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## Images of Naples: Class, Gender and the Southern Character in Hester Piozzi's *Observations and Reflections*

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Images of Naples: Class, Gender and the Southern Character in Hester Piozzi's  
*Observations and Reflections*

by

Kelley A. Cason

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: ‘Oh Never Wish Wit to a Lady:’ The Education and Life Experience of Hester Salusbury Thrale Piozzi	9
Chapter 2: ‘A Thing Most Sublime and Awful:’ Mt. Vesuvius and Representations of the Italian South”	23
Chapter 3: ‘A restless genus, for ever fermenting like their volcano:’ the Neapolitan Character in the eyes of Hester Lynch Piozzi	44
Chapter 4: ‘Breaking through old customs and choosing for one’s self:’ Hester Piozzi’s gendered reconsideration of the Neapolitan character	62
Conclusion	75
Notes	78
Bibliography	84

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ABSTRACT

On the tenth of January 1786, Mrs. Hester Lynch Piozzi recorded her entrance into the city of Naples, Italy in her travel journal *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey Through France, Italy, and Germany*. She emphasized the importance of her experience in Naples by stating that: “among all the new ideas I have acquired since England lessened to my sight upon the sea, those gained at Naples will be the last to quit me.”<sup>1</sup> This British woman’s stay in Naples was but a brief period within her three year long Grand Tour, yet it represented a great deal more than a simple respite. It became both a metaphor for her own break from the English society with her second marriage to an Italian musician and a forum through which she could express her complex opinions about class, ethnicity and gender. Essentially, this study reconstructs how Naples became a symbolic site in the journal and what it and its inhabitants represented to Hester Piozzi, both geographically and personally. Moreover, it simultaneously analyzes the common northern-European impressions that informed her opinions of Naples and the personal experiences that shaped her interactions with Neapolitans.

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<sup>1</sup> Hester Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey Through France, Italy and Germany* (Ann Arbor, 1967): 265.

Complex and sometimes conflicting beliefs and motivations formed Hester Piozzi's opinions of the place and its people. The object of my thesis is to understand how these various strands shaped her cultural interactions in the Italian south. In Piozzi's mind, Naples stood for many things. In part, long-standing northern European conceptions of Italian society formed the basis for her perceptions. More interestingly they also built upon her intensely personal observations as a woman who had split from her own social niche, the British upper-class. The city's exotic qualities provided her with the ability to fully embrace her liberation, yet in that context she also found common parallels that connected the lives of Neapolitan women to her own. Ironically, in the place that she believed to be most opposite to her home, she found a striking metaphor to help her evaluate and understand her own fractured life in England.

## Introduction

This work examines the life and contemplations of Hester Lynch Piozzi, an upper class English woman who traveled across the European continent in the late eighteenth century. It is about how she explained and justified her opinions regarding the people of other cultures in her travel journal, *Observations and Reflections made on a Grand Tour through France, Italy and Germany*. The specific place of interest in this study is the southern most point of her journey, Naples, Italy. Emphasis is directed towards how Mrs. Piozzi participated in the collective experience of travel and communicated shared constructions of Neapolitan society while at the same time diverging from them depending upon the topic. Through her words, we are able to trace one example of the complex ways that gender, nationality, and class shaped the cultural interaction that occurred as a result of the Grand Tour, a formative institution in eighteenth-century English society.

Travel and the Grand Tour have been important topics in the historiography of early modern Europe, particularly Great Britain, for the past century. Two of the most significant areas of importance have been travel as a means of British nation building and the participation of women. The former has been a constant theme in the discussion up until the present day. W. E. Mead summarized the heart of this trend in scholarship when he stated in 1914 that: “until recent years there has been little attempt to treat comprehensively and in detail one of the most significant chapters in the social history of

England in the eighteenth [century].”<sup>1</sup> His statement epitomized the historical perspective that would dominate the study of eighteenth-century travel for the next seventy years. Within this discourse, the importance of travel rested upon every aspect of the traveler’s experience. This included the details of journeys, what Grand Tourists gained from their educational experiences abroad, and the debate over the Grand Tour in England. Rarely, if ever, did historians explore the contact that occurred between cultures. Instead they concentrated upon how the Grand Tour functioned as a system of education for young, wealthy males and how this experience ultimately affected the British nation through their assumption of power within English society, government, and business.

This historiographical tradition dominated study of the Grand Tour for seventy years, yet new research has broadened our understanding of the purposes and effects of travel and travel literature by discussing women’s participation in continental travel and travel writing. One of the foremost characteristics of studies prior to the 1980’s was their tendency to analyze only the experiences of male travelers. Although female travelers were never completely ignored in most of the more traditional scholarship on the Grand Tour, historians did not recognize them as important historical figures. This has changed as the discussion of eighteenth-century travel branched into how and why women participated in the Grand Tour and how their journals differed from those of male tourists. Some scholarship has focused upon the way that upper class or aristocratic women utilized travel as a means of attaining such goals as social legitimization, education, and an escape from undesirable domestic situations.<sup>2</sup> These women had a means to get away. Sometimes they traveled with their husbands, as Hester Piozzi did, or with family members. Whatever their reasons for traveling, these women participated in a

typically male convention, yet brought with them their own distinct preconceptions and gendered biases. Hence, their impressions of foreign cultures differed. The topics that interested them also differed. They tended to emphasize the details of women's lives: their dress, conditions, and behaviors. In recounting these incidental particulars, women diverged from the traditionally formulaic structure of travel journals. Because of this, some historians argue that their journals may have been, in some regards, more inclusive. Women could be more open to understanding foreign cultures, especially when they encountered foreign women.<sup>3</sup>

Some historians contend that women used the tour, which was originally part of aristocratic or upper class male education, to gain a forum in which they could discuss their own lives back in England. Their point of entry was the travel literature genre. Grand Tourists typically published their travel journals after they had returned to their home country. They were, in fact, expected to share the benefits of their continental experiences with larger British society. Because of this emphasis on publishing, travel literature composed a major literary genre of the time, especially in Great Britain. When women began to participate more frequently in the late eighteenth century they challenged not only male domination of travel itself, but also of the written component and used their journals as an avenue into the arena of political and social commentary.<sup>4</sup> This allowed them access to a legitimate platform through which they could comment upon issues that effected their own lives by discussing the conditions of other women's lives in comparison to their own.

Although the historiography of the Grand Tour has expanded in the past two decades to include a discussion of women's participation in travel, these studies focus



almost solely on the travelers themselves without considering the larger shifts in relations between the home nation and the destination. Simply put, they do not consider the larger context surrounding international affairs and how changes in these relations affected regional opinions of specific nations. Recent literary and historical works have discussed the constructions that northern Europeans created in relation to Italy and the ways that these cultural biases affected the travelers' experiences and written observations while there. They analyze how eighteenth-century philosophers utilized theories of climate in order to assign regional temperaments and traits to different nationalities. As the British, in particular, gained international power, their travel literature reflected the beliefs that Italians were a subordinate people directed by a passionate and irrational nature. In connection with this theme the historian Nelson Moe demonstrated how volcanoes became a physical manifestation of these stereotypes, particularly Mount Vesuvius in Naples. In both the journals of female travelers and fiction written by women, it tended to play a major role, attracting much of their attention and acting as a synecdoche for the southern Italian character.

When upper-class English women like Hester Piozzi left England in search of freedom from social control they found themselves drawn to Naples, the southernmost point of most travelers. This city represented a libidinous space to them, free of the restrictions that they had endured in their home country. The volcano itself was active in the late eighteenth century. It threatened to literally exceed its own physical boundaries, regardless of the consequences. For many of these aristocratic or gentrified ladies, this dangerous spectacle became a metaphor for their own needs to overcome the social boundaries of their lives. Gender directed the connection of English travelers with the

city. Because of their cultural constructions of regional identities, these Englishwomen could envision Naples as an escape without necessarily ever connecting with the realities of Neapolitan life.

This work analyzes how one English traveler, Hester Piozzi, envisioned Naples, its general populace and its women. Born a member of the English gentry, she understood the sacrifices that women had to make in order to perpetuate the financial good fortunes of their families. She also understood well the limitations placed upon women's rights and roles. Throughout her life, she negotiated the gendered boundaries that determined how she could appropriately act and what she could accomplish as a woman. When she entered Naples in 1786 with her second husband, and Italian himself, Piozzi looked forward to seeing for herself the amazing city that had garnished so much attention for its volcano and people. What she found amazed her. The city was full of wonders; not only did it possess explosive physical features, but also an exotic people who resembled Vesuvius in their temperament. Throughout all of her remarks upon the general Neapolitan population, the author did not deviate from the northern European image of southern society that she had carried with her from England. She only validated her belief in the differences between English and Neapolitan society.

Although Hester Piozzi believed that southern Italians were extremely different from herself, she found common ground with Neapolitan women. She was able to engage with their stories and recognize them as individuals because of her own experiences in England. One of the most prominent themes in this discussion was the effect of class on women's choices. Piozzi was an upper class woman, yet she found links between her life and a variety of southern Italian women from different social ranks. She understood that

one's place in society dictated proper behavior, especially for women. She also empathized with the rigid line that both English and Neapolitan society drew between the upper and lower classes. Piozzi's marriage to her second husband was a scandalous affair; he was a foreigner, a Catholic and was of a lower social class. Because of these factors, she lost the respect of her family, friends and peers. Ultimately, she looked within herself to find ways in which she could comprehend the realities of life in the city. In doing so, she destabilized the theory of northern/southern regional characters by muddying the rigid differences between English and Italian society. If Hester Piozzi could find commonalities with Neapolitan women, they couldn't be so drastically different. This study will argue that her gendered perspective on class allowed her to overcome the common national biases that she carried with her abroad.

The first chapter will examine Hester Piozzi's life from her childhood through her departure for the continent. Up until her late teens, her parents encouraged the young girl's intellectual curiosity. A major reason why they did so was to use her as a hook to gain financial security, for themselves and their daughter, by attracting the attention of possible benefactors, her uncles. By the time that she was an adult, she had gained and lost two of them. Meanwhile, her education became more comprehensive and the young Hester Salusbury began to expect that she had a promising future as a writer and intellect. Her hopes were thwarted when her family forced her to marry Henry Thrale, a successful brewer. Although she attempted to find a way out of this marriage by proposing to her tutor a career in literature, she ultimately conceded and married Thrale. During her marriage, Mrs. Hester Thrale acted first as the submissive wife, and then after meeting

Dr. Samuel Johnson became a famous saloniere. Finally, after Thrale's death, she married her daughter's Italian music teacher against the wishes of her family, friends, and peers. Throughout her life, Hester Lynch Salusbury Thrale Piozzi continually contested the gendered boundaries that restricted her choices until she finally chose to completely defy them and marry Gabriel Piozzi.

The second chapter delves into the northern European constructions of "southern" nations such as Italy. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Britain began to rise on the international scene, gaining political and economic dominance. At the same time, philosophers such as Montesquieu revived older theories of climate in order to determine the intrinsic nature of regional characters. According to this, northern Europeans were more rational, even tempered, and logical. Southerners, in his estimation, resembled despotic regimes of the east more than nationalities such as the English. Italians were passionate, wild, and unpredictable. They quickly swung from laziness to fury. These stereotypes began to appear in British travel literature during the eighteenth century. Naples, as the southernmost point of many Grand Tours, the site of recent classical excavations, and the location of Mt. Vesuvius, became a symbol in the collective British mind of everything that the Southern nature represented. The volcano, in particular, drew the attention of many travelers, particularly women, who viewed it as a synecdoche not only for Italy, but also for the passionate transgression that they believed was possible if one visited the region. These constructions appeared in the paintings, travel literature and fictional works of the period.

Chapter three examines Piozzi's impressions of the Neapolitan people through her comments on their religious and political practices. While in the streets of Naples, her

cultural biases were put to the test, yet she ultimately failed to understand the complexities of life in the city. When discussing religion and politics, she stereotypes the people and failed to see both the hierarchical class arrangements and the poverty and social injustice that lower-class Neapolitans had historically faced. Instead, she chose to see them as a faceless crowd of irrational and passionate people, happy to live a rough life and filled with superstitious and exotic qualities. Piozzi continually returned to the volcano when discussing them, reinforcing the beliefs about southernness that she had carried with her from home.

In the final chapter, Piozzi's discussion of women is the focal point. Although she had ignored the intricacies of Neapolitan life when it came to the general populace, her analysis of women's lives was different. In a few instances, she maintained her cultural biases, using women as spectacles to validate her belief in the north/south dichotomy. Most of her encounters with southern women did not fit this pattern. She reflected upon her fascination and horror at the treatment of women. Whether class and gender marginalized them, facilitated victim-hood, or denied them choices, Piozzi interest in their experiences reflected her own interest in the gendered rights, roles and restrictions which had affected her own life. Through her examination of women's lives, she was able to attain a more realistic view of native life in Naples and to find common ground between English society and Neapolitan society. This revelation would complicate the distinct line between the two, showing how, for Piozzi, gender was the final arbiter in her observations and reflections upon Neapolitan society.

## CHAPTER ONE

### “Oh Never Wish Wit to a Lady:’ The Education and Life Experience of Hester Salusbury Thrale Piozzi”

When Hester Lynch Piozzi looked back upon her life at the age of seventy-nine, she considered her experiences as an educated woman in eighteenth-century England. “Oh never wish wit to a Lady,” she recommended in a letter, because this was “indeed Superfluous” and would “draw nothing but Envy and Malice from 18 years old to 81.” Although she recognized the inconveniences that her wit had brought her, Piozzi then ended by stating that no matter the hardships, she would “not...wish [hers] away.”<sup>5</sup> She had personally experienced the difficulties of female participation in what were deemed male intellectual pursuits. Gendered restrictions on women’s accepted roles in society precluded education and authorship from being the sole themes in her life. Social convention did not afford women many choices other than marriage and motherhood. Throughout her life, Piozzi continually defied these expectations by finding routes back to intellectual pursuits.

From her unusual education, to her arranged marriage, and position as a saloniere alongside the famed intellectual Samuel Johnson, Hester Salusbury Thrale Piozzi’s story represents a continual contestation of gendered boundaries. Yet the most controversial and independent choice of her life came when she did not merely push accepted boundaries, but instead shattered them, marrying an Italian Catholic of lower social

standing. Not long after her marriage to Piozzi, she embarked upon her Grand Tour and wrote *Observations and Reflections*. This chapter provides a context for her experiences abroad by examining how her life before the marriage to Piozzi set the stage for her interests and observations in Italy. Her background therefore lent meaning to her intercultural encounters, particularly those with other women.

Before Hester Piozzi traveled to the continent, she first gained the impetus for her adventurous spirit during the early years of her life. Born on January 27, 1741, she was christened Hester Lynch Salusbury. When she was a child, her parents, John and Hester Maria Salusbury, concentrated their efforts on her education, possibly due to the fact that she was an only child and there was no son on which to focus these attentions. Consequently, unlike most of her female peers, she underwent comprehensive instruction in philosophy, history, composition, and classical literature. When she was four years old, Hester's parents gave her a copy of Homer, at seven, her library included French translations of Livy, Plutarch, and Rapin's history of England and by fifteen, she had read Tasso in Italian and was translating the "Dissertation on the God Endovellicus" from Spanish.<sup>6</sup> They indulged her rapacious mind, and eventually she began a more formal course of education. Studying under Dr. Arthur Collier and Dr. William Parker, she began five years of study in the subjects of Latin, logic and rhetoric.<sup>7</sup> Under the guidance of these two men, Hester flourished. She read Rousseau, wrote poems and was published in the London newspapers.<sup>8</sup> During this time, her course of study lead her down intellectual paths that few women were allowed or able to tread.

According to the dominant perceptions of gender in the eighteenth century, women were to remain in the home. The popular Rousseauian ideal declared that women held the social role of not only bearing children, but also supervising their development and education. Rousseau's classic *Emile* emphasized the value of ongoing education for women, yet only education to prepare them for their future domestic roles, not for professional ones.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, other fictional and prescriptive literature of the time consistently emphasized women's obligation to devote their lives to obeying their husbands, educating their children and supervising their households.<sup>10</sup> Salusbury's studies in Latin and publications in major newspapers did not fall within these categories.

