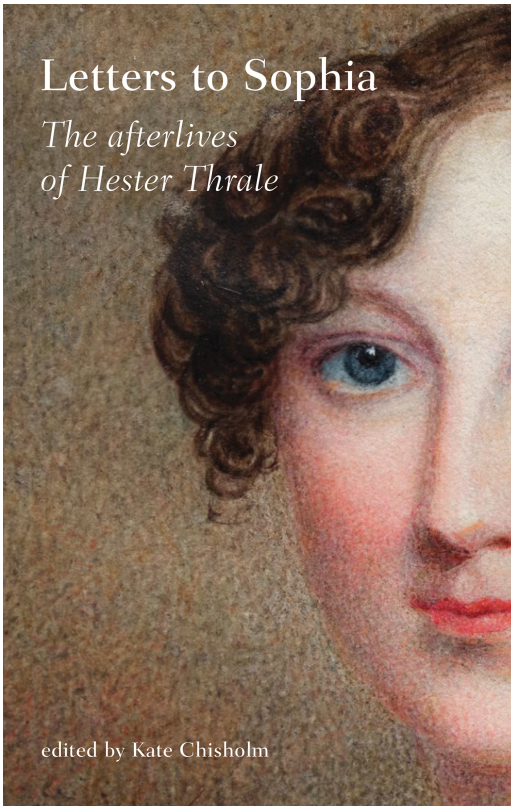
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Letters to Sophia

The Afterlives of Hester Thrale

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Loren Rothschild

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- Newly discovered letters
- New insights into Hester Thrale, a key figure in the Georgian world, friend of Dr Samuel Johnson and Sarah Siddons
- A series of 16 miniatures by Sophia Thrale Hoare published for the first time
- Commentary on the latest books, plays, actors and actresses, and singers
- Political gossip from the period
- How the Napoleonic wars were affecting local communities, and in Italy
- A woman's fight for independence in the early nineteenth century

The chance discovery of letters from Hester Thrale (1741–1821) to her daughter Sophia provides an opportunity to rethink our understanding of one of the key people in the life of the dictionary-maker and moralist Dr Samuel Johnson. Much-maligned after the death of her first husband for her decision to marry Gabriel Piozzi, an Italian musician and Catholic, Hester has often been portrayed as cold-hearted and lacking in the essentials of motherhood. These letters shed new light on her relations with her four surviving daughters (she gave birth to 12 children in 14 years). They also reveal her desire for recognition as a scholar and poet, and her keen awareness of her shortcomings. They provide a fascinating portrait of a complex woman, determining her independence and that of her daughters, in spite of family tragedy and vicious criticism in the press.

Kate Chisholm is the author of *Fanny Burney: Her Life and Wits* and *Wives: Dr Johnson in the Company of Women*. She has written biographical essays on the Burney family for *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, on Mary Wollstonecraft for *Mary Wollstonecraft in Context* and on her family's connection with India for *The Last Bungalow: Writings from Allahabad*. A former fellow of the Royal Literary Fund, she was the radio critic of *The Spectator* for 13 years.







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