

# Time to be wiser; Hester Thrale Piozzi's Elderly Life-Writing

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## Presentation Description:

This presentation examines the unpublished senior life-writing of the formidable eighteenth-century author, Hester Thrale Piozzi. Piozzi's commentary about her poetry challenges the researcher to analyse the relationship between reminiscence and performance in the autobiographical writing of old age.

## Abstract:

Hester Thrale Piozzi is known by most literary scholars of the eighteenth-century as the biographer of the renowned Samuel Johnson, and as a literary salon hostess. Piozzi, like many 'eighteenth-century' female writers, lived well into the nineteenth-century, making her a part of the first mass of female authors to survive to an advanced age. In doing so, "she encountered a new set of complicated prejudices for which [she] was largely unprepared" (Looser). This presentation will present my research findings about Piozziana, a manuscript collection Piozzi compiled in her seventies, in light of these complications. In examining Piozziana in the context of Piozzi's later old age, I argue that the process of its composition helped her to cope with being thwarted by the literary marketplace due to her age.

Piozzianna became a tool for a reformulation of the self, through which Piozzi transitioned thinking of herself as an author, to thinking of herself as the executor of her literary legacy. This transition inspired her to seek out influential people to make her work live on after her.

I will conclude with an analysis of Piozzi's commentary about her own poetry. In it, she alternates between moments of extreme self-consciousness, obvious false modesty, and direct self-praise. While these episodes have been depicted as demonstrations of Piozzi's "limited self-awareness" (Spacks), I will show how Piozzi's offhand commentary demonstrates her grappling with her artistic legacy.

## References/Acknowledgments:

I would like to thank Dr. Betty Schellenberg for her unparalleled feedback and support.

Featured images: [Zoffany, Johann. Portrait of Mrs. Thrale in a yellow dress at a writing table. Thrale.com.](#)

[Hester Lynch Piozzi \(née Salusbury, later Mrs Thrale\). 1785–1786. National Portrait Gallery, NPG4942.](#)

Piozzi, Hester Lynch. "Poems and little characters, anecdotes etc." 1810–1814. Houghton MS Eng 1280, seqs. 8–9 and 418–419. Houghton Library, Harvard University. Harvard Library Viewer.