THE TRIAL OF GIUSEPPE BARETTI, OCTOBER 20TH 1769:
A LITERARY AND CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE BARETTI CASE

by

MATTHEW FRANCIS RUSNAK

A Dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Program in Italian
written under the direction of
Professor Laura Sanguineti-White

and approved by

________________________________
________________________________
________________________________
________________________________

New Brunswick, New Jersey
May, 2008
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Trial of Giuseppe Baretti, October 20th 1769:
A Literary and Cultural History of the Baretti Case

By MATTHEW FRANCIS RUSNAK

Dissertation Director:
Laura Sanguineti-White

On October 20, 1769, Giuseppe Baretti (1719-1789) stood on trial at the Old Bailey for a murder that occurred during a street brawl in central London. Samuel Johnson, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, David Garrick and other English luminaries spoke in Baretti’s defense, and he was acquitted se defendendo. As news of the crime spread from London to Milan, the Baretti case generated controversy, public opinion, and critical commentary. Usually regarded merely as a curious footnote in the annals of literature, this case provides insight into the life and works of Baretti as well as the Age of Blackstone and Beccaria. A careful reconstruction of the crime scene, teased out of primary documents and unpublished manuscripts, reveals an event rich in cultural significance. A complex set of motivations can be seen behind the stabbing of Evan Morgan, an assault viewed at the time as manifestly Italian. Chapter Two analyzes the defense arguments in unlocking subtle rhetorical and legal strategies and locating it within a courtroom theater. Chapter Three focuses on C. F. Badini, Baretti’s arch rival, who “testified” against him in libel and invective. Chapter Four explores the back-story: over a year before the trial, Samuel Sharp, a London surgeon who had written on the Italian national identity in Letters from Italy, provoked an extended print feud with
Baretti. Ironically, a central point of disagreement between the writers concerned the relative violent tendencies of Italians, the use of stilettos instead of fists to resolve petty disputes. Chapter Five places the case in context of homicide law and legal debates in the period that seem to be speaking directly *Baretti*. Chapter Six records and explores the literary repercussions of the “The Haymarket Affair” in controversies that persisted through the 1780s. The Conclusion shows how later critics and scholars manipulated and repackaged the event, eventually flattening it and removing its ambiguities. The purpose of the study is not to defame Giuseppe Baretti, but rather to uncover the far-reaching cultural and literary implications of a day that would haunt the Italian writer for the rest of his English life.
PREFACE

“Some day I shall write an account of the whole affair, containing some strange stories, which will give you a better idea of the characters of the various classes of this nation than anything that has appeared in our tongue. But at present I have other things to do,” Giuseppe Baretti wrote to his brother Filippo on December 26, 1769. He must have been relieved that Christmas, for he had passed a very difficult year. Just two months earlier, he faced a judge and jury at the Old Bailey, defending himself against the charge of murder. Although Baretti would survive the trial and live another twenty years, the so-called “Haymarket Affair” haunted him and became, in the years that would follow, a metaphor for his writing life.

The unusual case of Baretti generated controversy and debate, as appeals were brought in the court of public opinion. The image of a furious Italian writer stabbing an English music hall minstrel—and then being let go free—seemed a travesty of justice, at least to some observers. Others stood by the verdict as a victory for honor, a display of the quality of English justice system, so much less barbaric than in the past. When people thought of Baretti from 1769 on, they thought of his trial, and they did not know what to think. In every generation since, historians and critics, tempted by the innate appeal of Baretti, would express surprise that no one ever explored the rich nuances of the most literary courtroom battle of the eighteenth century. Baretti wanted to write about this affair, but he never did.

In the work that follows, I have tried to fill Baretti’s pages by weaving together a wide variety of documents, from travel books to newspaper editorials, from vicious
lampoons to nasty marginalia, from manuscript letters to jokes, from legal commentaries
to obituary notices. Some of my observations have been made before, but in scattered
footnotes, in appendices, and in foreign scholarship difficult to obtain. I will be
“observing trifles” on the pages that follow, putting together the pieces of an
Enlightenment puzzle, some of them lost for more than two centuries.

In the early stages of working on this project, several colleagues rejected it
wholesale. “It sounds more like history than literature,” one of them sniffed. There was
no dissuading him. If this is history, it is what Robert Darnton calls “messy history.” It
is the history of the Italian microhistorians that gives voice to the voiceless and shows the
rich fabric of texts that create our understanding of the complex world. The life and
times of Baretti on these pages, furthermore, will be viewed through the microscope of
the literary productions. I will be looking at literary works in the wide range of genres
that writers like Baretti and Johnson had in their arsenals, travel works, speeches, and
personal letters, book reviews, anecdotes.

Some refined readers will likely consider this investigation nothing more or less
than a wallowing in the literary gutter of a fallow period in literary history. To them I
have no self-defense, as this is not an interpretation of confirmed masterpieces, but rather
a critical consideration of the literary underbrush, some of which is very closely related to
gossip, rumor mill, and petty propaganda. I will consider cruel invectives, offensive
jokes, and parodies. Many of the important texts discussed are so obscure that they are
not only out-of-print, their authors, publishers, and date-of-publication may never be
determined. Like a collection of forensic evidence – bone fragments and blood splatters
it may raise some reasonable doubts about an important case in literary and legal history.

Another of my colleagues was convinced, whenever I mentioned this project, that I have some personal gripe with Baretti, a warped desire to re-open the Baretti case in the Tribunale di Torino. In the pages of this study of Italian culture, I hope my inquiry into how Baretti unfolded in all of its literary mystery is not reduced to my wanting to find him guilty as charged. By examining the circumstances of the case and the literary circumstantial evidence, I would like the reader “to retain some sense of the multiplicity of voices and avoid slipping into the role or retrospective judges who render verdicts by deciding who is telling the truth.”

The point is not whether Baretti was innocent or guilty. Rather, the aim here is to put in context an event that caused tremendous commotion in his life, a moment that became a metaphor and captured the attention of an age. In this investigation, my concern is “less about the truth of the denunciation than the social atmosphere in which the accusations took place.” (ix) I have no interest whatsoever in judging Baretti, but only in exposing the “multitude of voices” that told his story, long hidden in the stacks of libraries and archives. By opening “a series of gaps and disjunctures,” I hope to illuminate the Age of the Grand Tour and shed light on the greatest period of law reform in modern times. (xx)

Why does this trial matter more than others do? It touched the lives of the best minds of the generation. Baretti bragged that three thousand people--sometimes he said five thousand--attended his trial. Word of the crime spread from the Old Bailey to Edinburgh to Milan, changing in the process as inevitably as a phrase in the child’s game
of whisper-down-the-lane. In the documents and exhibits related to this case, included in the text and Appendices, we see what Natalie Zeon Davis calls “the social creativity of the so-called inarticulate” (ix) The following account of a celebrated trial will not be presented as representative of the criminal justice system of the middle of eighteenth century. How could it be? The case was an exceptional one, for many reasons. Thousands of people knew about the Baretti case, and an astonishing list of cultural icons played a direct or indirect role in it. There has never been—before or since—a case that involved so many figures from art, literature, politics and law. The police reports, populated by the unfortunate, uneducated and unlucky, are routine and ephemeral, while Baretti slipped into history. Baretti was a case of wild contrasts, in which accusations of collusion fought with pronouncements of justice served. Nasty antagonisms led to character assassination, as self-defense became a mode of self-preservation in the literary arena.

Finally, this is the story of the most extraordinary period in Baretti’s life. Much of what I am documenting is the material of rumor mill and innuendo, diatribe and propaganda. However, it is also an investigation of his works, his style, and his bizarre life. Although he never wrote a biography or memoir—unlike Goldoni or Alfieri or Casanova--almost every Baretti page reveals something impressive or disappointing about the man. His personality and tone of voice is so decisive that his character seems to be conveyed even in genres that give an author little opportunity for self-expression. One thing is for sure: no mediocre writer ever tried harder to be famous.
The following study is an attempt to put words into the pages that Baretti left blank, though it will no doubt be very different from the story he would have wanted to tell.

* * *

Throughout the text, I have included English translation of material originally written in Italian. The translations will always appear in square brackets, immediately following the original when the quotation is short, occasionally parallel in the text, or dropped into a footnote. Since the analysis will focus on phrasing, diction and rhetorical nuances, the reader is encouraged to consult the original language. Unless otherwise noted, the translations are mine. There are three recurring abbreviations:

- **ODND**: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
- **DBI**: Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani
- **OBSP**: www.oldbaileyonline.org

To keep the flow of the main text, but also preserve as much of the original evidence pursuant to the case as possible, I have supplied Appendix D: News Reports, Reactions, and Documents.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Rutgers University Italian Department has provided a rich and supportive environment. Laura Sanguineti-White, for her intelligence, discretion, and intuition, deserves first place. David Marsh’s expertise in classical studies was valuable. Andrea Baldi assisted in many ways and was a tireless advocate. Paola Gambarota also smiled on this project, giving me the best encouragement a struggling writer can hear from someone vastly more talented: “Yours is the book I wanted to write.” I would like to thank Rudy Bell of the History Department for his patience and advice.

The Firestone Library of Princeton University generously issued me an access card to a superlative collection and provided reference support. This project would have taken a lifetime without the availability of ECCO and Online Burney Newspapers. Librarians and staff at the following institutions have been courteous and generous: Yale University Library, Harvard University Hyde Collection, Henry Ransom Center, Boston Public Library, University of Cincinnati Library Special Collections, University of Pennsylvania, New York Public Library, Columbia University, Wadsworth Atheneum, British Library, London Metropolitan Archives, Harold Acton Library, Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Braudense (Milano), Museo di Ferri Taglienti (Scarperia), Archivio di Stato (Firenze), Archivio di Stato (Perugia). I apologize for any omissions.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge three special women who are as precious to me as my lungs and my heart.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

*Abstract*  
*Preface*  
*Acknowledgements*  

**Introduction: Giuseppe/Joseph Baretti’s “Supplemental Personality”**

1. The Crime Scene: “The Haymarket Affair”  
2. The Defence: “A Constellation of Genius”  
5. “With a Fell, Furious, and Mischievous Mind and Intent”  
6. “It Is Well Known That He Was Acquitted”  

**Conclusion: Giuseppe/Joseph Baretti’s “Satirical Madness”**

**Bibliography**  
**Appendices**  
**Curriculum vitae**
INTRODUCTION

GIUSEPPE/JOSEPH BARETTI’S “SUPPLEMENTAL PERSONALITY”

To attack a man, in the warmth of resentment, however rudely, who is alive and able to defend himself, is certainly less exceptionable, in point of honour and spirit at least, than a premeditated design, conceived and executed in cold blood, to strip the dead of those honours which successive ages had bestowed on their memory.


He, least of all mankind, approved Baretti’s conversation; he considered him an insolent, over-bearing foreigner; as Baretti, in his turn, thought him an unpolished man, and an absurd companion: but when this unhappy Italian was charged with murder, and afterwards sent by Sir John Fielding to Newgate, Goldsmith opened his purse, and would have given him every shilling it contained; he, at the same time, insisted upon going in the coach with him to the place of confinement.


Murder is as fashionable a Crime as a Man can be guilty of. How many fine Gentlemen have we in Newgate every Year, purely upon that Article! If they have wherewithal to persuade the Jury to bring it in Manslaughter, what are they the worse for it?


In the Age of Johnson and Franklin, anyone interested in Italy or in Italian culture would have been familiar with the name Giuseppe, or Joseph, Baretti. When Thomas Jefferson or anyone else learning Italian at the time needed to check a definition, he relied on Baretti’s famous *Dictionary*, the Webster’s of Italian-English lexicons. Its compiler, born in a provincial town outside of Turin in 1719, improbably rose to a high profile in the second half of the eighteenth century in his native country as well as in his adopted city of London, where he spent (with a short interruption) forty years of his life. He left home at the age of sixteen, with neither family wealth nor impressive academic training to go in
search of literary fame first in Milan and Venice, finally achieving it in a foreign country by sheer force of will, by a combination of Grub Street smarts, tenacity, and resourcefulness.

No writer did more than Baretti in exporting Italian literature during the Age of the Grand Tour. While many English went in search of antiquities and oil paintings, Baretti brought to the same class the great writers who were yet un-translated or misunderstood, Dante, Boccaccio, Cellini, Della Casa, and many others. Baretti attempted to capitalize on the growing interest in learning Italian, tirelessly promoting the classics of Italian literature in anthologies and in private lessons. He had a hand in a translation of Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, he produced “a magnificent edition of Machiavel’s works,” and he wrote popular guides to learning the Italian language, the prototype of today’s textbooks that emphasize conversation.1 In one of his first compositions, a personal history of Italian literature in manuscript written in 1748, he accurately stated his singular advantage as a scholar: “io amai questa lingua de’ miei più teneri anni, e che l’ho studiata assai assai” [I loved this language from my most tender years, and studied it very, very much].2 When Baretti died in London in 1789, he left behind a legacy of literary works in a numerous languages and an extraordinary range of genres. One writer at the time spoke accurately of the Italian’s “exertions in the cause of literature.”3

On Baretti’s death, the notices identified him as the “Italian gentleman well known in the literary world.” He was also a very unusual man.

---

1 *European Magazine* (August, 1789), 92.
3 *European Magazine* (May, 1789), 349.
Baretti had lived a life, as Camillo Ugoni observed in 1820, “errante e zingaresca,” odd and like a gypsy, having first sought opportunities in Milan and in Venice before abandoning Italy, returning a decade later to publish his most controversial work, a short-lived book review called *La Frusta Letteraria* [The Literary Scourge], only to make a hasty retreat back to England. Like Casanova and Canaletto, like Mazzei and Metastasio, Baretti exuded something deeply, irrepressibly *Italian*, though he felt pushed out of the house or better able to express his true self when many miles away.

As Franco Fido writes, “Niente sembra mancare, nella vita e nelle opere del Baretti, di quel che occorre per vedere in lui un tipico rappresentante della civiltà letteraria settecentesca.”4 In the cosmopolitan literary world of mid-eighteenth century Europe, Baretti is as representative as his admired friend and collaborator, Samuel Johnson. The way the two met calls attention to Baretti’s bifocal vision of the literary world: Charlotte Lenox, a friend of Johnson, was in need of an assistant on research into Shakespeare’s Italian sources, and Baretti agreed to help in exchange for advanced English lessons. She introduced the Italian to Johnson. Through Johnson, Baretti was able to infiltrate the networks of London publishing and art, creating important ties with booksellers and painters, like Sir Joshua Reynolds, who would become stakeholders in his career. As one early Italian biographer pointed out, Baretti “fu amato da Richardson, Jhonson, Garich, Thomson, Young, Sterne, Reynolds, Bertolozzi, Cipriani, e dall'infelice Reylangs.”5

---

5 Giuseppe Franchi, *Notizie intorno alla vita di Baretti* (Torino, 1789’), 27. The “unhappy Rylens” is William Wynne Ryland (1738-1783), an English engraver who, upon being found guilty of forgery, attempted suicide before being executed at Tyburn on August 29, 1783.
At the end of Dr. Johnson’s life, Baretti would write in *Tolondron* (1785), “The oldest friend [Johnson] had in the world was the appellation he honoured me with.” Yet Baretti remains by far the least appreciated of Johnson’s circle of eminent writers, scholars, politicians, actors, and lawyers. Unlike Boswell and Burke, Baretti has been nearly forgotten. The only substantial English biography was written a hundred years ago.

This is the final irony in the ironic life of Baretti, for when he was alive no one who encountered him remained indifferent. When his life and accomplishments were assessed two hundred years ago, many regarded them as nothing short of spectacular. “A facility to acquire languages he possessed in a very extraordinary degree, and his perseverance was not inferior to his genius,” a memorialist wrote. Mrs. Thrale, who knew Baretti as well as anyone, was astonished by his linguistic gifts: “He had also a knowledge of the solemn language and the gay, could be sublime with Johnson, or blackguard with the groom; could dispute, could rally, could quibble, in our language.” Although Baretti did not study English till he was in his thirties – and never lost his accent – he must have had remarkable vocal chords. “Baretti has, besides, some skill in music, with a bass voice, very agreeable, besides a falsetto which he can manage so as to mimic any singer he hears,” Mrs. Thrale noted, adding, “I would also trust his knowledge of painting a long way.” Obituaries printed in the major newspapers praised the

---

6 None of Baretti’s works is available in a modern, scholarly edition. Franco Fido’s anthology *Opere di Giuseppe Baretti* (Milano, 1967) includes an excellent introduction, 9-27. There is nothing similar in English. Monographs and conferences on Baretti in Italy include the following: Crotti (1992), Cerutti (1993), Anglani (1997), Bracchi (1998), and Prosperi (1999).

7 Collison-Morley, in *Giuseppe Baretti with an Account of his Literary Friendships and Feuds in the Days of Dr. Johnson* (London, 1909), lamented that Baretti received so little critical attention. The indefatigable Luigi Piccioni, during the same period, voiced the same concerns.

8 *European Magazine* (May, 1789), 349.

industrious Italian’s voluminous output and his talent for second-language acquisition that allowed him to overcome “the difficulties that stand in the way of a foreigner on his arrival in England.”\textsuperscript{10} By the end of his life, Baretti was perhaps more admired for his idiomatic English than for his energetic Italian prose: “His English style was not only pure, but possessed an ease and familiarity very extraordinary in a foreigner.”\textsuperscript{11}

Baretti emerges more fully than any other figure of his time as the writer whose success would depend on his ability to embody the Italian abroad. Brash and well-read in Italian and English literature, he positioned himself as an authority of the best in contemporary Italian letters, as well as a judge of the classics of the past. No one before or since did more than Baretti in importing Italian literature to the English-speaking world. Much of his business was done, as the period demanded, in conversation (a skill of his that impressed Dr. Johnson) or in unacknowledged acts of literary charity, such as correcting proofs of translations, but he also published collections of Italian literature, such as the \textit{Introduction to the Italian Language} (1755). This 475-page book is printed in two columns and begins with a preface attributed to Dr. Johnson; the page layout itself places Baretti, as if it were, side-by-side with the author of the great \textit{English Dictionary}, published the same year. Baretti’s book, in addition to being a guide to the history of the Italian language, is a bilingual anthology of Italian literature, including passages they selected from a range of authors, including Politian, Machiavelli, Ariosto, Tasso, Castiglione, Michelangelo, Galileo and Giovanni Milton (one of his Italian sonnets). In 1760, Baretti published a companion volume, \textit{A Grammar of the Italian Language}, which included not only the grammar and a phrase book but what he called “a copious praxis of

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{A New and General Biographical Dictionary} (London, 1798), 84.
moral sentences.” This praxis – 200 pages of “pensieri sopra vari soggetti” – identified in the 1778 edition as having been “Collected from the works of Dr. Samuel Johnson.”

Evidently confident about his improved English skills, Baretti included in this volume an English grammar as well, but one expressly for Italians: he never liked to operate in one language if two were available. The Italian Library (1757), which opens with a lengthy “History of the Italian Tongue,” was intended for serious students and collectors of Italian books, like actor David Garrick, who would consult the catalog when making purchases at auction or abroad. It is powerful evidence of an intense, widespread interest in demanding Italian writers, from Leon Battista Alberti to Sperone Speroni, as well as the history of printing and textual scholarship. This was the last time such a learned bibliography of Italian literature was directed at the English common reader.

Baretti recognized the merits of Dante, though he lacked the foresight to translate the Inferno at a time when the Divine Comedy was still unavailable in English, perhaps because he was convinced that the work was untranslatable; anyone who wishes to read Dante, he felt, should take the trouble to learn Italian or ask an Italian to read the poem aloud. In An Introduction to the Italian Language, he hastened to remind anyone disappointed with his English renderings that “it was impossible to preserve any of their beauties; and whoever knows two language will be aware of this impossibility” (vii) His phrase “the dark labyrinth of a new tongue” rings true to anyone who has tried to learn Italian subjunctives. Although Baretti preferred the Florentine accent to any other, he reminded overconfident Englishmen teaching themselves Italian that “even among the

12 A Grammar of the Italian Language. To which is added a Copious Praxis of Moral Sentences (London, 1778).
13 Giuseppe Baretti, A Dissertation upon the Italian poetry, in which are interspersed some remarks. On Mr. Voltaire’s Essay on the Epic Poets (London, 1753). See 29-69 for Baretti’s remarks on Dante and Baretti’s interesting critical comparison between Dante with John Milton.
Baretti was also a resourceful, though sometimes wrong-headed, exporter of English literary material. His colloquial style shows the results of his hours of his tireless copying English writing – letters by Pope, passages from epistolary novels, essays by Addison and Steele – into his notebooks. Furthermore, his admiration for Shakespeare probably assisted greatly in exporting the English writer to Italy; despite Shakespeare’s frequent use of Italian materials, his plays were little known in Italy (and not translated) until late in the eighteenth century. When Baretti launched a vigorous defense of the English playwright against Voltaire, he lost a lot of favour with Frenchmen: Voltaire compared the burly Italian to a bug. Baretti relied on and exploited his role in the import-export trade of literature, in his expertise on poetry as well as the different “proses,” on shameless copying of others works (most of The Italian Library was plagiarized), on pure hack work, and on producing books that would supply a demand rather than display particular talents of creativity or personality. “These accomplishments, with his extensive power over every modern language, make him a most pleasing companion,” Mrs. Thrale observed, “while he is in good humour.” (93)

More than any writer in a century of peace, manners, and genial company, Baretti exhibited a remarkable talent to shock or irritate, by his tone of voice and unbridled criticism, and it would be possible to generate a long list of those who disliked him. Mrs. Thrale is hinting to this fact. Baretti demonstrated a remarkable ability to either get under the skin of readers or else express himself (evidence suggests he was more immoderate in

---

14 The Penn Commonplace Book Manuscript is a precious window into Baretti’s mind. The title is a misnomer, as scattered leaves are bound in the thick volume, pages from works-in-progress, drafts, duplicates of private letters and, of course, translations.
conversation than in print) with no rhetorical tact. Throughout his entire life, Baretti displayed an uncanny talent for making friends in the right places – and foes in the wrong. “Though his severity had created him enemies,” we are told in the Gentleman’s Magazine of May, 1789, “his talents, conversation, and integrity had conciliated the regard of many valuable friends and acquaintances.” (469) According to Fanny Burney, Baretti so unnerved Lucy, the wife of Dr. Johnson’s friend John Paradise (1743-1794), that she poured a pot of hot tea on his head. (ODNB, “John Paradise”) Baretti was frequently reproved for bad manners and for having a short-fuse. Another of Johnson’s friends, Anna Seward, thought the literary critic “base, ungentlemanlike, [and] unmanly.”15

Baretti was predisposed to alienating himself from both personal friends and the larger literary community, risky behavior in a time of literary clubs, poetic academies, and coffee shops. Whether his prickly but memorable personality was the result or the cause of the merciless reviews he often received will never, of course, be known. He was a study in conflict. A reviewer, writing for the London Magazine (April, 1771) identified Baretti as the author “whose books of travels are equally replete with falsehoods, puerilities, ignorance, and nonsense.” He was thought by various enemies at various times an undereducated oaf, a “literary swindler,” a plagiarist, and a tiresome babbler. But no one forgot him.