Hester Salusbury's parents broke from this tradition when they recognized her intellectual capabilities from an early age and provided her with the resources to encourage her education in the "male" tradition. As a child, Hester Salusbury was clearly treated differently than many women of her time. She spent her childhood reading the staples of a classical male education, and preparing herself to become a writer. Although she was educated in a traditionally male fashion, this did not entail that she was treated like young men of similar age. Salusbury once wrote of herself, "I was their Joynt Play Thing, & although Education was a Word then unknown, as applied to females; they had taught me to read, & speak, & think; & translate from French, till I was half a Prodigy."<sup>11</sup> She unmistakably expressed the frustration that accompanied being an educated young woman in the 1700's. Her education did not entitle her to professional aspirations outside of the home, as her mother continually reminded her. The young lady could not let her studies "ruin her figure."<sup>12</sup> Her mother feared that her intellectual development would impair her chances at finding a husband and following the traditional female



occupation in life, if she was too intellectual, suitors would not want her. It was the men in her early life that adored her for her wit and mind, yet her fate was still the same nonetheless. She was simply an amusement; she was an educated girl.<sup>13</sup>

Just before her first marriage, Ms. Salusbury proposed to Dr. Collier, her tutor and confidante, that she might make a living through her writing. Collier dashed her hopes, simultaneously confirming her fate. He answered her ambitious proposal, stating that she would not earn enough to support herself and her mother. At the same time, he also put an end to her Latin lessons saying that they “won’t make one a bit younger Richer, or Handsomer” and that the women whom he had known to pursue the matter “all lived to be old maids.” Even Collier submitted to the claim that women should not be educated in order to prepare for a career, but instead prepared for pregnancy, their profession in marriage.<sup>14</sup>

A major reason why Hester Salusbury’s parents encouraged her interest in education lay in the family’s poor economic situation. She was born into a family of old gentile Welsh decent that had slipped into a state of poverty.<sup>15</sup> Throughout her childhood, the Salusbury’s continually relied on Hester to impress more fortunate family members in order to gain financial support and possibly an inheritance. The first of these possible benefactors was her uncle, Sir Robert Cotton. Sir Cotton was captivated by the little girl’s accomplishments and promised to make her his heir, clothe her family, and relocate them to London.<sup>16</sup> Yet when in 1748 he died suddenly without a leaving a will, she and her parents were left again to find a source of income for the family. Her father found a government post in Nova Scotia, and she and her mother rotated between stays with various wealthy family relations.<sup>17</sup> One of these family members was her father’s

brother, Sir Thomas Salusbury. During the 1750's, mother and daughter lived with Sir Salusbury. He came to feel fondly for the girl, adopting her as his heir until she reached her late teens. Once again, Hester had acted as a "play thing" for the benefit of her family; achieving a sense of financial security that her father was unable to provide. This agreement was of little long-term help to the Salusbury's though, when her uncle decided to marry again and consequently felt the need to disentangle himself from financial responsibility of for brother's family.<sup>18</sup> This would be accomplished by finding an appropriate suitor for his niece.<sup>19</sup>

The potential bridegroom whom Sir Salusbury found was Henry Thrale. This rich brewer in his thirties appealed to Mrs. Salusbury, but not to her daughter. He spent much of his time conversing with her mother and took very little interest in his proposed match.<sup>20</sup> The young woman was not attracted to him, and referred to him as a "blockhead," in that he was not interested in her wit or charm, but merely in her dowry and good name.<sup>21</sup> She believed that when her father returned from Nova Scotia, he would turn him out, just as he had other suitors. Henry Thrale set the ground for a split in her family. Her uncle and mother sided with the brewer as the chosen bridegroom and her father and DR. Collier opposed him.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, John Salusbury's abrupt death in 1762 sealed Hester Salusbury's fate. It was at this time that Dr. Collier submitted to the force of Mrs. Salusbury's will and dismissed the girl's desire to pursue a literary career. She had attempted to thwart the marriage by asserting her desire to use her education, but even her mentor had rejected the idea. Following this, she gave in to her family's will. Writing to an aunt, she informed her of the engagement saying that her decision was based on reason rather than passion. This afforded her "some Right to expect some

happiness.” In addition, she believed that she should not “lightly esteem’d” his respect for her mother, yet she could “add no more” concerning her motivations for agreeing or expectations of the union.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout her young life, Hester Salusbury’s family had used her as hook to pull in much needed financial assistance. Her mother and father sought economic stability for their family by presenting her first to her uncles and then to her husband. Now, with her marriage to Thrale, Hester’s mother accompanied the new couple to their home at Streatham Park. The new Mrs. Hester Thrale had resigned herself to the match and seemingly forsaken her intellectual growth. Instead, she settled down into her life as a mother and wife. Her husband believed that his wife should be confined to the drawing room, bedchamber and nursery. Outside of these spaces, he controlled the household, taking care of all the domestic arrangements.<sup>24</sup> Her job, so to speak, was to produce children. The first of Hester and Henry Thrale’s children, Hester Maria, or Queeney, was born in September of 1764. After this, she was continually pregnant for fifteen years, producing twelve children, of whom eight died.<sup>25</sup> Besides pregnancies, she occupied her time compiling a “Children’s Book” where she recorded the details of her children’s education, which she supervised.<sup>26</sup> Her children, much like herself, were learning Latin and reading masters at the tender ages of four and six. Regarding her husband, he spent most of his time during the pregnancies away from Streatham, attending to business and his political aspirations, in addition to his extramarital excursions. In this aspect of her life, Hester Thrale effectively fit the recommended role for women; she was submissive to her family’s will and successful in producing children. Although she had resigned herself to perpetual pregnancy and the heartbreak of miscarriages and deaths that

accompanied it, another realm would open up in her life and allow her access to the intellectual community that she craved.<sup>27</sup>

In the early years of her marriage, Hester Thrale's mother and husband largely controlled her activities and encounters. They discouraged her from participating in public events, and she was left quite secluded. When she did create poems and try her hand at her literary talents, her husband was largely responsive. Although he was civil, their relationship was not emotionally intimate.<sup>28</sup> After having lost Dr. Collier during the dispute over her marriage, Mrs. Thrale had no one in whom to confide about her thoughts and writings. This changed when a friend brought Samuel Johnson to dinner one night in 1765. Johnson was a famous novelist, poet, biographer, critic, among other things. Johnson was, in fact, so famous that in England the period between 1750 and 1798 was termed the Age of Johnson in literary and intellectual terms.<sup>29</sup> Over the next sixteen years, Johnson would frequently stay with the Thrales due to his ill health. He even had a permanent room set aside in each of their residences and was considered a member of their family.<sup>30</sup> He became one of Hester's closest friends; tapping into her intellectual yearnings by employing her help in his literary projects, including the translation of poems in the *Consolations of Philosophy* and her own original works such as "The Three Warnings."<sup>31</sup> She was clearly not simply an amusement to him, but more importantly someone whom he respected. Johnson provided a door through which Hester could once again step into the literary world. Because of his immense fame and importance, his requests for her opinions and contributions did more than simply allow her to express herself. The combination of his reputation and their friendship gave her a measure of legitimacy that would have been much more difficult for her to achieve on her own. His

acknowledgement of her talents and wit gave her the first step towards her prominence as a hostess of literary gatherings and, more importantly, the connections to make her later writing a success.

During the sixteen years of his friendship with Hester Salusbury Thrale, Johnson opened up many avenues of opportunity for her. He did this by attracting prominent thinkers and writers to the Thrale household and its parlor. Hester became a famous saloniere and her salon drew artists and thinkers such as Sir Joshua Reynolds, Oliver Goldsmith, Edmund Burke, and Joseph Baretti.<sup>32</sup> Generally, salons were gatherings that occurred throughout Europe, at which intellectuals met and discussed political, literary, and philosophical issues. Some featured revered philosophers such as Rousseau and Voltaire. Women such as Thrale hosted many of these gatherings. The attendees were the great minds of the century that influenced politics and intellectual discourse. The salons were significant for their hostesses because they provided them with the first opportunity to pursue intellectual or artistic endeavors outside of the private sphere. Through Johnson, she became a part of literary and intellectual circles and eventually became one of the most famous salonieres in England.<sup>33</sup>

Although salonieres needed the support of literary figures and intellectuals to host their salons, they also held a great deal of power themselves. Invitations to such salons were viewed with a great deal of respect, hence the saloniere held power connected with the salons and also had the opportunity to display her intellectual capabilities in the typically male pursuit of discussing philosophy and politics. An invitation to the Thrale home at Streatham was considered a great honor. Frances Burney, the author of *Evelina*, wrote that her invitation to the parlor of Hester Thrale was, “The most consequential day

I have spent since my birth.”<sup>34</sup> Hence, her friendship with Johnson and his presence in her home provided her with a forum in which to discuss the topics that so inspired her mind. Johnson recognized Hester Thrale’s intellectual capabilities just as much as he recognized hers. Here, her education proved to be an asset that propelled her into Johnson’s circle and prepared her for the salons that she would host.

This aspect of her life defied the role of wife and mother that Mrs. Thrale also occupied. In stepping outside of her roles in the nursery and bedchamber, she moved beyond the expectations for women and by the late 1770’s, she had risen to social distinction. She was presented at the royal court and had become acquainted with Elizabeth Montagu and the Blue Stockings.<sup>35</sup> With this circle of women, she shared the radical belief that men and women could meet intellectually on equal footing. Thus, her erudition, in combination with her friendship with Johnson, propelled her into a respected status where she could speak her mind and display her talents. As a saloniere, she filled what was considered at the time an acceptable role for upper class women. By 1781 Hester Thrale was the wife of a wealthy man and respectable mother, but she had been able to carve out another space in her life when she opened her drawing room to the great intellectuals and artists of her day. With this act, she began to negotiate the roles that defined her, and shape her own identity.

Throughout the eighteen years of her marriage, Hester Thrale remained a respectable woman defined by both her relationship to her family and her participation in leading intellectual circles. Yet when Henry Thrale died she was left in a remarkably independent position. The forty-year-old widow was financially secure, with their children well provided for in his will.<sup>36</sup> What she chose to do next was in her own hands.

The choice that she made again showed independence, but this time it more than pushed the boundaries of respectability in the minds of many. Soon after her husband's death, Hester Thrale began receiving marriage offers and rumors began to circulate regarding her plans for remarriage. The man whom she chose shocked her family and friends alike. Not only was he Catholic, he was also an Italian musician who clearly ranked below Mrs. Thrale in the minds of her peers. Her relationship with Gabriel Piozzi was downright scandalous.

Hester Thrale had met Piozzi at a party given in his honor three years before the death of her husband.<sup>37</sup> Because of his reputation as a musician, she later requested his services as a music instructor for one of her daughters. After Henry Thrale died in 1781 a romance arose between the two. Their subsequent marriage in 1784 was very different from her first union. Unlike her relationship with Thrale, this time she married for love, not sound financial reason. Despite her exuberance, seemingly no one around her agreed with the match. There were many reasons for their outright disapproval. Not only his profession but perhaps more importantly, his ethnicity made him a distinctly inappropriate match for a female member of the English gentry. According to leading philosophers and political thinkers, Italians were a part of the 'southern' cultures that differed drastically from 'northern' elite societies such as England. They were believed to have an unpredictable 'character' that ranged wildly between laziness and passion. According to this ethos, Italian irrationality stood in stark contrast with the somber rationality of Englishmen.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, many feared that Piozzi would take advantage of Hester Thrale. Newspaper writers and cartoonists even ridiculed her in public displays of viciousness such as the caricature "Signor Pi\_z\_i ravishing Mrs. Thr\_e."<sup>39</sup> His

Catholicism was another strike against him, many of the English believing that Catholics were superstitious and backward thinking. All of these conceptions concerning Italians combined to make Piozzi a threat in the minds of her family and friends.

In the eyes of Samuel Johnson, Hester Thrale committed nothing short of treason against her society, class, family and religion when she eventually remarried. His opposition to the marriage divided the two friends. Johnson personally attacked her in a letter in which he stated that if she had married, she had indeed “abandoned [her] children and...religion.” God he prayed would “forgive [her] wickedness...if” she had “forfeited [her] Fame and...country” through the folly of her actions.<sup>40</sup> Finally, he entreated her that if she had not yet married to meet with him once again so that he might convince her not to go through with the union, yet she was already joined with Piozzi. If Mrs. Thrale wanted to be with Piozzi, she would have to give up Dr. Johnson. As a friend and advisor, Johnson respected her mind, yet he also expected her to act according to the expectations that were designated by her gender: to be a respectable mother and widow. If she remarried, he anticipated that she would do so in a reputable way. Her choice did not meet his qualifications.

In addition to Johnson’s attacks upon Hester’s marriage, her teenage daughter Queeny also vehemently opposed the union on the grounds that it would tarnish the family honor.<sup>41</sup> The girl also demanded that her mother act according to the expectations that her family had always placed upon her; Queeny wanted her mother to facilitate the interests and fortune of the family, not herself. Female disapproval of her actions also spread beyond her family to educated circles of women. In a condemning letter written by Elizabeth Montague to Elizabeth Carter in 1784, Montague discussed Thrale Piozzi’s



actions when she wrote, “Mrs. Thrale is undoubtedly married to Signor Piozzi, at which I am still more grieved than astonished. She...never appeared a Person of sound understanding.”<sup>42</sup> Women such as Elizabeth Montague attacked not only Hester Thrale Piozzi’s judgment and morality, more importantly they attacked her intelligence. Because of the reputation that she had gained as a saloniere, the new Mrs. Piozzi’s choice had left her open for public scrutiny. In the eyes of many, she was not fulfilling her role as a mother, Englishwoman, or Protestant. She was not upholding the role into which she was born. Hence, her personal and intellectual abilities were recognized and rewarded only if she did not completely ignore the boundaries set by her class and gender.

When Hester Piozzi looked back upon her decision some years later, she commented that she was “selfish once, and but once” in her life and though her friends and family “lost nothing by” her “second marriage,” they “never could be persuaded to forgive it.”<sup>43</sup> Retention of her sense of dignity and fame in society would have come at the price of pursuing what she wanted: the freedom to choose for herself. Mrs. Piozzi vividly realized the implications of her action. She knew, as demonstrated in her own words, that she acted in her own interests and not those of her family. She also recognized that she was giving up her respectability in her intellectual circle, her reputation in gentile society, and the approval of her family. In a letter written soon after the ceremony, she asked Fanny Burney “Can I love him too well? Has he not cost me my life almost? Have I not purchased him with my very vitals?”<sup>44</sup> She clearly recognized what she had given up, yet rejoiced in her ability to make the decision for herself.

Throughout her life, Hester Piozzi had accepted the choices that others had made for her. Her education and intellectual interests had made her different in her youth, and

had given her family means to look for a benefactor who could support not only the girl, but also her parents. Eventually, her intelligence and the recognition that she received for it gave her the confidence to defy normative gendered roles. As a child she was the “half prodigy” that performed for affluent relatives in order to secure her family’s financial stability. She had forsaken any hope of a literary career in order to marry and take up the female professions of motherhood. She had married a man with whom she had little in common in order to fulfill her family’s expectations. Yet when she encountered Johnson, she found a like-minded friend and companion with whom she could divulge her thoughts and with whom she could engage her mind. Within her salon she began to defy what her husband had expected her to be: a secluded woman who remained primarily in the nursery and bedchamber. In doing so, she gained a voice for herself outside of her family and claimed some share in the intellectual respect that she desired. After Henry Thrale’s death, Mrs Thrale was truly independent for the first time in her life. Without the guiding force of her mother or her first husband, she directed her own path, against the wishes of everyone around her, including Dr. Johnson. Perhaps ironically, this bold move ushered in her greatest literary accomplishment: *Observations and Reflections*, the travel journal that she wrote when abroad with Gabriel Piozzi after their marriage.

