only fifteen months after Johnson's death. However, she did so knowing that Johnson would not have objected to this. After all, Johnson had written in his well-known Rambler 60 regarding the biographer's choice of subject: "It is, indeed, not improper to take honest advantages of prejudice, and to gain attention by a celebrated name."⁶³⁸ As for writing about Johnson's private life and thoughts, Thrale was only following Johnson's dictum in Rambler 60 that the "business of the biographer" is to "pass slightly over those performances and incidents, which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestick privacies, and display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue."⁶³⁹ Thus in Anecdotes, Thrale does not write about Johnson's great achievements, but rather about the "domestick privacies" and the "minute details" of his life in accordance with Johnson's own beliefs regarding the proper content of biography.

⁶³⁸ Samuel Johnson, The Rambler (The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson, eds. Walter J. Bate and Albrecht Strauss, (New Haven: Yale, 1969) III: 321.

Taking this into consideration, one should read Anecdotes as Thrale's attempt to resolve her disparate positive and negative readings of Johnson rather than as a public attack on him by a vindictive author. Anecdotes is a text that reveals Thrale's continuing struggle to read Johnson after his death, a struggle that began in her private and social writing and that naturally was reflected in her public writing on him. In Anecdotes, Thrale continued to seek, but failed to arrive at, a consistent or concretized reading of Johnson after his death as she had during their twenty-year friendship. Indeed, rather than attacking Johnson in Anecdotes, Thrale courageously made herself vulnerable to attack by publicly revealing her vacillating private views of him. Anecdotes is a public attempt to resolve the range of responses Thrale had to Johnson in her private writing in the "Family Book" and Thraliana, and in her social letters to him.

The fact that Thrale was aware that Anecdotes might be misread as a public attack on Johnson was made clear when she wrote toward the beginning of her "Preface": "I am aware that many will say, I have not spoken highly enough of Dr. Johnson, but it will be difficult for those who say so, to speak more highly."⁶⁴⁰ Indeed, immediately after this statement, she placed her unflattering descriptions of Johnson in the following context: "If I have described his manners as they were, I have been careful to shew his superiority to the common forms of common life. It is surely no dispraise to an oak that it does not bear jessamine."⁶⁴¹ She then observed of Johnson's learning and intellect:

⁶³⁹ Johnson, Rambler, 321.

⁶⁴⁰ Hester Piozzi, Anecdotes of Samuel Johnson by Hester Lynch Piozzi, ed. S. C. Roberts (Books for Libraries: Arno Press, New York, 1980) 3.

⁶⁴¹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 3.

When I have said, that he was more a man of genius than of learning, I mean not to take from the one part of his character that which I willingly give to the other. The erudition of Mr. Johnson proved his genius; for he had not acquired it by long or profound study: nor can I think those characters the greatest which have most learning driven into their heads, any more than I can persuade myself to consider the river Jenisca as superior to the Nile, because the first receives near seventy tributary streams in the course of its unmarked progress to the sea, while the great parent of African plenty, flowing from an almost invisible source, and unenriched by any extraneous waters, except eleven nameless rivers, pours his majestic torrents into the ocean by seven celebrated mouths.⁶⁴²

Furthermore, Thrale suggested how she hoped Anecdotes would be read when she wrote of how pleased she was that her book was perceived by many readers as an "eminently just, generous, and humane" memoir of Johnson.⁶⁴³ Finally, Thrale told her readers that she intended for Anecdotes to serve a didactic purpose, one that only further commended Johnson to her readers. She wanted this book to "divert" her readers "from melancholy by my description of Johnson's manners," and she hoped that her praise of Johnson's character and beliefs would "warm" her readers "to virtue even by the distant reflexion of his glowing excellence," and "encourage" them "by the relation of his animated zeal to persist in the profession as well as practice of Christianity."⁶⁴⁴ Thus, although she wrote unflatteringly about Johnson at times, she did

⁶⁴² Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 4.

⁶⁴³ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 4.

⁶⁴⁴ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 5-6.

so for a greater didactic purpose, something that she believed Johnson would approve of.

But despite her best intentions, Thrale's continued perplexity in reading Johnson and her fascination with the paradoxes that she perceived in his thinking and in his behavior govern the overall structure and content of Anecdotes. Throughout Anecdotes, one can sense Thrale struggling with how to read Johnson as she presents her positive and negative views of him. Indeed, in the latter half of Anecdotes, she criticized Johnson even as she wrote panegyrically about him.

Structurally, Anecdotes is what its title describes it to be—a collection of brief stories about Johnson. Initially, Thrale arranged her stories about Johnson chronologically. She described incidents of Johnson's childhood and of his early education, as well as of his relationships with his parents and his only sibling, his brother Nathaniel. But by page 18 (of 196 pages), she abandoned this format to write a collection of haphazardly arranged anecdotes. As a result, the bulk of the book resembles a stream-of-consciousness reverie of Thrale's recollections about Johnson.

Regardless of how she arranged her stories about Johnson, Thrale saw her role as primarily an anecdotist working in a form she believed appropriate to her biographical writing on Johnson:

To recollect . . . and to repeat the sayings of Dr. Johnson, is almost all that can be done by the writers of his life; as his life, at least since my acquaintance with him, consisted in little else than talking, when he was not absolutely employed in some serious piece of work; and whatever work he did, seemed so much

below his powers of performance, that he appeared the idlest of all human beings.⁶⁴⁵

Furthermore, Thrale chose the anecdote format because she was aware that the appeal of Anecdotes rested largely on the well-known fact that she was Johnson's intimate friend for twenty years. Thus, it should not surprise readers of Anecdotes, or reflect negatively on Thrale as a scholar or as a writer, that she wrote about Johnson as a *friend* in an informal, conversational style rather than in the style of a more traditional, linear biography. Indeed, in the pages of Anecdotes itself, Thrale described her memoir of Johnson as "a piece of motley mosaic work" and also as an "ill-strung selection" which she hoped the "public" would "condescend" to read. Clearly, she intended to publish Anecdotes in this format. Moreover, Anecdotes is not a reflection of her incompetence in writing a biography of Johnson in the style of Boswell. Thrale is a precursor of Boswell, who perfected the intimate anecdotal style in the Life. However, Thrale's imperfections of style and organization do not detract from her Anecdotes. For as Thrale tells one anecdote after another, or repeats one or two in particular, one feels as if one is listening to her speak excitedly about her twenty-year friendship with Johnson--as if one is participating in a private conversation with her.