Despite attempts on the part of occasional biographers to draw Baretti as a sympathetic character, it is impossible to deny that he was difficult, touchy and prone to mood swings. He left his birthplace of Rivalta Bormida as a teenager when, disgusted by

what he regarded as his father’s moral degeneracy after a remarriage, he moved to Guastalla in the province of Mantua. About this early period Baretti was very reticent; when he did discuss his upbringing, he had a tendency to embellish the facts. As a result, biographies of Baretti are studded with unlikely facts, such as his noble lineage, his teaching post at the University of Turin, or his father’s association with Filippo Juvarra, the astonishing architect who designed many of the Baroque palaces of Turin.

Early in his career, Baretti’s ambitions pushed him toward poetry and toward Venice. When Dr. Biaggio Schiavo, a Venetian priest, criticized one of Baretti’s sonnets, however, Baretti “ridiculed Schiavo’s character, literary ability, and physical appearance,” writes Donald O’Connor.16 (ODNB, “Giuseppe Baretti”) In 1750, Baretti lampooned Giuseppe Bartoli, a well-connected scholar in Turin who had been appointed by the King to the post of Professor of Archeology. It did not take two-hundred years of hindsight to determine that “the revenge was out of proportion to the offence.”17 (ODNB, “Giuseppe Baretti”) Once roused, Baretti was merciless and, to say the least, “should his enemies be powerful, his quarrels might well get him into trouble.”18 Baretti was never neutral, nor was he inclined to the sort of flattery that was nearly as essential to advancement in literary academies as were high standards or good taste.

When he left Italy for London in the early 1750s, Baretti probably anticipated himself teaching and translating, and with some luck finding a post in the thriving Italian

16 Giuseppe Baretti, Lettere di Giuseppe Baretti torinese ad un suo amico di Milano sopra un certo fatto del dottor Biagio Schiavo da Este (Venezia, 1747?). Giuseppe Franchi, Notizia intorno alla vita di Baretti (Torino, 1789?): “Inasprito Baretti sfogò la sua collera contro lo Schiavo pubblicando tre lettere, che dal Mazzucchelli si chiamano piacevolissime, nelle quali sostiene bene le parti di difensore, che di accusatore.” (14)
17 Giuseppe Franchi, Notizia intorno alla vita di Baretti (Torino, 1789?): “Inasprito Baretti sfogò la sua collera contro lo Schiavo pubblicando tre lettere, che dal Mazzucchelli si chiamano piacevolissime, nelle quali sostiene bene le parti di difensore, che di accusatore.” (14)
18 Donald Gallup, Giuseppe Baretti’s Work in England (Yale, 1939), 5.
opera scene. This never panned out, for Baretti was entirely too forthright and undiplomatic to possibly survive the delicate operations of a theatrical troupe, where he would have been forced to defer to divas, oboists, and show-promoters. In one of his first pamphlets, unsigned and written in English and French, Baretti offered the following assessment of an Italian singer: “Seraphino is an Eunuch of no reputation in the musical World.” Some Persons who pretend to know him, say, that his Stature is low, his Figure unpleasing, his Voice weak, his Action disagreeable, and his Knowledge of music very inconsiderable.” Of Baretti’s first London years we know almost nothing for certain, except that this and similar publications sabotaged his future as a libretto writer.

Scanning Baretti’s juvenilia, there is little that displays a literary genius in the bud – except perhaps the poetry he eventually abandons – but we can already detect in the prose a tenor of voice and what in the 19th century Camillo Ugoni would refer to as Baretti’s “bizzaro ingegno,” bizarre intelligence. Baretti never lost his “disposizione perennemente giovanile all’istantanea,” as Franco Fido calls it, his naive confidence and brash energy in confronting literary art. In 1753, His name appears in print as “Joseph Baretti,” on the title-page of a brief history of Italian literature appended to a short compendium of ancient Greek and Roman writers. These succinct Remarks on the Italian Language and Writers in a Letter from M. Joseph Baretti, to An English Gentleman at Turin, Written in the Year 1751, display the spirit of the hostile critic, unabashedly personal, writing off-the-cuff and unaware of the impact what he is saying will have. There was always something improvised, as Fido suggests, in the style of Baretti. The voice is already loud and unmistakable: “I will not hesitate to assert, that

---

there are not, at this day, twenty persons in all Italy who understand [the Italian language] thoroughly, and can write it correctly.” (4) Johnson probably admired Baretti’s daring in harshly criticizing living writers, as well as praising poets of the past who “have given me some pleasure,” such as “Dante the Epic writer; the other Dante da Maiano, Cino da Pistoia, in short, all I have met with of that age.” (15) Baretti dismisses Merozini, a poet of the seventeenth century, as “a most wretched versifier, who nauseates me as often as he comes in my way.”

The autograph manuscript of this delightful history of prose and poetry, which I believe has escaped notice of scholars, is in the University of Cincinnati Library. It is written in Italian, although it is directed to an Englishman not mentioned in the print version, a silk merchant and book collector named Pietro Nouaille. Strictly speaking, this version is written self-consciously in Tuscan quite right for an Englishman learning proper Italian. In this 1748 version, however, Baretti’s sum of those alive who can understand the Italian language is ten, which suggests that he was not growing harsh with age. In the print version, Baretti judges Chiabrera’s poems “in blank verse, not ill done, the rest will hardly bear to be twice read,” while in the Italian version they are “scritti mediocrementemente bene, tutto il resto non merita d’esser letto.” Merozini on these pages is a “cattivissimo Verseggiatore, che mi move il vomito ogni volta, che me vien per le mani,” a horrible poet who makes me vomit every time he comes into my hands. Those who criticize his admired Boccaccio, Baretti writes with signature sarcasm, “evidently know nothing of the matter” in 1751 or, three years earlier, “sono tutti buona gente, che non sanno dove s’abbiano il naso”: they are all good people who cannot find their noses.

21 The printer even gets the name wrong: see Benedetto Menzini, Opere. (Florence, 1731-32).
22 Al signor Pietro Nouaille inglese, osservazioni e suggerimenti sulla lingua e sugli autori Toscani, di Giuseppe Baretti Torinese Venezia, 1748.
Interestingly, part of the truth value of what he is writing, Baretti tells Pietro/Peter, comes from the fact that he is addressing a reader who is not Italian: this frees him up to be totally honest and frank.\(^{23}\)

As Baretti unsystematically records what to read – and what to avoid at all costs – there is only one arbiter of taste, himself, and one can imagine a publisher telling Baretti to tone it down a bit. We sense already the fierce independence and biting style that will ten years later become the voice of the *Frusta Letteraria* (1763). When he returned to Italy in the early 1760s for a brief period, he wrote the *Literary Scourge*, a book review following the English model of Addison and Steele. Baretti adopted the persona of a truculent misanthrope named Aristarco Scannabue (Aristarco Bullbutcher), and launched harsh evaluations of contemporary authors, including Goldoni and other extremely popular talents. Here, again, Baretti’s lack of restraint and good manners seems to have invited controversy. His criticism of living authors was so nasty that the government stepped in to halt printing. Baretti was effectively shunned by the city of Venice, and was forced to hide in Ancona, where he persisted in publishing the offensive periodical, before returning to England. The fact that he never returned to Italy again led some to conclude, though Baretti denied it, that he had been banished from the peninsula: if he returned to Venice, he would have been assassinated. The publication “raised a storm of

\(^{23}\) “Ben so, che io parlassi, o scrivessi così liberalmente agli’Italiani d’oggidì, come faccio a voi, so che mi farei lapidare, o almeno riputare fuor del senno affatto, ma io parlo ad un Inglese, che non voglio ingannare, e torno a dire, voi giudicherete s’io parlo diretti, o torto quando farete bene al fatto della nostra Lingua.” (1748) “I am sensible, that was I to talk in this manner to modern Italians, much more was I to write so freely, they would be ready to dispatch me to the other world, or at least regard me as a perfect madman. But I speak to a stranger whom I would not deceive: and when you become acquainted with our language, you will judge whether I am in the wrong.” (1753)
enmity against the author, which rendered his abode in that country unpleasant, if not unsafe,” we read in an early biography.24

No scholar has ever tried to probe into why Baretti was the way he was. Perhaps because his father disapproved of the boy’s poetic sensibility (he wanted his son to become a priest or a lawyer), Baretti saw the act of writing as a gesture of interpersonal and civil disobedience, an act of self-assertion that might involve hurting, as much as helping, other people. Perhaps his candor (to put it gently) stemmed from his unique nature, the “indole singolare” that Giuseppe Maffei described in 1829 as “formed on good taste and strange fantasy, bold, irritable, exaggerated in praise and blame.”25 Maffei admires the Frusta letteraria as written with major fire, and he feels on every page the distaste for a great number of bad books, “scritta con maggior fuoco, e sente ad ogni pagina il disdegnio pel gran numero di cattivi libri.” (160) Giuseppe Cardelli called Baretti “uno de’ più ameni e vivaci ingegni del tempo suo, ma insieme caustico e mordace all’eccesso,” one of the most amenable and lively geniuses of his time, but together caustic and mordacious to excess.26 While travelling in London in 1766, Alessandro Verri jotted in his diary that he had seen an “eminent rogue” and a “literary reptile”: it was Baretti.27 Giovanni Battista Vicini (1709-1782), in response to Baretti’s critique of him, published a poem pleading with the Bullbutcher to just cease, and to

---

26 Compendio della storia della bella letteratura, Vol. 3 (Pisa, 1817).
return to his less confrontational poetry written in the serio-comic style of Francesco Berni.\footnote{Giovanni Battista Vicini, \textit{Il Beretti instruito nelle cose di Portogallo, e suoi errori, con un opuscolo contro la di lui frusta letteraria} (Roveredo, 1765), 6.}

Who do you think you are, my Giuseppe
With your petulant and stupid Scourge?
God and men will forgive you for this!
You want to see Italy shake with fear
Fall down and beg for pity
O ridiculous thoughts! from a pedant?

For my sake I don’t wish you any ill
But am advising you for your own good.
To leave your bestial enterprise:
And to me among others writing to you,
I swear your scourges are not worth a fig.

Baretti could be very cutting in his assessments of writers on whose work he depended, such as the lexicographer Ferdinando Altieri, on whose Italian-English dictionary Baretti based his own in 1760. “Altieri was no less in the dark as to the beauties of his native language,” Baretti wrote in his Preface, adding, “he had not the least sparkle of poetical fire in his soul; and unpoetical people ought never to assume the right of teaching.” The learned Altieri has been called “the unknown lexicographer,” because Baretti eclipsed him, elevating himself from reviser to the main compiler of the lexicon.\footnote{Desmond O’ Connor, \textit{A History of Italian and English Bilingual Dictionaries} (Firenze, 1990). See Ch. 4, “Ferdinando Altieri, The Unknown Lexicographer.” “The fact was, however, that the alterations and additions wrought by Baretti were, all in all, every minor.” \textit{ODNB}, “Giuseppe Baretti”) The many reprints of the \textit{Dictionary} appeared citing Baretti as the author, though his original contract had stipulated that he would produce a mere revision of Altieri, based on Altieri’s, first published London in 1726-7. In fact, he used an edition of Altieri improved by Evangelista Palermo, published in 1750.} In the public world of literature, Baretti earned a reputation in some quarters for double-dealing and for self-aggrandizement. Baretti told Edmond Malone, the Irish Shakespeare scholar, that he “copied from the dictionaries that had gone before.”\footnote{Prior, Sir J. \textit{Life of Edmund Malone}. London: Smith Elder 1860 391-2.}
Baretti was equally unforgiving about his own books. Toward the end of his life, he felt so disappointed in what he called his “ill-chopt performances” that he declared, “I wish now, and to my sorrow I wish it in vain, that every page I have sent to the press in Italy or in England were at the bottom of the sea.” Using the sort of violent metaphor that he relished, Baretti added the following permission: “I give you most ample leave to massacre all my literary offspring, these present speeches not excepted.”

Baretti’s dual citizenship in the literary world was neither easily earned, nor was this posture easily maintained. He published works in English, French, Latin, Spanish, German and his native Italian, though his competency in all six languages was frequently called into question. He purchased his reputation as a polyglot at a heavy price. He ran the constant risk of producing works in a second language, exposing himself to native speakers and professors prepared to discredit him. Not well-educated by standards of the time and lacking prerequisites necessary to produce a translation of Ovid, he did so only to later admit himself that it was not any good. Though he would maintain an adversarial relationship with France – and appears to have thoroughly despised Voltaire – his first publication was a finely printed, illustrated translation of Corneille. “His countrymen have sometimes denied him the credit of possessing the Tuscan purity in his Italian writings.”

His *Dizionario* would remain the standard reference until 1925, but it was heavily revised after his death by English editors who felt it left a lot to be desired. Even “non-native speakers” criticized his Italian as not Tuscan enough,

---

33 Giuseppe Baretti, *Tragedie di Pier Cornelio tradotte in versi Italiani, con l'originale a fronte* (Venezia, 1747-1748).
34 The *Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature, For the Year 1789* (London, 1792), 34.
such as James Roster, an obscure “Prof. of the Tuscan, English, and German Languages at Florence,” who gave the Italian lexicographer a taste of his own bitter medicine:

Baretti himself has been guilty of the grossest improprieties and absurdities in the indiscriminate use and mixture of modern and obsolete phrases and expressions; and had moreover stained his pages with definitions of words, never heard but from the lips of abandoned wretches in the most common receptacles of vice. Deficient also in taste and judgment, he blended together synonymous terms in such a manner, that instead of properly explaining the true meaning of the word, he frequently left the mind in greater doubt and uncertainty. He affected too a fondness sometimes for the language of fashionable life; and, at other times, for the lowest and most familiar conversation. He is likewise accused of grammatical inaccuracies in Italian, as well as in English.

It was fortunate that Baretti did not live to read this, the “Preface to the First Florentine Edition” in 1816, dedicated to Thomas Hall, Minister of the Anglican Church at Leghorn. Throughout the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century, many critics would agree with Pietro Custodi, one of the first to edit Baretti’s Scritte scelti (1822), that his late style was “forse non abbastanza corretto ed anche alquanto lezioso” [perhaps not correct enough and rather affected and rough.] (7) As for his English, despite those advocates who considered his fluency miraculous, there were others less enthusiastic: one contemporary remarked dryly that “he has also attempted to write in English, but without success.” (217)

Baretti further damaged his reputation as a linguist by publishing hastily and “out of his field,” such as in the German language or, regrettably, the Irish. Charles Vallancey (1721-1812) published an Essay on the Antiquity of the Irish Language in 1772, advertising on the title page the inclusion of “The Mistakes committed by Mr. BARETTI in his Collation of the Irish with the Biscayan Language (quoted in his late Publication) exposed and corrected.” According to Vallancey, Baretti had “mutilated” the Irish and Biscayne language versions of the Lord’s Prayer, in the fourth volume of his Journey
from London to Genoa (1770). In other works as well, Baretti would be exposed as a lackluster and overly ambitious linguist, given to confidently publishing work that was slapdash and misleading. His *Introduction to the European Languages* (1772) also met with stiff resistance, as critics saw it as the creation of a dilettante who was not master of Italian or English, much less German and Portuguese. Baretti spent the last decade of his life on an ill-conceived translation of *Don Quixote* and in studying Spanish literature; he simply did not know enough Spanish to complete the assignment. In fact, he exerted more energy in a misguided attempt to undermine the translation and annotations of English Reverend John Bowle’s *Historia del famoso cavallero Don Quixote de la Mancha* (Salisbury, 1781), regarded in Madrid, Spain as one of the seminal works in Cervantes scholarship. According to Boswell, Johnson registered misgivings about Baretti’s translation of Horace’s *Carmen Seculare*.

Some literary historians consider Baretti the first “professional” Italian writer, an author who, like Johnson, wrote what earned money, a journalist (in the words of Benedetto Croce) displaying “all the incoherence of that profession.” There is a marvelous and even poignant moment in the works of Baretti, where we feel the heavy burden of a life dedicated to culture that, in the end, never produced much of permanent worth. Looking back over his life of writing, he sums it up this way: “whether it be

---

35 Giuseppe Baretti, *An Introduction to the Most Useful European Languages, Consisting of Select Passages, from the Most Celebrated English, French, Italian, and Spanish Authors. With translations as Close as Possible; so Disposed, in Columns* (London, 1772). The book is “intended for the use of foreigners, merchants, and gentlemen who make the knowledge of those languages their study.”


37 “When Johnson had done reading, [Baretti] asked him bluntly, ‘If upon the whole it was a good translation?’ Johnson, whose regard for truth was uncommonly strict, seemed to be puzzled for a moment, what answer to make; as he certainly could not honestly commend the performance: with exquisite address he evaded the question thus, ‘Sir, I do not say that it may not be made a very good translation.’” James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (London, 1791), ii, 282.
scantiness of merit, gross mismanagement, or lack of luck, I never enjoyed what is called patronage form any body, either in Italy, or in England.” (150) Also like Johnson, Baretti’s life fascinated people of his time as much as did his writing, probably more. “The circumstances of the life of this writer, were they fully known, would, we are well assured, be both amusing and instructive.” Baretti miscellaneous papers, after his death, were burnt “without inspection,” or else we would know much more of his “circumstances.” No diary or biography survives, but Baretti left traces of his cantankerous personality on almost every page. He became a “character” in various works, some of them dialogues and speeches that convey the immediacy of his thoughts and registers of his voice. Benedetto Croce had no trouble arriving at adjectives to describe the man: “focoso, violento, impaziente, burbero, bisbetico.” While he appears to have been quite gentle with little children, he was given to impulsive fits of rage and acquired a reputation for a fiery temperament.

In his essay “The Social Function of Poetry,” T. S. Eliot wrote, “one of the reasons for learning at least one foreign language well is that we acquire a kind of supplementary personality; one of the reasons for not acquiring a new language instead of our own is that most of us do not want to become a different person.” The idea of acquiring a “second language” often stimulates vague, inauthentic sensations. In contrast to the world Eliot is describing, Johnson’s London was rich in bilingualism. Baretti was not the “resident Italian” but rather than an active participant in the cultural issues of the day. His stature began to sink in England by the nineteenth century, as the circulation of foreign books, translations, and classical literature receded.

---

we find references to Alessandro Pope and Tommaso Gray, though a hundred years later no one in England or America would read John Verga, James Leopardi or Louis Pirandello. As Eliot implies many of us feel uneasy in conversations in mixed languages, as confused as a raviolo in a shepherd’s pie. For Baretti, a second language was a psychological need and a practical advantage.

Scholars assessing the interplay between the English and Italians in the eighteenth century, such as Shearer West, argue that even two hundred years ago there was very little, if any, exchange on a personal level between the English and Italian artists. The Italians clustered together and tended to operate by a different set of rules.41 Baretti – somewhat unique in his time – seemed to have no qualms at all about surrounding himself entirely with English speakers. In fact, although he had some Italian friends during the years he spent in London, he seems to have sustained more friendships from the peninsula. Like other expatriate Italians, Giuseppe/Joseph Baretti seemed to go to some considerable lengths to mask or alter his Italian background when occasion required and to call attention to it when advantageous. We know that he frequented Orange’s Coffee-House, as did a great number of Italians, and we know he lived with Felice Giardini, a violin virtuoso, during his first London years. But when Baretti was dying in May 1789, there were no Italians at his bedside, nor did any attend his funeral. His international position in the literary landscape – both as cultural exporter of Italian goods and enthusiast of English culture – reveals the ambiguities in the position of the writer abroad in a period of exchange. Here even a comparison to Nabokov or Beckett or Conrad, all writers who achieved mastery over a second language, completely breaks

down. Baretti thought of his words in double and his works with testo a fronte. Baretti had a parallax view of literature that developed from years of translating, interpreting, teaching Italian, and acting as linguistic intermediary. Sir Joshua Reynolds’s occasional correspondence written in Italian was almost certainly from the pen of Giuseppe Baretti. The Penn Commonplace Book Manuscript shows better than any other book how Baretti’s mind worked, as it includes an Italian translation of Racine, careful transcriptions of letters Johnson wrote to Baretti, and one letter written to a Frenchman with a superfluous, sloppy English translation.