When Hester Piozzi set off for the continent in 1784, she left with a mind still buzzing over the controversies of the past few years. Her experiences were fresh, and affected the topics about which she wrote, particularly when it came to foreign women. Piozzi sought to understand what had happened to her through analyzing the lives of the people whom she met. Her gender had determined her infamy, and she wanted to know if

the same expectations applied to other women, if their lives held something in common. On a Grand Tour, it was conventional that she should travel throughout Italy. This was amplified by the fact that her husband was Italian. It was in Italy, especially Naples, that she encountered the intense complexities of her own life as both a woman and an English subject. Here, she found contradictions. Here she found the stark contrasts and danger that so many of her peers had feared that she would encounter in Mr. Piozzi. It was not unusual that an Englishwoman seeking liberation should feel drawn to Naples; many like her felt the same impulses and association with the place. What was unusual was her interest in the women of the city, and her ability to understand them within her own experiences. The life that Hester Piozzi left behind when she traveled abroad did not end when she traveled across Europe. It stayed with her, continually shaping her perceptions and experiences, sometimes in unexpected and conflicting ways. Through her intercultural exchanges, Piozzi continued to reshape her own role, challenging social boundaries for herself as well as in the name of other women.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “A Thing Most Sublime and Awful: Mt. Vesuvius and Representations of the Italian South”

In the fall of 1785, Hester Piozzi reached the southernmost point of her Grand Tour of continental Europe: Naples, Italy. When northern Europeans such as Piozzi entered this region, they were both attracted to and repulsed by Mt. Vesuvius, the most prominent physical feature of the landscape. In particular, women from northern countries developed a special relationship with this natural phenomenon. In the process of encountering it, they took up its sublime transgression, its overwhelming ability to violently exceed its boundaries during eruptions, to symbolize their own quests for personal independence. Piozzi was a member of the English gentry who had given up her place in high literary and social circles in order to marry her daughter's Italian music teacher. She faced widespread surprise and disdain for this. Her decision to marry a foreign, catholic man of lower social status had made her the center of ridicule not only in public, but also a source of embarrassment and shame among her friends and family members. At the same time, her choice also enabled her to break free from social expectations and embark upon a Grand Tour with her new husband. Hester Piozzi set off in search of another, more open space where she could escape the restrictions placed upon women such as herself. She found this space in Naples.

Northern Europeans like Piozzi had complex reasons for constructing the Italian south as a libidinous and illogical place of extremes. Popular beliefs of the time divided the world into northern and southern zones whose customs and dispositions directly correlated to the type of climate in which the people lived. Philosophers such as Montesquieu sought to explain the rise of ‘northern’ nations like England, while contrasting them with ‘southern’ peoples such as Italians. In doing so, Montesquieu and others stereotyped Italians as naturally passionate and unpredictable. Consequently, travel literature and paintings of the time, reflected these characterizations through their fixation with Mount Vesuvius. Hence, the volcano came to symbolize everything travelers like Piozzi believed the Italian south represented, especially Naples, the most southern destination on most Grand Tours. It was from within this perspective that she conceived of the city, and related its people and herself to the object of her continued amazement: the volcano.

Throughout her writings about Naples, Hester Piozzi could never linger far from the natural wonder that was Vesuvius. She continually peppered her accounts concerning the nature of Neapolitan society with contemplation over the “amazing mountain” that continually exhibited “various scenes of sublimity and beauty.”<sup>45</sup> She began this city’s chapter with an exhilarating passage displaying this. An hour after the sun had set the traveling party came into a dreadful storm. “Never was there such weather seen by me since I came into the world,” she wrote. The “thunder, lightening, storm at sea, rain and wind” raged, contending for mastery. These forces combined to “extinguish the torches brought to light” the travelers on “the last stage” of their journey. Left in the darkness, they faced Mount Vesuvius, the “only object” visible, “vomiting fire, and pouring

torrents of red hot lava down its sides.” “Blue lightening” then shot forth spectacularly towards the sky spewing “the original minerals from which [the volcano] drew [its] existence.” But then “sudden darkness soon followed in an instant” and “no object...but the fiery river could be seen, till another flash discovered the waves tossing and breaking, at a height” which she had never seen before<sup>46</sup> Her “entrance into Naples at the dead hour” was an event next to which she guaranteed her reader, “nothing sure was ever more sublime or awful.”<sup>47</sup>

Piozzi’s interest in Mount Vesuvius and use of it as a symbol for the surrounding Southern Italian countryside and people was not a singular representation in the history of eighteenth-century literature. In fact, her account was one example of a wider phase of the representation of Italy in the northern European travel genre. Over the course of the Early Modern period, Italy fell from its ascendant position on the geopolitical stage. In its place, the northern European states rose in supremacy. In order to justify this shift, enlightenment philosophers constructed images of ‘northernness’ and ‘southernness’, which corresponded with positive and negative societal characteristics. Yet they also looked to Italy’s newly discovered classical heritage for the roots of their own cultural traditions. The result of these two conflicting attitudes towards Italy created an ambivalent contemplation of the region as both the historical superlative and the degenerate contemporary.<sup>48</sup> Depictions of the Italian landscape and people as both passionate yet indolent, degenerate yet picturesquely natural, dangerous yet exhilarating became a constant theme in not only the travel literature, but also in the pictorial and fictional representations of the time. The classical Greek legacy demonstrated by the excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii attracted northern Europeans to southern Italy,

but the enduring image of the volcano came to represent the region. Ultimately, southern Italy came to symbolize the exacerbation of contradictions, which northerners saw in its culture as a whole. In turn, Vesuvius became the synecdoche for this conceptual framework.<sup>49</sup>

As England grew in international political supremacy, a new English self-image arose which expressed a general feeling of northern cultural preeminence.<sup>50</sup> This had been developing for some time. Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, accusations of Italian decadence and cultural degeneracy had become more prevalent in the political and literary discourses of English, French and Germans.<sup>51</sup> According to Fernand Braudel, these northern Europeans more frequently noted their observations of “extreme misery and poverty...in most of the Italian states” throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>52</sup> Thus, a sense of economic and political dominance strengthened claims of cultural degradation directed towards Italians. The trend only became stronger when France supplanted Italy’s position as the dominant European cultural center in the eighteenth century.<sup>53</sup> This subsequent transition, in combination with England’s growing position as the ascendant commercial and colonial power, helped to separate European respect for Italian cultural heritage from their growing disdain for contemporary Italian life.<sup>54</sup> As other nations rose in contemporary cultural, political, and economic prestige, northern European intellectuals revived older philosophies within the new discourse of scientific inquiry in order to explain the international power changes that had occurred over the past two hundred years.

In the course of the eighteenth century, the European intellectuals renewed the philosophical discussion of climate’s effects on regional characteristics. The rhetoric of

this reasoning fundamentally aided in the contemporary articulation of cultural distinctions between ‘northernness’ and ‘southernness.’ In the first few decades of the 1700’s, philosophers such as Montesquieu and Jean-Baptiste Du Bos renewed the Hippocratic discussion over the effects of climate on cultural identity.<sup>55</sup> The basis of their philosophies combined a fundamental belief in the old Hippocratic significance of ‘airs, waters, and places’ with the results of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, observation and empirical analysis.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps most influentially, Montesquieu used this amalgamation to formulate his theories concerning the effects of cold and hot climates and related them to the specific institutions of nations within these geographical areas.

In his classic work *The Spirit of the Laws*, published in 1748, the famed philosophe explained how climate was an important factor in the construction of European identity, and the placement of Italy within this context. He laid out ways in which hot and cold airs affected the bodies of human beings in a section entitled “On the laws in their relation to the nature of the climate.” In chapter one of Book 14, Montesquieu began with the “general idea” of this section. “If it is true that the character of the spirit and the passions of the heart are extremely different in the various climates,” he stated, then the “laws should be relative to the differences in these passions and to the differences in these characters.”<sup>57</sup> Basically, climate played an intrinsic role in the determination of regional and national identity. Therefore, divergent political institutions were appropriate in different areas. The next chapter, entitled “How much men differ in the various climates,” outlined the specific physical and moral differences that arose from these environmental factors. The result of cold air on the body was that “men are more vigorous in cold climates.” This “greater strength should produce many effects: for



example, more confidence in oneself, that is, more courage, better knowledge of one's superiority."<sup>58</sup> Among the northern region of the world one would find "peoples who have few vices, enough virtues and much sincerity and frankness."<sup>59</sup>

Converse to this determination of northern character, Montesquieu postulated that: "as you move toward the countries of the south, you will believe you have moved away from morality itself." Additionally, the climate of the south was so "insufficiently settled to fix" its inhabitants that travelers would "see peoples whose manners, and even their vices and virtues are inconstant." The passionate constitution that Montesquieu ascribed to the southern peoples made them seem unpredictable and hard to understand. They represented the absolute others of the stable, honest, and well-disciplined northerners that he described. This lack of stability and structure manifested itself in the wild undulations of southerners between the extremes of passion and complete idleness. For example, when not incited by internal passions, the heat of their surroundings overwhelmed southern people. This produced "prostration" that passed "even to the spirit." They possessed "no curiosity, no noble enterprise, no generous sentiment." In southern cultures, "laziness" was "happiness" and servitude was "less intolerable than the strength of spirit necessary to guide one's own conduct."<sup>60</sup>

The rhetoric of *The Spirit of the Laws* helped to solidify the imagined bifurcated relationship imposed between northern and southern societies. Montesquieu laid out the stereotypical characteristics that he believed were attributed to these types of cultures, throughout the world. In addition, he also defined Italy's cultural character as belonging to the southern, irrational group. Although Montesquieu's expressed purpose was to establish the superior and distinguished identity of Europe in relation to the rest of the

world, the two examples of northern and southern societies, which he picked to demonstrate these models of regional behavior were England and Italy.<sup>61</sup> “I have seen operas in England and Italy; they are the same plays with the same actors: but the same music produces such different effects in the people of the two nations that it seems inconceivable, the one so calm and the other so transported.” This, he believed was due to the fact that “in cold countries, one will have little sensitivity to pleasures.” On the other hand, in southern countries such as Italy, “sensitivity will be extreme.”<sup>62</sup> In placing Italian characteristics among those of the nations that he wished to construct as “other” to European identity, he fully articulated the construction of Italy as Europe’s south. In *The Spirit of the Laws*, Italians appear as the moral inferiors of northern Europeans, particularly the English. The dichotomies between a strong work ethic and laziness, moral rectitude and moral corruption, and inborn leadership and an inclination towards servitude emphasized the stark contrasts. Perhaps more significantly, Montesquieu’s work helped to provide a conceptual framework for attributing contemporary conceptions of Italian’s to the geographical position of Italy in the world; and therefore construed an innate relationship between the character of the environment and that of the people.

Montesquieu’s influential ideas concerning the construction of the European south became further attached to Italy in the middle of the eighteenth century. This occurred when the archeological discoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeii attracted English, French and German interest towards Naples and Sicily. Excavations of classical cities drew a new attention not only to Italy, but also more specifically to the traditionally feudal south of the peninsula. Earlier Grand Tourists had traveled to the peninsula in order to visit the principle Italian cities: Rome, Venice, Florence, and

Naples. This list was the typical itinerary of the traveler, and denoted a hierarchy; the most important being Rome.<sup>63</sup> Naples was significant due to its status as a metropolis, yet the city was not well noted in the travel journals of the time. Simply put, the Italian south was not a marked source of interest to the English, French, and German travelers before the discoveries. Instead, in the decades after the excavations had begun, the unearthing of Greek cities drew the attention of northern European travelers and artists to the south in search of the classical culture.<sup>64</sup> In the wake of the Enlightenment, this new interest in Greek civilization lured northern Europeans to the Kingdom of Two Sicilies.<sup>65</sup>

Yet according to the historian Nelson Moe, the rediscovery of ancient ruins was not the single conceptual link between mainland southern Italy and Sicily. The more important and enduring connective was the presence of volcanoes. Although volcanoes are common throughout the Italian peninsula, the idea of a “volcanic” south came to play an important role in the particularly exacerbated conception of “southernness” in the Italian south.<sup>66</sup> This was partially due to the fact that Vesuvius and Etna were still active throughout the last five decades of the 1700’s. Between 1750 and 1861 Vesuvius erupted on average twice per decade.<sup>67</sup> This activity made the volcanoes and their surrounding area interesting on several levels. First, volcanoes drew wide interest in Europe because of the scientific speculation over their geological origins and historical interest in their archeological effects.<sup>68</sup> Many travelers and artists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries held an interest in the scientific discussion over whether volcanoes were major creative forces that played a role in shaping the earth.<sup>69</sup> Many including Hester Piozzi, had heard of the British Ambassador to the Court of Naples, Sir William Hamilton, and his scientific investigations into the activity of the volcano. Hamilton, she

wrote, was called “Bartolomeo, the Cyclops of Vesuvius.” She knew of his famous “courage, learning and perfect skill” as a connoisseur who studied the “different degrees, dates, and shades of lava to a perfection that” amazed her. He also studied the volcano’s “effects and operations...with much attention and philosophical exactness.”<sup>70</sup> Yet when Piozzi wrote about Vesuvius, she placed the section concerning Hamilton’s skill and his scientific inquiry into the volcano’s effects immediately following an unsettled description of its overwhelming natural power. Perhaps scientific rhetoric was a method of containment for Piozzi and other travelers like her. She responded to the unknown, an unknown that northern Europeans had imbued with the passionate disposition of ‘southernness.’

For many of the English, German and French travelers of the late eighteenth century, this natural phenomenon provoked in them awe-inspired emotional responses which they could not easily explain. This aspect of the encounter with an erupting volcano led to some of the most enduring descriptions and depictions of southern Italy. In his popular travel journal *A Tour Through Sicily and Malta*, Patrick Brydon commented extensively on the beauty and terror of the Sicilian landscape, which he believed was symbolized by Mount Etna. In this aspect of the landscape he saw fire and ice, two opposite manifestations of nature, simultaneously united in the erupting volcano.<sup>71</sup> Piozzi expected to see the same. The night before she “mount[ed] the Volcano,” she noted her curiosity concerning this “favorite alembic of nature” which “guarded” its “secret caverns...with every contradiction; snow and flame!”<sup>72</sup> In the volcano, she expected to see the extreme juxtapositions that had become an enduring trope both in travel literature, and perhaps more significantly, in the theoretical framework and rhetoric concerning

Italian characteristics in general. Philosophers like Montesquieu had emphasized these contrasts as a fundamental aspect of southern societies. The wild undulations between laziness and passion, natural picturesqueness and degeneracy that he had attributed to Italians, were mirrored in the Volcano's display. For Brydone, as well as Piozzi, the volcano, an aspect of the landscape provided a natural, accurate and overwhelming symbol of the Italian character. If the demeanor of the people could be linked to the 'airs, waters and places,' then it was only natural that a part of the place should reflect the nature of the people. According to Piozzi, the Neapolitan "genius [was] restless, and for ever fermenting" much "like their volcano." But unfortunately, although "every individual" contained "a spark," the region, like the volcano, "naturally" threw "out of its mouth more rubbish than marble."<sup>73</sup>

The volcano essentially evoked for Brydon and Piozzi what came to be known in literature and the arts as the sublime, something that she had noted when entering Naples and viewing Vesuvius for the first time.<sup>74</sup> It denoted the drama of an interaction with the forbidden, with a society essentially considered "other" to their own. One response to this contact was the search for knowledge and control, based in scientific inquiry, yet the very act of attempting to contain the danger, physical and emotional, that a volcano represented signified a deeply inexplicable, overwhelming, and even horrifying confrontation. An encounter with Etna or Vesuvius was a transgression into the unknown, into a domain where the morally designated behaviors of the home, the imagined northern Europe, could be easily disregarded.<sup>75</sup> It represented the essence of what the northern Europeans imagined to be an adventure in southern Italy.

