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Michael John Franklin, *Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi* (University of Wales Press: Cardiff, 2020), ISBN 978-1-78683-540-6; e-ISBN 978-1-7860541-3; xii+195pp.

Depending on how one defines 'of Wales', opinions may be divided on whether the right place for this volume on Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi is the *Writers of Wales* series. There is no doubt, however, that a volume acknowledging the Welsh dimension of this pioneering writer, poet, business woman and mother has long been overdue, or that Michael John Franklin has written a beautiful and incisive yet rich account of the life, literary connections and varied oeuvre of the 'distinguished authoress, and well known ... friend of Johnson',¹ the only modern woman important enough to be included in Wales's second national biography in 1836.

Based on HLTP's extensive published autobiographical writings, collections of letters, and literary works, this volume allows fascinating insights into the inner life of a precocious teenager, wife, mother and widow in later Hanoverian Britain, but also into the networks, strategies and working practices of female intellectuals of the time. Franklin skilfully interweaves biographical, political and social detail with analyses of HLTP's poetry and political writing, translations and travel descriptions, and attempts at history and lexicography, demonstrating how they arose from as much as they express the experiences of an educated woman and mother restricted by the mores of Georgian society, and suffering from the resultant self-censorship. By including Piozzi's rich commentary on wider society – from Wilkite politics in the 1760s and 'Tahitian' fashion, to the Gordon Riots and war horrors of Brescia in Lombardy as recollected by a child – as well as on members of her extensive social networks, this book presents insights from multiple new angles. Eight chapters follow HLTP's life from child and 'bartered bride' to mother- and wifehood, from Welsh aristocratic descent to a life lived to the full in England, and a return to her native north Wales – where she settled with her second husband – and a death in Bath in 1820.

Chapters 1 and 2 record Hester Lynch's Welsh roots, and birth at Bodfel Hall, Pen Llŷn, in 1741, daughter of cousins Hester Maria and 'proud and restless' John Salusbury, before charting a London and Hertfordshire childhood marked by long absences of her father, and learning to satisfy the needs of those on whose patronage the family depended, well on her way to becoming the 'bartered bride' whose main value lay in securing a husband who would revive family fortune. Possessed of restless energy and intellectual hunger, the precocious teenager impresses by translating French and Spanish poetry and composing English odes before she is eighteen, and publishing well-received political commentary in *St James's Chronicle* and *Political Controversy* before she is twenty-one.

By October 1763 Hester was married to Henry Thrale, the rich Southwark brewer whose business she would help run and whose twelve children she would bear, and had struck up the life-long friendship with (or perhaps become the therapist of) Samuel Johnson. The middle chapters 3 to 5 shine and dazzle with detail and insight, charting the complicated workings of the mainly female and literary networks of Hester Thrale at Southwark and later Streatham Park mansion, her relationship with Johnson and her forgotten aptitude for business and finance, applied for the benefit of her surviving daughters before and after the death of their father. We learn of her connections with 'dear friend' Sarah Siddons, with writers like Anna Seward, Frances Burney, Hannah More and Helen Maria Williams, of Elizabeth Montagu as businesswoman, and of swords crossed with Mary Wollstonecraft. In all this, the private pain of being wife to a philandering brewer with political aspirations, and confidante to the sometimes depressed Samuel 'the great Cham' Johnson, while

¹ Robert Williams, *A Biographical Sketch of some of the most eminent individuals which the Principality of Wales has produced since the Reformation* (London, 1836), p. 56, 'Hester Lynch Piozzi'.

suffering 12 pregnancies, raising children and losing them young, is not forgotten. Again, Franklin enables us to experience the expectations, educational principles, joys and heartbreaks of Hanoverian womanhood by giving us Hester's voice, complemented with references to contemporary brewing lore, medical practice and educational principles.

The final chapters 6 to 8 chronicle the difficulties of widowhood, and the scandal caused by Hester's marriage to music teacher and Roman Catholic Gabriel Piozzi, following her European travels of 1784 to 1787, and her relocation 'home' to north Wales from 1792. They rightly focus on her writing, her political convictions, and her self-perception as a 'warm Welsh woman'. The sharp foci of chapter 6 are her biography and letters of Samuel Johnston (which laid the groundwork for the Welsh Victorian obsession with her), her fascinating travel observations (like others comparing alpine and rural Europe to Wales), and her published travel writing (pp. 96–103). They cemented her name as a successful author who shocked critics with her new 'intimate and conversational style [and] feminine authorial persona' (p. 96). As chapters 7 and 8 move into the 1790s, new social circles in north Wales, where the couple built 'Brynbella' [sic] between 1792 and 1797 are explored, and Franklin reminds us of her work as Loyalist balladeer, pamphleteer and lexicographer. These final chapters are shot through with the polarised and war-torn politics of the 1790s, where one is not surprised to find references to the paternalism and riots of hungry 1795 side by side with comments on Edmund Burke and Thomas Moore. Recording the death of her beloved Gabriel in 1809, HLP closed her *Thraliana* for the last time and retired to Bath, where she herself died in 1820, having celebrated her seventy-ninth birthday with 600 guests. A Hanoverian life lived to the full.

Franklin appears more focused on English literary and social networks, and rightly so, since they largely constituted HLP's intellectual environment. However, given the context of the *Writers of Wales* series, it is a pity that, apart from two short references to poetry volumes, there is little engagement with recent literature on late Hanoverian Wales. The work of Hywel M. Davies and John Barrell, and other volumes in the *Wales and the French Revolution* series would have enriched our understanding of radical and Loyalist Wales. The *Chester Chronicle* was indeed Jacobin, so much so that editor John Cowdroy published the death threat sent to him as 'rueful Jacobin' in November 1794, and the translator of Hannah More's *Village Politics* into Welsh as *Llywodraeth yn y Llan* was the Caerwys schoolmaster Edward Barnes. I am missing some publications on HLP I would have expected, including Jon Mee's recent chapter on her self-professed identity as a 'good Cambrio-Briton'.² However, that does not detract from the rich detail and enjoyment to be derived from this volume, by gender historians and historians of later Hanoverian politics and society, as much as by those interested in the poetry, prose and life story of Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi.

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² Jon Mee, "A good Cambrio-Briton": Hester Thrale Piozzi, Helen Maria Williams, and the Welsh sublime in the 1790s', in Mary-Ann Constantine and Dafydd Johnston (eds), *Footsteps of Liberty and Revolt: Essays on Wales and the French Revolution* (Cardiff, 2013), pp. 211–28; See also William McCarthy, 'The Repression of Hester Lynch Piozzi; or, How We Forgot a Revolution in Authorship', *Modern Language Studies*, 18/1 'Making and Rethinking the Canon: The Eighteenth Century' (1988), 99–111.