Beneath this polyglot instinct, one can detect at times the anxiety Eliot noted about linguistic authenticity and identity. Throughout his life, the problem of identity and an ambiguous self-image was always there, festering. He was most stable when he could assert a sort of bi-polar linguistic self, equally capable in English and Italian, and able to pass as an Englishman. Astute readers of Baretti have noticed that, despite his never writing a biography or memoir, his strong psychological presence is felt on almost every page. Massimo Bontempelli, in his Introduction to an edition of the Frusta letteraria, writes, “Questo libro, oltre che un documento letterario, è lo presentazione di un carattere singolarissima e quasi unico.” (14) In the Travels and elsewhere, he referred to himself “as a kind of demi-Englishman.” (26) Some English travelers went to visit Baretti when he was in Genoa in 1760. They thought it peculiar that Baretti was pretending to be – and had convinced that hotel staff that he was – an Englishman.

When an obituary of Baretti was published in the Gentleman’s Magazine in May of 1789, his literary life was summarized thus: “He has seldom written but with the
stiletto in one hand and the pen in the other.”42 We are meant to understand by this the perpetual violence of Baretti’s style and his taste for hostile reviews. Perhaps we are also meant to recall his prickly disposition and his assertive personality. The author probably had in mind what James T. S. Wheelock phrased as Baretti’s “lofty angers and his vituperative pettiness, his literary triviality and his critical acumen, his linguistic agility and his lexicographical obsessions.”43 We are surely expected to remember one day in Baretti’s life some twenty years earlier: October 6, 1769.

It was on this day, in the words of early biographer John Nichols, “an incident happened which involved [Baretti] in very disagreeable consequences.” (6)

Baretti was walking on Haymarket Street in London when he was involved in a sudden altercation with some men, and he killed one of them in self-defence. The event is summarized in one sentence in the Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani: “[Baretti fu] processato per l’uccisione di un uomo che lo aveva minacciato e provocato in una strada londinese [Baretti was put to trial for killing a man who had mugged and provoked him on a London Street].44 Recently, an Italian encyclopedia entry on Baretti captured the episode in single sentence: “Nel 1769, a causa di un omicidio commesso per legittima difesa, dovette subire un breve arresto e un processo che si concluse con l’assoluzione e la piena riabilitazione.” [In 1769, because of a murder committed in self-defense, he had to submit to a brief arrest and a trial that resulted in his complete acquittal].45 Early reference sources such as the General Biography (1801), however, offered more details about this somber occasion: “He was accosted in the Haymarket by a woman of

42 Gentleman’s Magazine (May, 1789).
44 DBI, Vol. 6, 331.
the town, whom he repulsed with some roughness. An angry altercation ensued, which brought on the interference of three men, who endeavoured to push Baretti into the kennel.⁴⁶

In fact, for early biographers in Italy and in England, this day was the culminating event in Baretti’s literary life. “Ma non è da tacersi,” wrote Camillo Ugoni, “un fatto principalissimo della vita di Baretti.”⁴⁷ At the end of the 1700s, *A New Biographical Dictionary* was published and, of course, it included an entry for Baretti, though he was not of English birth. This traumatic day in Baretti’s life appears here more important than every other happening in the author’s long and eventful life. As we turn back the clock, the event expands in significance:

Baretti (Joseph) born at Turin about the year 1716. He came over to England in the year 1750, where he resided (with a short interval) the remainder of his life. Baretti had the good fortune to be introduced to Dr. Samuel Johnson, and between them a very long intimacy had place. From the time of his arrival in England, he subsisted by teaching the Italian language, and by the sale of his writings. In 1760 he made a tour to Italy, through Portugal and Spain; on his return from whence, an event took place which hazarded his life at the time, and probably diminished, in future, some of the estimation in which, until then, he had been held among his friends. On the 6th of October, returning from the Orange Coffee-house, between six and seven o’clock, and going hastily up the Haymarket, he was accosted by a woman, who behaving with great indecency, he was provoked to give her a blow on the hand (as he declared) accompanied by some angry words. This occasioned a retort from her, in which several opprobrious terms were used toward him: and three men, who appeared to be connected with the woman, immediately interfering, and endeavouring to push him from the pavement, with a view to throw him into a puddle, in order to trample on him, he was alarmed for his safety, and rashly struck one of them with a knife. He was then pursued by them all; and another of them collaring him, he again struck the assailant, Evan Morgan, with his knife several times, and gave him some wounds, of which he died in the Middlesex hospital the next day. Mr. Baretti was

---

⁴⁷ Camillo Ugoni, *Della letteratura italiana nella seconda metà del secolo XVIII* (Brescia, 1820-1822): [But one cannot be silent about a very central fact of Baretti’s life]. 238.
immediately taken into custody, and at the ensuing sessions tried at the Old Bailey.\textsuperscript{48}

The rest of the biography – roughly two-thirds of what was printed – focused on the October 6, 1769, from the scene of the crime to the courtroom drama. Baretti would live another twenty years, but when the life of Baretti was recorded, October 6\textsuperscript{th} was the big day, the moment that defined him as a man, and as a writer.

* * *

Of the fifty or so cases tried at that session of the Old Bailey court, the vast majority involved more ordinary wrongdoers and routine instances of petty theft. On October 5\textsuperscript{th}, for example, Richard Neil had stolen “a silver watch, value five guineas” and was sentenced to transportation, a form of banishment recently enacted as a more humane alternative to corporal punishments. George Croucher, a seventeen year old boy, “was indicted for stealing two table cloths, value 5 s. and twenty-four halfpence from the pub of John Wood,” where he occasionally worked drawing beer. Like Neil, Croucher was found guilty and sent out of the country. Robert Farrel “was indicted for stealing two pair of cloth bodies for waistcoats, value 5 s. the property of Patrick Conolly,” a taylor who he claimed to have known for twenty years. A character witness testified: “I have known the prisoner six or seven years [and] never heard but that he was an honest man.” Farrel nonetheless was found guilty and sentenced to a public whipping. Richard Barnsby was tried for stealing a great variety of fabric, including “two yards of callicco, two pair of women's muslin ruffles…a black silk sack and coat, fringed with silk lace, a bombazeen sack and petticoat,” as well as “thirty-six silver medals, seven enamelled gold rings, a paper snuff-box, a copper medal, a brass medal, a chrystal locket set in gold, a

\textsuperscript{48}Stephen Jones, \textit{A New Biographical Dictionary: Containing a Brief Account of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Persons and Remarkable Characters in Every Age and Nation} (London 1799).
stone breast-buckle set in silver, a load-stone set in silver, a linen sheet, a silk tippet, a leather pocket-book and pencil, a shagreen box, and a cornelian seal.” He was sentenced to be executed. Andras Hendrick Longreen also received a death sentence: he had broken into a house at 2 a.m. some days before, and “had taken four punch bowls, and three handfuls of copper.” (OBSP, October 18, 1769)

A foreign author on trial for “the most serious offense in the criminal calendar” was a sensational happening.49 Compared to stealing handkerchiefs, Baretti’s crime was gripping and his life, as the sentences passed for theft above show, was at stake. James Boswell, a lawyer by profession, was strangely reticent in his Life of Johnson (1791), when he recorded the day of the trial, offering the following brief paragraph:

Next day, October 20, he [Samuel Johnson] appeared, for the only time I suppose in his life, as a witness in a Court of Justice, being called to give evidence to the character of Mr. Baretti, who having stabbed a man in the street, was arraigned at the Old Bailey for murder. Never did such a constellation of genius enlighten the aweful Sessions-House, emphatically called JUSTICE HALL. Mr. Burke Mr. Garrick, Mr. Beauclerk, and Dr. Johnson: and undoubtedly their favourable testimony had due weight with the Court and Jury. Johnson gave his evidence in a slow, deliberate, and distinctive manner, which was uncommonly impressive. It is well known that he was acquitted.

It must have been a dramatic occasion, indeed, for the Old Bailey Courtroom even more resembled a theatrical stage than the courtroom we know from dramas today. The onus was on the defendant to convince the jury of his or her innocence – there was no presumption of innocence—and Baretti arrived dressed all in black. Under English law, he “had the liberty, being a foreigner, to be tried before a Jury half of foreigners: but he chose to be tried by all Englishmen,” so as to escape any question of favoritism and preserve his honor.

Certainly of the jury trials of the eighteenth-century, none had the literary appeal of this one. Inside a store on Panton Street, where Baretti had sought sanctuary after the scuffle and was apprehended by a local constable, Baretti asked to speak to Sir John Fielding (1721-1780), the blind half-brother of novelist Henry Fielding, a powerful magistrate in London. The foremost English portrait painter, Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), and playwright Oliver Goldsmith (1728?-1774) accompanied Baretti in coach to the bridewell, or prison, in Tothill Fields, where he was held without bail.

On Sunday the first coroner’s inquest was held. It was adjourned until Tuesday, when another session was held; the final session was held on Wednesday, at which witnesses appeared to testify about Baretti’s character. It was a highly distinguished group: Reynolds and Goldsmith, the political writer Edmund Burke (1729/30-1797) and the lesser known but distinguished brother William (1728/30-1798), the greatest Shakespearean actor of the day, David Garrick (1717-1779), and “Dictionary” Johnson (1709-1784). In addition, there was the accomplished Samuel Hallifax (1733-1790), a Professor of Law and Asiatic languages at Cambridge, the M.P. William Fitzherbert, the learned book collector Topham Beauclerk (1739-1780) and Bennet Langton (1736-1801). The architect Sir William Chambers (1723-1796) was no doubt at the trial along with the sculptor Joseph Wilton (1722-1803), and the artist Mauritius Lowe testified on Baretti’s behalf. The prolific author of French textbooks, Jean Baptiste Perrin, would testify at the trial, and Italian authors in London and Italy followed it closely. On Thursday, bail was posted by Reynolds, Burke, Garrick and Fitzherbert at the house of Lord Mansfield, where Reynolds recoiled from the Chief Justice’s fitting but ill-timed allusion to Shakespeare:
When Sir J. Reynolds, Mr. Garrick, Mr. Burke, and others went to Lord Mansfield’s house to bail Baretti, his lordship, without paying much attention to the business, immediately and abruptly began with some very flimsy and boyish observation on the contested passage in *Othello*, “Put out the light,” &c. This was by way of showing off to Garrick, whose opinion of him however was not much raised by this impotent and untimely endeavour to shine on a subject with which he was little acquainted. Sir J. Reynolds, who had never seen him before (who told me the story), was grievously disappointed in finding this *great lawyer so little* at the same time.50

Even before the courtroom drama, the circumstances of the crime provoked allusions to tragedy and to theater.

In the chapters of this study, I will consider only some of the long cast of characters involved in this celebrated trial. Carlo Francesco Badini, a satirist and writer of libretti, and Phillip Mazzei, the friend of Thomas Jefferson, will figure in this story in obscene fashion. A wide range of travelers in Italy whose writings provoked Baretti, from French astronomer J. J. Lalande to English surgeon Dr. Samuel Sharp, will have bearing on the case. Indeed, sometimes it seems that Baretti was no more than a few degrees of separation from every cultural icon in England or Italy.

This case captured the collective imagination. It became a *cause célèbre*, and it was very difficult to let go of, especially for those already indisposed to Baretti, or his friends, or to Italians in general. The circumstantial literary evidence suggests that the crime was still much in the public sphere twenty years after the case closed. *Baretti* gave rise to an extraordinary amount of first-class writing, in the form of satires, letters and editorials, but also to many pages of scurrilous invective that sheds light on the period better known for clubs and etiquette. None of this material has been studied and some of it, I believe, is unearthed here for the first time. It generated an enormous quantity of interesting writing. Boswell was the first of many to call attention to the number of

illustrious participants in *Baretti*. The literary appeal of this trial left an enormous sum of written testimony, which allows us to reconstruct the scene of the crime with astonishing accuracy.

During the trial, according to a contemporary account, “Mr. Baretti for his defense…read from a written paper his narrative of the whole transaction, composed and pronounced with so much force as to melt into tears the greatest part of the audience.” More than once, Baretti promised to publish his version of the events, telling what happened as a *testimonio oculare*. A dozen letters he wrote about what he called “a terrible accident” survive, sent to friends outside of England and dating from a week after the trial to Christmas, 1769. But he never followed through on the promise to write a book about the “ugly danger passed,” neither would he ever live down the stigma of being *a furious Italian with a stiletto*. Despite the verdict, the image seemed to fit the facts of the case and, moreover, it seemed even better to capture the person behind his publications. In his writings, many felt, Baretti was less concerned with truth than with inflicting injury. Could his life be any different?

In the passing of time, the Baretti case settled down to a curious anecdote, a mere footnote in literary history. A bewildering trial that seemed to define Baretti as writer and man became an Enlightenment saint’s legend that cast a humane light on Dr. Johnson, whose powerful testimony in favor of his wronged friend saved him from the gallows. In 1939, Donald Gallup, the distinguished Librarian at Yale and bibliographer of Eliot and Pound, was writing a doctoral dissertation on Baretti’s English career. He

---

51 Letter to Montefani, December 10, 1769 (*Epistolario*, i. 428); Letter to his Brothers, October 17, 1769 (*Epistolario*, i. 412-415); Letter to Filippo, Nov. 10, 1769 (*Epistolario*, i. 421-423). See (*Epistolario*, i. 412-435) for other letters related to this study.
transcribed manuscripts of affidavits, the trial transcript and the coroner’s report. But regarding this event, he concluded laconically that “Baretti’s own account of the affair does not vary in important details from what seems to have been the truth of the matter.” (87) “No man on trial for murder has ever summoned up better surety for his reputation than Joseph Baretti,” scholar H. W. Liebert wrote in the introduction to a facsimile of the Proceedings for the City of London Justice Hall, published to commemorate Johnson’s 249th birthday in 1958. It was a happy occasion, the trial of Baretti, and the reprinting of this rare primary material pulled from the past a pleasant, largely unknown moment in the life of Johnson. Similarly, Franco Fido wrote that the events surrounding the case illuminate the esteem and sympathy with which Baretti was held in London.

I have tried to approach the words of Baretti, such as his letter to his brothers of October 17, 1769 (eleven days after the event), with more caution than previous scholars. This event was neither as incidental nor as straightforward as the précis in modern books suggest. Surely it was a lapse of judgment on the part of Gallup when he wrote that Baretti “would have had no reason for misrepresenting the details.” (165)

Italian scholarship has also offered very little on this strange episode, perhaps because much of the documentation appeared in London. But it was not by any means all in English; some of the most unsettling material on the case appeared in the Italian language, though it was not heavily exported. The earliest biographers of Baretti

---

52 The published report of the trial was constructed from the notes of shorthand writers present in the courtroom. Donald Gallup located the manuscript sessions papers at the London and Middlesex Guildhall (204-215). He did not offer an analysis of them in any detail, but did a great service in preserving them. After an exhaustive search (done with the help of archivists at the London Metropolitan Archives), I have concluded that the mss were destroyed during bombings in World War II. Only one page survives, OB/SP/1769/10/021A, which I discuss in Chapter Five. References to them are abbreviated “Gallup ms.”


54 Franco Fido, Opere di Giuseppe Baretti (Milano, 1967); “ci illuminano sulla stima e la simpatia che il Baretti gode a Londra.” (3)
published in Italy, however, demonstrate that the case was followed there with some attention and concern. By 1911, Luigi Piccioni, an indefatigable editor and bibliographer of Baretti, felt that there was little new to be said about what came to be called “The Haymarket Affair.” This straightforward case has served as an illustration of a group of intellectual titans in lending aid to a foreign author badly wronged in the streets of the big city, end of story.

The Baretti case sheds light on the life and mind of the least studied figure in the Johnson circle, whose career (unlike that of Boswell, Garrick, Reynolds and Burke) eludes today’s English literature scholars (being so much of it Italian) and Italian literary experts (being so much of it English). It represents one of the strangest episodes in the cross-cultural exchange during the time of the Grand Tour, revealing ambiguities and contradictions in the world of international literary commerce that have slipped through the cracks of scholarship in this area. The case exposes, if it is looked at in detail, the degree of animosity (frequently along mixed cultural lines) and the hostilities that took place beneath the veneer of polite or respectable eighteenth-century London society. The event and its literary echoes capture both the high degree of refinement and the vulgarity, the justice system and the court of public opinion, during the Enlightenment.

The Baretti case gives us some indication of the subtle connections between identity and language, between the bilingual and the monolingual, between the power of

55 Shearer West raises some of the ambiguities in the case in “Xenophobia and Xenomania: Italians and the English Royal Academy.” Italian Culture in Northern Europe in the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge, 1999), 129-139. Scholarship and exhibitions on the Grand Tour have emphasized art rather than literature. See Andrew Wilton and Ilaria Bignamini, The Lure of Italy in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1997). The subject has generated many studies including Jeremy Black, The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1992) and Chloe Chard, Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour: Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography, 1600-1830 (New York, 1999). Few books in English stress how much Italians admired and sought out English culture during the same period. For this angle, see Arturo Graf, Anglomania e l’influsso inglese in Italia nel secolo XVIII (Torino, 1911).
truth and that of network of reputable writers with strong connections. It speaks of the manipulation of fame through translations and scholarly posturing. Those issues of gender, race and class that fascinate scholars today are profoundly embedded in this human chronicle. It took place dead center in a period that would produce endless discussions of “the spirit of the laws,” debates regarding “the rights of man,” examinations of “crimes and punishments,” and drafts of “bills of rights.” The case telescopes so many of the issues that perplexed and occupied the great legal minds of the age of Beccaria and Blackstone. The trial was wrapped in a law of homicide that has changed little since that time, but that the current Law Commission of England and Wales is attempting to reform.

I will show that there were some present – in fact, it appears quite a few – who were convinced that an injustice had occurred in 1769. Some were stunned that Baretti was able to hoodwink the English public as well as the legal system. Others declared that day saw a victory for honor, the rule of law, and moral virtue.

One might very well have thought that there was nothing much to say about “The Haymarket Affair” and that attempting to re-open a case two and a half centuries later would be a preposterous endeavor. However, before drawing this conclusion, one should first examine all the evidence. As one journalist at the time put it: “The case of Mr. Baretti may be deemed one of the extraordinary kind.”
[One should never mock a person, if he were not an enemy, for it seems to show greater contempt in ridiculing someone than in injuring him. 

…There are also persons who are so short-tempered that one should under no circumstances poke fun at them.]  

Giovanni Della Casa, *Galateo* (1558), Ch. XIX.

The ITALIANS are an effeminate People; yet in the general Opinion, void of Humanity: They are given to Cruelty, Treachery, Assassination. The Question is, then, from what Causes this singular Appearance may arise?  


No more frenzied state besets the mind [than Anger], none more arrogant if it is successful, none more insane if it is baffled; since it is not reduced to weariness even by defeat, if chance removes its foe it turns its teeth upon itself. And the source from which it springs need not be great; for rising from most trivial things it mounts to monstrous size.  


On the rainy Friday evening of October 6, 1769, Giuseppe Baretti was writing letters and reading his mail where it arrived at Orange’s Coffee House, a short distance from his apartment in Queen Anne Street, near Portland Chapel. The coffee house, for many years operated by the Whitfield family, was particularly hospital to the many Italians living and working in London. We are in the west end of London, the district of theaters, opera houses, and foreign visitors, the wealthy aristocrats having abandoned it to French Huguenots and Italian opera singers. The area was associated with theater, opera, seamy encounters, and petty crime: it was crowded, unpredictable, and lively. “At the bottom of the Haymarket,” Boswell recorded in his *London Journal*, “I picked up a strong, jolly young damsel, and taking her under the arm I conducted her to Westminster Bridge, and
then in armour complete did I engage her upon this noble edifice. The whim of doing it there with the Thames rolling below us amused me much.” (Tuesday, May 10, 1763)

Baretti put a red wax seal on a letter and left Orange’s. He began walking – as he no doubt had many times before – down Haymarket Street in order to meet his friends, the author Oliver Goldsmith and Sir Joshua Reynolds, the most acclaimed contemporary artists in England.

Baretti had been just been selected by the recently knighted Joshua Reynolds to be the first Secretary of Foreign Correspondence of the burgeoning Royal Academy of Art. The position had no specific duties and no pay, but it was just the sort of prestigious post that appealed to Baretti, a man who never passed up the opportunity to reveal his *bona fides* in English literary circles. He included the title after his name on his address and title pages; he was displeased when his brother did not include the title on letters.

Haymarket Street was a major thoroughfare some sixty meters wide, well-known as a highly trafficked zone, a bustling section of the city, lined with various shops and public houses. On an ordinary evening between nine and ten o’clock, he might expect to encounter all manner of men and women along the way, reputable and disreputable.56

Within a few minutes, the unforgettable happened. One thing led to another and, three days later, Baretti was indicted “for willful murder of Evan Morgan.” Two weeks later Baretti, dressed in mourning clothes, was in the Old Bailey defending himself

against a charge that would bring death by hanging, if convicted. These days would have profound effects on the life of Baretti and would spiral into a series of fascinating literary productions.

For over a hundred years, this courtroom drama has been concealed in university libraries and archives. Today anyone with an internet connection has access to a detailed and arresting narrative contained in the trial transcript. Although not a verbatim account of all that was transpired in the courtroom – the court reporters lacked any recording devices – the Old Bailey Sessions Paper (OBSP) provides enough color and plenty of particulars to permit an accurate reconstruction of what transpired that night. We can vicariously experience one of the most celebrated trials of the century, a case that would involve a cast of characters drawn from the highest echelons of politics, art, jurisprudence, literature, and theatre. Using the OBSP and other primary documents, this chapter will discuss what exactly happened and attempt to answer the question, why?