Between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Vesuvius became a ubiquitous theme in the paintings and literature of the period. In pictorial representations, its perceived sublime character was largely demonstrated by these illustrations, as sublimity was simultaneously contained. For northern European painters such as the Englishman, Joseph Wright of Derby, Vesuvius bordered upon an obsession. During his two year trip to Italy (1773-1775) Wright found himself inspired by the phenomena. He painted thirty views of Vesuvius after his trip and many of them reflected upon the works of other amateur and professional artists who had portrayed the volcano.<sup>76</sup> This is not to say that Wright stole the ideas for his paintings, but rather that previous depictions of it had shaped his frame of reference for comprehending its significance before he arrived in Naples. For example, Sr. William Hamilton had displayed his “View of the Great Eruption of Vesuvius 1767 from Portici” in a series of letters that he had published in London in 1772. In Hamilton’s etching, the volcano occupies the central position. The viewer is positioned slightly above the scene. Although the volcano shoots a stream of lava upwards into ominously billowing, black clouds and sends fire down towards the city below it, the viewer does not have to look up towards a sky filled with flames and smoke. Instead, the Bay of Naples separates one from the scene, and a sailboat even calmly floats by. In this view from Portici, the side of the mountain sits parallel to Vesuvius and prevents it from being the highest structural point in the painting. In these ways, danger is averted because it is contained. The viewer observes from a safe distance without fear. The liminal space of the bay presents a safe zone. Again, the presence of the sailboat acts as another buffer. The person who surveys this scene can look on, as was Hamilton’s intention, and analyze the activity in a scientific posture. The image

symbolized a natural phenomenon to be contained, classified, carried back to England, and understood; all in order to render it benign. The act of creating a sketch for scientific purposes was also an attempt to domesticate the image and make its vitality and feared passion trivial; something that the artist and viewer could escape and retell in the north. The people of the city were not shown simply because they were part of this landscape; Englishmen like Hamilton assumed that Vesuvius itself represented their character.

In a similar painting, 'An Eruption of Vesuvius, seen from Portici,' dated several years later, Joseph Wright of Derby portrayed a corresponding, yet more dramatic scene. In Wright's portrayal, the lava again shoots straight up towards the sky, illuminating the surrounding clouds. The flaming lava pouring in torrents down the volcano's sides burn horrifyingly close to the town which appears miniature in the wake of the red, glowing colossus that is Vesuvius. Likewise, the viewer is positioned above the scene, as if looking on from a safe distance. The flame that explodes forth towards the sky is positioned in the middle of the canvas; it is not above a horrified viewer. Instead of using water as a liminal boundary between the viewer and the scene, the artist painted deep olive-green shrubs. As the scene pulls back towards the viewer, the intense reds and oranges become less emphasized and merge with the calm greens that make up the boundary between the viewer and the volcano. Most strikingly different about Wright's Vesuvius is the time of day; his scene, unlike Hamilton's, occurred at night. This change heightened the intensity of the volcano's fiery lava stream, by contrasting it with not only dark clouds, but also with a dark sky. Moreover, this scenario allowed Wright to include an important detail in the left background. Just coming up over the edge of the horizon is the moon. Its coloring is less intense and the clouds reflecting its light denote a softer,

more quiet and less dramatic entrance. The artist successfully introduced something more well-known, comfortable and secure into the painting in order to stabilize the horrifying sublimity of Vesuvius. While in the center the earth seems to take its vengeance in an unpredictable way, to the left, the moon takes its usual place in the night sky. It pulls the viewer's attention away from Vesuvius, and the terror becomes slightly alleviated. In many of his Vesuvius paintings, Joseph Wright used the moon in a similar fashion and therefore placed his own powers as a painter over the scene and controlled it.

Another of Wright's paintings exhibited many of the same characteristics as his Vesuvius from Portici, but also portrayed the Neapolitans interacting with the Volcano. This was 'An Eruption of Mount Vesuvius, with the Procession of St. Januarius's Head.' St. Januarius was a Bishop and martyr of Naples who had died in 305 and whose head and dried blood had been saved in the city's cathedral. From time to time, the blood was supposed to have miraculously liquefied, and when pointed towards Vesuvius during an eruption was supposed to have quelled the volcano's eruptions.<sup>77</sup> Many northern European visitors to Naples commented upon this ritual, usually with a combination of disgust at Neapolitan superstition and interest in the proceedings. Sir William Hamilton, a longtime resident as the British Ambassador, witnessed this ritual first hand during the eruption of 1767. He noted in his description to the President of the Royal Society that "in the midst of these horrors, the mob [grew] tumultuous and impatient." It "obliged the Cardinal to bring out the head of St. Januarius, and go with it in procession" to "Ponte Maddalena, at the extremity of Naples, towards Vesuvius." He affirmed that "it is well attested here, that the eruption ceased the moment the Saint came in sight of the mountain; it is true, the noise ceased about that time, after having lasted five hours."<sup>78</sup>



Wright's painting of the procession winding its way to an active Vesuvius was one illustration of how late eighteenth-century northern Europeans portrayed southern Italians. Wright rendered the Neapolitans in accordance with their relation to the volcano. The people are faceless in the painting, almost too small for the viewer to see. The volcanic passion of the landscape directed these representatives; they are acted upon and are shown responding to the natural forces that northern Europeans believed to control their lives. This portrayal also made the southerners seem closer to nature. If one believes Hamilton's account of the eruption in 1767, the Neapolitans understood how to interact with nature and successfully appeased it. But whether northern Europeans like Wright or Hamilton admired this naturalness or believed that the Italians were pagans (or both), their northern European constructions of southern culture structured these images of Neapolitans. Both contained and explained the otherness that they encountered among the Italians. These two Englishmen, the artist and the amateur scientist, saw the people of southern Italy through their own cultural lenses.

Though northern European constructions of the relationship between the Italians and the volcano were significant, perhaps more interesting were their depictions of themselves in relation to it. For some northern European women, Italy represented an escape from the strict and morally sound society that Montesquieu had praised. For Lady Elizabeth Webster, Italy meant not only a change in scenery, but also an escape from a loveless and abusive marriage. As a member of the British nobility, her family had chosen her husband, Godfrey Webster, a man thirty-four years her elder, based upon his social status.<sup>79</sup> Seven years after her wedding day, while in Italy with her husband and a traveling party, she reflected back on that "fatal day seven years [ago]" which she

believed had given her “in the bloom and innocence of fifteen, to the power of a being who” had made her “execrate [her] life since it [had] belonged to him.”<sup>80</sup> In her “dear, dear Italy,” she found freedom from the “country, climate, [and] manners” which she had found odious and constraining in England.<sup>81</sup> For Lady Webster, it represented a sense of freedom, an access to the passion and freedom which social expectations had denied her in her home country. Although she traveled with her husband, she escaped the society that had dictated her marriage, and therefore her subservience.

In the portrait that Robert Fagan painted of her in Naples, Italy’s geographical significance as a southern escape from northern propriety was obvious. Her need for liberation became manifested in her pictorial connection with Mt. Vesuvius. Lady Webster sits before a Greek column, serenely holding her spaniel Pierrot and smiling at the viewer. Behind her is the Bay of Naples and farther in the background is Vesuvius. The volcano is not erupting, but rather emitting smoke into a serene blue sky. The colors in Lady Webster’s dress are cream and golden, and they are repeated in the clouds above Vesuvius. Her blissful freedom, which was made possible in Italy, was inherently disruptive. She found a space outside of her strictly assigned gender role; this space existed in the south. The rupturing of her personal restrictions is mirrored in the stream of smoke coming from Vesuvius. Lady Webster takes up the majority of the painting’s foreground, yet is placed to the right of the canvas. To the left, the bay creates a liminal space, separating her from imminent danger, emotionally and physically. The scene is not overwhelmingly furious, like that of Wright. Instead it hints at the subtle fissures that time in Italy created in the subservient identity of upper class, English women. For these women, travel to the south was a form of transgression and a conduit into formerly

denied aspects of their own identities. In Lady Webster's case, this path took her into a sexual transgression, an affair with Lord Holland, one of her party's travelling companions.<sup>82</sup> Vesuvius was then not a boundary, but instead the representation of a metaphysical bridge into themselves.

Similarly, the Francois Gerard painting entitled *Corinne Improvising at Cape Miseno* shows the characters from a book entitled *Corrine, or Italy* that was published in 1807. The book followed the story of Corrine, a young woman who fled England to Italy, the home of her mother, in order to perform in public as an improvatrice. There she met Lord Nelvil, a Scotsman with whom she falls in love and experiences Vesuvius first-hand. The image illustrates an episode when Corinne and Lord Nelvil, the two main protagonists, ascend Vesuvius.<sup>83</sup> The traveling party sits at the cape, listening to Corinne, who is dressed in Greek garb, as she performs with a lute. Yet something has happened and the participants are anxious and fearful. The key destabilizing factor in this scenario is their vicinity to Vesuvius, on the verge of eruption. Another factor that contributes to this destabilization is Corrine's separation from the rest of the figures. The light clearly falls on her, emphasizing her importance as the person nearest to the viewer. Her body is also positioned slightly above the others, further making her the most dominant figure. The line that marks Vesuvius's right side descends at an angle that connects Corrine's body to the clouds of smoke rising from the volcano. The position of Corrine's head, in relation to this angle, mirrors the smoke emanating from the mountain. Finally, the light that falls upon her is also mirrored in the clouds behind Vesuvius. She and the area around the mountain form the two lightest parts of the image, emphasizing their connection. Thus, while the rest of the traveling party, most fully Lord Nelvil (dressed in

black), fades into the background, Corrine's body position and the the use of light combine to heighten her association with the Italian landscape. She is separated from the other people in the background and attached to both the ancient Greek heritage (through her dress) and to the contemporary Italian character (through the volcano).

The image by Gerard, though rendered in 1822, successfully related several of the important themes stressed by De Stael in her novel, particularly her symbolic association with Mount Vesuvius. In the chapter where Corrine and Lord Nelvil encountered the volcano, Madame de Stael described it with terrifying detail. As the ground began to give out beneath their feet, the author tells her readers that: "in this place nature has no longer any relationship with man. He can no longer believe himself to be the dominating power; nature escapes from her tyrant by dying."<sup>84</sup> The Vesuvius that the characters viewed was not the sleepy allusion that appeared in Lady Webster's portrait. Instead, it was a force much like that of Joseph Wright's fire paintings. The author described it in vivid detail. "The torrent is a funereal colour," she wrote, "the lava is dark, like the picture of hell in one's imagination." Its "glare" was "so fiery that for the first time the earth is reflected in the sky, giving it the appearance of continual lightening." The image was "repeated in the sea and nature" was "set ablaze by this triple image of fire." The wind could "be heard" and was "made visible by the whirlwinds of flame in the chasm from which the lava" appeared. Madame de Stael felt sure that "people must have wondered whether benevolence alone presided over the phenomena of creation or whether some hidden principle forced nature, like man, into ferocity."<sup>85</sup>

The scene that she described was sublime and overwhelming. Yet like the image painted by Wright, and the experience described by Piozzi when she entered the city, a

single feature signaled safety and disrupted the danger. For Wright it had been the moon, for Piozzi, the still city with its small lamps “hung now and then at a high window before a favorite image of the virgin.”<sup>86</sup> For Corrine and Lord Nelvil, De Stael constructed “one sound from the town,” the “tolling of the bells.” This small sound succeeded in “arous[ing] a gentle emotion in the travelers.”<sup>87</sup> As the two struggled through the wind and rain hoping that the forces of nature would not extinguish their lanterns,” the comforting tones of the town bell helped to guide them into Naples.

In the novel, Corrine came into close contact with the volcano for a specific reason. This protagonist’s identity, as the title indicated, became elided with the regional identity of Italy. It seemed only appropriate that her association with Mt. Vesuvius, the overwhelming symbol of southern passion, should embody her transgression outside of the boundaries of English society. Later, when improvising in the Neapolitan countryside, Corrine stated Madame De Stael’s cultural constructions of Italy: “The Neapolitan countryside is the image of the human passions: sulphurous and fertile, its dangers and its pleasures seem to stem from these flaming volcanoes, which give the air so many charms and make the thunder rumble beneath our feet.”<sup>88</sup> In these words, the author expressed the ambivalent attitude towards Italy that had been developing over the past two-hundred years. The land and people were inherently tied to the volcanoes, best expressing the regional climatic character. Yet De Stael went a step further. Two pages later she portrayed Corrine erupting with emotion, virtually imitating the volcano that she had dramatically faced and overcome. While improvising in the moonlight, she “was suddenly gripped by an irresistible emotion; she looked round at the enchanted place and wonderful evening” and realized that her lover, the northern Oswald Nelvil, may not

always be with her. ...and tears flowed from her eyes.” Then, for a while all of the people around her “waited silently for her words to tell them of her feelings.” Eventually she began to recite her poetry, “no longer dividing her song into eight-line stanzas;” in her poetry “she gave herself up to an uninterrupted flow,” a flow that expressed the human passions that she had seen in the countryside; which mirrored Vesuvius’s sublime expression.<sup>89</sup> It is important to note that Corrine was half Italian, her mother having been born there. This characteristic allowed the author to imbibe in the protagonist a complete identification with Italy and its synecdoche, Vesuvius. Through De Stael’s writing, Corrine became Italy by taking on the cultural characteristics which northern Europeans like the author identified with the Italian landscape and people.

Women such as Madame De Stael and Hester Piozzi reflected their own personal attempts to overcome restrictions in their home countries through their works of literature. The place that they both identified as a space for freedom, passion, and transgression was Italy. This was no coincidence. Theories of climate, like those elaborated by Montesquieu, encouraged the imagination of Italy as a southern region and its people’s behaviors as being shaped by location. It was also no coincidence that their understandings of Mount Vesuvius in relation to the landscape and people of Naples were very similar to the entrance scene told by Piozzi. They both viewed the volcano as a boundary that had to be crossed in order to reach Naples, the representative of the south. When they approached Vesuvius, both confronted its majestic and unpredictable power. Although the sight frightened them both, they were also enthralled by it and driven on by the “invincible love of grandeur” in the human soul, a concept that Longinus had articulated in his account of people’s attraction to the sublime in nature.<sup>90</sup> He argued that

the human imagination's insatiable quest for understanding led people to admire the transgressive qualities of natural phenomena, like volcanoes, because they represent the human struggle to cross limits and overcome restrictions, both intellectual and physical.<sup>91</sup> Northern European women like De Stael and Piozzi saw the volcano in this light. It was the embodiment of personal quests for freedom and flight from their gender-based constrictions. Corrine came to Italy in order to perform her craft in public. Hester Piozzi fled English society in order to be with her new husband, an Italian musician. Being present in the face of transgressive, explosive, southern nature was a pivotal action in both stories. It allowed them to find intrinsic support in the land for the destabilizing choices that they had made in the lives.

If Italy represented the natural south of Europe, then Naples represented the south of Italy. Vesuvius, because of its presence in Naples, connection to ancient Greece, and unpredictable, explosive and contradictory nature, became a symbol of everything that the Italian south meant to northern Europeans. In this capacity, it signified the character of the Neapolitan people. At the same time, it also became a conduit into an imagined space for northern European women who felt trapped by the gendered expectations of their societies. In the Italian south they believed that they could experience the passion and liberation of a southern culture. They believed that they could escape their corseted lives and overflow with emotion, just as Vesuvius spewed fiery lava behind them in their portraits and stories. When women like Hester Piozzi entered Naples, they felt as if they had transgressed a boundary. It was not simply physical, but more importantly imagined. It was a construction of their northern European cultural heritage; an interpretation that

blossomed after the shift in European centers of political and economic power. Ultimately, the source of this feeling of freedom also produced interpretations of the Neapolitan people, which served to reinforce the cultural hierarchy between north and south. Although women like Piozzi ran away from countries like England seeking escape, they could never fully circumvent the northern European culture that structured their Italian experiences.