From the beginning of Anecdotes, Thrale set about establishing her credentials as an informed reader with a special knowledge of Johnson by impressing upon her readers the great intimacy of her friendship with him. She showed us a comical and unexpectedly casual portrait of Johnson when she related how he leaped over a "cabriolet stool" one day in imitation of Henry Thrale, but did so "in a way so strange and so

⁶⁴⁵ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 18.

unwieldy, that our terror lest he should break his bones, took from us even the power of laughing."⁶⁴⁶ Similarly, she explained how Johnson in private gave "a good deal of pain by refusing to hear the verses the children could recite, or the songs they could sing" because of his own painful memories of having been made to perform by his parents in similar ways in front of others.⁶⁴⁷ On another occasion, Thrale demonstrated their special intimacy by telling us what Johnson said to her after relating a story about a personal incident in his childhood: "I cannot imagine . . . what makes me talk of myself to you so."⁶⁴⁸ She showed that Johnson was so comfortable with her that on another occasion, he cast himself in an unflattering light using an incident in his childhood to illustrate his point that "Poor people's children . . . never respect" their parents: "I did not respect my own mother, though I loved her," Johnson told Thrale, "and one day when she called me a puppy, I asked her if she knew what they called a puppy's mother."⁶⁴⁹

One might question Thrale's judgment in publishing these less-than-flattering stories. However, they are reasonable choices when one considers that Thrale was simply writing in accordance with Johnson's precept in Rambler 60 that the biographer should "lead the thoughts into domestick privacies, and display the minute details of daily life" of one's subject. Moreover, these choices were appropriate when one considers that Thrale knew that most of her readers were well aware of Johnson's Rambler 60.

Certainly, Thrale praised Johnson for his many qualities in Anecdotes. After relating a story of how Johnson composed a poem at age

⁶⁴⁶ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 8.

⁶⁴⁷ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 8.

⁶⁴⁸ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 15.

⁶⁴⁹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 20-21.

five, she cited it as "a striking example" of Johnson's "early expansion of mind, and knowledge of language. She recalled how, at age ten, he "searched . . . diligently but fruitlessly, for evidences of the truth of revelation." She also wrote that, "no man was more struck with voluntary descent from possible splendour to painful duty."⁶⁵⁰ In addition, she praised Johnson for his encyclopedic learning, and also asserted that, "No man knew better than Johnson in how many nameless and numberless actions behaviour consists: actions which can scarcely be reduced to rule, and which come under no description."⁶⁵¹ Moreover, she described Johnson's prodigious memory and his powers of composing in Latin.⁶⁵²

However, Thrale also presented some striking and unflattering readings of the venerable "Dr. Johnson" in the early part of Anecdotes. She described, for example, Johnson's undesirable urge to "confound" others in conversation, much to his own delight and the embarrassment of others, and the "promptitude of his own temper to take offence" which would "consign him back again to silent meditation" in company.⁶⁵³

More significantly, after praising Johnson for his knowledge of human behavior, Thrale wrote about his inability to see himself accurately. She related an instance when Johnson had rudely extolled the virtues of Oxford University over those of Cambridge in the company of five "Cambridge men," and of how, after these men had gone, Johnson had spoken quite seriously, but also quite unrealistically, about his own "good breeding":

⁶⁵⁰ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 14.

⁶⁵¹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 19.

⁶⁵² Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 22-23.

⁶⁵³ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 18.

'He [Dr. Barnard, a Provost of Eton] was the only man too' (says Mr. Johnson quite seriously) that did justice to my good breeding; and you may observe that I am well-bred to a degree of needless scrupulosity. No man,' (continued he, not observing the amazement of his hearers) 'no man is so cautious not to interrupt another; no man thinks it so necessary to appear attentive when others are speaking; no man so steadily refuses preference to himself, or so willingly bestows it on another, as I do; no body holds so strongly as I do the necessity of ceremony, and the ill effects which follow the breach of it; yet people think me rude; but Barnard did me justice.'⁶⁵⁴

Likewise, Thrale recounted how Johnson, "upon some occasions . . . would express his astonishment that he should have an enemy in the world," despite his delight in "confounding" and disputing with others in conversation. On these occasions, Thrale recalled, she would "make him recollect" that he gave people many reasons to be his enemy by reminding him, for example, of the time when he had deliberately berated Cambridge University to Cambridge alumni.⁶⁵⁵

Furthermore, Thrale argued that she did not criticize Johnson surreptitiously. She told her audience that she had Johnson's "leave" to record his conversational pronouncements in Anecdotes. With obvious reference to James Boswell, Thrale stated that she never engaged in the "trick" of "sitting steadily down at the other end of the room to write at the moment what should be said in company, either by Dr. Johnson or to him" because she believed that this behavior was "inclining to treachery":

⁶⁵⁴ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 26.

⁶⁵⁵ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 26-27.

A set of acquaintance joined in a familiar chat may say a thousand things, which (as the phrase is) pass well enough at the time, though they cannot stand the test of critical examination; and as all talk beyond that which is necessary to the purposes of actual business is a kind of game, there will be ever found ways of playing fairly or unfairly at it⁶⁵⁶

But although Thrale was certain about her role and responsibilities as Johnson's biographer, she struggled to resolve her disparate readings of Johnson. This becomes apparent early in Anecdotes. For example, Thrale wrote: "Dr. Johnson was liberal enough in granting literary assistance to others, I think, and innumerable are the prefaces, sermons, lectures, and dedications which he used to make for people who begged of him." However, she followed this by observing that it "was not very easy for people not quite intimate with Dr. Johnson, to get exactly his opinion of a writer's merit, as he would divert himself by confounding those who thought themselves obliged to say to-morrow what he said yesterday."⁶⁵⁷

In another instance, aware that her criticism of Johnson might attract more attention than her praise of him, Thrale identified with Johnson as a biographer by using a private/public monologue: "If . . . Johnson lamented, that the nearer he approached to his own times, the more enemies he should make, by telling biographical truths in his Lives of the later Poets, what may I not apprehend, who, if I relate anecdotes of Mr. Johnson, am obliged to repeat expressions of severity, and sentences of contempt?"⁶⁵⁸ Here again Thrale attempted to explain to the

⁶⁵⁶ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 31.

⁶⁵⁷ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 39.