The first witness called to the stand was not an articulate gentleman, but an illiterate woman by the name of Elizabeth Ward. Her profession, though never explicitly stated in the OBSP, did not need to be mentioned: the fact that she was on the streets alone at night left no doubts. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the Haymarket was recognized as a roaming ground of prostitutes, pickpockets and thugs. Not segregated in squalid slums of the city or a “red-light district,” these types worked in close proximity of the wealthy class coming out of the Italian Opera or Drury Lane Theatre. Engravings from the time suggest that the area was a shopping street, lined with a candle maker’s shop, an Italian pharmacy, grocery stores, and many taverns. It was also a major thoroughfare for wagons transporting goods and horse-drawn carriages moving at
breakneck speed. Ward, who signed her deposition with an X, remembered the first seconds of her encounter with Baretti that night between 9 and 10 p.m.: “There was another woman with me, whom I never saw before. She asked me for a penny: I told her I had none. She sat upon the step of a door, and I sat down by her. As this gentleman went past [meaning Baretti], the other girl asked him to give her a glass of wine, as she was sitting on the step, and she put her hand towards him.” At first, she cannot recall whether the woman touched Baretti, but finally she admits to it: “I believe it was by way of inducing him to go with her.” Baretti was a man of considerable worldly experience, and could not possibly have been shocked by the sight of prostitutes. Indeed, he occasionally walked the area late at night with his friend Samuel Johnson, commenting with compassion on the miserable fortune of these women. In a letter to his brother written nearly ten years earlier, published in Italian but not translated, he spoke of prostitutes in London living hungry and miserable in bestial houses, and he estimated their number at around 10,000.57 One hopes this was one of the many times Baretti exaggerated a figure to prove a point. He claimed to have “seen hundreds with my own eyes who have yet to reach ten, eleven, or twelve years of age.” Baretti and Johnson sometimes gave them some money when they saw the “melancholy…written in capital letters on most of their faces.”

But on this evening when one asked for a glass of wine, Baretti was not in the giving vein. Within a few steps distance, he turned suddenly around and, according to Ward, “struck me a great blow on the side of my face” that “hurt very much.” When questioned as to whether she returned the violent strike, she says no. The line of questioning continues in an attempt to uncover the details of what appears as nothing so

57 The population in London in 1760 is estimated around 750,000.
much as an early instance of *road rage*. Did she or did she not assert, asks the Questioner (Q), that the gentleman “ought to be clove down with a patten”? That is, did she threaten to smash Baretti on the head with a metal platform heal used to protect her shoes from the filth of the street? Ward denies ever making such a gruesome threat. Upon closer examination, however, Ward supplies some colorful details omitted from nineteenth and twentieth century accounts of the “The Haymarket Affair.” Baretti was not merely “struck a blow” by the woman – as the *DNB* politely puts it. As he walked past, another woman dressed in dark clothing put her hand “towards his breeches; towards his private parts.” Interestingly, in the dozens of accounts of the crime that circulated in newspapers during in the weeks before and after the trial, this rude gesture was rarely overlooked. Sometimes this first encounter is phrased in this discrete way: “The evidence against Mr. Baretti, were a woman of the town, who admitted that her companion had provoked him by a very indecent outrage.”

In the passage of the centuries since Baretti’s “horrible accident,” as he called it, both women disappeared from the scene of the crime. In literary histories and general encyclopedias, the crime scene will be presented without historical context. This “generic” presentation of the so-called “Haymarket Affair” fails entirely in capturing the rich color and the complications of the occasion. It misses details, gender complications, and dramatic hostilities implicit in the crime. Therefore, when examining this homicide, it is essential to keep in mind that it was *a situated transaction*, a term criminologist David Luckenbill uses to refer to the particular dynamics of a murder scene, so as to

---

58 *Gentleman’s Magazine* (October, 1769).
distinguish the culpability of the accused. The instigating offense that we are discussing would not have occurred on a street in Rivalta Bormida or any other place or time; The occurrence we are discussing could only have happened when and where it did, on account of the gender, class and background of the participants, brought in conflict in a collective battle set in time and space. For example, as we probe into the causes, we will discover that it would not have occurred before travel permitted an influx of immigrants and returning travelers to give rise to stereotypes and create threats about foreigners. It would not have occurred in a country where women are not allowed to stand out in the street at night and solicit attention with such assertion of independence. And the scene changes, furthermore, with every syllable attached to it, or denied. For instance, while most early documents about the case mention Baretti striking a woman, the lost manuscripts record that Baretti hit a girl.

We will have to reflect on the roles played by every participant in this collective event, this situated transaction, and the unique cultural tensions implicit in it. If we want to appreciate the resonance of Baretti, we cannot disregard the fact that “an unexpected violent assault was made upon him by a woman, who struck him in the tender parts, which gave him exquisite pain.” (508) We must explore whether there were any other reasons why a man like Giuseppe/Joseph Baretti might punch a woman in the face.

During the trial, Baretti will read from a prepared speech he later said that he penned the night before the trial. In his Old Bailey Speech (as I will call it), Baretti confesses to smacking away the woman’s hand only after “she clapped her hands with such violence about my private parts, that it gave me great pain.” Ward’s memory of the

---

60 Baretti’s Old Bailey Speech is available in the OBSP (October 18, 1769) and in Appendix B.
altercation differs from the Italian’s in emphasis, as she insists that his response was
unnecessarily brutal given the circumstances. She testifies that Baretti’s “blow on the
hand” was a punch in the face with “a double-fist.” After being struck, she vividly
remembers her words of approbation: “You do not behave like a gentleman.” From the
opening gestures, this was a story of men and women behaving badly, all amid
allegations of bad manners and moral misconduct. The occasion must have occurred in a
flash. As Baretti says in the Old Bailey Speech, imitating the voice of his friend Samuel
Johnson, “what is done in two or three minutes, in fear and terror, is not to be minutely
described.” (D-4)

The sound of the punch or the shrieks of the woman caught the attention of three
men—Thomas Patman, John Clark and Evan Morgan—who are walking by on the way
to an Ale House near Golden Square for Morgan sing to them. The three run up to
Baretti, asking a rhetorical question that shifts the blame yet again: “How could you
strike a woman?” The transaction becomes even more problematic, as we cannot tell
whether the three are coming to the aid of a damsels in distress, or seizing the chance to
pick the pocket of the recovering Baretti. Historians and biographers, basing their
conclusions on very limited evidence, have wanted to attribute the cause of Baretti’s
violence to a conventional robbery, partially for their inability to uncover the details
about an event they regarded as ephemeral, an unfortunate incident in Baretti’s life that
ended, rightly so, in his favor. And partially because Baretti himself would say as much
in various letters written to Italy after the event: [I was assaulted by a troop of rascals
who probably wanted to steal my purse or watch] “fui assalito da una truppa di birboni
che volevano probabilmente rubarmi la borsa o l’orologio.” The three are bullies (the English derives from *bulli*) and they bump into Baretti to rob him, end of story. At the time, however, the “probably” in Baretti’s phrasing was the operative word.

To be sure, Baretti would have been hardly the only hapless victim of a robbery in central London during the middle of the 1700s. During the trial, three witnesses (like Baretti, advancing in years) come forth in support of Baretti, testifying to having suffered similar assaults in the very same area. (D-5) “I called out watch! watch! very loud, but no watch came, though they were very near,” said Justice Kelynge, whose position as a legal authority added considerable weight to what he said. He added, “another brother magistrate in court, that has been attacked in the same manner: there is seldom a woman that attacks a man, but they have two or three men behind them, ready to pick your pocket, or to knock you down.” The thefts continue, the Justice testifies, “notwithstanding all the care we take.” A newspaper editorial, written by someone quite familiar with Montesquieu who signs his name A LOVER OF ORDER—could it be Johnson?—similarly deflects the guilt from Baretti to an “abominable” social ill, “so grievous and crying an evil, that Justice would be deaf indeed, if she do not immediately attend to it.”

(D-6)

In July 24, 1767, Francis Bateman Dashwood was attacked on the King's highway and put in “corporal fear and danger of his life, and taking from his person one hat, value 6 s. one silver hatband, value 3 s. the property of the said Francis.” Dashwood testified: “They pushed against me, and tripped up my heels; they attempted to take my watch, but while I was struggling, they snatched my hat, and ran off with that; I was walking

---

homewards without my hat; towards the Haymarket.” Edward Reeves, one of the four assailants, deposed to having gone out that night “in order to stamp some men, the cant word for knocking people down to rob them, and that they did the fact charged in the indictment; but being unsupported in his evidence by any person of credit, the prisoner was acquitted.” (OBSP, September 9, 1767) On July 13, 1767, “Thomas Warwick was indicted (together with two other persons unknown) for making an assault on the king’s highway, on Andrew Dodd, putting him in corporal fear and danger of his life.” He was charged with taking from his person “one man's hat, value 12 d. and two yards of green baize, value 6 d. the property of the said Andrew, against his will.” These trial transcripts provide the archetype of theft in the Enlightenment Age, usually involving unarmed young men at night who jostle a solitary older man, pushing him into the dirty street or off the raised sidewalk, grabbing his hat, handkerchief, or pocket watch, and running away as fast as they can. The scene often involved men and women, some shouts of “murder” but no bloodshed, and a striking absence of law enforcement. (D-7) Here is a passage from trial transcript worth reading carefully because it sheds light on Baretti:

I was walking up the Haymarket about half an hour after ten at night, on the right-hand side of the way, on the 13th of July, Mary Brooks was with me, I felt a sudden jirk at my pocket, and found my handkerchief was taken out; turning about I observed the prisoner at my right-hand, I secured him, and said he had picked my pocket; he past my handkerchief from his right-hand to his left, and dropt it behind a post; I had hold of him with my right-hand, and took it up with my left; then he struck me in my mouth, and knocked me down on my knees; I still kept hold of him; he dragged me into the middle of the road; I tripp'd up his heels, and got upon him; he got from me, and got up; I went then to look for my hat and cloth, and they were gone, I believe his accomplice carried them off. Q. Did you see the prisoner have your hat or cloth in his hand? Dod. No, I did not; I seized him a second time, he was not far from me; Mrs. Brooks had hold of him, so he could not get away; I threw him down upon the stones, he cried murder, the watch came and secured him, and we took him to St. Martin's Round-house.  (OBSP, July 15, 1767)
The resemblances to Baretti are very close – the Italian even loses his hat in the fray – but there are also distinct differences. If what happened to Baretti had been exactly what had happened to these other men, his trial would never have led to the effects we will see in the chapters that follow. The Baretti crime is different: in dual language, it begins with words and ends with blood.

It is possible the men were robbing Baretti – or taking advantage of an opportunity – and Elizabeth Ward admits to having known one of them. Contemporary satirical engravings show prostitutes engaged in such ploys in rooms along the Haymarket. In *Gender and Petty Violence in London, 1680-1720*, Jennine Hurl-Eamon notes, “the part of the city associated with ‘fallen women’ was considered dangerous in popular mentality.” Certain streets in London were “notorious as the ‘guileful Paths’ of Harlots;” at the time any women outside after dark, when most assaults occurred, was assumed to be “nightwalking.” (83) One third of all the people bound over for assault in the City of Westminster at the time were, surprisingly, female; Hurl-Eamon concludes that women could be as aggressive as men, but this was usually in the context of neighborhood tensions. The physical nature of the filthy, uneven streets (Baretti speaks of a pothole as if everyone knows it), the close quarters, the squalid poverty, as well as gin and gambling, all combined to create a location conducive to boxing matches, petty theft, and a mob mentality. Increased street lighting and an improved night watch, however, meant that most thieves were unarmed pickpockets, annoying and offensive but repelled with a cudgel or stick or by retreating into a shop, as Baretti’s witnesses did.

---

63 Jennine Hurl-Eamon, *Gender and Petty Violence in London, 1680-1720* (Columbus, 2005), 82.
Although incidents of pickpockets in the area are fairly common, a search of www.oldbaileyonline.com reveals only a few murders each year in the jurisdiction.\(^{65}\)

The contention that “when one ventured into the fleshpots of Drury Lane and the theatre district, danger was omnipresent” is not exactly true, if by danger we mean encounters anything like what happened in that section of town on October 6, 1769. (82) Greg Smith, an historian of violence and crime, points out that “most terrifying forms of violence, including murder and rape, were relatively rare events in the eighteenth century, even in the metropolis.”\(^{66}\) The brawls and physical altercations that frequently occurred appear to have been kept in check by a sort of community watch, a mob of neighbours who rushed where an encounter was getting out of control or a theft was in progress. Interestingly, the mob that ran to violent crime scenes was by no means in search of a riot. It served as a sort of police protection. When “an English sailor was stabbed to death as he was walking in Mill-Yard Westminster by a Portuguese man in April of 1760,” a mob chased him and “nailed him by his ear to the wall.” (177) See (D-8).

Contemporaries expressed doubt as to whether Baretti’s life was truly in danger, noting that the crime occurred when it was still daylight and on a “public” street. There seemed a dearth of evidence to prove that he had been robbed, or was about to be robbed, beyond the fact the men had “pushed him into the kennel.” The Englishmen had no weapons, and so if they were going to rob Baretti, it was at finger-point and not gunpoint. Baretti lost his hat in the fray, true enough, but the other man lost his life. The men were

\(^{65}\) Murder cases were rare enough that one contemporary commentator on Baretti compared the Italian defendant to Francis David Stirn, a similarly bookish man, who was sentenced to death for killing a man years before: “Stirn took poison, and died that Friday night about 11 o’clock [was] dissected, and buried in a cross road, with a stake through him, near Black Mary’s Hole.” (OBSP, September, 10, 1760)

never arrested for assault, attempted murder, highway robbery or pick-pocketing. Indeed, the occasional crimes and the prostitution in certain areas of the city were considered more a nuisance than a cause for alarm.

Evidently the dismal situation around the Haymarket was not much improved even five years after the unfortunate Baretti episode brought it to public attention. And evidently not every magistrate considered beggars and whores as troubling as did Justice Kelynge and the LOVER OF ORDER. In 1773, David Garrick wrote *A Letter to Sir John Fielding* (London, 1773) in which he called attention to “the numerous pickpockets that infest the doors of the playhouses, the street-walkers, link-boys, and other vagabonds, whose obscenity and riotous behaviour render them the terror of sober people.” He does not mention the Baretti case, oddly enough, even though the recipient of his letter knew it well, even though it would certainly have bolstered his argument on the ill consequences of the infestation. Justice Fielding was evidently not especially bothered by the problem, which Garrick reminds him is also in Bow Street, directly in front of the Magistrate’s office. Garrick implores Justice Fielding to “suppress those brothels with which your neighbourhood is crowed and disgraced” (26)

The first cause of the death of Evan Morgan was not simple robbery: that much is certain. Contemporary accounts reveal that the violence was provoked by a series of subtle, precipitant causes that touched on national and sexual identity, honor, and manhood. As the events that lead to the murder are further described in course of the trial transcript, it becomes evident that what occurred was not a silent fray: it was an expressive melodrama. A hat and a handkerchief were not the only things at play that
night, and to overlook various initial provocations would be to reduce a complicated case into one that is open-and-shut. (D-3)

BUT NAMES WILL NEVER HURT ME

After responding to questions about the initial physical altercation, Ward faces a second line of questioning. This time, Q is not interested in punches, slaps, or threats of cracked skulls, nor robbery. “Were there no names called,” Q asks Ward. The inquiry is intended to elicit the initial provocation, though at this point the unknown instigation is verbal, rather than physical.

Was it possible that ridicule provoked Baretti to respond the way he did? Was there some verbal insult to his honor or his manhood? Could language alone have precipitated such a catastrophic chain of events that left a young man in a pool of blood?

In Giuseppe Baretti with an Account of his Literary Friendships (1909), the standard life of Baretti in English, Collison-Morley writes that after a woman “struck [Baretti] a blow which caused him great pain,” she “began to scream like one possessed, calling him every kind of name.”67 Collison-Morley’s phrase, “every kind of name,” suggests that Ward shouted various derogatory terms of reproach at Baretti, any nasty name you wish. In the trial transcript, however, we learn that Baretti had a few choice words for the women as well, and her derogatory language was carefully chosen from the wordbook of slander. Ward denies at first that she called Baretti a “French dog, or to that purport,” though she remembers he “called us b—hes.” Pressured by the examiner,

---

however, she admits to hearing – though she doesn’t recall who was speaking – “some say buggerer, or some such name. Some called him so.”

In his excellent biography written in French and never translated into English, Norbert Jonard mentions the loaded language in his discussion of what Baretti called “my unfortunate accident.” Jonard emphasizes the vulnerability of the foreign writer, whose poor eyesight will come to have some bearing on the verdict. [At once surprised and expressing his anger at such name-calling, Baretti, in the darkness and hindered by his poor eyesight, mistook both the women for men and so answered one by the invitation with a masterly smack, so masterly even as the victim will assert later that this slap was a vigorous punch.] 68 Professor Jonard concludes that Baretti must have mistaken the women for men, on the chivalrous axiom that no man punches a woman. However, the transcript makes no doubt that Baretti knew it was a woman, and I believe the intensity of his reaction was, in part, related to this fact. To be called a “woman-hater,” a term for a gay man, was not something Baretti liked, and he liked it even less from the mouth of a prostitute.

The first of the two surviving men called to the stand was Thomas Patman of Peters Street Westminster, a wigmaker maker by profession. He testifies as follows: “We met Morgan near abouts where the fire was. We drank three pints of beer together, at a house that turns up on the left-hand. We asked Morgan to give us a song; he said he would give us a song, if we would go along with him to a house in Golden-square.” The questioning turns again to the name-calling, as Patman admits that there was indeed an

---

68 Norbert Jonard, *Giuseppe Baretti (1719-1789): l’homme et l’œuvre* (Clermont, 1963), 322: “A la fois surpris et furieux de s’entendre interpeller de la sorte, Baretti, l’obscurité et sa myopie aidant, prit les deux femmes pour des hommes et répondit a l’invite par une claque magistrale, si magistrale même que la victime affirmera par la suite que cette gifle était en fait un vigoureux coup de poing.”
exchange of words between Baretti and Ward, even before he saw Baretti “strike her on
the head” and “she reeled, and was very near ready to fall.” Patman categorically denies,
however, that their name-calling included racial slurs and sexual affronts: “Q: Did you
hear the word buggerer mentioned, or something like? Patman: I did not. Q: Did you
call him any names? Patman: I did not call him any names at all. I cried out I was
stabbed.” Patman testifies that he “never lifted a hand against the gentleman, neither did
I see any of the others offer to strike him,” but the questioner persists, wishing to keep the
focus on the particular offensive language that precipitated first blood. The OBSP and
Gallup MSS do not include a line of questioning regarding an attempted robbery that we
might well expect to have triggered the response; instead, Q is probing for some
compelling insult sufficiently brutal to provoke such a reaction. “Q: Did you hear any
such words as buggerer, or French buggerer? Patman: No, I did not. Q: Had you given
him no offence at all? Patman: No.” The fact that Baretti had stabbed Patman first,
before killing Morgan, vanished from many later account. Even during the trial itself, the
point never is highlighted.

The second of the three men who tussled with Baretti was John Clark, a local
lapidary. Called to the stand, he likewise goes to lengths in denying that names were
called in the Haymarket two weeks before. John Wyatt, a surgeon at the Middlesex
Hospital where Morgan was treated, asks Clark the same question the night of October
6th: “I asked him what provocation had been given to the gentleman [Baretti]; he said
none, only pushing upon him.” Pressing Clark for information, Wyatt is able to illicit the
cause: “[Clark] said he believed she had d---d him for a French bugger, and said he ought
to have his head clove with a paten.” Clark contradicts this statement in his testimony at
the Old Bailey: “Q: Did not you tell Mr. Wyatt, the surgeon at the hospital, he was called French bugger, or French woman-hater, or words of that sort? Clark: No, I did not.” The linguistic preliminaries involve reputation, shame, and honour. Moreover, the fact that Clark contradicted himself—that he was exposed in the lie—seems to have registered powerfully with the jury and the audience; indeed, it seems to have had more impact on them than what Patman had suffered. In Baretti the fact that Clark denies what a respectable physician heard him say takes on considerable importance in the moral geometry. In the early modern period, to be exposed as a liar was held to be great dishonor.69

Throughout this study of Baretti, we will see repeatedly how language takes on the power to incite and to injure when passions flare. A revealing later example of this can be found in the marginal annotations Baretti wrote in his copy of Hester Lynch Thrale’s Letters to and From the Late Samuel Johnson (1788). Objecting to what Thrale writes at one point, Baretti notes, “the Bitch is but a Bitch.” He surely was trying to injure the female author, with whom he had a longstanding feud, to curse her and expose her moral corruption.70 When he calls her names, he wishes to make an assault on her honor, her morality, and her character. On another page, Baretti annotates the text with the following pointed observations: “She thought of nothing but to gratify her lust,” and elsewhere he attributes to her the unpardonable sin in the hierarchy of early modern honor, being “caught in the lie.” In his Annotations on Thrale’s Letters, Baretti’s

70 For the strained relationship of Baretti and Mrs. Thrale, see Lyle Larsen, “Joseph Baretti’s Feud with Hester Thrale,” The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual, 16 (2005), 111–27. Baretti’s annotations in his copy of Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D., ed. Hester Lynch Piozzi (London, 1788) will be referred to as Annotations to Thrale’s Letters. Gallup, in his Appendix B, transcribed Baretti’s energetic marginal notes, 216-266.
repeatedly impugns Mrs. Thrale’s honor in a similar way, writing, “you lie, you bitch,” or “what an abominable lie,” or “she at last broke her word,” or “a fib of the first magnitude.” The idiom “calling names” is English, and does not exist in Italian except in the form of a phrase with the verb offendere, to offend. Being called a name carries with it a weight, a resonance, and perhaps a psychological violence.