### CHAPTER THREE

“A restless genus, for ever fermenting like their volcano: the Neapolitan Character in the eyes of Hester Lynch Piozzi”

After passing through the sublime and awful path of Mt. Vesuvius, Hester Piozzi entered the city of Naples. In her mind, the volcano represented a physical manifestation of the essential Neapolitan nature, but she had not yet been in the city. The people and practices that she encountered in the streets would eventually produce her most concrete understandings of the Neapolitan temperament. For months she strolled along the streets of the Naples, taking in everything around her. Out of all of the topics relating to the city, religion and politics occupied the majority of her writings. This chapter will analyze how Piozzi formulated her own opinions about the Neapolitan character through her discussions about the religious practices and political climate in the city. In her eyes, these two areas of Neapolitan life represented the starkest expressions of their ‘southern’ disposition. In her journal she described a city marked by religious and political extremes and inhabited by a blasphemous, superstitious, and irrational people; all of the qualities that northern Europeans typically connected to southerners. Because Hester Piozzi came to Naples already believing in the north/south dichotomy, her observations tended to confirm these stereotypes. Also, in choosing to discuss religion and politics, she concentrated upon two aspects of Neapolitan life that she believed were very different from their counterparts in English society. Thus, when she spoke about the general

populace in these contexts, she reconfirmed her preconceived notions about them, while failing to highlight the true social realities such as class and political injustice that affected many Neapolitans.

The institutional religion that Piozzi encountered in Naples was Roman Catholicism. This was, of course, no surprise to her. It was widely recognized throughout England that most Italians were Catholics. Despite this, the church was a minor theme in her discussion of religion. Neither the masses nor the edifices themselves attracted much of her attention. In the only section where she discusses them, she dismissed both stating that “more general decorum or true devotion” could not be found in “churches of Romish persuasion than in ours.” The bursts of “penitential piety” that she witnessed were indecorous enough, yet they were coupled with a general disrespect for the sanctity of these sacred places. Dogs were “suffered to run about and dirty churches” during the performance of “divine services,” and babies cried, while mothers took “the most indecent methods” to “pacify them.” In her view, the people did not respect the sacredness of these holy places. The churches were not pure sites of worship because the people failed to make them so. Piozzi did not believe that Neapolitans truly devoted themselves while in mass because they allowed defilement and distractions to go on during the services. Clearly, in her mind, the dignity of Anglican services in England represented the true devotion of people like herself and contrasted against the Neapolitans. At the end of the section, she used the chaos and disrespect that she viewed to demonstrate the “genius” and “nature” of a people who did not “mind small matters.”<sup>92</sup> In the final analysis, she stated that the Neapolitans were disposed to what she considered

almost blasphemous behavior. Although this was the first and last time that Piozzi expressed interest in institutional religion, she succeeded in reiterating the nature of the people and contrasting it to her own beliefs about the English character.

Throughout her section on Naples, the most dominant impression left by Hester Piozzi concerning Neapolitan religion was her sense of its overriding superstitious quality. She wrote that they lived in the “very hulk” of a “rather foundered Paganism.” This contributed, in her opinion, to an “odd jumble of past and present days, past and present ideas” that “still confused[ed] their heads” and could be “observed in every conversation with” the Neapolitans.<sup>93</sup> Many of her sections in the journal concerning religion reflected this opinion. One topic that she revisited several times was the story and veneration of St. Januarius, the patron saint of Naples. Like many other patron saints in Italian cities, Januarius had been a martyr whose relics were kept in main Neapolitan churches. Communities often regarded the patron as representative not only of the church and diocese, but also of themselves.<sup>94</sup> This led to the type of worship and personal reliance on religious figures like St. Januarius that Piozzi referred to in her journal. Some of her “friends of the Romish persuasion,” or Catholics, had originally told her the story with what she called “a just horror of the superstitious folly.” They recounted that the martyr was “so madly venerated” by the “poor uninstructed mortals” of Naples that when Vesuvius erupted or “any great disaster threaten[ed] them” they begged “of our Savior to speak to St. Januarius in their behalf.” Instead of looking to the Christian savior to help them, the people looked to him as an intermediary between themselves and Januarius, who she thought was a pre-Christian deity in new form. Piozzi responded to the story by rationally tracing this worship to the “adoration originally paid to” the old deity “Janus in

Italy,” suggesting that the Neapolitans still worshipped a pagan god through the form of a Christian saint. Thus she attempted to connect religious practices in Naples to ancient beliefs through an analysis of language. Piozzi believed that the Saint had existed and was a martyr in Naples, but that “much of the veneration originally bestowed on the deity” for “whom he was named” was transferred to Januarius in the years after his death.<sup>95</sup> In order to understand the strange ritual that horrified her Catholic friends, she categorized it as a part of the “odd jumble of past and present days” that she saw in the city.

Months later, Hester Piozzi referenced St. Januarius again when discussing her wonder at the Neapolitans who confidently built “snug little villages...at the foot of Vesuvius.” While visiting these neighborhoods, she inquired “of an inhabitant...how she managed” and “whether she was not frightened when the Volcano raged.” The woman responded by telling her that they “only desire[d] three years use of the mountain.” Their fortune in produce and food was “made before the fourth year arrive[d]; and then if the red river” came they could always “run away” themselves; “hang the property.” After those three years, the Neapolitan woman believed that they had made enough profit from the land to feel “above the world, thanks be to God and St. Januarius.”<sup>96</sup> The woman believed that the saint was the guardian and protector of the city and its people. In this vein, she believed that he could help them to take care of practical matters such as raising and protecting her crops. The figure of St. Januarius helped Neapolitans to make sense of their lives through worship of him and an understanding of his role in the city.

Instead of recognizing the integral position that the saint held in Neapolitan culture Piozzi, launched into another explanation of how the saint had come to occupy

such a revered position. In this way, she superimposed her cultural biases onto her actual experience. She first restated her “favourite hypothesis” about the actual man and how he had become a saint in Naples. St. Januarius, she wrote, “did certainly exist and give his life as testimony to the truth of our religion, in the third century.” Subsequently, she questioned this assertion, wondering to herself whether or not “corruptions and mistakes” had crept into the “field of religion” in the city. Then she questioned whether the enemy who was “ever watching his opportunity to plant them” had fostered these falsehoods, suggesting that the devil had encouraged the veneration of Januarius as a deception in order to corrupt the Neapolitans.<sup>97</sup> This analysis of their beliefs was markedly different from her earlier, more detached assessment of the saint. Instead of merely seeing his adoration as folly or an intellectual puzzle, she proposed that it was blasphemy. Piozzi insinuated that veneration of St. Januarius was evidence that the devil had spiritually influenced their worship and degraded religious practice in southern Italy. This commentary shows how much she misconstrued the place of patron saints in Italy and how little she accepted diverse religious practices. When Piozzi failed to see the daily purposes of the saint in Naples, she succeeded in separating herself from the people and labeling them as exotic.

Hester Piozzi continually commented on Neapolitan expressions of their religiosity in her journal. In order to demonstrate how exotic these practices were, she commonly referred to her northern Italian friends and their reactions to southern Italian customs. These people were her guides into the city, and were probably friends of her husband or people whom they had met within the Grand Tour social circle which formed in every great destination on the typical itinerary. Like the Neapolitans, these Italian

friends were also Catholics and were subject to attacks by English travelers' in the Grand Tour literature. Many of the English believed that Catholicism was an "irrational, evil and spiritually corrupt" religion that presented a danger to the people of the region and sometimes to the travelers themselves, yet Piozzi was married to an Italian Catholic.<sup>98</sup> When she accepted Gabriel Piozzi as her husband, she demonstrated a level of tolerance and understanding that precluded her from disparaging all Catholics out of hand. Instead, she highlighted a distinction between the Neapolitan people and her Italian Catholic friends, many of whom were northern Italian and members of the upper classes. In this way, she further separated herself from the people of Naples by demonstrating how foreign they seemed even to other Italians and emphasizing their southernness.

She made this difference explicit when reporting that she had seen "Italians from other states greatly shocked at the grossness of these their unenlightened neighbors." The 'barbaric' practice to which they referred was the Neapolitan "half-Indian custom of burning" religious "figures upon their skins with gunpowder." Here, Piozzi referred specifically to the poor Lazaroni of the city who had "small care about appearances" and went about with "a vast deal of their persons uncovered, except by these strange ornaments." In the heat of the day, the poor workers felt little compunction to remain fully clothed, unlike the upper class Italians with whom Piozzi would have traveled and conversed. Including an example of her interaction with one of the Neapolitans whom she described, she wrote that a brawny rower covered in tattoos interrupted her experience of rowing about in the "lovely bay." He had "perhaps the angel Raphael, or the blessed Virgin Mary, delineated on one...sunburnt leg" and "the saint of the town upon the other." Her revulsion was apparent when she went on to describe how "his arms

represent[ed] the Glory, or the seven spirits of god, or some strange things, while a brass medal” hung “from his neck, expressive of his favorite martyr:” St. Januarius.<sup>99</sup>

The custom of tattooing religious figures on the body reminded Piozzi of the accounts recorded by Captain Cook in Polynesia. She believed that “one need not however wander round the world...when Naples will shew one the effects of a like operation, very *very* little better executed, on the broad shoulders of numberless Lazaroni.” She cautioned readers that: “there is no need to examine books for information.” The person that ran “over the Chiaja” could “read in large characters the superstition of the Neapolitani.”<sup>100</sup> The custom of burning religious images into the skin may have represented for Piozzi a zealous form of idolatry and indicated pagan worship, yet she did not go this far into the reasons for her discomfort with the practice. It was apparent that she did not understand it and neither did her friends from other parts of Italy. The severe nature of her comments illustrated the extremes that she saw in Naples. The people and their beliefs were superstitious and foreign, very different, in her estimation, from other Catholics. Italians from other parts of Italy supported this belief when they expressed their own horror at Neapolitan customs. Ultimately, this led Piozzi to separate northern Italians from their more barbarous neighbors to the south, connecting the more “civilized” of the two with herself and the Neapolitans with the non-European Polynesians.

The religious practices and beliefs of the Neapolitans indicated a quality of otherness to Hester Piozzi. Their celebration of St. Januarius, reliance on him for protection from the volcano, and custom of tattooing images of religious figures into their own flesh were several aspects of religion in Naples that attracted her attention. When

seeking to determine why the people behaved in this manner and what was different about the city, she referred back to Vesuvius. The Neapolitan genius, she wrote, was “restless, and ever fermenting...like their volcano.”<sup>101</sup> Their behavior and beliefs were not only affected by the volcano’s eruptions, the people and natural phenomenon also shared common characteristics. Somehow the people and the volcano were imbued with the same material, and therefore produced similar spectacles. In her estimation, “man built Rome, but God created Naples...for surely, surely he has honoured no other spot with such an accumulation of wonders.”<sup>102</sup> The wonders to which she referred were not the palaces and churches which failed to share in her admiration, but instead the “ornaments” which “heaven...bestowed on” the city: the physical features of the landscape. These sites could truly “excite astonishment” and “impress awe.”<sup>103</sup> While the volcano was a central feature in this evaluation, her obvious connection of it to the Neapolitans extended her sense of awe to the people themselves and to their heterodox practices that differed so much from what she knew. When Hester Piozzi evaluated religion in the city, she validated her ideas about the Neapolitan people. Instead of recognizing the important place of St. Januarius in their everyday lives or accepting their practices of tattooing, she chose to use these traditions as evidence of paganism and superstition. In doing so, Hester Piozzi fundamentally misunderstood the people and substantiated her belief in their inherently ‘southern’ nature.

Besides religion, Hester Piozzi used another theme in her journal to access and determine the Neapolitan character: politics. Throughout she used both examples of political upheavals from the past in combination with comments on the contemporary



government to support her determinations about the people. Again, instead of critically examining the political background of the city she relied heavily upon her preconceived conceptions of Neapolitans as southerners who violently swung between laziness and irrational fervor. Unlike other Grand Tourists, she determined that the people, the poor masses, were not oppressed by a corrupt administration, but instead that they were contented, almost living in a state of nature. When she made these determinations, she further exposed not only her regional biases (north/south) but also her class-based ones. In many of the sections where she discusses Neapolitans, it was obvious that she wrote about the people of the lower classes, most typically the Lazaroni, without making a distinction between different groups within the city. This may have been because she did not come into contact with the Neapolitan aristocracy and the majority of her acquaintances in the city were foreigners themselves. The Palmeritan prince and the German Banker's wife, two acquaintances that she named and spoke with most frequently, were not originally from Naples. Piozzi never made the distinction clear when referring to the Neapolitans as a whole, and glossed over the complicated social dynamics within the city. Doing so made it easier for her to reinforce the simple dichotomy between north and south and divide Naples' political upheavals from real social injustices. Instead she could contribute unrest to irrationality, passion and the fervid southern temperament.

In the reality, the Neapolitan political context into which Piozzi stepped in 1786 was in turmoil. This situation came to a head in 1799, in the decade following Piozzi's stay there. Three factors combined to foster an ill-fated Neapolitan revolution just before the turn of the century. An ancient legacy of foreign domination, a complicated economic

history, and a burgeoning center of the Italian Enlightenment had all developed in relation to one another over the last hundred years. Simply put, foreign domination created a political and economic system that lacked progressive structure and therefore prompted intellectuals to apply the ideas of the Enlightenment to their native country and call for a release from foreign sovereignty. Contradictions and struggles between the Neapolitan nobility, government, and intellectuals produced a situation where little change could be accomplished due to the oppositional nature between the traditions of the past and the reformist ideas of the present. The three legacies were intimately interwoven and combined to produce the revolution that would occur in 1799.<sup>104</sup>

Hester Piozzi could not have known what the future held for the Neapolitan people or their government, yet was aware of the political upheavals in Naples' past. Her knowledge of these events shows how widespread information about Naples past was in the late eighteenth century and confirms her fascination with southern Italy. This interest became apparent when she mentioned an uprising that had occurred over a century before. She "wished exceedingly to purchase" in Naples "the genuine account of Massaniello's far-famed sedition and revolt."<sup>105</sup> This event was an uprising led in 1647 by a young fish vendor against the Spanish King and Viceroy. The primary causes of the rebellion were a rise in food prices, the effect of taxes, and poor harvests. It resulted in the expulsion of the Viceroy, an alliance between the city and provinces, and the establishment of an independent republic. Although the movement succeeded in these goals, the King's forces eventually put it down less than a year later.<sup>106</sup> When Piozzi described Massaniello's behavior, she referred to it as "more dreadful in a certain way than any of the earthquakes" that had "at different times shaken this hollow-founded

country.” Her sense of excitement regarding the uprising was even further heightened by the knowledge that the account of the event “was suppressed, and burned by the hands of the common executioner.”<sup>107</sup> She however, presented Massianello as a troublemaker instead of discussing the hardships that the people had endured or the independent republic that they built. Her interest seemed to lay more in the dangerous nature of a successful revolt led by people of the lower classes, which briefly toppled a government. In subsequent passages she delved more into her opinions concerning why the people would take to the street and act with such passion against authority, yet she did not include repeated injustices against those very people in her analysis.

Although Hester Piozzi failed to outline her opinion of Massaniello’s revolt or its outcome, she did outline her general opinion of the Neapolitan people’s nature, especially when they were aroused to anger. She began this discussion with a description of the Neapolitan coat of armor, which consisted of an unbridled horse. She believed that in their nature, the people of the city “much resemble[d] him.” They, like the horse, were “generous and gay,” but also “headstrong and violent in their disposition;” “easy to turn, but difficult to stop.” Because of this, she postulated that: “no authority is respected by them when some strong passion animates them to fury.” Normally “lazily quiet,” they were “unwilling to stir” until an accident “rouse[d] them to terror” or “rage urge[d] them forward to incredible exertions of suddenly-bestowed strength.”<sup>108</sup> In her mind, this pattern of behavior may have explained the seditious behavior of the people who participated in the revolt of 1647. She clearly stated that the Neapolitans were irrational people who swung from one extreme to the other only when instigated by fear or passionate anger. Absent, of course, in such an examination, were the social

circumstances that daily affected the lives of Neapolitans, especially those of the lower classes. What this analysis did include though, was an inherent analogy to Mt. Vesuvius. To Piozzi, the people, like the mountain, seemed tempestuous and unreasonable in their actions, motivated by natural, inherent characteristics, rather than social injustice. The people of Naples, she believed, were bound to rise up against their rulers if provoked; yet this provocation did not arise, in her opinion, from true wrongs. Instead it sprung out of their southern irrationality.

