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## TWO NOTES ON GIUSEPPE BARETTI IN ENGLAND

## I. BARETTI AND BOSWELL

Ever since its first publication in 1791, Boswell's *Life of Johnson* has been recognized as one of the most readable and engaging biographies in the English language. But whereas generations of readers have taken delight in the brilliantly drawn portrait of the great «dictator» of English letters, scholars of the period have found Boswell's work an invaluable mine of information about all sorts of major and minor figures that formed Johnson's *entourage* — perhaps the most homogeneous intellectual society England has ever known; and generations of editors of the *Life* have shed new light on that fascinating circle of 18th Century worthies. It is therefore natural that Giuseppe Baretti, who spent a considerable part of his adult life in England<sup>1</sup> and considered himself one of Johnson's oldest friends<sup>2</sup>, should from time to time appear in Boswell's pages. Indeed, like Boswell, Baretti seems to have kept a record (no doubt far less systematic than Boswell's) of Johnson's sayings<sup>3</sup>, though whether he meant

<sup>1</sup> From 1751 till 1760 and again from 1766 (with brief interruptions) till his death in 1789.

<sup>2</sup> They had met in 1753 or 1754, as appears from Johnson's own statement during the trial of Baretti for manslaughter in 1769. Johnson's deposition is reproduced in D. C. Gallup: *Giuseppe Baretti's Work in England*, Yale Ph. D. thesis, 1939, Microfilm in the British Museum; p. 210. cf. also note below. According to Gallup, Baretti met Johnson through Mrs. Lennox, who had engaged Baretti as an Italian teacher and to help her with the Italian parts of her *Shakespeare Illustrated*, 3 vols., London, 1753-4.

<sup>3</sup> Reported by Mrs. Thrale on 26 November 1777 «After my coming to London [Johnson is giving Mrs. Thrale advice about a possible biography she might want to write of him] you will be at a Loss again; though Jack Hawkesworth and Baretti both, with whom I lived quite familiarly, can tell pretty nearly all my adventures from the year 1753... But for a Johnsonsiana cried I [i.e. Mrs. Thrale] we will defy you at least; Boswell & Baretti & myself from Time to Time have a trick of writing down Anecdotes, Bons mots & c.» *Thraliana The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale 1776-1809*, 2 vols. ed. K. C. Balderston, Oxford, 1951, p. 173.

to publish them or not will forever remain unknown. Probably these notes perished together with much other invaluable material when Baretti's executors thought it the better part of valour to burn all his papers unread<sup>1</sup>. But the amazing thing is that Boswell should mention Baretti so seldom, considering that Johnson and Baretti were pretty close friends, at least until 1776, when Baretti left the Thrale household, where, on Johnson's recommendation, he had been engaged as Italian tutor to Mrs. Thrale's eldest daughter «Queeney». A more careful reading of such references as there are to Baretti in the *Life* will reveal that Boswell had very little sympathy for the voluble and somewhat exuberant Italian. This impression is confirmed by a more accurate study of the relationship between the two men, now made possible by the great wealth of material contained in Boswell's private papers, which are at present in the course of publication at Yale, under the supervision of Prof. F. A. Pottle.

The two men met for the first time in Venice on 3 July 1765. James Boswell, still a raw youth of twenty-five with no claim to fame (though this had not prevented him from forcing his attention on Rousseau and Voltaire the year before and was not to prevent him from doing the same with General Paoli in Corsica later in the same year) was on his way through Venice in the course of his Grand Tour. Exactly how he met Baretti is not clear, but in any case shyness in meeting people was not one of Boswell's failings. His annotation on this occasion is of the utmost brevity: «See Dominican's friend and Johnson's translator»<sup>2</sup>. Naturally the young Scotsman, who had met Johnson in London two years before and had been befriended by the great man<sup>3</sup>, was anxious to meet someone who had for many years lived on terms of great intimacy with his idol. Baretti, on the other hand, was in a very low state of mind after the suppression of his *Frusta Letteraria* by the Venetian authorities in January 1763<sup>4</sup>, and was on the

<sup>1</sup> cf. *ibid.* p. 747.

<sup>2</sup> *Boswell on the Grand Tour: Italy, Corsica and France* ed. F. Brady and F. A. Pottle, London, Heineman, 1955, p. 99. Baretti had translated Johnson's *Rasselas* into French. We should remember, however, that for this period we only have Boswell's memoranda, not his full Journal. cf. Pottle's introduction, pp. xxii-xxiii.

<sup>3</sup> cf. *Boswell's London Journal* ed. F. A. Pottle, London, Heineman, 1950, *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> cf. G. Baretti: *La Frusta Letteraria* a cura di L. Piccioni, Bari, Laterza, 1932, Vol. II, p. 430.

point of leaving Venice for his hide-out in Ancona, from where he was to direct his last venomous darts at his enemy Buonafede, before finally shaking the dust of his native country off his feet. We may therefore imagine with what pleasure he received the young Scotsman, who brought him news from his friend Johnson and the air of a literary world not oppressed by censorship and petty personal controversies. In fact Boswell records two further meetings with Baretti on 7 and 8 July:

«Monday 8 July; Yesterday morning came Baretti, Johnson's friend; curious Italian. Copy».

«Tuesday 9 July; Yesterday... Baretti's who showed you some letters of Johnson's; rich. Gave books. Was quite miserable, and said Devil had created us:

'Why not die like dog?' & c. Pitied him»<sup>1</sup>.

Fortunately a number of letters, including a copy of the only known letter from Baretti to Johnson, found among Boswell's papers and recently published<sup>2</sup> throw more light on Boswell's rather cryptic remarks.

The letters that Baretti showed Boswell on this occasion must have been the three that many years later Baretti himself was to publish in *The European Magazine* and that Boswell, in his *Life*, where he naturally reprinted them, defined «among the very best he ever wrote»<sup>3</sup>. And well might Boswell be pleased with such an unexpected find in Venice. The book that he received was Baretti's *Lettere Familiari*, which he did not find entirely to his liking. In the grave manner that Boswell occasionally liked to assume with people he considered below him

<sup>1</sup> *Boswell on the Grand Tour*, *op. cit.* pp. 103-4. The reference to «Why not die like a dog» is fully expanded in the *Life*, see G. B. Hill's edition revised by L. P. Powell, Oxford, 1934 vol. II, p. 8, where Boswell merely speaks of a «foreign friend of his». It is on this occasion that Boswell reports Baretti as saying; «I hate mankind for I think myself one of the best of them, and I know how bad I am», to which Johnson's reply was; «Sir, he must be very singular in his opinion, if he thinks himself one of the best of men, for none of his friends think him so».