Recent scholarship has explored how in the early modern period, especially in the Mediterranean, name calling could have considerable force, leading to violent encounters, to duels, to written and spoken invectives.71 A survey of manuscript court documents in early modern Italy reveals murders frequently arose after minor disagreements, quarrels that involved the victim called the wrong man a “Baronfottuto,” a name so demeaning that only death could remove the stain.72 By the late eighteenth century, as Robert Shoemaker argues in “The Decline of Public Insult in London 1660-1800,” however, there was a marked “decline of defamation as a significant public act.”73 In England, insults once delivered in front of a public audience for purpose of humiliation were brought indoors and, so to speak, privatized. People continued to abuse each other verbally, as they always will, but less often was gossip and defamation used as “methods of enforcing conformity to community norms.” (97) As a general rule (we will look at this in Chapter Five), eighteenth-century Londoners considered insults more a sign of bad taste or lack of manners than a provocation calling for self-defense in order to maintain personal honor.

72 F****** Baron.
In addition, many insults lost their former moral (and even legal) force, as they were more frequently dismissed, according to Shoemaker, as the “common words of brabbling.” (118) Ward’s “several bad names in a most contumelious strain,” consistent with Shoemaker’s argument, are delivered in “semi-private.” The name-calling is not before a large audience, brought to apply a peer pressure on the humiliated recipient, but neither are they expressed in the confines of a dwelling. Like punishments that “shamed” the violator – public whipping, for example, or the scarlet letter – that in the course of the 1700s came to seem immoral or inhumane, these shaming invectives came to be somewhat taboo. The demonstrable decline in public insults may be connected, furthermore, to the decline in interpersonal violence during the same period. Paradoxically, the decline in insults led to a lower threshold of acceptance at certain moments, as happened on October 6th. That is, name-calling, when it did occur, on occasion had even greater impact than it did when public abuse was more common. In this particular trial of unusually rich literary value, despite the decline in name-calling, there is a heightened sensitivity toward “hate speech.” The men’s quick and insistent denial that they called Baretti a bad name suggests that public name-calling was still considered highly inflammatory.

In searching to discover the initial provocation – term much in use in legal discussion of the Enlightenment – the Questioner must attempt to uncover “conduct or words causing someone to lose his self-control.” What provoked Baretti’s extreme, immediate and violent reaction? Could the woman’s touch used as way of luring men

---

74 For a brilliant presentation of gossip, rumor and ballad, see Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford, 2000).
have been so “exquisite” as to have elicited from Baretti such violence? Was he genuinely at risk to lose his life, or did he perceive himself to be in imminent peril?

Alternatively, was he unnerved not by the physical pain suffered by the woman groping him, but by something equally annoying, though purely verbal? Was he perhaps enraged even more by the fact that the woman calls him a Frenchman, and a damned Frenchmen and a French homosexual? Or was the trigger, rather, the dynamic of three younger men accusing him of bad manners and conduct that ill becomes a gentleman?

While none of these questions can be answered simply, asked together they reveal the complexity of the case and the limitations of standard accounts of the “Haymarket Affair.” In the life of Baretti – as we shall see again and again – words come to be very powerful weapons and are wielded with the hostility of offensive weapons. To call Baretti a Frenchman was not the same as “calling him every kind of name.” It was an affront that cut to his identity, an identity with porous borders that crossed borders of culture and language. Ward’s profanities – with her justification of them as retribution for Baretti’s initial slur – would assault his masculinity, insult his authorial pride, and throw into question his ethnic and sexual identity. By a rich mixture of insult and castration threat, innuendo and racial stereotyping, Ward hit Giuseppe/Joseph with a “Baronfottuto.”

“The Haymarket Affair,” more than a conventional mugging and robbery, emerges as a real-life dramatization of an anxiety complex unique to the time. Baretti, suddenly provoked by the physical pain of the woman’s inappropriate gesture, is enraged subsequently by her verbal accusations that imply his subordinate position as effeminate Frenchmen or as homosexual. Interestingly, Luigi Piccioni translated a portion of
Baretti’s *Old Bailey Defense* into Italian accurately save for one minor oversight in historical idiom. Piccioni writes: “Fra queste quelle di Bougre d’un Francese, Francese dannato: una donna fra le più svergognate, fu la più ascoltata.” [Among which those of French Buggerer, damned Frenchman: a woman among the most shameful, was the one most heard.” (543) The hyphenated word “woman-hater” is an English idiom for a gay man, not a “shameful woman,” as it appears here.

Interestingly enough, literature provides us with many illustrations of precisely the same drama of insults in London during the very same period.

**WAS BARETTI A MACARONI?**

The provocative power of the name-calling debated in *Baretti* cannot be appreciated outside of the context of international cultural exchange from 1765-1775, roughly speaking. In this decade, according to art historian Diana Donald, there was “a sort of backlash of bigotry in a culture that transportation is making for the first time multi-ethnic.” Foreigners and foreign fashion became increasingly the subject of ridicule in print and visual satire, as well as, we might add, in the common parlance of prostitutes. According to Donald, “mincing and bowing fribbles who fill the London assemblies,” overdressed Frenchmen and milquetoast Italians appeared frequently in engravings and caricatures. (80) As she writes in *The Age of Caricature*, “The ideal of the English nobleman and gentleman was constructed in contradistinction to the Frenchified fop.” (8) The names Baretti is called are not merely impolite, therefore, but were at the time extremely loaded epithets that could have been more cutting than one

---

realizes at first. More than one contemporary observer was dismayed to notice the prevalence of racial epithets emanating from the mouths of “the vulgar tribe” that inhabited London, a bad habit that was arising in London, a dreadful by-product of the freedoms of speech enjoyed there.

In *The Political Progress of Britain* Third Edition (Philadelphia, 1795), James Callender was appalled by the fact that “in Scotland or Ireland, an Englishman, who behaves properly, may reside, to the end of his life, without hearing a single national reproach. But one-half of the inhabitants of England display the most illiberal contempt for the rest of mankind, that ever distinguished a civilized people.” (97) In particular, Callender recalls a time “some years ago,” when interpersonal abuse touching on national identity reached such a peak that “scarcely any body durst speak French in the streets of London, or in public places, without running the risque of being insulted by the populace, who took any foreign language to be French; and frequently saluted him, who spoke what they did not understand, with the appellation of *French Dog.*” (97)

As this passage suggests, that initial altercation involved not just name-calling, but name-calling against a foreigner, an insult in which one’s native tongue, as well as one’s manhood, is dishonored.

As strange and extreme as the linguistic details of *Baretti* seem at first, they were not at all unusual in those years. What happened that night is described in other guidebooks (and always as if it were a common, though offensive, occurrence). It happens like this: someone from the lower classes launches a series of derogatory insults against a social superior whose accent and accoutrements have given away his foreign birth, insults that imply asexuality, impotence, or homosexuality. Frenchman Pierre
Grosley’s *A Tour to London; or, New Observations on England*, put in English by the gifted translator Thomas Nugent in 1772, contains a similar scene, with the word “Buggerer” left blank:

My French air, notwithstanding the simplicity of my dress, drew upon me, at the corner of every street, a volley of abusive litanies, in the midst of which I slipt on, returning thanks to God, that I did not understand English. The constant burthen of these litanies was, French dog, French ______: to make any answer to them, was accepting a challenge to fight; and my curiosity did not carry me so far. I saw in the streets a scuffle of this kind, between a porter and a Frenchman, who spit in his face, not being able to make any other answer to the torrent of abuse which the former poured out against the latter without any provocation. (I, 84)

In most of the occasions of such international name-calling in the street, the end result appears to have been only hurt feelings or being the target of spit. Baretti, unlike the Frenchman, knows enough English to “answer...the torrent of abuse,” but he is nonplussed and reacts with violence.

During the late 1760s and early 1770s, there was a flurry of attacks and lampoons against foreign culture and those who travelled abroad for improvement and learning. The young Englishmen returning from the Grand Tour were widely ridiculed for having adopted foreign manners, fashions, habits, postures and affectations. The name for these gentlemen was *macaronis*.

A writer in the *Oxford Magazine* had this to say of the macaronis the year after the Baretti trial: “There is indeed a kind of animal, neither male nor female, a thing of the neuter gender, lately started up amongst us. *It* is called *Macaroni*. *It* talks without meaning, *it* smiles without pleasantry, *it* eats without appetite, *it* rides without exercise, *it* wenches without passion.”77 The problem with the foreigner, then, was not merely his (there are no female macaronis) silly accent and his flowery dress, but manifest sexual

---

ambiguity, or rather his lack of any natural sex drive. An article “A new Description of a MACARONI” appeared in The British Magazine and General Review of the Literature, Employments & Amusements of the Times (1772). It began with a verse that captured the essential features “of that wretched thing, called a Macaroni”:

“Is it a man? ‘Tis hard to say – a
“A woman then?” – a moment pray –
So doubtful is the thing, that no man
Can say if ‘tis a man or woman:
Unknown as yet by sex or feature,
It moves – mere amphibious creature. (544)

The macaroni satire – delivered against a silent opponent – is always very fierce, as the foreigner is reduced to a nonentity, the animal imagery used in other personal satires being considered too kind. The author of the verses above “is of the opinion, that it is neither a Christian, nor an ass, nor a four-footed beast, nor a woman.” (555) Certain common features in the literary and artistic depictions of the macaroni make him very easy to spot. One distinctive attribute is his concern with fashion: velvety clothing, baroque accessories, large hair and dainty hats. “No handsome fellow will belong to this society, because their dress is calculated to make the handsome ugly, and the ugly ridiculous. Were you to see a group of them together, you would swear that the sepulchers had disgorged their nauseous contents.” (545) The disgusted author imagines that a macaroni could only be born when “a gouty Citizen, to divert the paroxysm of his distemper begets an imp.” (D-10)

In addition to reflecting the English distrust of Continental (specifically French and Italian) excess, some of the early documents suggest anxieties caused by the attempts at upward mobility and sexual equality, according to Diana Donald, and the satiric images show men and women trying on the same clothes, or wig, or make-up, in front of
the same toilet, or dressing table. In the iconography of the macaroni (which appears from the Baretti case to have been only an artistic invention about learned “assemblies,” but at play in the lowest classes of society) the “macaroni's hair functioned as a potent and multivalent symbol and blurring the boundaries of gender, class, and nationality.”

In short, the macaronis are a “straddling, nervous and consumptive tribe!” Hats are a very common source of ridicule, particularly when worn above a great head of hair, sometimes kept in a bun (with a “bag” attached to it). “His hat, like his understanding, is very little” and he has “generally a good quantity of hair, and well he may: for his head produces nothing else: if he has not a sufficient quantity of his own, he borrows it from his neighbours.” Baretti, in fact, wore his hair “with the back hair or queue turned up on itself and tied round the middle—the catogan style then favored by the “macaronis,” Aileen Ribeiro tells us. During the fray, Baretti loses his hat and is afraid of “some of them attempting to catch me by the hair-tail.” Given the widespread comical treatment of the subject of foreigners with ponytails, some in the audience at the trial must have snickered when Baretti added, “If this had happened, I had been certainly a lost man.”

The macaroni furthermore is “the sworn foe of learning,” a designation that would have a great impact on the proud, but equally insecure, Giuseppe/Joseph Baretti. “For all learned fellows, who can spell and write sense, are either queer dogs, or poor rogues, both which he hates mortally.” Another feature of the “tribe,” amazingly, is the wearing a sword. Still in fashion on the continent – an engraving of Beccaria shows him wearing one at his writing desk! – the English lost the habit of carrying weapons by 1769. The uncontrollable urge to kill with a sword an insulting a harmless adversary is in the

---

78Quoted in Nicholas Penny, Reynolds (London, 1986), 122.
cowardly macaroni DNA. “He will draw his sword to pursue a dog, or to silence the
cackling of a hen: but is irreconcilably averse to the sight of human blood.”(545) Perhaps
narcissism (satires sometimes show him preening in front of a mirror) is the macaroni’s
most vile habit: “in short, he loves nobody but himself; and by nobody but himself, is he
beloved.” (545) John Bowden captures this side to the character in *The Explosion*
(London, 1773), “The Macaroni struts along our streets/Out braz’ning every modest face
he meets.”

It is highly significant (though rarely mentioned in modern accounts) that the
insults against Baretti came from a woman, whose forward actions and teasing language
would have especially unnerved him (as the macaroni satires show). A macaroni
engraving by Philip Dawe from 1773 shows a scene with an uncanny resemblance to the
Baretti incident. 79 A female fishmonger assaults the grimacing dandy by thrusting a
stinky fish in the face, while another woman, with a knowing smile, leans out of a
window behind the macaroni and snips off his ponytail. “The Enraged Macaroni” – such
is the title of the engraving – is dressed in a silly hat and an enormous tie. The engraver
catches him in the act of pulling out his dagger in self-defense. To some observers, “The
Haymarket Affair” must have seemed like it came off, or should be on, the paper of a
caricature.

While these images are always funny, beneath them there is a serious message of
alarm. Samuel Fawconer, in *An Essay on Modern Luxury* published in London four years

---

79 British Cartoon Print Collection, Library of Congress, (PC3+1773). The inscription on the engraving is
wonderful and revealing in terms of violence, name-calling, silence, and rage:
The Billingsgate with rude and cutting Jokes
The Macaroni to fierce Rage provokes;
Who threatens Blood and Wounds with glaring eyes;
But she with vip’rous Tongue his Rage defies.
before Baretti, captured the contemporary anxiety regarding the shifting in gender power being noticed at the time. He writes, “For want of preserving a necessary decorum, we may observe one sex to advance in masculine assurance, the other sinks into unmanly indelicacy.”

The attack on macaronis involved anxiety concerning independent, assertive women. He continues, “The men are grown delicate and refined, and the women free and easy.” (75) The woman’s forward touching and aggressive name-calling effectively belittles Baretti, reducing him from a scholar of international renown to the level of a “Frenchified fop.”

Jokes and witticism about macaronis played on the asexuality and the affectations of the foreigner as well: “A macaroni being told that none of his fraternity could keep a secret: ‘Yes,’ cried he, ‘but we can; for no one yet knows whether we are male or female.’”

A young Macaroni who had been at France, and was extremely desirous of letting every body know that he understood the language of that country, meeting Derrick one morning bid him Bonjour.—“Why (says Derrick) I generally have a pretty good morning of it, -- for I always avoid the coffee-houses where there is any danger of meeting you.”

Lord Chesterfield’s Witticisms includes some one-liners and riddles about macaronis among the other “ingenious puns,” “smart repartees,” and “lively flights”: “Why is a macaroni traveller like a corroded wound? Why is a macaroni like a house? Why is he like a cuckold? Why is he like nothing?" And the jokes always

---


81 Lord Chesterfield’s Witticisms: or the Grand Pantheon of Genius, Sentiment, and Taste (London, 1773?), 73.

82 Derrick’s Jests; or, the Wits Chronicle (London, 1769).

83 Because he be full of undigested matter.

Because his upper story is worst furnished.
implied the macaroni was not only fussy and overdressed, but easily abused by an ordinary woman for his lack of masculine virility and English blood. Notice how this joke calls attention to the obsession with hair: “A fribbling hair-dresser, near St. James’s, asked a lady whom he was dressing, what she thought a macaroni was like? She replied, “like you, or any other puppy.” (73)

By 1772, journalists were declaring the city of London overrun with macaronis, the “new, artificial species of character” that shows “an exuberant degree of effeminacy and foppery.” 84 “Their habits of living naturally lead them to acquire and bring home with them only the vices and follies of a foreign country,” the author writes. Three years earlier, when Baretti walked down the Haymarket, Elizabeth Ward saw a man whose “character is distinguished by carrying to the most ridiculous excess, dissipations, softness of manners, and modish novelty of dress.”

When Ward called Baretti the names she did, she was probably merely imitating an extremely commonplace retort, the sort of ridicule that was in wide circulation not merely in printed books, but in songs, vulgar rhymes, jokes and riddles. The earliest print versions of the American song “Yankee Doodle Dandy” date, not surprising, from the mid-1770s, when sticking a feather in a cap was a dubious action. Frequently in the oral tradition of macaroni satire, the upper-class foreigner is being abused by a lower-class, illiterate woman, not unlike Elizabeth Ward in the Baretti case. A good example is the following joke, which plays on the characteristically outrageous hairstyle favored by the foreign dandies. The king was passing through St. James gate one day, when an old woman was nearly knocked over by the crowd of eager onlookers. “But a macaroni who

Because he is pointed at.
Because nothing is like him. (134-136)
84 London Magazine (April, 1772).
was standing just before her, had a remarkable long tail, which she laid fast hold of.—

“What’s the women about?” says he: “I beg your honour’s pardon,” says old
Mumpsimus, “but I’d been laid all along in the kennel, if it had not been for your
honour’s tail.”85 (85)

There was nothing amusing, however, during the trial defense: Baretti recounts
his fears when “some of them attempt[ed] to catch me by the hair-tail: if this had
happened, I had been certainly a lost man.” He loses his hat in the scuffle, he fears being
tossed into the street and run over, he is outnumbered and cannot see well. And yet we
know that some viewers in the audience found the whole incident comical. A newspaper
reports that the trial, rather than being the solemn affair Baretti presented, was a bit of a
show, noting the presence of some giggling girls in the audience who were “amused and
edified by the various gross allusions.” Another implies that Garrick was engaged in a
little overacting. (D-14) Some observers thought it incredible that a murder arose from a
funny insult, and questioned whether the violent frenzy could have been prevented, if
Baretti had been a more willing to take a joke. Someone placed a fake advertisement for
“New Publications Extraordinary,” one of which was “Baretti's Trial, cooked up into a
comic opera, by Mr. B________ff.”86

There can be no doubt that a man of literature such as Giuseppe Baretti would
have been very familiar with parodies, lampoons and satires that operated on the
international paradigm. References to the effeminate foreigner are not difficult to find in
English—we might even say London – literature of the mid-1760s, where the Italian term

85 Lord Chesterfield’s Witticisms: or the Grand Pantheon of Genius, Sentiment, and Taste (London, 1773),
85.
86 Independent Chronicle (Wednesday, January 24, 1770). The author referred to is Isaac Bickerstaffe
(1733-1808), a much maligned Irish dramatist.
macaroni subsumes all the frivolity, eccentricity and silly extravagance of the dainty Frenchman, even more than the mincing Italian. An early reference to the macaronis occurs in Horace Walpole’s letter to the Earl of Hertford of (February 6, 1764): “The Maccaroni Club (which is composed of all the traveled young men who wear long curls and spying-glasses).” Lord Chesterfield wrote to his godson on June 8, 1769 the following: “And if I should live till you are a man, what a cruel blow would it not be to me, to hear that like most of the young men of the present time, you passed yours in frivolous dissipation, losing your time…at the Macaronies.” As early as 1757, the word ‘macaroni’ appears in David Garrick’s play The Male-Coquette, which features a character named the Marchese di Macaroni. Oliver Goldsmith, in his play She Stoops to Conquer (1773), included the following lines:

Let all the old pay homage to your merit;  
Give me the young, the gay, the men of spirit.  
Ye travell’d tribe, ye macaroni train,  
Of French friseurs, and nosegays, justly vain,  
Who take a trip to Paris once a year  
To dress, and look like awkward Frenchmen here.

Clearly, for a literary man like Baretti, to be associated with a characterization being mocked by English literati, some of whom (Garrick and Goldsmith) he counted among his close friends, was extremely offensive; that the insult came from the mouth of a common streetwalker redoubled it strength, and when three pure-bred, working-class Englishmen arrived on the scene, accusing him of not knowing how to behave in public, the end-effect must have been emasculating to the extreme.

A year after the crime, Baretti published A Journey from London to Genoa, through England, Portugal, Spain, and France (1770), an edited version of letters he sent to his brothers, one of which speaks directly to the subject of bullying of foreigners. It is
Letter X, dated August 24, 1760, was written on board the King George Packet. Battling seasickness, Baretti comments on the offensive and ignorant “low people” on the Island he just left: “The Further I went from London, the more tractable seemed the low people. None did I meet that was sparing of bows and civil behavior.” (42) “In the whole journey,” he goes on to remark in language that suggests some residual rage, “I never was honoured once with the pretty appellation of French dog, so liberally bestowed by the London rabble upon those who have an outlandish look; and you know how few are the strangers that can look like natives anywhere.” (62) “The custom of abusing strangers without the least provocation,” Baretti continues, “is by many attributed to the freedom of the English government.” (43) He is convinced that the “low people” calling foreigners “by injurious names as they go by” is not uniquely English and seems to be on the decline, though it will take another twenty years until the English “become quite as civil to strangers as the French and the Italians.” (43) As discussed in the Introduction, the bifocal criticism was something Baretti relished, as he could take the benefits of inhabiting both worlds, looking from outside London (with his hair in a bag), while also being inside the English city.