⁶⁵⁸ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 42.

public that she was aware of the dangers of criticizing Johnson in Anecdotes. But she, like Johnson, wanted to write "biographical truths." Indeed, immediately after the foregoing statement, Thrale attempted to ameliorate her criticism of Johnson by re-contextualizing it—a rhetorical pattern that she would employ, repeatedly, throughout Anecdotes. This is evident when she wrote: "Let me at least soften them [Johnson's "severity, and sentences of contempt"] a little, by saying, that he did not hate the persons he treated with roughness, or despise them whom he drove from him by apparent scorn. He really loved and respected many whom he would not suffer to love him."⁶⁵⁹ In other words, it was Thrale's conscious design, rather than wrathful anger, that determined her criticism of Johnson in Anecdotes.

Having made this statement, Thrale attempted to prove its validity from her own experience by explaining how Johnson could be quite intentionally unfeeling and rude in his behavior toward her and her friends:

He was no gentler with myself, or those for whom I had the greatest regard. When I one day lamented the loss of a first cousin killed in America— 'Prithee, my dear.' (said he), 'have done with canting: how would the world be worse for it, I may ask, if all your relations were at once spitted like larks, and roasted for Presto's supper?'⁶⁶⁰

Perhaps to restrain herself from telling additional stories of a similar nature, Thrale noted: "I only instance these replies, to excuse my mentioning those he made to others."⁶⁶¹ Clearly, Thrale wanted to leave her readers with the impression that such discourteous behavior was

⁶⁵⁹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 42.

⁶⁶⁰ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 42.

common for Johnson, but she did not want to appear petty by listing a multitude of similar incidents.

Because Thrale knew Johnson so well, her readings of him are often complex. On the one hand, she pitied Johnson for his physical ills: "Mr. Johnson's health," she wrote, "had been always extremely bad since I first knew him." On the other hand, she argued that it was Johnson's "over-anxious care to retain without blemish the perfect sanity of his mind" that "contributed much to disturb" his physical health. Indeed, Thrale claimed that of all his ills, Johnson was most afflicted by the disorders of his imagination. She related how "Dr. Lawrence told him [Johnson] one day, that if he would come and beat him [Lawrence] once a week he [Lawrence] would bear it; but to hear his [Johnson's] complaints was more than man could support." She then added angrily and bitterly: "'Twas therefore that he [Johnson] tried, I suppose, and in eighteen years contrived to weary the patience of a woman."⁶⁶² Although Thrale does display anger at Johnson here, there is no indication in these words that this anger is related to Johnson's objections to her marriage to Piozzi. If anything, her anger here signals that she had reasons, *other than Johnson's objection to her marriage*, to part with him after twenty years of friendship.

At other times, Thrale responded to her inability to resolve her disparate readings of Johnson by attempting to explain his character and behavior. She observed, for example, that "Dr. Johnson . . . did not even pretend to feel for those who lamented the loss of a loved one because he believed, 'these are the distresses of sentiment . . . which a man who is really to be pitied has no leisure to feel. The sight of

⁶⁶¹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 43.

⁶⁶² Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 52.

people who want food and raiment is so common in great cities, that a surly fellow like me, has no compassion to spare for wounds given only to vanity or softness.'" ⁶⁶³

However, she observed soon afterwards that Johnson "was a great reader of Mandeville" and of Rochefoucault's acerbic Maxims, "and was ever on the watch to spy out those stains of original corruption, so easily discovered by a penetrating observer even in the purest minds." ⁶⁶⁴ Thus, Thrale saw the influence of Mandeville in Johnson's obstinate declaration to her: "'I hope . . . that I have lived long enough in the world, to prevent me from expecting to find any action of which both the original motive and all the parts were good.'" Yet Thrale also recorded how Johnson, despite his love of Mandeville's philosophy, "took care always loudly to condemn the Fable of the Bees, but not without adding, 'that it was the work of a thinking man.'" ⁶⁶⁵

At times, as she continued writing about Johnson in Anecdotes, Thrale seems to go beyond simply reporting and arranging Johnson's contradictory statements and behavior. Indeed, through the many examples of such behavior that she cites, Thrale seems to imply that she regarded Johnson as hypocritical at times. For example, Thrale noted that Johnson hated to discuss history or politics, yet "No man . . . was more zealously attached to his party; he not only loved a tory himself, but he loved a man the better if he heard he hated a whig." ⁶⁶⁶ Likewise, she observed that Johnson "loved the poor as I never yet saw any one else do, with an earnest desire to make them happy" ⁶⁶⁷; but she also asserted: "While Johnson possessed however the strongest

⁶⁶³ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 57-58.

⁶⁶⁴ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 59.

⁶⁶⁵ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 112.

⁶⁶⁶ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 56.

compassion for poverty or illness, he did not even pretend to feel for those who lamented the loss of a child, a parent, or a friend."⁶⁶⁸ Similarly, regarding Johnson's stoicism in the face of other people's pain, she observed:

[T]he truth is, nobody suffered more from pungent sorrow at a friend's death than Johnson, though he would suffer no one else to complain of their losses in the same way; 'for,' (says he) 'we must either outlive our friends you know, or our friends must outlive us; and I see no man that would hesitate about the choice.'⁶⁶⁹

Even Johnson's piety came under Thrale's close scrutiny: "With advising others to be charitable however, Dr. Johnson did not content himself. He gave away all he had, and all he ever had gotten, except the two thousand pounds he left behind; and the very small portion of his income which he spent on himself"⁶⁷⁰ However, soon after this praise, she described how Johnson's Christianity was seriously flawed in that he practiced it zealously and pathologically to his own detriment. Indeed, she knew that Johnson did not approve of mixing zeal with the beliefs and practice of any religion:

No one had . . . higher notions of the hard task of true Christianity than Johnson, whose daily terror lest he had not done enough, originated in piety, but ended in little less than disease. . . . finding his good works ever below his desires and intent, filled his imagination with fears that he should never

⁶⁶⁷ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 57.

⁶⁶⁸ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 58.

⁶⁶⁹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 80.

⁶⁷⁰ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 69-70.

obtain forgiveness for omissions of duty and criminal waste of time.⁶⁷¹

Moreover, from private experience, Thrale observed that "to pray by his sick bed, required strength of body as well as of mind, so vehement were his manners, and his tones of voice so pathetic" that she had found his behavior overwhelming: "I have many times made it my request to heaven that I might be spared the sight of his death; and I was spared it!"⁶⁷² Thus, while citing some of Johnson's incongruous beliefs regarding religion, Thrale uses the opportunity to state boldly to the general public that it was *her wish* to be absent when Johnson was dying. In other words, Thrale argues that she had intentionally remained away from Johnson near the end of his life because of his sickbed behavior—and *not* because of her anger at his disapproval of her marriage, nor because of guilt over the end of their friendship.