<sup>2</sup> See R. Warnock: *Nuove Lettere inedite di Giuseppe Baretti in Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, Fasc. 393 (1954) pp. 73-87. What follows is in large part based on the material printed in this article.

<sup>3</sup> See *Life*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 361-6, pp. 369-71, pp. 380-2 and Boswell's own note on them. It is, of course, quite possible that Baretti showed Boswell some letters of Johnson's that he did not publish in later years and that were consequently lost.

in social standing, and also no doubt feeling that in one who had been honoured by Johnson's friendship levity was out of place, he wrote to Baretto from Siena on 12 September:

«I am obliged to you for your two Volumes of letters. I like you very much when you relate a fact, or give your opinion on a point of learning or of science; but your strokes of humour and agreeable trifling displeas me. If you can figure yourself dancing a hornpipe<sup>1</sup> you may have an idea how I am affected by your *light sallies of drollery*»<sup>2</sup>.

Altogether Boswell's attitude towards Baretto seems to have been rather cool and detached. They met another two times before Boswell's departure from Venice: on 11 July when they visited the church of Madonna dell'Orto, and on the following day when they were on the Rialto together<sup>3</sup>, but Baretto seems not to have sensed Boswell's somewhat condescending attitude towards him, though he was not only twenty-one years his senior, but also a well-known literary figure both in Italy and in England. This difference of age, experience and knowledge was however felt by Baretto who on 18 July, shortly before leaving for Bologna, where by an unlucky coincidence he failed to meet Boswell who was staying there on his way to Florence, wrote him a long fatherly epistle, advising him among other things to go on with his journal, adding (dare we say prophetically?).

«The day will come that you will be pleased to find an Account of your past thoughts and opinion of things»<sup>4</sup>.

Boswell, of course, needed little encouragement to go on with his voluminous journal, nor was Baretto alone in giving him this advice, for Johnson himself had already done so, and he was merely backing up Johnson's counsel, as he himself admits in a letter written to Johnson at this time, a copy of which he sent to Boswell, who in his methodical way preserved it among his countless other

<sup>1</sup> Baretto was rather fat.

<sup>2</sup> R. Warnock: *loc. cit.* p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> The references to these meetings are omitted from Pottle's edition of the *Tour*, but see Warnock, *ibid.* p. 74. Baretto refers to this meeting in his letter of 7 November, 1767, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> R. Warnock: *loc. cit.* p. 75.

papers<sup>1</sup>. Then after their abortive meeting in Bologna their paths separated, Baretto going to Ancona to write the last eight numbers of the *Frusta*, and Boswell to Florence and Siena (where he was at last to taste the delights of an «intrigue» with an Italian lady) and subsequently to Corsica. They did not meet again until the end of the year 1766, when both of them had returned to England.

I have dwelt at rather inordinate length on their relations in Italy, because it seems to me that from this the pattern of their subsequent relationship in England can, in a rather vague way, already be seen. Right from the beginning one can sense a feeling of superiority and condescension on Boswell's part, whereas Baretto is effusive and anxious to please and if possible to be of help to Johnson's young friend. However, later on in England an estrangement took place between the two men, though in November 1766, two months after his arrival in London, we find Baretto writing in a short letter to Boswell that he was «*fraudato tuttavia del diletto di trovare il mio Boswell in questa Metropoli.*»<sup>2</sup>. It seems fairly certain that Baretto was not the first to begin hostilities, for again in January 1767 we have a letter from him to Boswell in which he announces his intention of visiting Scotland and, if possible, meeting Boswell's father, the austere and forbidding Lord Auchinleck. Perhaps we can see the origin of Boswell's resentment in a warning that Baretto added in this letter, to the effect that he would like to see Boswell's projected *Account of Corsica* before he sent it to the printer, as he was afraid his enthusiasm for General Paoli and the Corsican cause<sup>3</sup> might result in «*che diciate qualche cosa de' Genovesi che non istà alla mia coppella, essendo io da un canto netto di ogni avversione ai Corsi, ma dall'altro inclinato molto ai Genovesi.*»<sup>4</sup>. Need-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.* pp. 76-9.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* pp. 80-1. Boswell had returned to Scotland by this time. His answer to Baretto has not survived.

<sup>3</sup> The Corsicans were trying to break away from Genoese rule and set up an independent republic under Paoli. Boswell's visit to the island, suggested to him by Rousseau, had made him an enthusiastic supporter of this movement.

<sup>4</sup> R. Warnock: *loc. cit.* letter printed 81-2. Baretto had a number of good friends in Genoa and was fonder of that city and its inhabitants than any other in Italy.

less to say, Boswell was not to be put off by a warning of this kind, for one of the main purposes of his book was to show the bravery of the Corsicans and their leader Paoli, and contrast it with the infamous tyranny of the Genoese. Indeed, even before returning to England he had begun conducting an anonymous press campaign in *The London Chronicle* consisting of a series of partly true and partly fictitious reports concerning events on the island, with a view to stirring up public opinion and eventually also inducing the British government to aid the Corsicans' fight against their Genoese oppressors<sup>1</sup>. Whether Baretto was aware that these reports came from Boswell's pen is doubtful, though Boswell's efforts on behalf of the Corsicans were of course the talk of the town. In any case, when Baretto published his *An Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy* in 1768 we find the following very uncomplimentary reference to the English partisans of Corsica:

«I cannot help taking notice here, that the Genoese have the misfortune of reckoning amongst their enemies many of the English nation; namely a very large number of those despicable wretches who go in this kingdom under the appellation of Grub-street writers.

These tremendous myrmidons are perpetually venting their formidable rage in your news-papers against the Genovese for two powerful reasons. The one is, that those republicans appear unwilling to lose Corsica tamely; and such an unwillingness in them is not reconcilable with the Grub-street notions on liberty and property...<sup>2</sup>.