He continues the discussion, recalling how when he first came to London, “every porter and every street-walker would give a pull to his bag, merely to rejoice themselves and passengers…nor is French dog by far so much in fashion as it was then, when they would even bestow it upon a Turk, whose chin was shaded by a beard, and whose head was hidden in a turban.” (43) It is not merely being thought foreign, but being thought a Frenchman that riles Baretti, insofar as it exposes his enemy’s complete ignorance of foreign culture. Baretti is dismayed by the fact that the “low people” blindly assume
every foreigner must be French. Baretti recreates the dialogue of his opponent: “But talk to them of other nations; of the Italians for instance: They have heard something of the Italians; but a’n’t the ‘Talians French? What are they? Have they any bread to eat, or any beer to drink, like the English? Or do they feed upon soup-meagre and frogs like the French?” (44)

At this point, however, Baretti switches his allegiance, noting that “our Italian populace are full as ignorant, and even more.” In fact, the English “rudeness to strangers, and their contempt for all other countries” should be excused, says Baretti, observing that he has seen the English “sorry when the news came that Damiens had stabb’d the King of France: and I have heard an universal shout of joy when their parliament voted a hundred thousand pounds to the Portuguese on hearing of the tremendous earthquake.” (45) The Baretti parallax that I discussed in the Introduction intrudes again, as Baretti switches from the foreigner looking disdainfully on the English, to the foreigner wishing to be English, so enamored of the country as to desire to forget he is Giuseppe, and be known to all as Joseph. The English has such sympathy for the stabbing of Louis XV in 1757. Only the foreigner is to blame, if he is offended by verbal abuse. “What do you say to this? Is it possible to hate people of this make? What signifies their ridiculous custom of calling names, by which foreign blockheads are so much offended?” (45) In the end he appears to deny that he could have been upset by the name-calling of a year before.

Throughout his writings, Baretti will display this peculiar ambivalence, often in this, his signature tone of derision.

BEING THOUGHT A FOREIGNER
Anton Blok, in Honour and Violence writes, “It is well know that many cases of homicide result from insults. We also know that sensitivity to insults varies with context and that some people are more sensitive to them than others.” (105) The name-calling that hit an unstable Giuseppe/Joseph Baretti was very intense, loaded with implications about his masculinity, his sexuality, his cultural identity, his intelligence, and his manners. But there was another implication in the volley of insults that occurred during the situated transaction, an implication that perhaps many readers will not fully appreciate. While we are very aware of the abusive force of racial epithets and sexual denigration, we cannot easily appreciate another level on which the insult operated that night. What struck Baretti to the core, I believe, was Elizabeth Ward’s immediate recognition that he was a foreigner when she heard him speak.

The insult that Baretti suffered so intensely must be read within the context of his obsessive interest in English and in second-language acquisition. Hypersensitivity to insults is found, according to Blok, in “men from minority groups in confrontation with members of the autochthonous population.” This describes Baretti, but we must remember that he was a man obsessed with words and meanings. Baretti later will admit in his defense, written in English and read aloud before the audience and jurors, that his accent gave him away, and provoked the woman to launch the macaroni insults. He was not merely the effeminate macaroni, an Englishman masquerading as a continental fop, but something even worse: a foreigner incapable of overcoming his native accent. In his Old Bailey Speech, Baretti says, “The woman got up directly, raised her voice, and finding by my pronunciation I was a foreigner, she called me several bad names in a most contumelious strain.” Monolingual Elizabeth Ward could not have realized the
psychological impact of insulting Giuseppe/Joseph Baretti about faulty pronunciation. What we must keep in mind here, I would argue, is Baretti’s status as a foreigner writer. Central to the situated transaction is Baretti’s alienation and anxiety about being exposed as an imposter. By calling her a “beetch,” rather than a “bitch,” Baretti reveals himself as unable to pass as the Englishman. In polyglot London of the 1700s, people could better than many of us appreciate the effect of this linguistic insult on a man of letters like Baretti. When Ward heard him speak, she realized immediately that he was Giuseppe, not the Joseph Baretti as he was called in the trial documents and as he appeared the title page of English publications.

The question of one’s ability in the speaking of a foreign language was, for Baretti, a particularly sensitive subject, to which he would frequently return in writing. One notices in Baretti the fear of being thought a fake or sham, a subject which will occur several times in this study. It reveals Baretti’s deep-seated psychological insecurity and a certain ostentation and play-acting, for which Baretti appears to have been particularly prone. Mrs. Thrale observed, “Baretti could not endure to be called, or scarcely thought, a foreigner.”87 He was hypersensitive about never having lost his accent, and was subjected to ridicule for his linguistic shortcomings. Another anecdote Thrale records resonates on the case: Baretti is so insulted by being “thought a foreigner” that he insinuates the man a no-good criminal who deserves public hanging: “Walking in a field near Chelsea, he met a fellow, who, suspecting him from his dress and manner to be a

87 Hester Lynch Thrale, *Thraliana* (Oxford, 1942), 88. Thrale’s comment continues with a revealing compliment: “and indeed it did not often occur to his company that he was one.”
foreigner, said sneeringly, Come, Sir, will you show me the way to France? “No, Sir, says Baretti, instantly, “But I will show you the way to Tyburn.”

Baretti seems to have taken great – even perverse – pride in his knowledge of the English language. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, Baretti time and again would attack other writers for their pretensions toward bilingualism, as if it were a gross moral failing or a criminal act defined under the Italian or English Penal Code. When the streetwalker perceives in a syllable that he is not an Englishman, I believe, Baretti was humiliated by the fact that he – the writer of an Italian-English Dictionary – was incapable of mastering the simplest of English slang words. Ward had “unmasked the macaroni’s inauthenticity,” to use Donald’s phrase, making a “spectacle out of his eccentric individualism,” an “individualism” inseparable from an atypical accent. This “in-authenticity,” while only a manifestation of the enormous difficulty of mastering a foreign language later in life, was for Baretti a sign of deception, laziness, and theft, and maybe other vices as well. Baretti was incensed by anyone who claimed knowledge of a foreign language which he or she did not really possess. In the Baretti mind, an insult to the tongue is as bad as one to the genitals. When Baretti finds himself bested in English by an illiterate whore, he becomes somewhat of an “enraged macaroni.”

Nowhere do we see what I am trying to explain better than in a letter of June 12, 1777, probably written to the musicologist Charles Burney, himself a hard-working student of Italian. In an irritated tone – and at the length of four pages – Baretti talks about Voltaire’s claim of fluency in English. In point of fact, Baretti asserts, Voltaire

---

knew “as much of English, as your tender Misses do of French.” What is interesting here is not so much whether what Baretti says is true—after all, how will we ever know?—but the irritation in Baretti’s voice. Consider, for example, the condescending use of the word “silly” in the following line: “And have you not noted the many blunders that he [Voltaire] has committed in his silly translations from the English.” One is inclined to think, given Baretti’s excessive annoyance, that he might be masking some of his insecurities with regard to his own linguistic accomplishments, if not in English then in French or Latin. Part of the force of his claim, however, no doubt comes from the fact that he is writing his letter not in Italian, but in English; Baretti loved to give credence to what he was saying on the basis of the language he was able to use to say it. In a letter, he justly expressed his pride at having written a book, his Account, defending Italy against the English, in English. His mastery of the second tongue thrusts him into a position of authority in what he looks at as a pitched battle.

He does not merely wish to reveal Voltaire’s ignorance; rather, he would like to expose the Frenchman’s moral duplicity and literary deceit. “Can you really swallow [Voltaire’s] repeated assertions that he was the writer of the two English Pamphlets published under his name when he was in England,” Baretti asks. Having read many works in translation by unnamed translators, or works with unacknowledged contributions from others (Johnson was famous for this), and works published anonymously, and works written by committee, Baretti feels even more confident in his accusation. He is only more eager to expose Voltaire as, in his words, “a very shallow

89 This letter, now at the Folger Shakespeare Library (Washington, DC), is printed in Franco Fido, Lettere sparse (Torino, 1976), 87-89. Burney’s daughters were learning French.
90 One pamphlet attributed to Baretti (written in French and English), The Voice of Discord, or the Battle of the Fiddles (London, 1753) could be a collaboration on stylistic grounds.
smatterer in English.” To give more credit to his claim, Baretti calls forth a kind of witness, an expatriate Italian living in London named Genovese Celestia, whose English wife wrote a popular tragedy entitled *Almida* in 1771. Celestia was on intimate terms with Voltaire, and he told Baretti flatly: “Voltaire knows almost no English at all.”

Baretti made attacks of this sort on many adversaries, as we shall see later in this study, but in this Letter he becomes really unhinged and reveals that he has long been irritated by the great French writer’s deceptive claims to fluency in English. “I began to think of exposing him on this head,” Baretti writes, “but never found a fair opportunity.” Baretti seems to imply that the entire reputation of France’s greatest intellectual would be ruined, once “detected for an Imposter.” Amazingly and paradoxically, Baretti argues that the English people have been hoodwinked into thinking Voltaire knows their language, and only he, Baretti, has the prerequisite to “detect him further”: “He may cheat Englishmen who know it [the English language] naturally; not me, that acquired it by incessant study.” He goes on to argue that Voltaire, in an effort to appear bilingual, copied in English the letter written by someone who was, in fact, English. And when Voltaire did, he copied somewhat sloppily, so as to give further the impression of fluency he only wished to have. Baretti insists, “[He] copied it with as quick a hand as he could, to impose himself upon his correspondent for the real composer of it, which he certainly was, but in French, and not in English.”

As I discussed in the Introduction, Baretti was quite familiar with works produced in such duplicitous ways, and he was caught in the act himself, on several occasions. The short essay *Remarks on the Italian Language and Writers* (1751) was written in English at a time when it seems unlikely that Baretti could have written it alone, even with Altieri
in his hands. His letters in the *Scelta di Lettere Familiari Fatta per uso degli Studiosi di Lingua Italiana* (1779), though purportedly written by famous men, were all composed by Baretti himself.91 One of his enemies, who will appear later in this study, said that Baretti had an “old woman” look over his pages written in English and accused Baretti of publishing a broadside libel under the name Phillip Mazzei, perhaps after Mazzei had left London.

Judging from the Voltaire letter, Baretti was clearly hyper-critical about those who claim knowledge of a second language that cannot demonstrate it before a judge and jury. In his *Easy Phraseology* (1775), a strange bilingual book of dialogues manifestly written from his teaching notes and *scambi di conversazioni*, Baretti discusses the origin of the term “Maccherone,” and layers into the etymology these same qualities of falseness and pretension toward cultural understanding and linguistic ability.

M. When we will say that a man is a booby, a man of gross understanding, a dolt, a fool, a vulgar fellow, we [Italians] say he is a maccherone.

E. Strange, that this word has so much changed of its meaning in coming from Italy to England that in Italy it should mean a block-head, a fool; and mean in England a man fond of pompous and affected dress!

The term “macaroni” has for Baretti added significance, since those who use it to display their sophistication, do not even know that, in Italian, the word has a further pejorative meaning. Their “affectation” is all the worse for revealing linguistic ignorance:

M. This shall not appear so strange to you when I tell you the reason of it. ...I have heard it said, that at Newmarket a club of young gentlemen made a bargain with the inn-keeper, where they went every day to dine all together, that he should give them every day a dish of macaroni's, thus affecting to show, that they were all traveled people, as they call them. ... Hence it happened, that the scoffers, from

---

91 Camillo Ugoni: “Quel bizzarro cervello finge, che queste lettere sieno scritte da parecchi italiani, nominando a capriccio, a' quali si fa parlare di ciò, che meno intesero, e la finzione è somigliante ad una satira.” (238)
that regular dish which those gentlemen would have every day on their table, denominated that club the macaroni club [in Italian, ‘il crocchio de’ maccheroni’], and each individual of it a macaroni, not knowing that this word has in Italy a very different meaning. (39-40)

To return to the trial, throughout all the proceedings, Baretti never utters a single syllable in Italian. There is not a single Italian witness brought in defense, nor is the fact that he is Italian ever directly raised, where he is presented as Joseph Baretti. His witness Peter Molini, an occasional editor of Italian books, was a resident of London and had no need for an interpreter any more than Baretti. Baretti prided himself on his ability to assimilate. Yet the entire accident was provoked by an insult that placed Baretti outside of the English society. It is one of many ironies in Baretti.

Despite his excellent display of English in his Old Bailey Speech, the altercation that preceded the murder on October 6, 1769 exposed him as an “imposter” – in exactly the way he later sought to expose Voltaire – on the basis of a very minor infraction, the inability to pronounce a curse word, a language he was envious in acquiring. Furthermore, unable to pass as Englishman when he is assaulted, he is mistaken not only for a foreigner: He is a Frenchman! “I was a Frenchman in their opinion, which made me apprehensive I must expect no favour no protection, but all outrage and blows,” he will remark in his defense.

Let’s return, in our reconstruction of the crime scene, to the physics of the situation: exacerbated by heated language, perhaps tempted by a purse or silk handkerchief, three men come into a collision course. Morgan shoves Clark into Patman, who then bumps into Baretti. The physical altercation like the rest of the story is very difficult to decipher, however, for it appears to have been a sort of domino effect that blurs primary responsibility. Patman is stabbed first, according to Clark, and Morgan
then “went up to collar the Gent. before he heard Patman complain, he was stabbed.”

(Gallup MS, 206) In the standard accounts found in encyclopedias and literary histories, Baretti is being chased by murderous ruffians, fearing for his life and crying out “Murder!” Manuscript evidence, however, seems to suggest that just the opposite was true: it was “one of the said Men then cried out Murder or a Murderer and said he had got a Knife, says that Baretti then got run away.” (Gallup MS, 205). The closest to an unbiased eye-witness—this absence too seemed odd to followers of the case, considering that the street would normally have been very crowded – to the crime is John Lambert. He is unable to confirm or deny whether Baretti was shouting bloody murder or being chased as a bloody murderer. “About nine o’clock in the evening, I was sat down to supper,” Lambert states, “when I heard the cry of murderer, or stop murderer, which alarmed me a great deal. I got to my door, and observed the prisoner and two or three men pursuing him.” We simply do not know if the men were chasing Baretti or trying to capture him after he had hastily stabbed one of them.

It is interesting to apply modern concepts and viewpoints to “The Haymarket Affair,” for it was the kind of sordid, violent, and impulsive event that characterizes contemporary society. Was Elizabeth Ward guilty of “hate-speech,” or was she merely making a wisecrack and asserting her status as a woman? Would the provocation have made a “reasonable man” (a term that arrives later) in the defendant’s position do the same”? Most of us would feel justified in murder if we were attacked in the street by three thugs intent on killing—hence the common assertion in biographies of Baretti that his life was in danger – but the transcript seems to suggest that name-calling may have been the sufficient cause. What connection is there between physical violence and verbal
abuse? Anton Blok writes, “When inflicted in public, insults can be experience as a serious form of verbal violence, in which injury mixes with insults. This is particularly true in cultures with a strongly developed sense of honour, as anthropologists have demonstrated for Mediterranean communities.” Are there reasons beyond superior physical strength to explain why men, and not women, resort to physical violence in response to verbal taunting? According to Blok, “For men, the use of violence is the best way to obtain satisfaction for stained honour and to restore their reputation for manliness. It has been argued, therefore, that ‘the ultimate vindication of honour lies in physical violence’.”

The provocation from the rabble on October 6th put Baretti into a double bind from which he was unable to extricate himself. In an attempt to combat this shift in power and gender reversal, Baretti gets physical. But this action backfires, as three men arrive, representative of the status quo of masculine strength, but who side with the damsel in distress, adding further insult to his tenuous status as an English “gentleman.” Baretti resorts to an attack with the Freudian knife, but even this gestures cannot be interpreted in a way favorable to Baretti; that is, the other men are not armed and his knife turns out to be nothing more or less, according to his witnesses, than a French knife used mostly by women at the dinner table for paring fruits and sweetmeats. On the one side, he is unable to overpower the woman as a man, but on the other he is prevented from bonding with the Englishmen (for he is a fashion-conscious foreign intellectual who has just punched a woman in the face).

There is a well-known proverb in English that states, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” It refers, of course, to that fact that you

should ignore calling you names, since names are just empty words and so can’t really hurt a person, the way “sticks and stones” can. Curiously enough, this same proverbial expression appears in a popular eighteenth-century book on learning Italian, Henry Pleunus’s *A New, Plain, Methodical and Compleat Italian Grammar* (1702). Dedicated “to the worthy English gentleman, Merchants at Leghorn,” the didactic volume includes a list of maxims in dual language, including the one just mentioned. The universal wisdom conveyed in the Italian version, however, is exactly the opposite of the English: “La lingua non ha osso, fa romper il dosso.” In English: “The tongue breaks bones, though it has none.”

In this period of translations and international commerce, we can detect in the linguistic detail the still enormous culture gap between England and Italy.

**NEWS REPORTS, PROPOGANDA, AND PUBLIC OPINION**

Newspapers in eighteenth century London were issued once a week, daily, or three times a week. News about what happened to Baretti hit the papers the next day, and between the Morgan’s death and the verdict articles and updates, reports and editorials, would appear in all the principle periodicals. (D-1) The monthly magazines, like the famous *Gentleman’s Magazine*, also contained news about the trial. One is tempted to dismiss these newspapers articles as the scribbling of tabloid journalists, but this would be anachronistic. The pages of the “daily prints” expressed public opinion and had a powerful impact in swaying that opinion, one way or another. By the mid-1780s there were no fewer than nine dailies, eight tri-weekly and nine weekly periodicals; the
Gazetteer sold at least 1500 copies a day, while the Morning Post claimed to have achieved sale of 5000 copies. 93

It is on the pages of these papers that we find the remnants of "public opinion" and the circumstantial literary evidence about Baretti, and there we discover, furthermore, how it became a minor cause célèbre. (D-2) When the Sessions Papers, a compilation of the most interesting or titillating trials, was advertised, the Baretti case was the one most aggressively promoted. And once the “trial transcript” appeared, it was reprinted in numerous other print outlets, spreading throughout the metropolis the details of the crime. News reached Dublin and Milan, Italy, where newspaper journalism was still in its infancy. In newspaper accounts we sometimes find vestiges of lost oral forms (gossip, rumor, jokes) and ephemera (letters, handbills, pamphlets) that destroy the solid foundation of Baretti as presented in standard, authoritative, reference books. In this study, I am in search of what was said, as well as what was withheld or manipulated. If Baretti was not the trial of the century, it surely left a lot of people in the century scratching their heads.

The followers of the case, like Baretti’s publisher Thomas Davies, had not been able to rest during the tense time leading up to the trial. He wrote to a client the day after the trial, “I have been so taken up with a very unlucky accident that befell an intimate friend of mine, that for this last fortnight I have been able to attend to no business, tho’ ever so urgent.” The reason did not even have to be stated: “I need not tell you that Mr. Baretti was yesterday tried at the Old Bailey, for stabbing one Morgan, who assaulted

him in the street.” Davies could not put more emphasis on Baretti’s innocence that this: “He was honourably acquitted; the jury, after a pause of five or six minutes, brought it in *self-defence*.”94 Davies was not the only one who, in the interim between the death of Morgan and the verdict, had been “taken up” with the case.” Nor was he the only participant who wanted to circulate in no uncertain terms that honorable conclusion of the jury and the restitution of honor to his injured friend. “I could not easily turn my thoughts to any other thing but the danger of losing by a jury that life which had wonderfully escaped a gang of ruffians,” Baretti wrote October 25, 1769 to Lord Charlemont, an Irishman obsessed with Italian literature. I believe that attempts were made by friends and supporters of Baretti to circulate this position with respect to the crime days before the verdict was, as Davies put it, so easily reached.

Consider the following example, not from a published paper but from a personal letter, one written by Richard Griffith to Lord Charlemont. On October 12, 1769, eight days before the trial, Griffith broke the bad news. One of the most influential figures living abroad, Charlemont would be very concerned and might be willing to send funds. Griffith put the matter bluntly: “Your friend Baretti is in a distressed situation.” (296) In his version, the chain of events is quite different than what the evidence showed: the necessity of Baretti to defend himself is the point of departure, not the result of a series of provocations:

[Baretti] defended himself one night lately, in the street, against a strumpet and two of her bullies, who attacked him. They first knocked him down, and attempted to rob, and strangle him. He had neither stick nor sword, but drew out a little silver paring-knife, for fruit, and stabbed one of the assassins, who died of

---

94 The letter is today kept in Harvard’s Hyde Collection of Manuscripts. It was published, to the best of my knowledge only once, in James Granger, *Letters between the Rev. James Granger and Many of the Most Eminent Friends* (London, 1805).
the wound. The others fled, and he was taken up. He had been admitted to bail with difficulty, from the idea of an Italian and a stiletto.95

This account is remarkable, as the first “blows” are overlooked entirely, the woman here (unlike in the trial transcript) is referred to as a “strumpet,” there are only two bullies or robbers (obviously in collusion with Ward), who run away in escape from the authorities (in fact, they did not flee the scene, but rather chased Baretti until he found sanctuary in a shop, after tending to the critically wounded Morgan). Some adjustment and drama are added to the situated transaction, as Baretti stabs only one of his “assassins,” while he is pinned on the ground and being choked to death; Baretti’s adversaries were unarmed, this is true, but they were according to Griffith bloodthirsty nonetheless. Even Baretti himself, in his long defense statement at the trial, does not assert that “assassins” wanted to strangle him, but rather “my assailants wanted to throw me into a puddle, where I might be trampled on.” Griffith equivocates on the matter of Baretti’s weapon, noting that Baretti possessed “neither stick nor sword,” the weapon of choice in such situations: he had no choice but to use an eating utensil he happened to be carrying. Very relevant here—as we shall see in Chapter Four—is the deadly weapon, for daggers and stilettos and knife-fights in general were associated with the evil Italian for centuries, the violent gestures familiar to anyone in the audience during productions of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar or Romeo and Juliet, to name only two more familiar representations of Italian stabbings. The description of the weapon as “a little silver paring knife” delicately strips the ferocity from the scene of the crime, kindling instead images of soup tureens and white napkins. It doesn’t require a conspiracy theorist to see that some tampering with the evidence is going on here.