In order to provide evidence for her opinion of the Neapolitan character, she recounted an incident connected to the eruption of 1779. When the volcano began to erupt, the people's "fears and superstitions rose to such a height, that they seized the French ambassador upon the bridge." This mob then proceeded to tear him "almost out of his carriage as he fled from Portici," yet he did not escape. The group succeeded in blocking him "upon the Ponte della Maddalena." According to Piozzi, they threatened the ambassador with "instant death if he did not get out of his carriage" and prostrate himself "before the statue of St. Januarius" in order to "intreat [the saint's] protection for the city." He managed to pacify the crowd by throwing down "all the money" in his pocket onto the ground.<sup>109</sup> She did not share with her readers the source for this story or any reason why the mob's targeted the French ambassador. Instead, she believed that the story supported her explanation of Neapolitan behavior. In Piozzi's explanation, Neapolitan mob, in a fit of fear and anger, grabbed the first person that they could find and demanded that he should supplicate to their martyr or die. The Neapolitans, in her mind, were animalistic in their actions and reactions; they very much resembled the horse that represented them. Here Piozzi failed to probe the situation and determine why the

people had attacked the French ambassador. She viewed the Neapolitans almost as an amalgamated group, devoid of individuality and motivated by fury instead of real fears or social injustices. When she did so, she underestimated them and ignored both their real religious and political concerns: poverty and corruption.

When Grand Tourists visited other countries, they viewed and commented upon types of government very different from their own. Many of the English tourists who traveled throughout the continent in the second half of the eighteenth century clearly condemned absolutism abroad, including the situation in Naples. When John Northall visited Naples in 1753, he wrote that the “prerogatives of the Crown” and “power and property of the clergy were so excessive” that hardly any other countries existed where “the generality of the people are more dissolute in their morals” or “more wretched in their circumstances.”<sup>110</sup> Lady Craven was also critical of the Neapolitan government. She indignantly noted that in Naples “the government supplie[d] nothing for the ease of its subjects” and that “public misery [was] concealed under national pomp.”<sup>111</sup> These travelers believed that the state of the government adversely affected the Neapolitan people and caused their desperate situation. Their comments point to a cognizance of both the general population’s state of poverty and what little the Monarchy did to remedy the situation. Although both male and female tourists frequently noted poverty and oppression, these aspects seemed to be largely absent from Piozzi’s account.

Hester Piozzi’s reflections upon the Neapolitan state did not resemble those of Northall or Lady Craven. First, her opinion of King Ferdinand IV was exceptional. In other states, she may have held a different opinion of authoritarian rulers, yet in Naples, the situation differed. Piozzi stated that “stories of monarchs seldom” gave her pleasure.

Most sovereigns spent their time addressing the “few,” or the privileged instead of living and working for their people, yet the King of Naples was unusual. She believed that he lived “among his subjects with the old Roman idea of a window before his bosom.” He was transparent to the masses, simply because he lived among them. The people knew him. Like them, he “dance[d] with...girls, [ate] macaroni” with his fingers, and competed in rowing contests “against the watermen in the bay.”<sup>112</sup> He was, she determined, “resolve[d] to be happy himself” and was “equally determined to make no man miserable.” He acted more like a member of his population than an absolutist monarch. He was a simple man; much like the simple people that she believed inhabited the city. In this way, Piozzi connected the head of the state with the people although she never met him. In doing so, she was able to extend her conceptions of the Neapolitan temperament to the King himself. Even though she disliked monarchs in general, she could appreciate this one because he represented the southern character itself. In her eyes, he was a member of this simple group of less civilized people who inhabited the Italian south.

Second, she commented upon the way that the King of Naples dealt with reformist ideas. She recounted a story of how the “Emperor and Grand Duke” of Florence and Milan had talked “to him of their new projects for reformation in the church.” He told them that he believed they had brought “little advantage” to “their states by these new-fangled notions.” In fact, he insisted that their reforms had crowded Naples “with refugees from” their domains. In short, he informed them that “they might do their way, but he would do his” and that he “would not make himself any [enemies] for the sake of propagating doctrines that he did not understand.” According to Piozzi, he stated that he would pray as usual, “only begg[ing] blessings on his beloved people.” She marveled at

his attitude including at the end that he had advised his “wise brothers-in-law” to “learn of him to enjoy life, instead of shortening it by unnecessary cares.” He then invited them to “see him the next morning play a match of tennis.”<sup>113</sup>

Apparently, religious reform was not an important matter for the King. Yet no matter how he responded to his people or suggested changes in ecclesiastical institutions, most significant was Piozzi’s reaction to this information. She never questioned the stories that she heard about the monarch, made reference to the sources of these anecdotes, or expressed any type of criticism. Instead, she determined the truth was that “the jolly Neapolitans [led] a course life” but it was “an unoppressed one.”<sup>114</sup> She believed that there was surely never in any town “a greater shew of abundance.”<sup>115</sup> “These folks want for nothing,” she wrote. A house, even, would have been “an inconvenience to them.” She confidently told her readers that “they like[d] to sleep out of doors.”<sup>116</sup> They were jovial and carefree because their ruler represented the best of their nature. In Piozzi’s estimation, he seemed generous and gay, like the unbridled horse that represented that Neapolitans, yet he was not full of rage or violent, as she also described them. She equated the King with his subjects, assuming that he really did share their interests and represent them well. As a member of the people, he could understand them. He was not full of fancy and complicated initiatives like the rulers of Tuscany and Milan, but instead remained simple in his outlook. This, she believed allowed for a good relationship between the monarch and the Neapolitans. In the passages, she described an ideal situation. Therefore, the anger or violence that occurred in the city could not have been founded in any real social grievance. Piozzi’s analysis of the political context that she encountered in Naples and evaluation of the King further validated her belief in the

southern disposition. According to her account, the people had no reason to be unhappy, so instances of explosive public rebellion had to be based in something more inherent, in the people's passionate and irrational character.

In reality, the situation was much more complicated. The King had to contend with barons and a growing intellectual elite who pushed for reform. When Piozzi described the city and its political structure she left out these factors, probably due in large part to the fact that she had no access to them. Unlike the picture that Piozzi painted, the reality of the eighteenth-century political situation in Naples was ultimately one of struggle. Although Neapolitan intellectuals had supported the establishment of the Independent Kingdom of Naples from its inception, disappointment with the new King developed over several decades. Originally, they had heralded Prince Charles as ushering a "heroic age" of enlightened reform.<sup>117</sup> The changes that they expected were hardly easy to achieve due to the complexities of established traditions and channels of administration. Although it was hard to accomplish true reform, the newly established kingdom, represented by Prince Charles, in contrast to the Spanish Habsburgs, was concentrated on more anti-feudal, anti-papal, mercantilistic measures.<sup>118</sup> These initiatives were displayed, in part, through the ecclesiastical reforms that the government of Charles III enacted between 1736 and 1742. They included the subjection of the ecclesiastics to royal taxation and the curtailing of their jurisdiction in governmental affairs.<sup>119</sup> Yet Naples was plagued with longstanding corruption. In addition, Prince Charles' adolescence and apparent control by other Spanish ministers and his parents created a considerable point of weakness in the government and helped to block or delay



proposed reforms. Feudalistic barons and enlightened philosophers continually clashed in the coming decades over the future of the Neapolitan government and society.<sup>120</sup>

Throughout the late 1770's and into the 1790's, the fight over the end of the feudalistic system persisted. The struggle to end this system was perpetuated by Enlightenment reformers and opposed by lawyers in the public administration and, naturally, the barons. The former wanted to do away with the fiefs and argued that the barons were not the true liaison between the monarch and the people.<sup>121</sup> They followed in the footsteps of an older generation of theorists and strove to improve the condition of the common people in the Kingdom. These men wanted not only to reform the state, but also to reorganize the entire society by bolstering a middle-class of small property owners and creating a base of democratic representation. Following their efforts to convince the King, the sale of land as free property was approved in 1791, but unfortunately was delayed and ultimately stopped by a slew of complaints from nobles and legal obstacles.<sup>122</sup> The barons and the intellectuals essentially fought one another for the future of the kingdom. The former sought to preserve their familial privileges while the latter sought to create a new society. Neither was completely successful. The government, in effect, was caught between the two, struggling to survive amid a situation that was inherently contradictory. The sovereign and the state were entrenched in the effects of foreign domination and economic backwardness. Ultimately, the common people suffered most.<sup>123</sup> They did not live in the midst of the ideal abundance that Piozzi described, but were immersed in poverty.

When Hester Piozzi considered the people of Naples, she did so with respect to religion and government. What she concluded was that the people, in general, were content in their almost primitive state. In their very make-up, Neapolitans were different not only from Englishmen, but also from other Italians. They were superstitious and passionate. When accident or anger aroused an instance of social rebellion or mob fury, Piozzi attributed their actions to their national character or 'genius.' This, in turn, she compared to the most dominant feature of the local environment: the volcano. For Hester Piozzi, Vesuvius was a physical representation of the Neapolitans. The city that she found was filled with brawny rowers tattooed with images of the Virgin Mary, pagan gods, overflowing lava, violent public outbursts and possibly even the devil himself. It was an exotic and dangerous place, filled with mystery and populated by a people as inexplicable as the "hollow-founded ground" upon which the city was built. These Neapolitans fascinated Piozzi because they were so different from her, yet not all of the inhabitants of southern Italy would prove to be so alien, as I will discuss in the next chapter. When discussing the social realities of the general Neapolitan people, she failed to understand the social injustices that racked the region and left the majority of the population destitute. She also failed to take into account the complex class hierarchy in there, designating the people as a faceless group. Instead of helping her to truly discern the Neapolitan context, Hester Piozzi's experiences and observations regarding religion and politics in Naples reinforced her preconceptions about southern exoticism and reconfirmed her own feelings of cultural superiority.

## CHAPTER 4

“Breaking through old customs and choosing for one’s self: Hester Piozzi’s gendered reconsideration of the Neapolitan character”

When writing about the general populace in Naples, Hester Piozzi failed to appreciate the religious and political realities of their lives. In the process, she confirmed for herself the widely accepted early modern notion of temperament based upon climate. The Neapolitans were a simple ‘southern’ people motivated by instincts and fear to act in intense and illogical ways. Both her comments upon the religiosity and politics of the city bolstered this belief. Conversely, when specifically approaching southern Italian women in her journal, she commented most about the social inequities that they experienced. Although Piozzi could not see the plight of the poor Lazaroni, she certainly recognized how class and gender determined the choices of women in Naples. This chapter will show how she began to deviate from the theory of southern temperament when addressing Neapolitan women and engaging with their stories. Her own class, sex and past decisions formed the fundamental basis of her willingness to approach them as individuals instead of as parts of the faceless crowd. She could understand the nuances of their experiences because she felt that she had something in common with them. Piozzi had challenged her own gendered roles in England and had suffered the consequences of doing so. As a result, her analysis of individual women’s circumstances was very different from the more typical male tourist’s approach to native women. Instead of

merely considering them as inaccessible examples of the exotic, Piozzi expressed true interest in their lives. Consequently, when women became the subject of her attention, her understandings of the 'southern' character became complicated, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the Neapolitan people as a whole.

The Grand Tour literature that *Observations and Reflections* became a part of was still dominated by male authors during the second half of the eighteenth century. These tourists concentrated largely upon classical art and architecture, their interactions with foreign dignitaries, politics and religion, much as Piozzi also did in her journal. The important differences between her journal and others lie in observations concerning women. Piozzi included everything from their dress to more comprehensive discussions about the rights, roles and social exploitation that they experienced. Among the many topics that male travelers covered, the contexts of native women's lives were virtually ignored. In fact, they were rarely even assigned a voice at all in the journals. This was in large part due to the role that Romanticism played in how tourists constructed idealized images of foreign women. This literary and artistic movement emphasized the role of the heroic artist who stood detached from practical and moral responsibilities.<sup>124</sup> The individualistic artist or writer was gendered as masculine, while femininity came to represent something quite different.<sup>125</sup>

In literary works of the late eighteenth century, such as the travel genre, female natives tended to be generically grouped along gendered lines. According to Clare Brant, this related to a critical aspect of Romantic aesthetics. The mute female muse became a very important trope in literature and the arts. She represented an archetypal alternative to

women who engaged in polite conversation and participated in the salons of Western Europe.<sup>126</sup> This representation of femininity sought to idealize them as objects that inspired the masculine individual. She was the starting point through which an artist or writer could display sophistication whose purpose was to act as objectified device. The muse would never attempt to enter into the intellectual arena. She possessed other qualities, namely a combination of mystery and sexuality. Thus, instead of defining women by their regional, national, political or intellectual identities, Romantic rhetoric defined them according to their sex.<sup>127</sup> **Following this trend,** many artists and writers depicted them as spectacles to be witnessed, not individuals with voices to be heard.

Romantic aesthetics came to profoundly effect both what travelers expected to find in foreign places and the way that they constructed their encounters abroad in their accounts. In the late eighteenth century, this Romantic ideal of womanhood constituted one conduit through which travelers could express their search for the exotic. It resulted in portrayals of women as manifestations of their surroundings. The universal woman, opposite of the individual man, symbolized the exotic inherent in the foreign and therefore the experience abroad in general. For example, one of the ubiquitous female figures in the literature concerning Italy was the cloistered nun.<sup>128</sup> In his popular travel journal, *Tour through Sicily and Malta*, Patrick Brydone elaborated on this theme. He commented on the handsomeness of several Sicilian nuns, and thought that “no artificial ornament, or studied embellishment” could produce the same effect as the “simple attire of a pretty young nun” who was “placed behind a double iron gate.”<sup>129</sup> These girls were beautiful and intriguing because of their separation from him.

Brydone could interpret the nuns from a distance, and this remoteness was the key to their appeal. The source of this distance, this inaccessibility, was obviously their religion. Thus, the nuns became a spectacle, which could give him some insight into aspects of Italian life. Although he expressed interest in their context, the source of this curiosity was the nature of their sexual appeal, not their social status.<sup>130</sup> Also, the encounter was decidedly one-sided. Because of the iron gate between Brydone and the Sicilian women, they could not engage him in conversation or voice their own reflections concerning their culture or enclosure. This traveler viewed the nuns as he would have viewed a painting. He did not conceive of them as a part of the larger social hierarchy. Thus, he became intrigued by his own perceptions of their exotic nature, not by the women themselves. This resembled the ways in which Piozzi had viewed the people of Naples through their religion and politics. In both instances, the authors were able to superimpose their own cultural biases onto the southern Italians by ignoring the social, religious and political contexts of their lives.

Exoticism in the form of women's actions was a common theme that surfaced in the work of many English travelers, Hester Piozzi among them. While she was in Naples, Piozzi recorded many different observations of the city and its inhabitants. The behavior and status of Neapolitan women was a theme that frequently reoccurred, yet the comments that sprung from this interest were at times contradictory. Women sometimes appeared in her writings as exotic spectacles and other time as people with whom she could personally identify. One instance in particular resembled the passage in Patrick Brydone's journal concerning the Sicilian nuns.<sup>131</sup> One morning at church, she recorded an "odd scene" in which a woman performed what Piozzi considered an embarrassing act

of contrition. The lady, dressed in “a long white dress” and veil came in and “moved slowly up the church.” She then dramatically “threw herself quite upon her face” before the altar. Piozzi was astonished at not only the act of penitence, but also the length. The lady “remain[ed] prostrate there at least five minutes, in the face of the entire congregation.” To her equal amazement the onlookers “neither stared nor sneered, nor laughed nor lamented, but minded their private devotions.” Unlike Brydone, Piozzi’s interest did not lay in the sexual appeal of the woman in question. Instead, the woman became exotic through the sheer drama of her actions. Unlike Hester Piozzi’s fellow Anglicans, she believed that those who followed “the Romish persuasion” did not have lacked true respect for and faith in Christianity.<sup>132</sup>

There were two factors which tied Piozzi’s account to Brydone’s. First, they were both interested in what they considered to be an alien religion which moved its members to exotic behaviors; the nuns cloistered themselves and the lady in white publicly prostrated herself at the altar before hearing mass. Piozzi also viewed the event as a spectacle in which the woman had no voice. She did not engage with the Italian Lady in order to hear her story. This incident demonstrated how Piozzi, although different from other travelers, also carried with her some of the same preconceptions of the exotic. She too was capable of using women’s actions to establish her convictions about the Neapolitan southern character. Although this was true, she devoted a greater portion of her journal to understanding how Neapolitan women interacted within their society. Her interest in their women’s rights and roles within Neapolitan society would set her apart from other travelers in this regard.