Boswell himself denies that he was angry about this paragraph and told Baretto so personally when he went to see him in London on 30 March 1768, Davies, the bookseller, having told Baretto that Boswell had taken offence at it, but he adds:

<sup>1</sup> See *Boswell on the Grand Tour*, *op. cit.* p. 258 and Appendix D pp. 338-43. Boswell went to see Pitt on 22 February 1766, shortly after his return from the continent, to enlist his support for the Corsicans, but received a highly diplomatic and non-committal answer.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. II, p. 129. Baretto frequently ridiculed the English notion of «liberty», and even defended Italian censorship of books, in spite of the fact that he himself had on more than one occasion suffered from it. On the other hand the cause of Corsica appealed to Boswell's youthful romantic imagination.

«I found his manners exceedingly rough, which had not disgusted me when I saw him at Venice, because I was so happy to find there a great admirer of Mr. Samuel Johnson»<sup>1</sup>.

This complaint about Baretto's rough manners — and his conceit — is repeated on a number of occasions by Boswell, and indeed also by other writers of the period. The fact is that Boswell, who was anything if he was not a snob, felt sufficiently sure of himself by now — he was the friend of Johnson and Paoli, had met and argued with Rousseau and Voltaire, travelled in the company of Lord Mountstuart, son of Lord Bute, and had met countless other persons of note — not to need the good opinion of a penniless and comparatively obscure Italian man of letters, least of all in London. And if this man dared pour scorn on his favourite project of aiding Corsica, he, «Corsica Boswell» as he came to be known after the publication of his book, was certainly not prepared to humour him. Dare we also conjecture that there was an element of jealousy in Boswell's feelings, since Baretto was so firmly established in Johnson's good books? It is just possible: Boswell's later attitude towards Mrs. Thrale certainly shows he was not over-generous to his rivals in Johnson's favour.

The two *Accounts* — Baretto's of his own country and Boswell's of Corsica — were both published within a few weeks of one another. Baretto no sooner read Boswell's book, than he wrote him a letter in which he mixed measured and well-mannered congratulations with a complaint of Boswell's treatment of the Genoese<sup>2</sup>. That Baretto wanted to be friendly is perhaps best proved by the restrained tone of the letter; he does, it is true, complain that Boswell had «asserted that the assassins make no

<sup>1</sup> *Boswell in Search of a Wife* ed. F. Brady and F. A. Pottle, London, Heineman, 1957, p. 170. Baretto's suspicion of Boswell was increased by a banal misunderstanding; he had called at the house of a Mr. Bousfield who lived in the same street as Boswell, under the impression that it was Boswell's residence, and having been repulsed at the door, not unnaturally thought Boswell was offended. But undoubtedly Boswell was offended *cf.* the letter mentioned below, in which he specifically says «you must know that the manner in which you have accustomed yourself to talk of the Corsicans for whom I have such an enthusiasm, provoked me».

<sup>2</sup> R. Warnock: *loc. cit.* pp. 83-4.

inconsiderable part of the Genoese nation», adding an obviously sincere defence of a people who had

«given me reason to be displeased when I see them libelled, especially in favour of the Corsicans, who upon the very face of your book do not appear to be any thing better than bloody-minded savages».

But for anyone who knows what venom Baretto was capable of, both in his literary and personal controversies (we think of certain pages of the *Frusta* and of his treatment of Mrs. Thrale in his *Strictures* published in *The European Magazine* in 1788), the letter is almost honeyed in tone. However, Boswell does not seem to have been pacified quite so easily, and no evidence of an answer has come down to us; and though this cannot be taken as positive proof that none was ever written, if we consider Boswell's practice in these matters, it seems quite likely that he did not bother to reply.

From November 1768 till April 1769 Baretto was out of England on a journey through Spain, in order to refresh his memory of that country with a view to publishing an English version of his *Lettere Familiari*<sup>1</sup>. A few months after his return, on 6 October 1769, Baretto, while walking along the Haymarket alone after dark, was accosted by some prostitutes and their bullies and in defending himself stabbed one of these, a man by the name of Evan Morgan. The affair naturally created quite a scandal and at once brought Baretto into the limelight; his numerous English friends such as Johnson and Reynolds, to name only two of the most illustrious, at once rallied to his help by visiting him in prison, standing bail for him and above all by testifying at his trial at the Old Bailey about his character and peaceful disposition<sup>2</sup>. Baretto read his own defence and was triumphantly acquitted of the charge of manslaughter. Only one among Baretto's British friends did not believe in his innocence, and indeed expressed a desire to see him hanged — Boswell. And though after Baretto's acquittal, Boswell composed a letter asking his pardon for having

<sup>1</sup> Published in Milan (1762) and Venice (1763). The English version appeared under the title *A Journey from London to Genoa*, London, 1770. Cf. the second part of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Boswell's *Life op. cit.* II. pp. 96-8 and also Baretto's own letters at this period in *Epistolario* I, a cura di L. Piccioni, Bari, Laterza, pp. 412-30.

thought him a murderer and offering to be pacified with him<sup>1</sup>, the two men never became friends again. In 1775 a casual visitor to England, Dr. Thomas Campbell, notes that

«Boswell and Baretto... are mortal foes, so much so that Murphy and Mrs. Thrale agreed that Boswell expressed a desire that Baretto should be hanged upon that unfortunate affair of his killing...»<sup>2</sup>.

But if Boswell found Baretto's manners rough, he too showed that he could be rude, for on the occasion referred to he refused to get up when Baretto came into the room. As if the testimony of an outside observer were not enough, Boswell himself on a few subsequent occasions refers to Baretto with distaste and contempt. Though acquitted by an English court, to Boswell Baretto's innocence was, to use a Scottish legal term «not proven». Thus, for example, on 16 March 1776 he visited the Thrales and as the servant opened the door, he observes

«Baretto appeared. I coldly asked him how he did. Methought there was a shade of murderous blood upon his pale face»<sup>3</sup>.

And if on that day kept his considerations to himself, a few weeks later, on 5 April, he openly mentioned the subject in society. The company — including Johnson, Mrs. Thrale and others — were talking about the journey to Italy on which the Thrale family, accompanied by Johnson and guided by Baretto as interpreter and Cicerone, were planning to set out shortly<sup>4</sup>. In the course of the conversation it was mentioned that there were several towns in Italy where Baretto could not go, as he might run the risk of being hanged there, whereupon Boswell maliciously observed «Ay, ... the Gallows is a Roadpost for his direction at

<sup>1</sup> R. Warnock: *loc. cit.* pp. 85-6. I entirely agree with Warnock in thinking that this letter was never actually sent to Baretto.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Campbell: *Diary of a Visit to England in 1775*, Sydney, 1854, pp. 52-3.