95 The Manuscripts and Correspondence of James, First Earl of Charlemont, Vol. 1, (London, 1891), 296.
The newspaper reports included in the Appendix are works of undeniable literary value as well, perhaps because of the nature of the case. (D-9) They convey rhetorical sophistication that belies their ephemeral nature. Every detail and every syllable is significant. For example, everyone claimed that there were two women, but Baretti staunchly argued for one. By claiming this, his retaliation (slapping Ward) is directed at the aggressor, not a mere bystander. The *Old Bailey Speech*, Baretti’s letters, and every newspaper account bear careful reading. As William Eden in *The Principals of Penal Law* (London, 1771) wrote “It is extremely dangerous to give any extract from cases of homicide, *where every circumstance weigheth something the scale of justice*, and where imperfect reports have most fatal tendency.”

A sedentary and nearly blind man, Baretti must have felt incredibly vulnerable that night. Was his the understandable reaction of a fifty-year old foreigner with very bad eyes? Baretti will assert in his statement that “a great number of people surrounded me presently, many beating me, and all d___mning me on every side, in a most frightful manner.” It may very well have seemed that he was surrounded by a mob, but no one corroborated it. What did he have to say to his family and friends in Italy, when the time came to write? He waited a month, by which time he had a lot to say about “la più sventurata epoca della mia vita,” the most unfortunate epoch of my life. To Antonio Battarra, a friend in Rimini, he recounted how [going along one of the widest streets in this city, I was assaulted by a gang of thieves. I took out a little knife with a silver blade, and with that defended myself with great ferocity, I murdered one and wounded three or

---

four others]. To Vincenzo Bujovich, a close friend in Venice, he seemed equally unrepentant about how he responded to a “truppa di birboni” [troop of scoundrels]: [I succeeded in wounding a bunch of them. To one I gave such a nice [stab] that he died two days later].

News of Baretti’s “delitto” circulated far and wide – all the way to Milan, a city in which Baretti had acquired a dubious reputation. A brief note appeared in La Gazzetta de Milano on November 22, 1769. While it too differs in some particulars from the trial transcript, it is rather closer to the facts than what would coalesce by the twentieth century. Baretti stabs repeatedly the assailants, wounding some, killing one, all because a “Woman of the World” made a wisecrack at his expense. “Egli il giorno sette di questo mese, essendo la notte avanzata, s’incamminava verso casa, quando da una Donna di Mondo gli fu fatto uno scherzo, che a lui dispiacque.” [On the seventh day of this month, being late at night, he was walking home when a Woman of the World made a joke about him that he did not like]. Through some channel of communication, the idea travelled that Baretti was just being teased. “Veggendo questi il caso disperato, messe mano ad un trinciante, che egli aveva in tasca, e menò più colpi addosso agli aggressori alcuni de’ quali rimasero feriti, ed uno mortalmente.” Realizing the situation was desperate, he put his hand on a blade that he had in his pocket, and he gave many blows on the aggressors some of whom remained wounded, and one mortally. In this version, Baretti (responding both to acts and words) is described as forceful in defending himself against the numberless “aggressori.” Clearly less effort is made to remind the audience that the

---

97 Letter to Battarra, November 7, 1769 (Epistolario, i. 420): “andando lungo uno delle più ampie strade di questa città, fui assalito da una brigata di ladri. Cavai un coltellotto con la lama d’argento, e con quello difendendomi con molta ferocia, ne ammazza uno e ne ferii tre o quattro altri.”

98 Letter to Bujovich, November 14, 1769 (Epistolario, i. 424-425): “Mi riusci di ferirne diversi. Uno d’essi ne toccò una si buona, che morì due giorni dopo.”
weapon was merely a utensil for fruit and desert. Indeed, “un trinciante” is the Italian word for a large carving knife used since the Renaissance to slice sides of roasted meat.

More commonly, however, the reports resembled the version that, by the early nineteenth century, would be firmly in place and replicated in a wide range of publications, such as James Northcote’s *Memoirs of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (Philadelphia, 1817). Baretti gave fair warning to the assailants: “Some more of the gang then approached, and attempted to hustle him, when he was obliged, in his defence, to pull out a small knife, warning them not to use him ill, that he would not bear it, and would strike the first person that should come near him.” (97) Baretti was running away in fear for his life, and inflicting the wounds with an improbably backward arm motion. “He then ran, and as they pursued him, he kept moving his hand backward and forward in running from them, to defend himself, and thus wounded two of his assailants, one of whom died afterwards in the Middlesex hospital.” (97) After the affair, Baretti “no longer in dread of his life, immediately submitted himself, and was committed by Sir John Fielding to Tothill-fields prison.” (97) Much of the original event evaporated from the narrative.

The complex moment we have seen in this chapter, I believe, underwent a rhetorical manipulation on pages almost as soon as the “accident” occurred. (D-1, D-2) The earliest newspaper accounts, I believe, reveal a deliberate effort to include or emphasize certain details, while overlooking or warping other facts (the stabbing of Patman being one example). It is remarkable that these reports still persuade. Why was this important fact not reported? Was it seen as, on the moral calculus of the time, less blameworthy than the insult to honor that the men inflicted on Baretti, “well known in the literary world”? Perhaps they believed a second stab was less offensive—or less
newsworthy – than a wise-cracking woman threatening to smash a man’s head with her steel-toed boot. Almost nothing in the early accounts seems casual.

Like most newspaper articles of the time, they are unsigned, and there is really no way to determine (save for finding some autograph) who the writer, or the writers were. It seems to me safe to assume—though impossible to prove—that many of these earliest efforts to sway public opinion came from the hands of Johnson, Burke, Arthur Murphy, or even Baretti himself, in an effort to sway public opinion. In other cases, the newspapers report damaging accusations about what was viewed by some as a travesty of Justice. We shall see in some letters the voice of public outrage, in others at least of some doubt regarding the verdict in the case.

In a marvelous essay, “The Meaning of Senseless Violence,” Anton Blok points out that “the use of physical force, even in its most brutal and enigmatic forms, is rarely ‘meaningless’ or ‘senseless.’”99 Block argues that the expression “senseless violence” is a “misnomer, produced by divorcing violence from its context: by under-reporting cases of violence and ignoring telling details of its circumstantiality, most notably aspects regarding meaning, reputation and status.” (105) When a particular violent act is closely examined and placed in its social context, the confrontations become a great deal more interesting, according to Block. He recommends that we consider, as we have in this chapter, “gaze, gesture, posture and verbal exchange. “Beneath the straightforward crime are “forms of symbolic attacks on the person and violations of his territory that may have triggered the violence and fatal response.”

As we can see from the many early publicity reports, there was nothing senseless about the event on Haymarket Street that might at first appear random, simply a case of a

man being in the wrong place at the wrong time. When examined with attention to all the
voices involved, a battle scene rich in cultural meaning emerges. We are left picturing
Baretti running away alone, silenced by a woman, without his hat, his foreign tongue
having fatally given away the fact that he is not English, but was only pretending to be
so. As Anton Blok writes in *Honour and Violence*, “Unintended conditions and
unintended consequences of intended human interaction render social reality opaque,
mysterious, enigmatic.” (1)

This brief scene from the drama of *Baretti* speaks volumes about the barbed force
of language on the streets of the Enlightenment. It also tells us about personal animosity
and national identity.

As we shall see in a later chapter, the very fact of his being Italian may have
pushed him to reach for a dagger, rather than spit in the face of the woman or simply
walk away hurt. But before we can discuss that possibility, we will look at the case for
the defense.
CHAPTER TWO
THE DEFENSE: “A CONSTELLATION OF GENIUS”

Why, there’s Baretti, who is to be tried for his life to-morrow, friends have risen up for him on very side; yet if he should be hanged, none of them will eat a slice of plumb-pudding the less Sir, that sympathetick feeling goes a very little way in depressing the mind.


Mr. Joseph Baretti, an Italian gentleman well known in literature, was tried at the Old Bailey, for stabbing Evan Morgan, who with others, in company with two street walkers, had grossly insulted and ill used him in the streets; when on inquiring into the circumstances of the affair, and very respectable testimony appearing to Mr. Baretti’s character, he was acquitted of the murder.

*The London Magazine* (October, 1769).

To be attached to the subdivisions, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections.


Given the extremely public nature of the crime, the relatively reliable postal service, and the many newspapers in circulation, notice of Baretti’s crime and his trial circulated rapidly far and wide. It was not a media circus, but the early comments of the crime scene—in letters, conversations, and newspaper accounts—contain a maze of conflicts and ambiguities. Each writer would alter the facts of what happened on the street, and this subtle manipulation of detail, the register of diction and weight connotation would change dramatically the entire crime scene in the minds and hearts of viewers. We often do not know who to believe and feel ourselves in front of the birth of media hype and

---

spin, of the manipulation of the truth through the selection of details disseminated to a large audience incapable for various reasons of testing the veracity of what is provided.

The participants seemed aware from the start that Baretti’s would be a literary trial, not merely because of the many writers involved, but because the language used to defend his actions would be essential in bringing an acquittal. In this chapter we will look carefully at Baretti’s defence and consider a question that would be central to it: the question of character. Baretti’s guilt or innocence seemed to hinge not so much on what, in fact, had occurred on that rainy night, but rather on defining who he really was. That was not an easy definition to make.

The night before the trial tension and uncertainty was in the air. Death by hanging was evidently very much on the mind of Dr. Johnson, for it was on that evening that he delivered his now famous observation about death, justice, and the extent of human sympathy.

Boswell. "But suppose now, Sir, that one of your intimate friends were apprehended for an offence for which he might be hanged." Johnson. "I should do what I could to bail him, and give him any other assistance; but if he were once fairly hanged, I should not suffer." Boswell. "Would you eat your dinner that day, Sir?" Johnson. "Yes, Sir; and eat it as if he were eating it with me. Why, there's Baretti, who is to be tried for his life to-morrow, friends have risen up, for him on every side; yet if he should be hanged, none of them will eat a slice of plum-pudding the less. Sir, that sympathetick feeling goes a very little way in depressing the mind."

Given the ambiguous crime scene and the severity of punishment, the Baretti defense would have to be careful and vigorous. The trial would be a public event, attended by a large audience and followed by an even larger one. Every effort had to be given to what
Peter Linebaugh describes as “the theater, costuming, make-up and ‘staging’ of the Old Bailey drama.”

It was a very fortunate that Baretti had so many friends, and so many well-respected, literary ones. In the 1700s, if an accused criminal “did not or could not defend themselves, no one would do it for them.”

It was standard procedure for the defendant at the time to orchestrate his own defence, arranging his witnesses and preparing his arguments. Only six percent of defendants had counsel in the middle of the eighteenth century, according to Allyson May. Before the 1780s, the criminal trial did not take the form of a professional adversarial contest between two well-dressed advocates fighting to win. As Langbein and May have written, victims of crime were responsible for bringing offenders to justice, and the accused was required to conduct his or her own defense. Although not allowed to testify on oath until 1898, their unsworn response of defendants to the charges laid was a fundamental determinant of the outcome of a trial.

In a sense, the courtroom of the eighteenth century was, Langbein contends, closer to a “contest between citizen equals,” though the contest was weighted on occasion in favor of those who were able inclined to take center stage or gifted in dramaturgy. Paradoxically, the goal was to have no interference in discovering the truth, while the practice allowed for playacting and stagecraft. As odd as it seems today, legal assistance in answering the charges was thought to be unnecessary and often counterproductive to

---

justice, insofar as the advocate became a barrier between the jury and the accused. There was a general skepticism about lawyers and a concern that their presence in the courtroom might tend to obfuscate the presentation of the facts or lead witnesses away from the truth. The defendant’s unrehearsed reactions and response in front of the accusations was considered an essential way to arrive at the truth. Justices discouraged defense counsel, in part because they felt innocence would be revealed by speech and body language. For instance, Justice Hawkins wrote, “the very Speech, Gesture and Countenance, and Manner of Defence of those who are Guilty, when they speak for themselves, may often help to disclose the Truth.”

There was much criticism that lawyers would manipulate the truth. Despite this aim for an “unrehearsed” trial, in the theatrical, rhetorical world of the eighteenth century, it could be very advantageous to have, as Baretti did, a playwright/lawyer on your defense team, as well as the greatest Shakespearean actor in the world. In what John Langbein calls the "accused speaks" trial—as opposed to the modern adversarial battle between two professional lawyers—a defendant such as Baretti has a decided advantage. He not only had many more friends, he knew how to garner sympathy, create suspense and tension, and construct a compelling narrative. He knew how to create a personage and how to evoke in an audience sentimenti. When it came to building a defense, it was very advantageous in the 1700s to have a taste for creative non-fiction. Trials were generally quite brief, a half-

---

105 Sir William Hawkins
107 Baretti had, in fact, three lawyers. One was the Irishman Arthur Murphy (1727-1805), barrister, journalist, playwright, and biographer. Murphy introduced Samuel Johnson to the Thrales in 1765. He wrote many comedies and farces in the 1760s. Baretti’s second lawyer was a Mr. Lucas, most likely Henry Lucas (c1740—1802), a lawyer also interested in theater. The third was Solicitor Cox.
hour or so from start to finish, though the Baretti case lasted four or five hours. The judge acted as examiner and cross-examiner in the process that was somewhat noisy and unorganized.

As Allyson May writes, in *The Bar and the Old Bailey*, “there were various ways in which the execution of an offender could be avoided: the exercise of discretion was available at virtually every stage of criminal proceedings.”\(^\text{108}\) The accused was entitled to present both material witnesses as well as friends and upstanding citizens to testify to his general character and reputation, although he could not compel such witnesses to appear. After the incident, was Baretti, like Tom Davies, losing sleep over impending doom? We will never know, but we can be assured that he was looking around for good friends.

Dana Rabin, in *Identity, Crime and Legal Responsibility in Eighteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 2004), argues that the “defendants, their families, and their communities exerted a significant and direct influence on the negotiation of mitigation.” (47)

Baretti’s first written words on the event that survive today are dated October 17, 1769, eleven days after the incident.\(^\text{109}\) He sent a letter to his three brothers in Turin, apologizing for not writing sooner, explaining that he was simply too distraught to put pen to paper. Although often read by scholars as a confessional, “non-literary” document, I believe that it was a studied and deliberate composition. There are few writers, even in the great epistolary age of the 1700s, who were more shrewd and self-conscious about letter-writing than Baretti. He published volumes of letters, his own and those of other writers, and he copied into his notebooks letters, his own and those of others, and he wrote letters and said they were written by others, and he evidently learned

\(^{109}\) Letter to his Brothers, October, 17, 1769 (*Epistolario*, i. 412-415).
English by the daily grind of translating letters: in short, Baretti was never more attentive and deliberate than in what seems, at times, the unstudied genre of familiar correspondence. 

This is the way Baretti wanted the story told: [That evening, going along one of the largest and most frequented streets of this city, one of those many poor whores, that go around there every night causing commotion and fornicating and stealing, gave me a big punch in the parts that one doesn’t mention]. Baretti remembers—or reveals that he does – much better what the woman did than what he did, for he returns “il complimento con la mano aperta, non so se sulla mano o sulla faccia” [returned the compliment with an open hand, I don’t know if on her hand or her face]. Baretti’s wording adds some details in conflict with Ward’s testimony. And, interestingly, he focuses not merely on the initial groping, but on those verbal instigations which he recalls with not a little irony. “La briccona cominciò a gridare come un demonio e a darmi dei bei nomi. A un tratto alcuni suoi bulli mi furono addosso coi pugni.” [The slut began to scream like a demon and to give me some nice names. All of the sudden some of her bullies were on top of me with punches. I tried to flee, but the kicks and punches on every side would not permit me.] Baretti makes it clear that he [tried to flee, but the kicks and punches from every side would not allow me to], “procurai di fuggire, ma i calci e i pugni d’ogni parte non me lo permisero.” There can be no doubt that Baretti, a man who struggled with very high myopia, must have been frightened as things got out of hand that cold and

---

110 “Quella sera, andando lunga una delle più ampie e più frequentate strade di questa città, [quando] una di quelle tante povere puttane, che si vanno aggirando ogni notte per bruscarci la vita o fornicando o rubando, mi diede un gran pugno nelle parti che non si nominano.”

111 “La briccona cominciò a gridare come un demonio e a darmi dei bei nomi. A un tratto alcuni suoi bulli mi furono addosso coi pugni.”
wet night. But when he sat to write about what occurred, the impression he gives is not that of a short-winded or distraught man.

The rhetorical flair of this letter seems to indicate, among other things, some residual fury against “una puttana e due bricconi,” a whore and two rascals. Baretti writes: “L’infernale uomo non sentì due ferite, e ne volle una terza che lo buttò in terra gridando.” [The damn man did not feel two cuts, and I gave him a third wound throwing him to the ground shrieking]. The tone here, unapologetic and unsettling, will be carefully tempered in the trial testimony, which we will look at in this chapter.

In other letters Baretti expresses no remorse about what occurred, and he confidently reports that he was found completely innocent, as he “should have been.” He speaks of giving stabs to two of the men “very effectively.” [The second who was wounded by three stabs for not leaving me alone, screamed at the third with such a pained voice of being dead.] “Il secondo, che fu ferito di tre colpi innanzi di voler lasciarmi, gridò alla terza ferita con tanto dolorosa voce d’essere morto.” To another friend Baretti wrote, “Cavai un coltelletto con la lama di argento, e con quello difendendomi con molta ferocia, ne ammazzai uno e ne ferii tre o quattr’altri.” And to another, “Davvero que’ furfanti possono ringraziare che non avevo spade, ché, se l’avevo, avrei fatto assai meglio e avrei insegnato loro a non tentar di rubar chi va per via.”

112 See Épistolario, i. 412-435.
113 Letter to Montefani, December 10, 1769 (Épistolario, i. 425-432)
114 Letter to Battarra, November 7, 1769 (Épistolario, i. 420)
115 Letter to Bujovich, December 19, 1769 (Épistolario, i. 430-432)
If this was the real Baretti, it was not the one he wanted on stage on October 20, 1769. It is a very different Baretti, and one that he did not want to see in English translation.

A CAST OF LUMINARIES

In the Old Bailey courtroom on the 20th, after the witnesses against him have been examined, Baretti is invited “to speak or read any thing you have wrote.” Such formal, prepared speeches were uncommon in trials at the time, but Baretti requests to read in English “something I wrote concerning this accident,” perhaps aware of the rhetorical weight of a written word in recording what he calls “a history of the fact.” Indeed, there are some rather ingenious rhetorical effects, and the entire achievement is brilliantly polished. Baretti’s speech is the most substantial document about the event and a remarkably piece of literature. Many critics have praised the work: “The speech of Baretti lacks neither courage nor nobility. It touches by its simplicity, strikes by its clarity, persuades by its reasoning. No declamation, no grandiloquence, no pomposity.”

The first part of Baretti’s *Old Bailey Speech* is the narrative. The second part, which summarizes and argues for his innocence, reveals if not the hand of another, certainly the cooperation of the “constellation.” Most critics, like Pietro Custodi in the early 1800s, consider this speech given at the trial as if were an accurate statements of what happened, rather than the events filtered through the mind of the protagonist of the drama, “literary” documents constructing a credible story, one in this case on which the

author’s life depended. Donald Gallup believed Baretti “would have had no reason for misrepresenting the details.” However, it is worth keeping in mind a legal axiom (present in the 1700s) held that an individual is the best witness against himself, and the worst for himself. The day of Baretti’s trial, three men had been found guilty and sentenced to death – one for highway robbery, another for forgery, and another for “stealing money and linen.” There was a great deal at risk, and there can be no doubt that Baretti knew that the outcome of his trial would depend in no small measure on how the events of just two weeks earlier were displayed.

A close reading of Baretti’s Old Bailey Speech reveals it to be not merely a “statement of fact” but a carefully constructed argument, with all the rhetorical flair of superbly managed political campaign. Baretti stresses only the narrative details that render him in the positive light – either as victim or as defender – invoking the process of memory and forgetting. To deny any alternative narrative, it is enough to replicate with complete conviction a coherent alternative. Baretti’s ignores any alternative chronicle, repeating his seamless account again and again in letters. This constant repetition calls to mind a psychological mechanism evident in those criminals who deny calmly deny wrongdoing with each passing year, though the facts point incontrovertibly to guilt. Baretti was fascinated by the concept of denial, for he wrote in the Commonplace Book Manuscript the following maxim: “It is easier to bear in a denial given, than to give it at first.”

By reading a refined and graceful literary document in English, Baretti immediately positions himself as an individual quite distinct from those who daily appeared before the court on similar charges, usually working class or illiterate
individuals, repeat offenders, and the inarticulate poor. Baretti begins his presentation, oddly enough, with a sort of self-advertisement. He announces to a captive audient that his revised Dictionary is “actually printing and working off” and he has “another book in four volumes, which is to be published in February next.” Only after asserting his hard-working “literary” character, does he begin the narrative of the night of October 6, 1769. Baretti’s self-presentation is that of a decidedly successful and well-spoken intellectual, thoughtful and thorough (in contrast to the working class Ward or Patten, with faulty memories and simple sentences). The dynamics of the drama are already set in motion, with the net contrast between literary refinement and street talk, industry and idleness, business and begging. Every syllable is studied, as the blow here is “on the hand” and Baretti’s “few angry words” contrast with the vulgarities the woman uttered “in a most contumelious strain”:

Baretti never specifies the moment of the first stab, nor does he mention the particular wounds he gave, not does he ever mention his weapon, nor is he able to “absolutely fix the time and place where I first struck.” He does vividly recall that she “clapped her hands with such violence about my private parts, that it gave me great pain.”

This I instantly resented, by giving her a blow on the hand, with a few angry words. The woman got up directly, raised her voice, and finding by my pronunciation that I was a foreigner, she called me several bad names in a most contumelious strain; among which, French bugger, d-----ned Frenchman, and a woman-hater, were the most audible. I had not quite turned the corner, before a man made me turn back, by giving me a blow with his fist, and asking me how I dare strike a woman; another pushed him against me, and pushed me off the pavement; then three or four more joined them.