When Hester Piozzi addressed religion and politics in Neapolitan society, she largely ignored the complicated social hierarchy that framed how the people experienced these two areas of their lives. When referring to these two themes, she normally spoke of the people as one large group, indistinct from one another. Regarding religion in particular, she emphasized superstition rather than the privileges of the ecclesiastics or their relationship to their parishioners. This pattern changed when she noted one day that “a friar” had “killed a woman in the church just by the Crocelle inn.” He killed her “for having refused him favours he suspected she had granted to another.” Piozzi remarked indignantly that although the friar had elicited sexual favors from the woman and murdered her in a church “no step” was “taken towards punishing the murderer” for the sole reason that he was “a *religioso*” and was above legal penalty. This instance prompted her interest because it involved a woman who was left unprotected by the law. She believed that it was “a miracle that more outrages” were not committed every day “in a country where” the “profession of sanctity” and those of “high birth, are protected from law and justice!”<sup>133</sup> By incorporating her outrage over the woman’s murder, Hester Piozzi brought the rigid class system in Naples into her commentary on Neapolitan society. The victim experienced the injustice because she was a woman of a lower class. Her status in combination with a lack of civil punishments for ecclesiastics and members of the aristocracy made her an open target for abuse. She was sure that in England clerics and those of “high birth” were protected by the law, and therefore so were individuals. Piozzi was horrified by the realization that these safeguards did not exist in Naples. As a result, the Neapolitan people became more stratified in her mind and the distinctions between them became clearer to her. So too did the place of women within the hierarchy.



Within this more comprehensive framework, she could no longer ignore social injustices or the complicated nature of Neapolitan society.

In another instance, Piozzi described the assemblies where women of different classes came to socialize. They were divided into two groups, one for the nobilita' and the other for de'buoni amici, or the poor. She recognized that the purpose of this separation was to instill subordination and reinforce the power of the aristocracy, yet was revolted by the display. Her expectation was that the classes should be treated equally, yet they were not. She observed that a "merchant's wife, shining in diamonds" could present herself "reverentially before the chair of a countess" and expect a salutation, yet the "poor amici" were "totally excluded from the subscription of the nobles."<sup>134</sup> This realization contradicted her opinions about the King, the head of the aristocracy, who she thought lived among the people. In her political analysis, the monarch represented the people and therefore acted as a leveler of all social classes. Here, in the assemblies, the aristocracy perpetuated differences. Only members of the wealthy, upper classes had access to the aristocracy; they kept the lower classes at a distance. The hierarchy of Neapolitan society was much more complicated than Piozzi had realized. She visited these gatherings several times with a fellow northern European lady, her German Lutheran friend.

The pageantry of the assembly, women presenting themselves before the aristocracy in diamonds and finery, provoked questions in Piozzi's mind regarding the details of status. She asked her friend if "men confined their addresses wholly to their own rank" in Naples. The lady replied that although "beauty often broke the barrier," it was ultimately in vain. A man of the first "rank" (a member of the nobility) would "not

even try to push [his lover] up among the people of fashion.” She added that a beautiful woman of the second “rank” could only take happiness in “triumphing over equals” because rivaling a superior was “an impossibility” in Naples.<sup>135</sup> The nobility did not marry commoners. Even women of the second rank, who certainly did not count themselves among the poor, could not surpass their positions by marrying into a higher class. Although women of the lower classes made acceptable mistresses, their social positions were quite rigid. This reminded Piozzi of her own experiences and her husband’s. Her friends, family and peers all deemed him an unacceptable choice for her, a woman of the English gentry. Part of the reason for their rejection of her husband was his class. He was a musician and did not guarantee her family more financial security, unlike her first husband. Many of her friends had expected her to marry another Englishman like Thrale. In both societies, the mixing of classes was discouraged. Fundamentally, the difference between the Neapolitan women’s situation and hers was that Hester Piozzi was free to choose a love match. Although she was discouraged from doing so, no legal or financial constraints existed that could stop her. Henry Thrale’s will provided for her daughters and the widow had sold his brewery soon after his death. She was able to make her own decisions, no longer having any financial dependents. She chose Gabriel Piozzi. The Neapolitans, it seems, were not free to do the same.

After exploring female activities and customs for herself, Hester Piozzi desired to understand how rank divided Neapolitan women. In doing so, she unearthed the complications and realities of Neapolitan life that she had ignored when examining religion and politics alone. She understood that both English and Neapolitan society emphasized the importance of rank, especially when it came to marriage. In this way,

they were not that different. In addition to the complications related to her husband's class, she had also experienced the related limitations that both societies placed upon women. When addressing gendered restrictions, a topic close to her own heart, Piozzi was able to overcome some of her cultural biases related to southern Italians. This subject allowed her to see them as real people whose lives held some characteristics in common with her own. Rank divided these women and marginalized them, but their gender also contributed to their lack of control. The social system was inflexible; it limited the personal choices they could make regarding their destinies and therefore their power over themselves. In her early years, Hester Piozzi's family had denied her the right to determine her own future. She believed that her mother and father had used her as a 'plaything' for their amusement, encouraging her to invest herself in a comprehensive education. Like the Neapolitan women who could only serve as mistresses, or 'playthings' of the aristocracy, social restrictions thwarted her agency. While she connected opposition to her second marriage to the issue of rank, she also linked her own early experiences to the lives of Neapolitan women. This fact, in and of itself, destabilized her belief in the north/south dichotomy. According to the theory of 'northern' and 'southern' characters, the people of the two regions were distinctly different. Finding common ground between herself and southern women allowed her to complicate those seemingly clear disparities.

One of the most interesting and revealing conversations that Mrs. Piozzi recorded in her travel journal while in Naples concerned the fate of a young Sicilian girl, just "past ten years old." While conversing with Prince Ventimiglia, a Palmeritan prince whom she had met in Naples, the prince mentioned that his mother had written him expressing

concern over the girl's future. This young woman was an orphaned member of the Sicilian nobility, and had not yet been betrothed or married. Piozzi was astonished by the "expression of surprise" on his face after he had read the letter. The fact that someone in her family had not completed her marital arrangements distressed him. The girl's situation fascinated the Englishwoman, for it represented a specific situation through which she could gain a more complete understanding of women's liberties and roles. Hester Piozzi wanted to pursue the topic, and asked the prince a hypothetical question, "for information's sake." She conjectured that "perhaps" the girl could "break through old customs, and chuse" a husband for herself. As a woman who had been forced into an unwanted marriage, she hoped that the girl could have the freedom of choice that young Hester Salusbury had desired. Because the Sicilian was an orphan, Piozzi suggested that there was "no one whom she need consult" about her decision. The traveler wanted to know if it was possible for "such a lady" to "assert" what the author called "the rights of humanity, and make a choice somewhat unusual" concerning her future plans.<sup>136</sup>

In asking this question, she obviously referenced the unusual decision that she had made in England when she married Gabriel Piozzi. She thought that the 'rights of humanity' should guarantee a woman's right to choose her own husband, and not have one designated by custom or class. She asked Prince Ventimiglia what would become of this young girl if she made the same choice as she had and found a man below her station. Here she referred to her second marriage to a man of lower rank. She also wished to understand what would happen if the girl fled her native Sicily with such a man in order to escape her social expectations. He replied quite firmly that: "nothing in the world would come of it." The girl "would immediately be at liberty again," and the man would

be put to death. Unlike when Hester and Gabriel Piozzi left England on their Grand Tour, the girl and her lover could not escape. If they did flee together, her “folly” would not financially “benefit” the man’s family because her “estate would immediately” pass legally “to the next heir.” The prince believed that widespread knowledge of these consequences kept men of “inferior rank” in Sicily from setting their lives “to hazard for the sake of a frolic.” In his opinion, the girl should “be once legally married to a man every way her equal” in order to find a fully gratifying, “personal attachment.”<sup>137</sup> Apparently, this was the legitimate and socially sanctioned way for her to pursue love. It was also evident to the prince that it was not the Sicilian woman’s right to chose a man equal to her social status; it was her family’s right and duty.

Here, her interest in the young Sicilian girl sheds light upon how Piozzi’s gender affected the ways in which she pursued information concerning Naples. Her own life experiences obviously guided the types of questions that she pursued regarding women of other cultures. When she had considered the topics of religion and politics, the traveler did not truly ask many questions. She confidently believed that the southern character determined Neapolitan social customs, and followed her assumptions to their logical ends. The people of Naples were simplistic, irrational and exotic. The girl’s story instead represented an opportunity through which Piozzi could further synthesize her own choices through cross-cultural comparison. The traveler, like the young girl, was a member of the upper classes whose family had chosen her first husband and her life path. The prince made it clear that the young Sicilian girl’s future did not lie in her own hands. She did not have the right to choose for herself. The Englishwoman’s experiences and their repercussions guided the questions that she asked Prince Ventimiglia. This was one

of the most striking instances in the journal regarding Italian women for it pointed to the root of Hester Piozzi's divergence as a Grand Tourist and author. Her interest in women's lives provided her with a channel into Neapolitan society. Instead of assuming that all southern Italians bore the same mindset and lived amidst identical circumstances, she began to discern the details of their lives, particularly if they were women.

Unlike many other Grand Tourists of her time, Hester Piozzi represented femininity in a complex manner. Occasionally her reflections on southern women served to show the exotic in Naples, yet these instances were anomalous. The majority of the passages in her journal relating to women served to investigate their lives more fully. Here, instead of merely applying her own preconceived notions of southernness to them, Piozzi sought out examples of the rights, roles, and restrictions that defined their place within Neapolitan culture. When Hester Piozzi married her second husband and left England, she broke through the restrictions that had guided her early life. She also sacrificed the respect of her friends and family. Dr. Johnson admonished her that "she had indeed "abandoned [her] children and...religion." She had "forfeited [her] Fame and...country" through the folly of her actions."<sup>138</sup> With this choice, she separated herself from her own society and became exotic in a sense. This allowed her to find common ground between herself and the Neapolitan women whom she encountered. With this connection, the traveler moved beyond merely viewing them as two-dimensional spectacles and examples of the exotic abroad. Essentially, Hester Piozzi engaged her own gendered concerns with theirs; she identified with their stories and their dilemmas. In doing so, she created a bridge between her travel account and their lives. This

connection transcended the many late eighteenth-century romantic illustrations of femininity in the travel genre and created another version of femininity more grounded in the realities of their lives. Through Italian women, Hester Piozzi found routes to a more comprehensive understanding of Neapolitan society. In the process, she muddied the line between northerners and southerners, and succeeded in finally seeing one aspect of southern Italian society as more than simply reflective of a generic character determined by climate.

## CONCLUSIONS

During the second half of the eighteenth century many northern European travelers flocked to southern Italy seeking a myriad of things. Some came in order to see the bustling metropolis, others to visit the ruins that had recently been unearthed, and still others arrived simply order to experience the exotic Italian south. They came for varying reasons, yet were similar in that most kept travel diaries and published them for the benefit of their countrymen and women after returning home. At the end of her stay in Naples, Hester Piozzi made a judgment about these authors and their writings. She wrote in her journal that “it is vain to read” the work of a traveler “without candour.” A reader, she thought, “might as well hope to get a just view of nature by looking through” colored glass “as to gain a true account of foreign countries by turning over pages dictated by prejudice.” Personally, she believed that her admiration of Naples had developed unbiased by intimate attachments to friends in the city, or by any “particular pursuit” which had led her there.” Naples, “dear delightful Naples,” was amazing in and of itself.<sup>139</sup>

What Piozzi either failed to consciously recognize or kept from her readers were the underlying reasons for her attachment to the city. The contemporary northern European fascination with regional character, coupled with the discoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeii and the existence of live volcanoes drew travelers like her to



the Italian south. Female travelers, in particular, felt its lure because of the reputation it held as a passionate center of transgression, symbolized by Mt. Vesuvius. Piozzi was no exception. She, like Lady Webster and Madame de Stael, felt confined by the social expectations placed upon her in her home country. She chose to break through them, marrying for her own happiness instead of familial obligations and expectations. Entering Naples, the famed southern city, represented a validation of her own transgressions. Consequently, while experiencing this personal bond with Naples' regional reputation, she placed her own constructions of passion, irrationality and danger onto the landscape and the people, predetermining many of her experiences and impressions before she ever entered the city.

The chapter on Naples is one of the most striking examples in the journal of how class, nationality and gender all took part in fashioning Hester Piozzi's experiences abroad. All of these factors drew her to the city and influenced many of her observations and reflections, yet her gendered experiences in England would also bring her closer to the Neapolitan women, shedding light upon the common ground that existed between them. Ultimately, this factor would complicate her image of southern Italians and produce a more nuanced discussion of Neapolitan class, gender, and society. When she engaged with the women's stories, Hester Piozzi was able to see past simple stereotypes and into the complicated nature of Neapolitan society. In the process, she also expressed her own frustration with the social limitations placed on women, both Italian and English alike.

While abroad, Hester Piozzi also came to realize her most auspicious goal; she began to write the travel journal that would become her most widely celebrated published

work. *Observations and Reflections* was widely read in England after its publication in 1789. Through it, she succeeded in expressing her views on gender and society to the wider English public, subtly questioning and subverting the established norms for the sexes. Piozzi's infamy in both literary circles and the English press gained her an audience. She did not waste that attention, but instead used it to enter the public discussion of travel and culture, making her voice known.

In the end, Piozzi did not reach her goal of being an unprejudiced traveler, yet she never could have. Many of the complicated webs of influence that affected not only her life, but also the lives of all travelers, went unrecognized. Significantly, she had discerned how gender influenced the choices that she could make and the paths that she could pursue as a woman. Because of this self-consciousness, she was able to appreciate the links that bound her life to the lives of Neapolitan and southern Italian women and move beyond her national and class-based cultural biases.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> W. E. Mead, *The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1972): ix.
- <sup>2</sup> Brian Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour* (New York, 2001).
- <sup>3</sup> Marie E. McAllister, *Woman on the Journey: Eighteenth-century British Women's Travel in Fact and Fiction* (Ann Arbor, 1988): 165.
- <sup>4</sup> McAllister, *Women on the Journey*, xi.
- <sup>5</sup> Hester Lynch Piozzi MS Ry. 590.445, letters to John Salusbury Piozzi Salusbury, 1807-21, quoted from William McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi: Portrait of a Literary Woman* (Chapel Hill, 1985).
- <sup>6</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 5.
- <sup>7</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 7.
- <sup>8</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 7.
- <sup>9</sup> Bonnie E. Smith, *Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700* (Lexington, 1989): 75-6. See also Joel Schwartz, *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Chicago, 1984); Margaret Hunt, Margaret Jacob, Phyllis Mack and Ruth Perry, *Women and the Enlightenment* (New York, 1984); Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, 1990).
- <sup>10</sup> Hannah More, for example, stressed this in *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*. She stated that the “bent” of ladies “instruction should be” that of shaping “daughters, wives, mothers and mistresses of families.” See Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (Newark, 1806) quoted in McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 20.
- <sup>11</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 5.
- <sup>12</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 20.
- <sup>13</sup> For more on the content of male education see Christopher Hibbert, *The English* (New York., 1987) and H. T. Dickenson, ed., *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Malden., 2002): 311-328.
- <sup>14</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi* 19.
- <sup>15</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 4.
- <sup>16</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozz*, 6.
- <sup>17</sup> Mary Hyde, *The Thrales of Streatham Park* (Cambridge, 1977): 4.
- <sup>18</sup> Hyde, *The Thrales of Streatham Park*, 6.
- <sup>19</sup> Recent works on the English Gentry during the eighteenth century H. T. Dickenson, ed., *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Malden., 2002): 158-171; F. M. L. Thompson, *Gentrification and the Enterprise Culture: Britain 1780-1980* (New York, 2001); John Habbakuk, *Marriage, Debt, and the Estates System: English Landownership 1650-1950* (New York, 1994); Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (Oxford, 1984).
- <sup>20</sup> Hyde, *The Thrales of Streatham Park*, 7.
- <sup>21</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 18.
- <sup>22</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 18.
- <sup>23</sup> Hyde, *The Thrales of Streatham Park*, 12.
- <sup>24</sup> Hyde, *The Thrales of Streatham Park*, 17.
- <sup>25</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 26.
- <sup>26</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 27.
- <sup>27</sup> Among the upper classes, marriage was important for the transferal of property and also to produce heirs. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries birth rates fell, making it more important towards the end of the century to produce more children. For more information on marriage in the eighteenth century among the gentry and aristocracy see H. T. Dickinson, ed., *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Malden, 2002); Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives*

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in *Georgian England* (New Haven, 1998); Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850: The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (New York, 1998).