<sup>3</sup> *The Private Papers of James Boswell from Malahide Castle* prepared for the press by G. Scott and F. A. Pottle, privately printed, 1930-4, Vol. VIII p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> In the autumn of 1775 Baretto had already guided the same company on a tour through northern France and Paris — and thoroughly enjoyed acting as Cicerone. To his great disappointment the tour to Italy never took place, owing to the death of Mrs. Thrale's son.

several places: *Turn from this* »; and though he adds what Johnson had told him, namely that he was not guilty of common crimes but only « political daring writings », Boswell insists that at any rate in London Baretto had been guilty of murder<sup>1</sup>. Evidently, therefore, Boswell's dislike of Baretto was deep-seated and, considering all the circumstances, particularly ungenerous. It is difficult to justify Boswell's harping on this matter on merely rational grounds, but his morbid fascination with murderers and hangings may have had something to do with it<sup>2</sup>. On purely psychological grounds it seems to me quite possible that, whereas he frequently visited murderers in the condemned cell and witnessed countless public hangings, when the man who had risked the gallows was a personal acquaintance, he felt a deep revulsion against him, so that his subconscious attraction towards the criminal turned in the case of Baretto into conscious repulsion of his former friend. Boswell's mind is often a mass of contradictions which even his voluminous private papers cannot entirely resolve. On the level of documentary evidence it is perhaps worth quoting a satirical epitaph on Baretto that Warnock found among Boswell's papers; it repeats the conviction that Baretto's escape from the gallows was due more to good fortune — and perhaps good friends — than to his innocence.

« Hic jacet  
Josephus Baretto  
Italus Italia Profugus  
Qui per multos annos in Anglia  
protectione generosa Anglorum vivens  
rabie barbara in platea  
Anglum barbariter interfecit.  
Hic Furcam feliciter evasit »<sup>3</sup>.

The document is undated, but it does not matter much when it was written, for as we have seen Boswell preserved his conviction

<sup>1</sup> *The Private Papers op. cit.* VIII. pp. 226-7. It is interesting to note that, though the first part of the conversation regarding the Thrales' intended tour of Italy is reproduced in the *Life* in a form very similar to that of the *Journal*, the parts here quoted about Baretto were left out. Undoubtedly the danger to Baretto in visiting certain Italian towns was greatly exaggerated.

<sup>2</sup> There is ample evidence of this in his various journals and even in the *Life*.

<sup>3</sup> R. Warnock: *loc. cit.* p. 85.

for a good many years, and if after 1776 there is no further mention of Baretto in Boswell's papers, there is no reason to assume that he radically changed his mind. Indeed, towards the end of his life Baretto made more enemies than friends in England, and it seems unreasonable to suppose that the one man who had always been his bitter enemy<sup>1</sup>, should now turn to his defence. On the other hand, apart from the letters discovered by Warnock, there is no mention of Boswell in any of Baretto's letters or polemical writings. As regards Boswell, at any rate, it seems that Baretto was not the first to attack, and indeed was very slow to hit back, for Boswell's hostility must have been obvious to him and he was no respecter of persons when the venom got into his veins. It is of course possible that had his private papers survived, that some indication of his attitude towards his Scottish rival in the affections of Johnson would have come to light; but we shall never know this. If we are to judge from such documents as have survived we must conclude that Baretto was the victim and Boswell the aggressor. But their hostility existed on a purely social level, and when Boswell published his *Life* in 1791 Baretto had already been dead for two years; besides Boswell's references to Baretto in the *Life* — and they are not many — were not of the kind that would have offended Baretto, as certain passages in Mrs. Thrale's publication of her correspondence with Johnson deeply wounded Baretto and stung him into writing the fiercest — because also the most personal — of his many violent controversies. Whatever the reason may be, not only his published works but also such of his private papers as contain any reference to Boswell, show Baretto as meek as a lamb towards a man who, after all, went about in the very drawing-rooms that Baretto frequented, calling him a murderer. Was Baretto unaware of this? Boswell himself makes it clear that he took no pains to hide his general attitude, so who or what restrained Baretto from hitting back is a question that cannot be answered. But the fact is that for once Baretto seems to have accepted insults without retaliating.

Boswell survived Baretto by six years. It is tempting to see

<sup>1</sup> Though later on Baretto and Mrs. Thrale had a furious quarrel, she could never conceal a secret liking for him, and in spite of his undoubted ferocity and unfairness to her, her comments on his death show generosity and appreciation of his many good qualities.



his hand in the letter written after Baretti's death to the *Gentleman's Magazine*<sup>1</sup>, in which the anonymous correspondent says that « he has seldom written but with the stiletto in one hand, and the pen in the other ». On the face of it, the author cannot be Boswell as he declares he « did not personally know the foreigner »<sup>2</sup> or for that matter Mrs. Thrale, Baretti's attack on whom he condemns, but he shows an uncommonly good acquaintance not only with Baretti's English works but with his Italian books as well; and as we have seen, Baretti himself had given Boswell a copy of his *Lettere Familiari* when the two men met in Venice, and later on had offered to read his *Frusta* with him. Of course, Boswell had many other interests at this particular moment, quite apart from being kept busy by the composition of the *Life*. I have no concrete evidence whatsoever for ascribing this posthumous attack on Baretti to Boswell, for Baretti certainly had plenty of other enemies in London at the time of his death. On the other hand Boswell was the only one of his circle to doubt his innocence in the Haymarket affair and to continue to do so, as we have seen, many years after his judicial acquittal, so that perhaps it is not too fanciful to see Boswell's malice behind the equivocal reference to the stiletto. However that may be, there was certainly no love lost between the two men.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. LIX, May 1789, pp. 469-70.

<sup>2</sup> And yet this contempt for Baretti for being a « mere » foreigner is latent in many of Boswell's references to him, and particularly evident in the Latin epitaph quoted above. Boswell did not despise foreigners as such provided they were distinguished enough, but Baretti in his opinions was very small fry.