Thrale then proceeded to write about Johnson's paradoxical social behavior: "Mr. Johnson liked a frolic or a jest well enough," she wrote; however, she continued, "he had strange serious rules about it too: and very angry was he if any body offered to be merry when he was disposed to be grave."⁶⁷³ Similarly, on the one hand, she praised Johnson's company and his skill as a storyteller:

Johnson's various life, and spirit of vigilance to learn and treasure up every peculiarity of manner, sentiment, or general conduct, made his company, when he chose to relate anecdotes of people he had formerly known, exquisitely amusing and comical . . .

⁶⁷¹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 74.

⁶⁷² Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 63.

⁶⁷³ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 76-77.

. . . no man told a story with so good a grace, or knew so well what would make an effect upon his auditors.⁶⁷⁴

But, on the other hand, she noted that Johnson "loved late hours extremely, or more properly hated early ones. . . . Nothing was more terrifying to him," she explained, "than the idea of retiring to bed, which he never would call going to rest, or suffer another to call so. 'I lie down . . . that my acquaintance may sleep; but I lie down to endure oppressive misery, and soon rise again to pass the night in anxiety and pain.'"⁶⁷⁵ As much as Thrale pitied Johnson's fear of night, she wrote that "with this pathetic manner, which no one ever possessed in so eminent a degree, he used to shock me from quitting his company, till I hurt my own health not a little by sitting up with him when I was myself far from well." She added ruefully, "nor was it an easy matter to oblige him even by compliance, for he always maintained that no one forebore their own gratifications for the sake of pleasing another, and if one did sit up it was probably to amuse one's self."⁶⁷⁶ Although Thrale admitted that Johnson's company could be pleasing, even on such occasions, she clearly read his behavior as more of a selfish imposition on his part than a blessing when she concluded this passage: at "Streatham indeed I managed better, having always some friend who was kind enough to engage him in talk, and favour my retreat."⁶⁷⁷

In Anecdotes, Thrale also wrote publicly about having had "the honour and happiness of contributing to" Johnson's complete recovery from his nervous breakdown in 1766. However, she argued that his complaints of madness were a seriously debilitating affectation, one

⁶⁷⁴ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 81.

⁶⁷⁵ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 81

⁶⁷⁶ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 81.

⁶⁷⁶ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 81.

that revealed Johnson's peculiar lack of discretion. "Johnson," she stated, "often lamented to us [Thrale and her husband] the horrible condition of his mind, which he said was nearly distracted." She then added, "and though he charged us to make him odd solemn promises of secrecy on so strange a subject, yet when we waited on him one morning . . . [we] heard him, in the most pathetic terms, beg the prayers of Dr. Delap, who had left him as we came in."⁶⁷⁸ Moreover, Thrale discreetly described how Johnson then "wildly proclaim[ed] what he could at last persuade no one to believe and what, if true, would have been so very unfit to reveal."⁶⁷⁹ Although it is true that in Anecdotes Thrale revealed some of Johnson's innermost thoughts regarding his fears of madness, she appears not to have thought this a betrayal of Johnson's confidence because she wrote about this subject only after learning that it was *already* widely known in the public sphere.

Thus, as we continue to read Anecdotes, we see that Thrale clearly gave the public several reasons (other than her anger at his disapproval of her marriage) for her parting with Johnson. It becomes increasingly apparent that Thrale did not write Anecdotes as a vindictive response to Johnson's disapproval of her decision to marry Piozzi.

In addition to displaying the paradoxes, inconsistencies, and hypocrisies of Johnson's character in Anecdotes, Thrale portrayed Johnson as a man who was also prey to the petty jealousies that afflict all human beings. She described a rivalry that arose for her attention between her mother and Johnson when Thrale cared for Johnson during his nervous breakdown in 1766. In writing that her mother and Johnson "disliked one an other (sic) extremely, and teized me often with

⁶⁷⁷ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 82-83.

⁶⁷⁸ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 82-83.

perverse opposition, petty contentions, and mutual complaints," Thrale portrayed Johnson as having the ordinary flaws that one might have expected "Johnson the philosopher" to have overcome long ago. However, Thrale also pointed out that, over time, Johnson came to admire her mother and "acknowledged himself improved by her piety, and astonished at her fortitude, and hung over her bed with the affection of a parent, and the reverence of a son." But then, as if to balance her "low" description of Johnson, Thrale praised Johnson highly in describing how her mother came to respect him:

Nor did it give me less pleasure to see her sweet mind cleared of all its latent prejudices, and left at liberty to admire and applaud that force of thought and versatility of genius, that comprehensive soul and benevolent heart which attracted and commanded veneration from all, but inspired peculiar sensations of delight mixed with reverence in those who, like her, had the opportunity to observe these qualities, stimulated by gratitude and actuated by friendship.⁶⁸⁰

But Thrale followed this high praise of Johnson by agreeing with Hogarth's assessment of Johnson that "'though so wise a fellow . . . he says in his haste that all men are liars.'" She supported this statement by writing: "This charge, as I afterwards came to know, was but too well founded: Mr. Johnson's incredulity amounted almost to disease, and I have seen it mortify his companions exceedingly."⁶⁸¹ Developing this thought even further, Thrale once again alluded to the anomalies in Johnson's character: "Mr. Johnson's fixed incredulity of every thing he heard, and his little care to conceal that incredulity, was teizing

⁶⁷⁹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 83.