<sup>28</sup> Hyde, *The Thrales of Streatham Park*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Recent works concerning Samuel Johnson include Lawrence Lipking, *Samuel Johnson: The Life of an Author* (Cambridge, 1998); Philip Smallwood, ed., *Johnson Re-Visioned: Looking Before and After* (Lewisburg, 2001); Nicholas Hudson, *Samuel Johnson and the Making of Modern England* (Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 24.

<sup>31</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 23.

<sup>32</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 24.

<sup>33</sup> Throughout eighteenth-century Europe, salons were important gatherings that helped to promote social change. Instead of discussing new political, philosophical, literary, or scientific discoveries and ideas in court, people met instead in the homes of wealthy women, the salonieres. Many historians believe that the salons encouraged social change among women and the middle classes. See Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of Their Own Volume II* (New York, 2000): 104; Smith, *Changing Lives* (Lexington, 1989): 77-79.

<sup>34</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> The Bluestockings were a group of intellectual women led by Elizabeth Montagu in late eighteenth-century England. Although their meetings were similar to salons, they differed due to their implicitly female orientation. Men were invited, yet women formed the heart of the group. All of the members rejected the common lifestyle of upper-class English women; what they viewed as a life of uselessness. Fanny Burney, the novelist and Hannah More were members. Although she had much in common with the Bluestockings, Thrale never truly became a member of their circle. See McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 32; Smith, *Changing Lives*, 79; Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1990).

<sup>36</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 34.

<sup>37</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 34.

<sup>38</sup> Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Los Angeles, 2002): 24.

<sup>39</sup> Cindy McCreery, *Lewd and Notorious: Female Transgression in the 18th Century* (Michigan, 2003): 121.

<sup>40</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 37.

<sup>41</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 36.

<sup>42</sup> Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, *The Piozzi Letters* (Newark, 1989): 101.

<sup>43</sup> McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi*, 34.

<sup>44</sup> Bloom, *The Piozzi Letters*, 75.

<sup>45</sup> Hester Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy and Germany* (Ann Arbor, 1967): 223-24.

<sup>46</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 222.

<sup>47</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 222.

<sup>48</sup> Maura O'Connor, *The Romance of Italy and the English Political Imagination* (New York, 1998): 4.

<sup>49</sup> Recent works that discuss enlightenment philosophers' constructed images of 'northernness' and 'southernness' include the Chloe Chard and Helen Langdon, eds., *Transports: travel, pleasure, and imaginative geography, 1600-1830* (New Haven, 1996): 75-149; Amanda Gilroy, ed., *Romantic Geographies: Discourses of Travel 1775-1844* (New York, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> In order to understand the representations of Vesuvius as a symbol of southern Italian character, it is important to first understand how and why this northern European imaginary conception of Italy developed. One of the fundamental factors was a shift in the economic dynamic of early modern Europe. Roughly from the period of the Renaissance until the sixteenth century, the major city-states of Italy had been the centers of European economics and culture. Italy's geographical position as a peninsula that jut into the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, the center of overseas trade at the time, placed it in an advantageous economic position. Yet since the 1600's, Holland, England and France had risen in political and economic superiority over the former Mediterranean powerhouse.<sup>50</sup> This transition was based upon the growing

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importance of transatlantic trade after the discovery of the “New World” in the late fifteenth century. As the center of commercial activity shifted from the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic in the seventeenth century, Italy’s position on the international scene changed dramatically. Although it maintained a reputation as an intellectual and cultural capital, its contemporary economic and political supremacy on the world stage shifted to the newly emerging powers, the formerly barbarous northerners. England, in particular, took on the leading economic role in the transatlantic scene during the decades following the Seven Years War, (1756-1763). It now controlled many imperial trade routes not only in the “New World,” but also in India. One of the results of this victory was that economic success increased the number of people from diverse classes able to travel to the continent. In turn, this diversification of tourists helped to change the purpose of travel. Many more people began to travel, including wealthy women in search of an escape from their domestic situations and members of the middle class. This altered the nature of travel writing from a genre devoted to conveying the national benefits of sending aristocratic sons abroad for education to a more self-conscious exploration of the self-identity of the traveler. These men and women considered their privileged cultural and economic roles as English citizens to be a very important aspect of their self-identity. These roles manifested themselves in the ways that they began to portray Italians, in opposition to their own cultural, political and economic situations at home. See Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Los Angeles, 2002): 14-15; O’Connor, *Romance of Italy*, 15; H. T. Dickinson, ed., *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Malden, 2002): 431-446; John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State 1688-1783* (London, 1989).

<sup>51</sup> Moe, *View from Vesuvius*, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Fernand Braudel. *L’Italia fuori d’Italia: Due secoli e tre Italie* (Paris, 1991).

<sup>53</sup> On the Italian economic situation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Peter Earle, ed., *Essays in Economic History 1500-1800* (Oxford, 1974): 185-198; John Marino, *Pastoral Economics in the Kingdom of Naples* (Baltimore, 1988); Stuart Woolf, *The Poor in Western Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London, 1986): 47-75.

<sup>54</sup> Louis Turner and John Ash, *The Golden Hordes: International Tourism and the Pleasure Periphery* (New York, 1976): 31. For more information concerning the debate over eighteenth-century Italian artwork in northern Europe see Shearer West, ed., *Italian Culture in Northern Europe in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1999): 1-19.

<sup>55</sup> Chard and Langdon eds., *Transports*, 92.

<sup>56</sup> Chard and Langdon eds., *Transports* 92.

<sup>57</sup> Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*. (New York, 1989): 231. It has also been noted by Clare Brant that these categories were flexible depending upon the nation visited and nationality of the visitor. The English, for example, when visiting Sweden, viewed themselves as being the more ‘southern’ culture. For a discussion of the relativity of the north/south dichotomy depending upon the global positioning of the country see Amanda Gilroy, ed., *Romantic Geographies: Discourses of Travel 1775-1844* (New York, 2000): 129-149.

<sup>58</sup> Gilroy, ed., *Romantic Geographies*, 231-232.

<sup>59</sup> Gilroy, ed., *Romantic Geographies*, 234.

<sup>60</sup> Gilroy, ed., *Romantic Geographies*, 234.

<sup>61</sup> Moe, *View from Vesuvius*, 24.

<sup>62</sup> Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 233.

<sup>63</sup> Jeremy Black, *The British and the Grand Tour* (Dover, 1985): 5.

<sup>64</sup> According to Frank M. Turner, Europeans confronted a growing need to look for alternative cultural roots, explanations, and models that diverged from their newly problematized Roman/Christian tradition in the wake of the Enlightenment. In the second half of the eighteenth century, they began to posit this need upon the classical tradition that had been largely considered extraneous until that point. Because of the divergence between Christian/Roman and Greek culture, Europeans could posit whatever theoretical framework they needed onto this tradition. For more information see Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, 1981): 2.

<sup>65</sup> After 1750, English, French, and German interest in southern Italy increased due to the appeal of antiquity. What these northern Europeans found in southern Italy was a region that had lost its independence in 1503 and had since been dominated by the Spanish and Austrian empires. The Kingdom of

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Two Sicilies was a creation of the Spanish who regained control of the region under Philip V. In itself, the Kingdom of Two Sicilies, especially its capital, Naples, provided a generic conceptual space for northern Europeans, which merged mainland southern Italy and Sicily. This led to a general confusion between two unique places. The discovery of classical ruins on both the mainland and the island also helped to fuse the two places in the minds of northerners.

<sup>66</sup> Moe, *View from Vesuvius*, 42-3.

<sup>67</sup> Moe, *View from Vesuvius*, 45.

<sup>68</sup> Stephen Daniels, *Joseph Wright* (Princeton, 1999): 64.

<sup>69</sup> Daniels, *Joseph Wright*, 64.

<sup>70</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 253.

<sup>71</sup> O'Connor, *The Romance of Italy*, 16.

<sup>72</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 252.

<sup>73</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 260.

<sup>74</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 16.

<sup>75</sup> Chard and Langdon, eds., *Transports*, 125.

<sup>76</sup> It is significant that he painted almost all of his thirty views of it after he returned to England.

See Daniels, *Joseph Wright*, 64.

<sup>77</sup> William Hamilton, *Campi Phlegraei*, 35. Quoted from Judy Egerton, *Wright of Derby* (New York, 1990): 174.

<sup>78</sup> Egerton, *Wright of Derby*, 175.

<sup>79</sup> Brian Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour: British Women in Pursuit of Enlightenment and Adventure in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York, 2001): 96.

<sup>80</sup> Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour*, 97.

<sup>81</sup> Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour*, 111.

<sup>82</sup> Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour*, 118.

<sup>83</sup> Chard and Langdon, eds., *Transports*, 132.

<sup>84</sup> Madame De Stael, *Corrine, or Italy* (New York, 1998): 225.

<sup>85</sup> De Stael, *Corrine*, 226.

<sup>86</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 223.

<sup>87</sup> De Stael, *Corrine*, 226.

<sup>88</sup> De Stael, *Corrine*, 234.

<sup>89</sup> De Stael, *Corrine*, 236.

<sup>90</sup> Chard and Langdon, eds., *Transports*, 119.

<sup>91</sup> Chard and Langdon, eds., *Transports*, 119.

<sup>92</sup> Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey Through France, Italy and Germany* (Ann Arbor, 1967): 237.

<sup>93</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 255.

<sup>94</sup> Diana Webb, *Patrons and Defenders: The Saints in the Italian City-States* (New York, 1996): 4.

<sup>95</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 230-31.

<sup>96</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 254.

<sup>97</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 255.

<sup>98</sup> Jeremy Black, *The British and the Grand Tour* (London, 1985): 191-192.

<sup>99</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 229.

<sup>100</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 231.

<sup>101</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 260.

<sup>102</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 256.

<sup>103</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 225.

<sup>104</sup> Tommaso Astarita, *The Continuity of Feudal Power* (Cambridge, 1992); Girolamo Imbruglia, *Naples in the Eighteenth Century: The Birth and Death of a Nation State* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>105</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 234. For a more detailed discussion of Masaniello's revolt see Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy* (New York, 1987): 191-206.

<sup>106</sup> Anthony Pagdon, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination* (New Haven, 1990): 65.

<sup>107</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 234.

<sup>16</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 230.

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- <sup>109</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 233.
- <sup>110</sup> Black, *The British and the Grand Tour*, 178.
- <sup>111</sup> Black, *The British and the Grand Tour*, 181.
- <sup>112</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 234-35.
- <sup>113</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 235.
- <sup>114</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 235.
- <sup>115</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 235.
- <sup>31</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 231.
- <sup>117</sup> Imbruglia, *Naples in the Eighteenth Century*, 73.
- <sup>118</sup> Gregory Hanlon, *Early Modern Italy, 1550-1800* (New York, 2000): 340.
- <sup>119</sup> Hanlon, *Early Modern Italy*, 341.
- <sup>120</sup> King Charles departed for Spain in 1759, leaving behind a Coniglio di Reggenza (Council of Regency) to rule for his young son Ferdinand IV until he was old enough to assume power. He did so in 1767. See Imbruglia, *Naples in the Eighteenth Century*, 106.
- <sup>121</sup> Imbruglia, *Naples in the Eighteenth Century*, 114.
- <sup>122</sup> Imbruglia, *Naples in the Eighteenth Century*, 114.
- <sup>123</sup> Imbruglia, *Naples in the Eighteenth Century*, 114.
- <sup>124</sup> 'Romanticism: 2. Aesthetics', *The Grove Dictionary of Art Online*, (Oxford University Press, Accessed [25, April, 2004 ]) <<http://www.groveart.com>>
- <sup>125</sup> Female writers of the eighteenth century who pushed for equal female civic rights, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, understood that women had to take on the socially assigned, masculine qualities in order to prove their abilities to reason and gain the rights to liberty and equality. Wollstonecraft, for example, tried to accomplish this by criticizing the customs of women in foreign countries and separating them from herself. Lady Mary Wortley Montague, on the other hand, redefined the masculine, Orientalist discourse of Ottoman women in order to illustrate her inferior position at home in relation to what she believed to be the superior status of the foreign women. For a discussion of Wollstonecraft's articulation of these themes and a relation of eighteenth-century feminism to the philosophical theories behind the Enlightenment see Felicity A. Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* (Baltimore: 1995): 192-210.
- <sup>126</sup> Amanda Gilroy, ed., *Romantic Geographies: Discourses of Travel 1775-1844*. (New York, 2000): 137.
- <sup>127</sup> Gilroy, ed., *Romantic Geographies*, 138.
- <sup>128</sup> Chloe Chard, "Grand and Ghostly Tours: The Topography of Memory," *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 31 (Autumn, 1997): 101.
- <sup>129</sup> Patrick Brydone, *A Tour through Sicily and Malta in a Series of Letters to William Beckford* (New-York, 1813).
- <sup>130</sup> Brydone's description of his attraction to the nuns differed from other overtly sexual descriptions of Italian women such as the ones found in the travel journal of James Boswell. While in Naples, Boswell said that he found the "Neapolitan ladies" resembled "country chamber-maids." He went on to describe his "sensual relaxations" which entailed him running "after girls without restraint." Apparently Boswell found his blood to be inflamed by the "burning climate" which made his passions violent. In his overt sexual gestures, I would argue that Boswell relates his actions to the climate in and therefore regional character of southern Italy. Boswell does not see mysterious sexuality in the women, but instead attributes their sexuality and his to the climate, which was thought at the time to determine regional characteristics. Thus, in the sensuous south, Brydone identifies women as bastions of the exotic, while Boswell partakes in exotic behavior with women. Significantly, in both, the Italian women are voiceless. James Boswell, *Boswell on the Grand Tour* (New York, 1953): 5-6. For a discussion of climate in the eighteenth century, see Chloe Chard and Helen Langdon eds., *Transports: travel, pleasure, and imaginative geography, 1600-1830* (New Haven, 1996):75-116.
- <sup>131</sup> It is interesting to note that Piozzi referenced Brydone, showing that she had probably read his travel journal. Yet her allusion to him concerned his accounts of the eruptions of Mt. Etna, not the Sicilian nuns. Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 247.
- <sup>132</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 237.
- <sup>133</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 237.

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<sup>134</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 245.

<sup>135</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 245-6.

<sup>136</sup> Female writers of the eighteenth century who pushed for equal female civic rights, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, understood that women had to take on the socially assigned, masculine qualities in order to prove their abilities to reason and gain the rights to liberty and equality. Wollstonecraft, for example, tried to accomplish this by criticizing the customs of women in foreign countries and separating them from herself. Lady Mary Wortley Montague, on the other hand, redefined the masculine, Orientalist discourse of Ottoman women in order to illustrate her inferior position at home in relation to what she believed to be the superior status of the foreign women. For a discussion of Wollstonecraft's articulation of these themes and a relation of eighteenth-century feminism to the philosophical theories behind the Enlightenment see Felicity A. Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* (Baltimore, 1995): 192-210.

<sup>137</sup> Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections*, 248.

<sup>138</sup> William McCarthy, *Hester Thrale Piozzi: Portrait of a Literary Woman* (Chapel Hill, 1985): 37.

<sup>139</sup> Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey throughout France, Italy and Germany* (Ann Arbor, 1967): 265.



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