II. THE LETTERE FAMILIARI AND  
A JOURNEY FROM LONDON TO GENOA

Baretti's literary production is divided fairly evenly — at least as far as quantity is concerned — between Italian and English, not to mention his occasional excursions into French and Spanish<sup>1</sup>. The history of literature does not record many cases of writers who have composed in a language not their own, and the amazing thing is not that there are so few, but that there should be any at all. Today, it is true, Baretti's fame as an English author has somewhat faded, his place in Italian literature as the author of the *Frusta Letteraria* being secure, but we should not forget that his English friends, and the English reading public in general, thought highly of him, and though financial success is a very uncertain measuring-rod for literary worth, it is certain that he earned far more by his writings in English than by his Italian productions, which he thrust on a largely unwilling public. Much of his work in English was of a rather ephemeral nature, though this this does not detract from the charm of a book like his *Easy Phraseology for the Use of Young Ladies* written for his beloved pupil Hetty (Queeney) Thrale, in which he gives full rein to his whimsical imagination. But two works, apart from his dictionary, above all gained him respect as an author in his adopted country, his *An Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy* published in 1768, and *A Journey from London to Genoa* published two years later. And if, as one of Baretti's most recent and authoritative critics has insisted,

« a lui che fu sopra tutto e sempre letterato, toccò in sorte l'opera che abbiamo cercato di illustrare, di critico della lingua e dello stile contemporaneo »

<sup>1</sup> E. g. his *Discours sur Shakespeare* (1777) and his English-Spanish Dictionary, as well as *Disertacion Epistolar acerca unas obras de la Real Academia Espanola*, now lost.

and again

«La critica del Baretti sorge dalla sua esperienza di scrittore: fuori di quella, si può dire, non esisteva per lui argomento che lo interessasse sostanzialmente e durevolmente»<sup>1</sup>

then a comparison between the Italian and English versions of the account of his journey through Portugal and Spain to Italy may not be altogether devoid of interest. There is ample evidence, even outside his printed works, of Baretti's extraordinary gifts as a linguist and of his knowledge of English in particular<sup>2</sup>, and though it would be too much to expect the linguistic virtuosity of his Italian writings when he composed in English, yet his style in this language certainly does not grate on the ear. Besides, it is not merely a question of capacity: we may well ask ourselves whether in re-writing his *Lettere familiari* in English for an English public, his aims had not changed a little. I hope the following remarks will provide some answer to this question.

Baretti left London on 14 August 1760 to return to his homeland for good, as he hoped, after a parenthesis in London of nine years which, though extremely pleasant, he yet felt as a form of exile. He had made money and what is more important, friends in England, and had come to love that country and appreciate its virtues and perhaps most of all admire the intellectual life of London society, but he felt that after nine years he had had enough and so on returning to Milan he tried to obtain some sort of public or diplomatic employment from the Minister Plenipo-

<sup>1</sup> M. Fubini: *Dal Muratori al Baretti*, Bari, Laterza, 1954, p. 253 and p. 254.

<sup>2</sup> For example Mrs. Thrale remarks: «his accent was wonderfully proper; and his Language always copious, always nervous, always full of various Allusions, flowing too with a Rapidity worthy of Admiration & far beyond the Power of nineteen in twenty Natives». *Thraliana*, op. cit. p. 47. As to his writing of English, few will want to quarrel with the reviewer of *The Town and Country Magazine*, who wrote of his *A Journey* «though there are some few slips of the foreigner's pen, these, so far from being just subjects of criticism, should remind us, to our astonishment, how uncommonly well English may be written by an Italian». (July 1770, II, 379).

tentiary, Count Firmian. In the meanwhile he had not forgotten Johnson's advice:

«to register all occurrences and observations; for your friends expect such a book of travels as has not been seen before»<sup>1</sup>.

and in 1762 he published his *Lettere familiari di Giuseppe Baretti a' suoi tre fratelli*, after some of them had already been circulating in manuscript among his friends<sup>2</sup>. Even before their publication in Milan, some of Baretti's friends foresaw difficulties with the authorities<sup>3</sup>, and they were not long in coming, for after the publication of the first of the projected four volumes, the censorship yielded to pressure from the Portuguese ambassador and prevented the publication of any further installments. This was not the first time that Baretti's writings had fallen foul of the authorities in Italy, but perhaps nine years in England, where the most absolute liberty of the press ruled, had made him forget the pettiness of literary censorship, and in disgust he retired to Venice, where after the publication of the second volume, which had undergone further mutilations and revisions, he at last gave up the idea of printing the letters in their entirety<sup>4</sup>, and the rest of the book never saw the light, at least in its Italian form. Shortly before leaving Italy for good he does mention that he intended to complete his edition of the letters, before finally giving up writing in Italian<sup>5</sup>. No doubt this idea was superseded, some two years after his return to England in 1766, by the publisher Davies's offer to bring out an English version of the whole book, an offer which Baretti eagerly accepted. He took his task very seriously and in order to refresh his memory he returned to Spain to gather additional information, so as to make the book not only amusing but also instructive;

<sup>1</sup> From the first of Johnson's three letters to Baretti (cfr. p. 241) printed in Boswell's *Life*, op. cit. I p. 365, Baretti also acknowledges his debt to Johnson in the preface to *A Journey*, see passage quoted below.

<sup>2</sup> L. Piccioni in his edition, Società Subalpina, Torino, 1941, Introduction, p. xv.

<sup>3</sup> Carlo Antonio Tanzi in a letter to Chiaromonte, 18 August 1761 «Voglia però Dio che la libertà del suo scrivere non gli e ne impedisca la pubblicazione», quoted *ibid.* p. xvi.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. xvii.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Bujovich, Genoa, 25 July 1766; see L. Piccioni: *Epistolario* I, p. 341.

no doubt he felt he had to give the public his best, as he was paid 500 guineas for the work, a considerable sum for that time. *A Journey from London to Genoa* appeared towards the middle of July 1770 and on the whole had a very good reception. Baretto's admirers rightly saw in it his best work published in English to date; in fact it marks the culmination of Baretto's popularity in England, and after 1770 his star gradually began to wane. Baretto's English friends certainly thought he had surpassed himself; Johnson writing to Mrs. Thrale remarks:

«That Baretto's book would please you all I made no doubt. I know not whether the world has ever seen such travels before. Those whose lot it is to ramble can seldom write, and those who know how to write very seldom ramble»<sup>1</sup>.