⁶⁸⁰ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 84.

enough to be sure. Though thus uncommonly ready both to give and take offence, Mr. Johnson had many rigid maxims concerning the necessity of continued softness and compliance of disposition" ⁶⁸²

Besides his contradictory nature, perhaps the chief disappointment that Thrale expressed in Anecdotes is Johnson's restricted friendship for her. She wrote of how Johnson preferred her husband's friendship to her own: "When Mr. Thrale's perplexities disturbed his peace, dear Dr. Johnson left him scarce a moment, and tried every artifice to amuse as well as every argument to console him." ⁶⁸³ As we have seen in Thrale's private writing and in her social correspondence, Johnson did not extend this solicitousness to Henry Thrale's wife. Thrale described herself as having "never had any ascendancy over Mr. Johnson, except just in the things that concerned his health," meaning only when nursing him when he was too ill to hold sway over her. She described her husband's relationship with Johnson in this way: "Mr. Thrale had a very powerful influence over the Doctor, and could make him suppress many rough answers: he could likewise prevail on him to change his shirt, his coat, or his plate, almost before it became indispensably necessary to the comfortable feeling of his friends." ⁶⁸⁴ Thrale felt Johnson's bond with Henry Thrale even more keenly after Henry's death when Johnson attempted to act in Henry's role as "Master" of Streatham. Indeed, Thrale explained to her reading public that this was one of the reasons why she found it so difficult to be in Johnson's presence after the death of her husband: "it grew extremely perplexing and difficult to live in the house with him when the master of it was no more; the worse indeed,

⁶⁸¹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 90.

⁶⁸² Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 92, 95.

⁶⁸³ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 85.

⁶⁸⁴ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 85.

because his dislikes grew capricious; and he could scarce bear to have any body come to the house whom it was absolutely necessary for me to see."⁶⁸⁵ Moreover, Thrale presented, by way of explanation, Johnson's beliefs on why a wife should be submissive to her husband:

When any disputes arose between our married acquaintance however, Mr. Johnson always sided with the husband, 'whom' (he said) 'the woman had probably provoked so often, she scarce knew when or how she had disobliged him first.' 'Women (says Dr. Johnson) 'give great offence by a contemptuous spirit on non-compliance on petty occasions. The man calls his wife to walk with him, in the shade, and she feels a strange desire just at that moment to sit in the sun: he offers to read her a play, or sing her a song, and she calls the children in to disturb them, or advises him to seize that opportunity of settling the family accounts. Twenty such tricks will the faithfulest wife in the world not refuse to play, and then look astonished when the fellow fetches in a mistress.'⁶⁸⁶

It was most likely these views of women by Johnson that prompted Thrale to exclaim later in Anecdotes: "He did indeed say very contemptuous things of our sex."⁶⁸⁷ Likewise, she reported how on one occasion, Johnson had been "displeased" with her for repeating a remark that he had made about women. She recalled that Johnson said that "it was well managed of some one to leave his affairs in the hands of his wife, because 'in matters of business,' (said he), 'no woman stops at integrity.'"⁶⁸⁸ Thus, Thrale informs the public that Johnson's personal coldness to her and possibly latent misogyny also played a role in her

⁶⁸⁵ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 91-2.
⁶⁸⁶ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 98-99.
⁶⁸⁷ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 174.
⁶⁸⁸ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 174.

desire to distance herself from him--reasons that were separate from her disagreement with him over her decision to marry Piozzi.

At times, in the first half of Anecdotes, Thrale's criticism of Johnson overwhelms her praise of him. Halfway through the text, she continued to cite instances of Johnson's self-contradictory thinking about social hierarchy: "Dr. Johnson's knowledge and esteem of what we call low or coarse life was indeed prodigious," she wrote, "and he did not like that the upper ranks should be dignified with the name of 'the world.'"⁶⁸⁹ However, Thrale wrote, "With all this haughty contempt of gentility, no praise was more welcome to Dr. Johnson than that which said he had the notions or manners of a gentleman." Indeed, she observed that Johnson "had . . . an avowed and scarcely limited partiality for all who bore the name or boasted the alliance of an Aston or a Hervey."⁶⁹⁰

Likewise, despite his stoicism in the face of other people's mourning, Thrale pointed out that Johnson himself was "driven to distraction" over his dear friend Miss Boothby's death and over the death of his own wife.⁶⁹¹ Moreover, Johnson's opinion that "the world was not half as wicked as it was represented" and his refusal to believe reports of catastrophes and miracles was seen by Thrale to be actually a product of Johnson's intellectual stubbornness and the narrow thinking that he sometimes exhibited. She stated that Johnson, "might very well continue in that opinion, as he resolutely drove from him every story that could make him change it."⁶⁹²

⁶⁸⁹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 101.

⁶⁹⁰ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 102.

⁶⁹¹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 105.

⁶⁹² Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 110.

Although Thrale praised Johnson for his philosophic wisdom in the latter half of Anecdotes, she also argued that Johnson's secular philosophy could be narrowly reductive. As an example of this, she observed that Johnson would return repeatedly to one conclusion for a host of problems in life:

The vacuity of life had at some early period of his life struck so forcibly on the mind of Mr. Johnson, that it became by repeated impression his favourite hypothesis, and the general tenor of his reasonings commonly ended there, wherever they might begin. Such things therefore as other philosophers often attribute to various and contradictory causes, appeared to him uniform enough; all was done to fill up time, upon his principle.⁶⁹³

To illustrate Johnson's favorite philosophical reply to the problems of human behavior, Thrale wrote:

One man, for example, was profligate and wild, as we call it, followed the girls, or sat still at the gaming-table. 'Why, life must be filled up' (says Johnson) 'and the man who is not capable of intellectual pleasures must content himself with such as his senses can afford.'⁶⁹⁴

Another was a hoarder: 'Why, a fellow must do something; and what so easy to a narrow mind as hoarding halfpence till they turn into sixpences.'⁶⁹⁵

Thrale recalled of how she had argued with Johnson that this "principle" of the need to fill the "vacuity of life," "was like the Clown's answer

⁶⁹³ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 100.

⁶⁹⁴ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 100.

⁶⁹⁵ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 100.

in All's well that ends well, of 'Oh Lord, Sir!' for that it suited every occasion."⁶⁹⁶

As Thrale's struggle to arrive at a specific or concretized reading of Johnson continued in the second half of Anecdotes, her failure to do so is particularly apparent. As if to offset her criticism of Johnson in the first half of Anecdotes, she began to praise Johnson more fulsomely. It is as if, having read over the first half of her manuscript, where she had seen herself at times unable to praise Johnson without criticizing him, she now wished to make some unmitigated statements to celebrate his genius and character. But these attempts seem forced. In fact, Thrale went so far as to contradict both her earlier criticism of Johnson and her earlier resolution not to write a panegyric. For example, she suddenly compared Johnson favorably with her old beloved mentor, Dr. Arthur Collier, as a teacher. Johnson, she wrote, "did not wish to confound, but to inform his auditors":

and though he did not appear to solicit benevolence, he always impressed with the idea, that it was his to teach in this world, and theirs to learn. What wonder then that all should receive with docility from Johnson those doctrines, which propagated by Collier they drove away from them with shouts!⁶⁹⁷

However, try as she might to praise Johnson, Thrale seemed unable to stop criticizing him. Indeed, she wrote that Johnson's "natural roughness of manner, so often mentioned, would, notwithstanding the regularity of his notions, burst through them all from time to time" when he was engaged in social conversation, whether he was instructing someone or not. Thrale wrote of how Johnson had responded harshly to

⁶⁹⁶ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 100.