This is no mean praise from a man of Johnson's calibre.

But of course *A Journey* is not a mere translation of his *Lettere familiari*. If it were there would be little point in comparing the two versions. The Italian book is undoubtedly the more amusing of the two, whereas the English version consciously tries to be informative and 'solid'. One feels that in writing for his Italian public Baretto was out chiefly to make them pass a pleasant couple of hours, to make a smile rise to their lips at every page, in other words to make his travels the pretext for sundry amusing and curious observations. But in the English work the desire to give his readers serious and reliable information outweighs any attempt to amuse them; there is an air of, undoubtedly studied, spontaneity in the *Lettere* that is absent in the *A Journey*: a difference of emphasis not of substance, but one that can give us some clue to the difference between the English and the Italian Baretto.

The diversities between the two versions may be classified as follows: certain remarks that might offend his English readers are toned down or omitted altogether. Other observations are left

<sup>1</sup> 20 July 1770. *The Letters of Samuel Johnson* ed. R. W. Chapman, Oxford, 1952, 3 vols., Baretto's own comment on this letter is «Johnson does not tell it, but he never could think that the petty adventures in it were true: they are however true to a tittle in spite of his incredulity». From his own manuscript annotations to Mrs. Thrale's edition of the letters, in the British Museum copy, pressmark C. 45. e. 5, 6.

out because they are felt to be of no interest to an English public. But the most interesting point of difference is unquestionably to be found in style and tone, for in this we can see how Baretto reacts differently to another kind of environment. In part, it may be, he felt that in writing in English he had to renounce that verbal virtuosity that is so characteristic of his Italian style, but chiefly I believe he realized that what was appropriate in Italy was not so in England — and besides, in the seven to eight years that separate the two works his views on *how* to write had undoubtedly altered, though how far this is due to his contact with his English friends is difficult to determine<sup>1</sup>.

Let us briefly examine these differences.

Though, of course, *A Journey* is almost twice the length of the *Lettere familiari* there are a number of passages in the latter that Baretto on revising the book for the English edition left out. The Italian edition gives a greater sense of immediacy and more circumstantial details — Baretto, no doubt rightly, judged that his English public would be more interested in his descriptions of Portugal and Spain than in the exact particulars of a journey undertaken ten years before, and consequently, whereas in the *Lettere familiari* Signor Edoardo (Edward Southwell whom he accompanied to Italy) makes a regular appearance, in *A Journey* there is no mention of his young companion. In the same way he tends to cut down certain descriptions of and observations on things to be seen in England, such as Stonehenge, of which there is a full description in the Italian, but only a bare mention in *A Journey*. Naturally his English readers might be expected to know enough about this subject, whereas to an Italian public it would be a novelty. Similarly, in the *Lettere familiari* there are a number of digressions which could not possibly interest his British public, such as Letter XIII, in which he rides his two chief critical hobby-

<sup>1</sup> C. M. J. Lubbers-van der Brugge in her book *Johnson and Baretto*, J. B. Walters, Groningen, Djakarta, 1951, maintains that Baretto from about 1754 onwards was entirely under Johnson's influence, and that also the *Frusta* shows strong Johnsonian traces. It is, of course true, as I have pointed out above, that Johnson encouraged Baretto to write his *Lettere familiari*, but it seems to me that it is only in the English revision that he is consciously adapting his practice to more Johnsonian principles. Cfr. Fubini's review of Lubbers-van der Brugge's book in *Giornale Storico della letteratura italiana*, 1953, Fasc. IV, in which he rejects her extremist views on Johnson's complete dominance of Baretto.

horses, violently inveighing against Arcadian poetry and blank verse, subjects that were to receive the full blast of his irate pen in the *Frusta*. But more interesting than these is a study of the passages in which Baretto tones down his criticism of certain English institutions or habits, evidently so as not to offend English sensibilities. Thus, for example, on leaving England, in the Italian version he addresses a highly rhetorical and pathetic farewell to the country that had given him hospitality for nine years, but his praise for her good qualities is mingled with condemnation (in very general terms) of her vices:

«Addio, Sede di Virtù: Sentina di Vizio... Ecco ch'io m'accomiato da te, Inghilterra gloriosa, e mi inginocchio e bacio il tuo nobil Terreno, e prego l'Altissimo Iddio che voglia toccar il cuore a que' tanti Furfanti, onde t'è in parte sconciata la natural bellezza, e renderli simili a que' tanti Galan-tuomini che te l'accrescono».

Together with the superlatives of praise, also the critical phrases disappear in the English version. In the following letter his comments on the militia he saw exercising a Honiton is toned down from

«Colà veddi un Battaglione di Milizia quartierato in quella Città; e dacché vedo Soldati, la più malandata e la più schifosa guerresca genia non l'ho ancora vista».

to

«At Honiton, from the window of the inn, I saw a battalion of militia newly raised. They went through their military exercise; and I own I did not much admire their movements. However, they will drive the world before them, when they come to be better modelled; and the French will find it no jest, if ever they dare to come over in their flat-bottom boats and set their feet on the British shore as they have been threatening this long while».

It is obvious how here Baretto has not only wanted to tone down his offensive remarks, but add a little flattery to British pride as well. There are a number of similar passages, from minor points, such as the description of Plymouth which, from a «piccola e brutta cittaduzza» becomes a «small and irregular town», to the whole of Letter XII in the *Lettere familiari*, dealing with the

abject condition of the poor in London, the number of prostitutes and criminals and adding for good measure a fierce condemnation of the English laws on Sunday amusements, which by prohibiting lawful pastimes, according to Baretto drive the poor to drink and melancholy. Not unnaturally this letter was wholly omitted from the English edition, but Baretto's English enemies were not to forget it so quickly and this letter is specifically mentioned by the anonymous correspondent of the *Gentlemen's Magazine* who wrote a violent attack on Baretto after his death<sup>1</sup>. Again, there are passages in *A Journey* in which he is evidently pandering to the Protestant scepticism of certain Catholic practices, such as the description of the so-called Cork Convent outside Lisbon<sup>2</sup>, where the Italian version enthusiastically accepts and approves the story of the hermit who spent twenty years in a hole without being able to lie down, whereas the English version contemptuously dismisses it as legendary.

On the other hand descriptions of political conditions in Portugal are much fuller in *A Journey*<sup>3</sup>, in which he feels at liberty to say all he knows about the recent political disturbances in that country and to attack the wholesale expulsion of the Jesuits, whereas in the *Lettere familiari* one can see the Milanese censorship intervening<sup>4</sup>, as also in Letter XXXVII (corresponding to Letter XXXVIII of *A Journey*) in which he makes it clear that the authorities would not let him print all he knew about the political upheavals in Portugal, saying he intends to tell his brothers personally about everything. Naturally this remark is left out in *A Journey* and the whole passage greatly expanded.

Examples of changes of this and similar kinds could be multiplied many times and would certainly be tedious to cite. After all, it is only natural that after seven years an author who is re-writing a book originally written in Italian for an Italian public, in English for an English public, should make certain changes

<sup>1</sup> See the previous part of this article p. 250. However, his *Scelta delle Lettere familiari* printed in England in 1779 (Part II, Letter XXIV) contains very similar material partly based on this passage.

<sup>2</sup> Letter XXVIII in *A Journey* corresponding to Letter XXVII in the *Lettere familiari*.

<sup>3</sup> Letter XXXI in *A Journey*, Letter XXX in the *Lettere familiari*.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. G. Ricciardi: *Giuseppe Baretto e le sue Lettere familiari ai fratelli*, Catania, 1902, pp. 142-3.

designed to please his new readers and if possible avoid offence: and this is what we have seen Baretto doing so far.

But what of the more significant changes of style and tone? As I have said, in the *Lettere familiari* the desire to entertain the reader, to regale him with amusing titbits and anecdotes, to make him smile at an odd whimsical expression is always breaking in upon the graver purpose of instructing him. The English version has largely lost this lighter tone in favour of a more ponderous Johnsonian approach. In fact, as Fubini notes<sup>1</sup>, Baretto in writing his *Lettere familiari* has still not entirely forgotten his early love of Berni's burlesque style (one of the formative influences on the young Baretto), and it is interesting to see, for example, how a remark like the following:

« Vedete, se l'Orà del pranzo in questa nave [the packet taking him from Plymouth to Lisbon] meriterebbe un Capitolo Berniesco in lode. E sì, che mi viene quasi volontà di provare se di que' Capitoli ne so ancor fare, come quando ero Giovanotto »<sup>2</sup>.

disappears in the English version. And this is only to be expected, for apart from the difficulty of reproducing a 'Capitolo Berniesco' in English, by the time he came to write *A Journey* he had left this stage of his literary development behind him.

The difference of approach is evident right from the preface to the two books. The *Lettere familiari* contain a long « A Chi vuol leggere » signed by Giuseppe Richino Malatesta, Stampatore Regio Camerale in Milano, but evidently written by Baretto himself. In it, in his light bantering tone, he invites the reader to follow Baretto on his travels, promising a new and amusing adventure at every page, as well as solid philosophic delight from his original descriptions.

Compare:

« In queste lettere voi troverete, Leggitori, un Caos di Roba. Voi troverete Descrizioni di Città, di Porti di Mare, d'Arsenali... voi vi troverete una Pittura del Terremoto di Lisbona tanto viva e tanto patetica, che probabilmente la riputerete un Capo d'Opera... »

<sup>1</sup> *op. cit.* p. 261 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> Letter VIII.

with

« In the descriptions that follow, I hope it will appear that I have spared no pains to carry my reader in some measure along with me; to make him see what I saw, hear what I heard, feel what I felt, and even think and fancy whatever I thought or fancied myself. Should this method prove agreeable and procure the honour of a favourable reception to my work, I shall owe it in a great part to my most revered friend Dr. Samuel Johnson, who suggested it to me, just as I was setting out on my first journey to Spain ».

The difference in spirit is obvious, and not only in the principles which he proposes to follow and in the — let us admit it — not entirely sincere modesty of the English text, but in the very words he uses: the Italian reader will find 'un Caos di Roba', but in English he hopes to 'carry the reader in some measure along with' him. The very quality of the enjoyment that he promises his readers has subtly changed.

Again

« Non vi dico nulla della bella Catalina di Badajoz, e delle Fanciulle di Meaxaras, che le più inzuccherate Novellette non le avrete forse mai sentite. In somma ogni Coltivatore delle Scienze, ogni Amatore dell'Arti si faccia a leggere questo Viaggio, e qualche cosa, che quadri coll'umor suo ve la troverà senza fallo... Nessuno però sia tanto pazzo da crederci di trovar la minima sdruciolevol cosa d'amore, che il Sig. Baretto ha fatto scorrere una libera vena di piacevolezza e di giocondità per tutto questo suo Libro, ma non s'è perciò scordato mai un momento d'essere Cristiano, onde i Padri e le Madri lo lascino pur leggere da' loro anche teneri Figliuoli, e le Badesse e le Priore dalle loro Monache, senza paura che l'innocenza loro ne venga minimamente contaminata... ».

where in English we read

« my only fear upon this occasion is, that some want of dexterity in the management of my narrative may justly have subjected me to the charge of egotism, as I am convinced that I have passed too frequently from my subject to myself, and made myself as much too often the hero of my own story. Yet this fear is not so predominant as to exclude the hope that such an impropriety will be overlooked [*what pseudo-Johnsonian phrases!*] if I have but succeeded in the main point, and effectually assisted the imagination of my reader to form an idea tolerably just of Spain, by exhibiting as well the face of the country, as the manners of the inhabitants ».

In the Italian the 'piacevolezza e giocondità', it seems, are ends in themselves, part and parcel of the plan of the work, where in the English version they are, at best, subordinate to the main purpose of the book, which is to give a reliable and interesting description of the country. Just as the phrase 'inzuccherate Novelle' is typical of the spirit, tone and style of the *Lettere familiari*, so 'the hope that such an impropriety will be overlooked' is characteristic of the Baretto who was preparing *A Journey* for his British public.