⁶⁹⁷ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 115.

the compliments of Hannah More by stating that she should "'consider what her flattery was worth before she choaked him with it.'" Thrale then added, critically, "a few more winters passed in the talking world shewed him the value of that friend's commendations however; and he was very sorry for the disgusting speech he made her."⁶⁹⁸ By describing this incident, Thrale gave the world a reading of Johnson as a distrustful man who was slow to admit his mistakes. Furthermore, in her eyes, Johnson's mistrust of others and the world deeply affected how Johnson practiced Christianity, inclining him to zealousness:

. . . his fears of his own salvation were excessive; his truly tolerant spirit, and Christian charity, which hopeth all things and believeth all things, made him rely securely on the safety of his friends, while his earnest aspiration after a blessed immortality made him cautious of his own steps, and timorous concerning their consequences. He knew how much would be required, till his impressed imagination was often disturbed by them, and his health suffered from the sensibility of his too tender conscience.⁶⁹⁹

Thrale concluded this passage by praising Johnson as "a real Christian [who] is so apt to find his task above his power of performance!" But then, immediately following this exclamation, she related how Johnson had once told her that long after his mother had died, he had heard her voice call "Sam" one day and kindly attributed this event to the fact that Johnson's senses were disordered at the time.⁷⁰⁰ Thrale must have known that her Christian audience would surely see this anecdote as an example of "Christian" Johnson's belief in pagan spirits or ghosts.

⁶⁹⁸ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 118.

⁶⁹⁹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 123.

As she continued to vacillate between praise and criticism of Johnson in the second half of Anecdotes, Thrale seemed to strain to delineate and define the various, often paradoxical, aspects of Johnson's character in a concise and compact sentence or paragraph. This is particularly evident in a passage that Thrale wrote about the kind of friend Johnson had been to her and to others (a passage that followed the one on the more pagan aspects of Johnson's Christianity). She now cited discrepancies between Johnson's beliefs as a Christian and his actions as a friend, discrepancies that she had been confronted with and had been seriously disappointed by in her long friendship with Johnson (as we have seen in her diaries and letters):

As Johnson was the firmest of believers without being credulous, so he was the most charitable of mortals without being what we call an active friend. Admirable at giving counsel, no man saw his way so clearly; but he would not stir a finger for the assistance to those whom he was willing to give advice.⁷⁰¹

She continued even more critically:

[B]esides that, he had principles of laziness, and could be indolent by rule. To hinder your death, or procure you a dinner, I mean if really in want of one; his earnestness, his exertions could not be prevented, though health and purse and ease were all destroyed by their violence. If you wanted a slight favour, you must apply to people of other dispositions; for not a step would Johnson move to obtain a man a vote in a society, to repay a compliment which might be useful or pleasing, to write a letter of request, or to obtain a hundred pounds a year more for a friend,

⁷⁰⁰ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 123.

⁷⁰¹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 125

who perhaps already had two or three. No force could urge him to diligence, no importunity could conquer his resolution of standing still.⁷⁰²

However, after having found fault with Johnson's assistance, Thrale went on to praise Johnson's abilities in conversation:

His information best enlightened, his argument strengthened, and his wit made it ever remembered. Of him it might have been said, as he often delighted to say of Edmund Burke, 'that you could not stand five minutes with that man beneath a shed while it rained, but you must be convinced you had been standing with the greatest man you had ever yet seen'⁷⁰³

Three-quarters of the way through Anecdotes, having had no success in reconciling her opposing views of him, Thrale tried another approach: she attempted to distinguish Johnson's speech from his actions—as if making a final attempt to balance her criticism of what Johnson said with her commendations on his actions. Thrale explained to her public: "When I relate these various instances of contemptuous behaviour shewn to a variety of people, I am aware that those who till now have heard little of Mr. Johnson will here cry out against his pride and his severity; yet I have been as careful as I could to tell them, that all he did was gentle, if all he said was rough."⁷⁰⁴ She went so far as to write: "Had I given anecdotes of his actions instead of his words, we should I am sure have had nothing on record but acts of virtue differently modified, as different occasions called that virtue

⁷⁰² Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 125.

⁷⁰³ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 134-35.

⁷⁰⁴ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 135.

forth."⁷⁰⁵ Immediately after this, she once again exalted Johnson's behavior:

[A]mong all the nine biographical essays or performances which I have heard will at last be written about dear Dr. Johnson, no mean or wretched, no wicked or even slightly culpable action will I trust be found, to produce and put in the scale against a life of seventy years, spent in the uniform practice of every moral excellence and every Christian perfection, save humility alone, says a critic, but that I think must be excepted. He was not however wanting even in that to a degree seldom attained by man, when the duties of piety or charity called it forth.⁷⁰⁶

Lowly towards God, and docile towards the church; implicit in his belief of the gospel, and ever respectful towards the people appointed to preach it; tender of the unhappy, and affectionate to the poor, let no one hastily condemn as proud, a character which may perhaps somewhat justly be censured as arrogant. It must however be remembered again, that even this arrogance was never shewn without some intention, immediate or remote, of mending some fault or conveying some instruction.

If anything, Thrale now seemed to use the distinction she had drawn between Johnson's words and his actions to create an opportunity to write panegyric about him:

Had I meant to make a panegyric on Mr. Johnson's well-known excellencies, I should have told his deeds only, not his words—sincerely protesting, that as I never saw him once do a wrong thing, so we had accustomed ourselves to look upon him almost as

⁷⁰⁵ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 142-43.