How does this difference appear in the actual writing, in the passages in which Baretto is translating or adapting from the original Italian text? Almost invariably the latter shows a conscious seeking after an original or striking expression, with an abundant use of superlatives and a general tendency towards exaggeration, where the English text is plain, restrained and straightforward. This can, of course, in part be attributed to the difficulty of rendering many characteristic Barettoian stylistic tricks in English, but it is undoubtedly also due to a desire to write in a less flamboyant style in English, for Baretto's Italian, particularly in the *Lettere familiari*, often leaves the impression of a series of fireworks of the kind so common in Italian popular festivities. The reader is treated to a continual juggling and playing with words, and, it must be admitted, is at times distracted from the subject discussed or the matter described by these verbal shock-tactics that arrest the reader's attention and make him sit up to take note of a curious word or turn of phrase and so interrupt the flow of the narration, so that the detail is allowed to obscure the whole design. In other words, in the *Lettere familiari* (as in almost all of Baretto's Italian writings) we feel that the author is the whole time conscious of *how* he is writing, turning over in his mind this or that expression to see which will be more effective of striking. In *A Journey* we are at times aware of a superimposed ponderousness, an attempt to be serious and 'solid' that is not entirely in keeping with the spirit in which the work was conceived: in certain passages a general observation bearing an obvious Johnsonian stamp is added, almost, it seems, as a makeweight.

Let us take two passages describing the same event and see how Baretto has managed it in both versions. In Letter XVII of the

*Lettere familiari* (corresponding to Letter XIX of *A Journey*) we have the famous description of a bull-fight in Lisbon and the confusion caused by some pickpockets among the crowd:

«dopo la morte dell'Ottavo o Nono Toro si levò un romore grandissimo nell'Anfiteatro dalla parte dove stava il Re; e le genti cominciarono a buttarsi a centinaia giù del riparo nello steccato con un precipizio grandissimo, come tutto l'Edificio di legno fosse stato messo a fuoco, e tutti correvano rovinosamente verso il mezzo dell'Arringo; e que' che stavano dalla parte opposta, dove ero anch'io, cominciarono gridando a domandare la cagione di quel subito trambusto; e le strida di quelli che si buttavano o che erano buttati giù nello steccato da una banda, e lo schiamazzo dall'altra di quelli che volevano sapere perchè quegli altri facessero tanto trambusto, era sì grande, che a casa le anime dannate forse non si sente la metà del rombo che colà si sentiva: e chi interrogava aveva bello interrogare, e chi rispondeva aveva bello rispondere, che i tuoni dell'Alpi, e della Cordigliera non si sarebbero in quel punto sentiti».

The seventh or eighth bull had just been slain and dragg'd out, and the man at the bull's-gate was going to let in another, when the people in the ground-floor boxes opposite to that where I was, rose at once one and all with the most hideous shrieks, leapt precipitously into the area, and ran about the place like madmen.

The sudden disorder terrified the assembly, and few were those who had any sang-froid left. All wanted to know what was the matter, but the noise of a cataract could not have been traced through the cries of such a multitude».

The reader will at once sense the difference in tone, the greater liveliness of the Italian compared with the more staid approach of the English; in short how a scene like this fires Baretto's imagination in Italian and brings out his quaint humour in the description of a scene of terror, whereas in English the narrative is flat, we might almost say utilitarian.

Or let us take one or two minor examples that illustrate my point. In Plymouth<sup>1</sup> Baretto describes a meeting with

«un Signor Tolcher, Giudice di Pace o Podestà, come si direbbe da noi, di quella Città, e Antiquario sopramerato, Uomo di sessant'anni circa, bello

<sup>1</sup> Letter III in the *Lettere familiari*, Letter VI in *A Journey*.

come una Rosa o un Tulipano, grasso e lucido come un Carnesiale, e festevole come una Cingallegra ».

which in English becomes simply « He is a Naturalist and Antiquarian ». Or again, describing the princesses of Portugal, Baretto says « Una d'esse... manca poco ad essere un plusquamperfetto di bellezza », a typically Barettoian expression that is turned into somewhat colourless English as « one of them... is a striking beauty ». Not, of course, that Baretto always reduces his very personal Italian into similarly flat English, for a little later<sup>1</sup> we read

« ma venga [those who have not travelled and think travelling is all pleasure] in Portogallo chi è di questa opinione e se non si sganna, sgiuséppemi e sbaréttimi pure, che gliela perdono ».

which in English becomes

« But let him who holds this opinion, come to travel about Portugal, and I will submit to eat thistles if he does not stagger in his notions about travelling »,

an expression which to my mind shows perhaps more taste and judgment.

It would be useless to multiply examples of this kind, for I hope the few I have given will serve to bear out my points. To end up with, let me cite a short passage in which it seems to me obvious that a ponderous Johnsonian generalization has been superimposed on a purely casual remark. In Letter II (in both versions) Baretto mentions that on his way south from London he passed close to the Earl of Pembroke's Seat near Salisbury but that

« Cento volte fui sul punto d'andar a dar un'occhiata a quelle Statue e a que' Marmi nel lungo soggiorno che ho fatto in quest'Isola, ma non potetti mai effettuare il mio pensiero, onde non ve ne posso dir altro ».

In English the hyperbolic 'cento volte' are reduced to their real proportions and a sententious remark, worthy of the *Rambler* is

<sup>1</sup> Letter XXVI in the *Lettere familiari*, Letter XXVII in *A Journey*.

added:

« I do not know what possessed me, that I never went to see that seat in the space of ten years, especially as I was twice in the neighbourhood. But men are naturally procrastinators: they put it off till next day, till next week; and the next day or next week never comes ».

It would be foolish to labour the point or to pretend that *A Journey* is anything but a revised and slightly altered version of the *Lettere familiari*, but it is worth while pointing out that in preparing his work for an English public Baretto did more than translate his vivacious and at times rather superficial Italian letters into English. That he took his task very seriously we know, for, as we have seen, he returned to Spain on purpose to refresh his memory of that country and its customs, but I believe that the student of Baretto — and this means the student of the whole two-way traffic of literary and cultural relations between England and Italy during the second half of the 18th Century — will find it interesting to note these subtle changes of contents, style and tone, for though we may in part attribute them to the fact that Baretto is after all writing in a foreign language, they are, I think, largely the result of the influence of his English environment and to a change in his whole attitude towards the art of writing.

THOMAS FRANK