⁷⁰⁶ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 143.

an expected being; and I should as much have expected injustice from Socrates or impiety from Paschal, as the slightest deviation from truth and goodness in any transaction one might be engaged in with Samuel Johnson.⁷⁰⁷

Near the conclusion of Anecdotes, perhaps fearing that her vacillation about Johnson would only reflect negatively on both herself and Johnson, Thrale reminded the reading public once again of the educative purpose of her memoir and of the "zeal" with which she wrote about Johnson: "I could doubtless wish so to conclude it [Anecdotes], as at least to shew my zeal for my friend, whose life, as I once had the honour and happiness of being useful to, I should wish to record a few particular traits of, that those who read should emulate his goodness" ⁷⁰⁸ She continued this passage by incorporating her criticism of Johnson into the didactic purpose of explaining why she had written Anecdotes. She claimed that she had written her memoir in part, "seeing the necessity of making even virtue and learning such as his agreeable, that all should be warned against such coarseness of manners" which "drove even from him those who loved, honoured, and esteemed him"—including Thrale herself.⁷⁰⁹

Thrale seemed increasingly anxious to explain her negative views of Johnson in the closing pages of Anecdotes, views which clearly had preyed on her mind while writing this memoir of Johnson, and ones that she seemed unable, or unwilling, to suppress in her book. Once again separating Johnson's actions from his words, Thrale wrote:

I saw Mr. Johnson in none but a tranquil uniform state, passing the evening of his life among friends, who loved, honoured, and

⁷⁰⁷ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 142-43.

⁷⁰⁸ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 143-44.

admired him: I saw none of the things he did, except such acts of charity as have been often mentioned in this book, and such writings as are universally known. What he said is all I can relate; and from what he said, those who think it worth while to read these anecdotes, must be contented to gather his character.⁷¹⁰

Again, nervous about her "slight performance" in Anecdotes, Thrale wrote: "Mine is a mere candle-light picture of his latter days, where every thing falls in dark shadow except the face, the index of the mind." Moreover, perhaps fearing that she had not been complimentary enough of Johnson, she added, "but even that [Johnson's "face"] is seen unfavourably, and with a paleness beyond that what nature gave it." After this, Thrale once again emphasized the didactic intent of her praise and criticism of Johnson in Anecdotes:

It is chiefly for the sake of evincing the regularity and steadiness of Mr. Johnson's mind that I have given these trifling memoirs, to shew that his soul was not different from that of another person, but, as it was, greater; and to give those who did not know him a just idea of his acquiescence in what we call vulgar prejudices⁷¹¹

To further offset her negative views of Johnson, Thrale continued to praise him even for attributes she did not admire herself. She wrote of how "Dr. Johnson had indeed a veneration for the voice of mankind beyond what most people will own," although it had been his "veneration for the voice of mankind" that had determined Johnson's opposition to her decision to marry Piozzi.⁷¹² At the same time, she asserted that Johnson

⁷⁰⁹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 143-44.

⁷¹⁰ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 144.

⁷¹¹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 159-60.

⁷¹² Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 161.

could also be obstinately indifferent to public opinion in order to raise his own self-esteem:

Mr. Johnson indeed always measured other people's notions of every thing by his own, and nothing could persuade him to believe, that the books which he disliked were agreeable to thousands, or that air and exercise which he despised were beneficial to the health of other mortals.⁷¹³

Moreover, Thrale observed again that Johnson lacked the ability to "see himself" as others saw him, and was inclined to "rigidity" in his thinking that made him often quarrelsome:

Mr. Thrale too could sometimes over-rule his rigidity, by saying coldly, 'There, there, now we have had enough for one lecture, Dr. Johnson; we will not be upon education any more till after dinner, if you please'—or some such speech: but when there was nobody to restrain his dislikes, it was extremely difficult to find any body with whom he could converse, without living always on the verge of a quarrel, or of something too like a quarrel to be pleasing.⁷¹⁴

Thus in the closing pages of Anecdotes, Thrale returned to praising and criticizing Johnson alternately. For example, she wrote: "Fear was indeed a sensation to which Mr. Johnson was an utter stranger," but immediately after this, "excepting when some sudden apprehensions seized him that he was going to die." She ameliorated this by writing, "and even then he kept all his wits about him, to express the most humble and pathetic petitions to the Almighty."⁷¹⁵ But then she described how Johnson had angrily responded to her stoic answer

⁷¹³ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 166-67.

⁷¹⁴ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 186-88.

⁷¹⁵ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 177.

after "he had lamented in the most piercing terms his approaching dissolution, and conjured me solemnly to tell him what I thought":

I made him a steady, but as I thought a very gentle harrangue, in which I confirmed all that the doctor had been saying, how no present danger could be expected; but that his age and continued ill health must naturally accelerate the arrival of that hour which can be escaped by none 'And this,' (says Johnson, rising in great anger), 'is the voice of female friendship I suppose, when the hand of the hangman would be softer.'⁷¹⁶

Thrale thus argued again that although Johnson responded stoically to the pain of others, he did not wish to hear a stoical and reasonable response to his own pain.

Perhaps having looked over her text in its entirety, Thrale attempted to avoid minor misreadings of her intent in Anecdotes by stating: "though in the course of these memoirs I have been led to mention Dr. Johnson's tenderness towards poor people, I do not wish to mislead my readers, and make them think he had any delight in mean manners or coarse expressions."⁷¹⁷

But Thrale unmistakably tells the public that she saw herself independently of Johnson, and clearly explains why she eventually chose to avoid his company, using an example of an embarrassing social moment involving Johnson's petulance and irascibility:

Such accidents however occurred too often, and I was forced to take advantage of my lost lawsuit, and plead inability of purse to remain longer in London or its vicinage. I had been crossed in intentions of going abroad, and found it convenient, for every

⁷¹⁶ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 143-44.
⁷¹⁷ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 182.

reason of health, peace, and pecuniary circumstances, to retire to Bath, where I knew Mr. Johnson would not follow me, and where I could for that reason command some little portion of time for my own use; a thing impossible while I remained at Streatham or at London, as my hours, carriage and servants had long been at his [Johnson's] command, who would not rise in the morning till twelve o'clock perhaps, and oblige me to make breakfast for him till the bell rung for dinner, though much displeased if the toilet was neglected, and though much of the time we passed together was spent in blaming or deriding, very justly, my neglect of oeconomy, and waste of that money which might make many families happy.⁷¹⁸

She continued by explaining her understanding of the dissolution of her twenty-year friendship with Johnson:

The original reason of our connection, his particularly disordered health and spirits, had been long at an end, and he had no other ailments than old age and general infirmity Veneration for his virtue, reverence for his talents, delight in his conversation, and habitual endurance of a yoke my husband first put upon me, and of which he contentedly bore his share for sixteen or seventeen years, made me go on so long with Mr. Johnson; but the perpetual confinement I will own to have been terrifying in the first years of our friendship, and irksome in the last; nor could I pretend to support it without help, when my coadjutor was no more.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁸ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 182.

⁷¹⁹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 182-3.

Thrale asserted that rather than having harmed or betrayed Johnson, her friendship had actually conferred many benefits on him, and by association, his readers and literary history:

To the assistance we gave him, the shelter our house afforded to his uneasy fancies, and to the pains we took to sooth or repress them, the world perhaps is indebted for the three political pamphlets, the new edition and correction of his Dictionary, and for the Poets Lives, which he would scarce have lived, I think, and kept his faculties entire, to have written, had not incessant care been exerted at the time of his first coming to be our constant guest in the country; and several times after that, when he found himself particularly oppressed with diseases incident to the most vivid and fervent imaginations. ⁷²⁰

Thrale concluded her thoughts on her reading of their relationship with an eulogium on Johnson:

I shall for ever consider it as the greatest honour which could be conferred on any one, to have been the confidential friend of Dr. Johnson's health; and to have in some measure, with Mr. Thrale's assistance, saved from distress at least, if not from worse, a mind great beyond the comprehension of common mortals, and good beyond all hope of imitation from perishable beings. ⁷²¹

But rather than simply concluding Anecdotes here, Thrale returned to praising and criticizing Johnson, as if her reading of him and her ruminations on him would never be resolved. She continued to write about Johnson at the conclusion of Anecdotes as if it were an unfinished work. First she wrote: "May the public condescend to accept my ill-

⁷²⁰ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 183

⁷²¹ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 183-4.

strung selection with patience at least, remembering only that they are relics of him who was great on all occasions, and, like a cube in architecture, you beheld him on each side, and his size still appeared undiminished."⁷²² Then she returned to criticizing Johnson's slavish regard for the titled: "The other singularity I promised to record, is this: That though a man of obscure birth himself, his partiality to people of family was visible on every occasion; his zeal for subordination warm even to bigotry; his hatred to innovation, and reverence for the old feudal times, apparent, whenever any possible manner of shewing them occurred."⁷²³ Indeed, Thrale even anticipated her detractors' response to the haphazard structure of her memoir (for example, their concluding from it that she was no scholar), by refuting in an afterword to the text, Boswell's claim in his Tour to the Hebrides that she "could not get through Mrs. Montagu's Essay on Shakespeare." Thrale stated that she had "read it [Montagu's Essay] through, and few things would give me more concern than to be thought incapable of tasting, or unwilling to testify my opinion of its excellence."⁷²⁴

Thus, in writing Anecdotes, Thrale was not trying to give a premeditated vision of Johnson to the public. Instead, she continued her previous private and social readings in an attempt to arrive at a concretized, or decisive, reading of Johnson, and, more significantly, she chose to do so, courageously, in the public sphere. In Anecdotes, Thrale is on a private as well as public mission: to make a debut as a public author. She wrote Anecdotes from the perspective of an intimate friend who praises and criticizes Johnson, and who, on occasion, attempts to explain his behavior toward her to the public. But she does

⁷²² Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 192.

⁷²³ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 194-95.

not feel any responsibility to exonerate him for his behavior—nor should she as his biographer in Anecdotes.

⁷²⁴ Piozzi, Anecdotes, ed. Roberts 196.

Conclusion

James Clifford wrote of Thrale: "There is one obvious reason why Mrs. Piozzi is difficult to understand. Throughout her life she was a bundle of contradictions, a chameleon changing colour with her varying surroundings" ⁷²⁵ He writes that she defies "concise characterization," ⁷²⁶ and that "it is just this human unaccountability which is her most engaging quality." ⁷²⁷ However, Clifford sees this as an impediment to being able to know Thrale, or, as he puts it, to arrive at "any general estimate of her character." ⁷²⁸ I see this as her main strength and as a defining quality of her character in her relationship with Johnson. Thrale had to be chameleon-like in her friendship with Johnson because she had to respond to Johnson's contradictory friendship for her, a friendship that she came to distrust over time. As much as she loved Johnson, Thrale came to see him chiefly as a friend who cared more about how the relationship suited him than whether there was emotional reciprocity with her. This became glaringly clear to Thrale after Henry Thrale's death, when she chose to pursue happiness by beginning a new life with Gabriel Piozzi in Italy. Thrale was independent enough emotionally and intellectually that she never bothered to rewrite Anecdotes in answer to her critics who said that she had been unfair to Johnson and had written a memoir of him that was disrespectful in tone, flawed in its structure, and traitorous in content.

Privately, Thrale was happy with Piozzi. Socially, her reputation had not been irreparably harmed, and publicly she wrote with increasing

⁷²⁵ Clifford, Piozzi xv.
⁷²⁶ Clifford, Piozzi 459.
⁷²⁷ Clifford, Piozzi 459.
⁷²⁸ Clifford, Piozzi xvi.

confidence—first about Johnson in Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D. to which are added some Poems never before Printed in 1788, but then as an author separate from her connection with him. In 1789 she published as a travel writer her Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany; then she appeared before the public as a linguist when she published British Synonymy; or an Attempt at Regulating the Choice Words in Familiar Conversation in 1794, a political pamphleteer when she published her Three Warnings to John Bull before He Dies in 1798, and as an historian when she published Retrospection: or a Review of the Most Striking and Important Events, Characters, Situations, and Their Consequences, which the Last Eighteen Hundred Years Have Presented to the View of Mankind in 1801. Thrale returned to live in England unafraid of and unperturbed by those who viewed her as having mistreated Dr. Johnson. Privately, she grew beyond her image as Johnson's intimate friend and in writing her other works, she tried to bring this private image of herself into the public sphere.

Thrale's private, social, and public writings about and to Johnson make abundantly clear that Thrale did not stop reading or re-evaluating her friendship with Johnson while he lived nor after he died. Thrale clearly loved Johnson and always respected him, but she would not let her reading of herself or her life be controlled and defined by him in the private, social, and public spheres of her life or in the opinion of literary posterity.

Although I disagree with some of Clifford's interpretations of Thrale, and of her friendship with Johnson, my goal is identical to his. Clifford wrote at the end of his biography of Thrale of the importance "to trace the underlying forces which have kept Mrs. Piozzi from being

fully understood."⁷²⁹ My goal has been to shed new light on Thrale's friendship with Johnson by offering a better understanding of how she viewed her friendship with him.

⁷²⁹ Clifford, Piozzi 457.

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