Ingeniously, Baretti recreates a scene in which, following his initial retreat, the intense assault against him makes his reaction seem the rather mild by contrast: “I gave a quick
blow to one who beat off my hat with his stick.” In his account, an unspecified “great number” are attacking him “on every side.” And it is he who “cried out murder.”

This gripping version is believable, though no corroborating eyewitness can support it. Baretti’s claim that there were “a great number of people surrounding me” seems a vivid example of a talent that Mrs. Thrale was to observe in Baretti years later, namely, his remarkable capacity to stretch the truth. “He beat Boswell himself in the Courage of Coining Untruths; I know not whether his Skill was superior.” By “a great number,” Baretti can’t possibly mean three men and a woman. In Baretti’s narration, a great deal indeed is made of the “damning” and the assailant’s vicious actions, his fear at the thought of his inevitable demise, and his vulnerability as “a Frenchman.” With a Johnsonian flourish, Baretti offers the level-headed statement of a rationalist in conclusion: “I am certainly sorry for the man, but he owed his death to his own daring impetuosity.”

In the second portion of the statement, Baretti apologizes for the inaccuracy of his account of his “unfortunate accident” by a rationalist appeal to general human nature. “What is done in two or three minutes, in fear and terror,” Baretti says in a line of Johnsonian thrust, “is not to be minutely described.” Baretti establishes three central defense arguments which his character witnesses later will reiterate: (1) that he was a scholar, not a fighter, (2) that he was near-sighted and sober, and (3) that the knife was just a table utensil – and not a weapon – he luckily had in his pocket. Baretti says:

I hope your Lordship, and every person present, will think that a man of my age, character, and way of life, would not spontaneously quit my pen, to engage in an outrageous tumult. I hope it will easily be conceived, that a man almost blind could not but be seized with terror, on such a sudden attack as this. I hope it will

be seen, that my knife was neither a weapon of offense or of defense: I wear it to
 carve fruit and sweetmeats, and not to kill my fellow creatures. It is a general
custom in France not to put knifes upon the table, so that ladies wear them in their
pockets for general use.

Baretti’s self-description toward the end of this passage is almost incredible, if it were not
written with such gravity, for he defends himself by association with the image of French
woman, though the entire episode appears to have been triggered by a suggestion that he
was a womanly Frenchman. That is, the contemptuous remark of the prostitute, with its
implicit assumption regarding the weakness of foreign men, is here used by Baretti to
defend the very actions that the same language precipitated.

A QUESTION OF CHARACTER

In the second part, Baretti’s defense is not that he was being robbed or that his life
was in danger, but rather that he was too studious to have ever committed a heinous
crime. He asserts a dichotomy between the criminal (drunk and bloodthirsty) and the
intellectual (passive, balanced in emotions, non-violent). “A man who has lived full fifty
years, and spent most of that time in a studious manner,” Baretti states in a Johnsonian
phrasing, “I hope, will not be supposed to have voluntarily engaged in so desperate an
affair.” He argues, in effect, that it would have been out of character for him to act in
such a rash and violent manner: “A man of my age, character, and way of life, would not
spontaneously quit my pen” is a loaded statement, insofar as it assumes (a) a certain
“stable” character that writers of a certain age have and (b) Baretti has that character and
(c) to engage in a violent act would require him to suddenly denounce the status of writer
that his opening words in the Old Bailey Speech announced.
That he killed a man becomes, as it were, a non sequitur without ever having to consider the particulars of the night now clouded in the fog of memory. It is at this point in the trial, that the “constellation of Genius” came to the defense of Baretti, led by Topham Beauclerk, who calls Baretti a “gentleman of letters, and a studious man.” Sir Joshua Reynolds offers the following remarks about Baretti’s character, clubability, and calm disposition:

I have known Mr. Baretti fifteen or sixteen years. He is a man of great humanity, and very active in endeavoring to help his friends, I have known many instances of it. He is a gentleman of a good temper; I never knew him quarrelsome in my life; he is of a sober disposition. He never drank more than three glasses in my company. I never heard of his being in passions or quarrelings. This affair was on a club night of the Royal Academicians. We expected him there, and were enquiring about him, before we heard of this accident. Mr Baretti is secretary of foreign correspondents.

The other witnesses repeat the characterization almost word-for-word, each description (the printed text is clearly abbreviated) is reduced to a hundred words or less.

Fitzherbert: “He is a man of as good a character as ever I knew any body; a peaceable man.”  Edmund Burke: “He is an ingenious man, a man of remarkable humanity; a thorough good-natured man.”  Mr. Garrick: “I never knew a man of more active benevolence.”  Doctor Goldsmith: “He is a most humain, benevolent, peaceable man…He is a man of as great humanity as any in this world.”  Doctor Hallifax: “Mr. Baretti is a man of extremely affable temper, and quite a good-natured man.”  Dr. Johnson:

I believe I began to be acquainted with Mr. Baretti about the year 53 or 54. I have been intimate with him. He is a man of literature, a very studious man, a man of great diligence. He gets his living by study. I have no reason to think he was ever disordered with liquor in his life. A man that I never knew to be otherwise than peaceable, and a man that I take to be rather timorous.

Q: Was he addicted to pick up women in the street?
Dr. Johnson: I never knew that he was.
We cannot say whether these oddly repetitive assertions, or just the effect of the dramatic occasion, or whether the witnesses offered more varied reflections on Baretti’s good character, but the note-taker recorded this, and only this, general consensus. Had any one of them spoke outside of the chorus, some trace of that would have passed into the record; but there is not a scintilla of inconsistent character evidence. Early commentators on the trial noted how valuable these “character witnesses” were in Baretti. As “Mr. Baretti’s character was of the utmost service to him on this solemn occasion. His learning, his connexions, his disposition, were all of the highest importance to him; and though the alleged crime was no less than murder, we well remember that he was bailed by four gentlemen of distinguished character; so that he did not lay in Newgate even a single hour.”

No one can doubt, therefore, the impact these character witnesses had in eliciting the verdict; nor can one deny how closely their portrait coincides with the self-characterization Baretti gives in the Old Bailey Speech. In the legal theater the eighteenth-century England, there was no assumption of innocence, but it could be created by a careful orchestration of personal recommendations. This presentation before the justice and jury was not the adversarial procedure of prosecution and defense attorneys, a system that will become the standard operating procedure only in the nineteenth century. “Accused felons might seek a lawyer’s advice on points of law, as Baretti did, but if they wanted to question the prosecution evidence or to put forward a

---

118 Gentleman’s Magazine (October, 1789)
defense, they had to do that on their own behalf. Thus, the defense was fabricated by the accused, and prosecutions could involve personal grudges, biases, and the general sense of the relative goodness of the accused. “It is supposed Mr. Baretti was assisted in drawing up his defense by Dr. Johnson and Mr. Murphy. We have heard it said, that a short time after the trial he claimed it however as his own, at Mrs. Thrale’s table, in the hearing of these gentlemen.” Before the so-called “adversarial” system that we know today, the strategy of self-defense frequently relied on the careful use of selected character witnesses. The virtues the accused displayed in other occasions were sufficient defense of discreditable actions, often more than a cautious weighing of the complex facts of the case.

After Baretti reads his *Old Bailey Speech*, a series of witnesses appear, including Peter Molini who claims to have seen swelling and bruising on Baretti the day after the crime. Such evidence in the period before photography was viewed as easily invented. In fact, Molini states that he had witnesses, “two other gentlemen were present at the same time.” With no police force and no photography, the crime scene vanished as quickly as the crime, and eye-witnesses had no motivation or civic responsibility to come forth. Indeed, in general, one gets the impression that the eighteenth-century jury viewed character evidence as perhaps the most reliable, the hair follicle or blood spatter, difficult to deny or to manufacture. If the “facts” were unclear (or memories had faded), character evidence was “solid.” The judges and magistrates “paid attention not just to the facts alleged and the defense offered,” J. M. Beattie observes in *Crime and the Courts in*.

---

121 *Gentleman’s Magazine* (August, 1789)
Odd as this might seems, character evidence was often considered more reliable than memory, eye-witnesses, and any material findings. Indeed, the prisoner was often better served by the accumulation of evidence about his or her behavior, profession, age and class than by a discussion of the particular “facts” surrounding a protected crime scene.

The offender and victim, therefore, were placed in a larger picture that involved their social standing, previous record of behavior (there were, of course, no “criminal records,” who they knew, and how they made their living. As Beattie writes, “There is no doubt that the character of the capital laws encouraged the courts to pay attention to the identity of the prisoner, and surrounded the issue of guilt and innocence with concern for who the prisoner was who might suffer in a particular way.” (439)

Although he does not cite Baretti as an example, Beattie notes that “there is evidence that where the proof of guilt was not persuasive or the character of the prosecutor himself was not entirely certain, strong witness to the good reputation of the accused could well bring an acquittal.” (441) Distinct from nineteenth and twentieth century trials, character witnesses in the time of Baretti were not usually subject to a cross-examination, during which they might be impeached. Such witnesses, it was assumed, were friends of the prisoner and such apparent conflicts of interest were generally accepted within early modern courtroom operating procedure. (447) A person’s character was not merely checked to verify that he or she might be speaking the truth about the facts of the case. No, judges and juries considered the question character—both good and bad – to determine whether on the individual was inclined, capable or predisposed to the criminal act. The jurors were drawn from the local area.

precisely because they might have some prior knowledge of either the defendant or the accuser, or even a witness. Character became the main focus of many trials, as “all evidence was judged in the light of the character of those who gave it.”123 “Men were not all equal before the law; nor was that sought as an ideal,” Beattie points out. (440)

Character witnesses were central not only in exceptional cases like Baretti, but in run-of-the-mill trials. The two related questions were routinely raised: “What is his general character? How long have you known the prisoner?” The answers given by the witnesses in Baretti as recorded by the note-taker, very closely resemble the responses in other trials. Certain kinds of set-phrases recur about being “addicted to quarrelling” and “of a riotous disposition,” or “peaceable” and “never drunk.” There were certain protocols as to how this evidence was to be presented: it had to avoid any specifics. When a certain James Watling, “commonly called, or known by the name of Tom Tit,” was charged with tax evasion on May 26, 1748, a witness is restricted from mentioning the specific facts; the questioner is interested, rather, in “general character” and his overall reputation among in the village where he lives: “Q. Pray what character does he bear? Barber. He bears a very bad character, with respect to stealing poultry and other things. Coun. for the Crown. You must not go into that, what is his general character? Barber. It is very bad. Q. What is the report of the neighbourhood as to his character in general? Barber. It is that of a very disorderly fellow.” (OBSP, May 26, 1748) The defendant could not supply anecdotes about particular good acts to show that he did not commit a crime, or otherwise extenuate the circumstances: his best strategy was to supply the testimony of some pillars of the community.

123 Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, Tales from the Hanging Court (London, 2006), 130-135.
According to Beattie, character in the legal battles of the 1700s was so important that “a man who could produce no witnesses was likely to have a difficult time in court.”

When Benjamin Housden was tried for stealing a pair of silver shoe-buckles on September 26, 1769, his youth and paltry income did little to help his dire predicament: “Q: How old is he? Wade. He is twenty-one, or pretty near the mark. Q. What character do you give him? Wade. As good a character as a poor man can do. (OBSP, October 18, 1769) Consider another example: William Parish was “indicted for feloniously assaulting William Stent on the King's highway, on the 27th of September last, with a certain offensive weapon, called a pistol, with intent to steal the monies of the said William Stent.” (OBSP, October 20, 1784) He requested a postponement of the trial: “If you will please to put my trial off till to-morrow morning, I can have gentlemen to my character.” This request was denied and Parish was sentenced to transportation for seven years. The question of character entered every sort of trial, even those in which the particulars of the crime were a good deal less obscure than in the Baretti case. For instance, on December 3, 1772, Daniel Brads was arrested for “stealing a stick of Turkey box wood, value 4 shillings.” Despite being caught red-handed, Brads still made an effort to call “two witnesses who gave him good Character”; in the end, he was found guilty and sentenced to transportation. (OBSP, December 9, 1772) Sometimes good character was just not enough. When Joseph Simpson was indicted “for putting Edward Snape in corporal fear on the King's highway, and taking from him half a guinea and two half crowns, the money of the said Edward, against his will,” he assembled a dozen character witnesses (fellow parishioners, evidently) who, just as in the Baretti case, came
to a complete accord that he was “an industrious, sober, honest man.” Justice Fielding sentenced Simpson to death. \(\textit{OBSP, September 6, 1769}\)

All things being equal, writes Beattie, “the good reputation of the accused could well bring an acquittal.” (440) It is no doubt with this in mind that so much of the trial report is focused on the “character” of Baretti, so much less on the witnesses at the scene. Peter King, in \textit{Crime, Justice and Discretion in England, 1740-1820} (Oxford, 2000), analyzed the factors affecting judicial decision making in 1787 and 1790, and he found that “previous good character” was by far the most important factor leading to pardons.\(^{124}\) “In many trials, pardons were granted when the accused “pleaded or implied a respectable background,” according to King. (87) Character testimony was an accommodation built in the system, an escape valve, given the seriousness of the punishments of the time. The case between Baretti and Ward/Morgan from this point of view looks different.

Not infrequently – as was the case in Baretti’s trial – the particular timeline of the crime was simply avoided by the defense, and attention given to subsequent happenings and who the defendant was in the eyes, preferably, of respected members of the community, if not the great and the good. Poor individuals accused of crimes lacked both the friends and the means to arrange for those friends to attend the trial and speak favorably on behalf of the accused. In the granting of pardons, Beattie observes, age and gender would play a significant role, and “it was decidedly more difficult for the poor females to assemble reputable individuals willing to attest to their character and reputation.”\(^{125}\) This system gave a considerable advantage, therefore, to the older male


with “connections” and a stable set of well-thought-of associates; in contrast, it made the
defense of the young, females, or anyone from out-of-town or newly arrived, often
difficult, even in the presence of compelling evidence. A prisoner’s habits of life”
(440), such as his sobriety and his established place in the community could – and often
did – have more impact on the outcome than any other type of evidence. Commentaries in the late seventeenth century endorse the use of character evidence by
jurors. As Beattie writes, “Some trials give the appearance of having involved as
much a weighing up and balancing of the reputations and social worth of the principals
on each aside as of the evidence.” In Baretti’s case, the opposition between the
“character” of the defendant and the prosecution could not have contrasted more, nor
could it have been more advantageous to Baretti. In cases such as Baretti, in which the
defendant could present good character and demonstrate the bad character of the victim,
“such testimony could certainly overturn the evidence.” (441)

Clearly in Baretti, as in the many hundreds of less “literary” or sensational trials
of the time, much effort was made in trying to learn something about the individuals
involved in the trial, which went far beyond the hard facts. Our reading of the Sessions
papers depends on an appreciation of the enormous effort made in establishing Baretti’s
social status and his professional prestige. Baretti was in the enviable position of having
from the start connections with the world of letters and law necessary to construct a
convincing defense on the terms of the period. Immediately after he was taken in the

126 See examples in Beattie, 439-449. The justice system was not stacked against the lower classes, as
Langbein writes in “Albion’s Fatal Flaws,” but against the immoral class.
127 Beattie persuasively shows how the same crime, done against a poor woman without reputation and a
wealthy man had very different results, in which all things are equal except for character witnesses. (442)
Prisoners spent time in jail negotiating character testimony for their upcoming trial. Beattie concludes, “A
man who could produce no witnesses was likely to have a difficult time in court.” (440)
128 Robert Shoemaker and Tim Hitchcock, Tales from the Hanging Court (London, 2006), 100.
shop, Baretti asked to speak to Sir John Fielding, the blind half-brother of Henry Fielding, one of the most literary magistrates in the history of English jurisprudence. Goldsmith and Reynolds accompanied Baretti to the prison. His defense was financed by reputable and wealthy English (and, some evidence will show, some generous Italians living in London). The eighteenth century courtroom drama was, therefore, a presentation of moral contrasts, frequently exaggerated by circumstance or by the verbal advantages of one side in the conflict. A bad reputation, in short, was a tremendous liability for anyone accused of, or the victim of, criminal wrongdoing. According to King, any person who had “an addiction to quarrelling” could be “badgered about their immorality,” unless he could find someone respectable to “vouch for their good behaviour and quiet ways.” (130)

Baretti’s *Old Bailey Speech* works, thus, on two levels, by trying to reconstruct the events in the Haymarket (instilling them with doubt, uncertainty, confusion), while asserting in firm, economical and clear terms his own position, in a tight network of scholarly associates, and authority within English society. For instance, while the three men who arrive on the scene admit to having been drinking beer, Baretti “spent the whole day at home correcting my Italian and English Dictionary, which is actually reprinting and working off, and upon another book in four volumes, which is to be published in February next, and has been advertised in the News-papers.” While Baretti was purposefully going “to the club of Royal Academicians in Soho, where I stopped about half an hour waiting for my friends, and warming myself in the club-room.” Evan Morgan, an itinerant singer from the lower ranks of society, was idly drinking ale. “We met Morgan nearabouts where the fire was. We drank three pints of beer together, at a
house that turns up on the left-hand. We asked Morgan to give us a song; he said he would give us a song, if we would go along with him to a house in Golden-square.” Morgan could never have provided a similar set of supporters; much worse, the testimony revealed that he had kissed a prostitute the night before the crime.

Weighed on this moral balance, the blame shifts, as we witness a real-life performance of William Hogarth’s print series called *Industry and Idleness* (1747), which shows the progression of two apprentices going in opposite moral directions. One young man follows a commendable work ethic, while the other is a lazy bum. After being betrayed by his whore, the degenerate bum named Tom Idle turns highwayman and eventually is executed at Tyburn. Guess who in the end is named Lord Mayor of London? Francis Goodchild! Within the refined and artificial theater of the courtroom, the specific facts of the case are subsumed within what seems a larger—and a more seemly and straightforward—presentation of virtue and vice. The spectators during the case, consequently, become viewers of a morality play that seems much more edifying than what could be gained by a direct contemplation of matters of fact. Baretti begins his speech by announcing his forthcoming publications (less costly than a newspaper classified advertisement in the *Morning Chronicle*). He is advertising himself in front of a captive audience. There is more to the opening rhetorical gesture than selling copies, however, for he also hastens to assert a distinction between himself, diligently writing, revising, meeting esteemed colleagues and checking mail, and the hapless Evan Morgan, aimlessly wandering half-drunk and coming to the aid of vagrants and common whores. The strategy is transparent, to be sure, but it seems to have been very persuasive to the eighteenth-century audience. Though Baretti was probably not any more industrious in
his life than the average wigmaker, his defense proves him to be from the same mold as Francis Goodchild.

The language of the various witnesses certainly suggests that some sort of script or tacit agreement on how to present the case. Indeed, there is clear evidence that the witnesses met at the house of the lawyer the evening before. Johnson, according to Boswell, had a heated dispute with Edmund Burke over some matter, but later contended that the disagreement had been blown out of proportion, that in fact they were of like mind. It was probably in the days leading to trial that the witnesses decided to emphasize Baretti’s character, and to repeat the adjectives that would best serve Baretti.

In the case we are reviewing, one cannot overstate the advantages in favor of Baretti, particularly in terms of constructing a “character” that would garner sympathy—and admiration—from the jurors. Men and women were skillful in emphasizing their own weaknesses and vulnerabilities, while at the same time fashioning those on the other side as malicious criminals. As Jennene Hurl-Eaman argues, women assaulted or raped in the eighteenth century were very careful and attentive to conveying their status as victims in order to achieve the desired results. She concludes that assault victims of both sexes in London were empowered as prosecutors, strategically using "victimhood" to achieve a successful prosecution. She contends that "victimhood" was a conscious act of "self-fashioning." Usually men, according to Hurl-Eamon, did not emphasize their weaknesses or vulnerability, but rather the dreadful circumstances of the occasion of the

---


crime. In *Baretti*, the techniques for fashioning his character are masterful, as both vulnerable and courageous. Johnson puts heavy emphasis on his nearsightedness, though some commentators thought this beside the point, as the stabs were given from very close range. The witnesses chorus emphasize the fact that he was a foreigner, and so could expect, as Baretti says, “only outrage and blows”; the perceived vulnerability in the attempt to gain advantage. Dana Rabin, in *Identity, Crime and Legal Responsibility in Eighteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 2004), explores the “presence or perceived presence of the language of mental excuse or anxiety.” Given the growing distaste for capital punishment, there was a search to find “extenuating circumstances such as the defendant’s gender, age, character and reputation.” Historians have documented the rise of new defenses in the 1700s, such as passion, compulsion, insanity, and drunkenness, all of which show a complex idea of identity and the self.

Well concealed beneath the surface is a question that many at the time harbored: was Baretti really at risk of death, or did he just imagine himself to be? However things were in Baretti’s head at the time, the elaborate staging is crafted with the clarity of a moral play. Baretti has perfectly managed to present himself as the passive bystander, the recipient, and the solitary foreigner in contrast to an urban “mob.” Important, furthermore, is the way the defense captivates and monopolizes the discussion of character, by creating for Baretti a sort of scholarly immunity, by emphasizing his academic and bookish behavior; to have done what he is accused of, he would have

---

needed to abandon his writing life. Implicit in the defense is the widely held notion that scholars are not self-serving, vicious, and criminal. Finally, the construction of Baretti’s character in defending himself reveals the truth of a phrase written by William Hazlitt, “Simplicity of character is the natural result of profound thought.” By reducing Baretti’s character to a one-dimensional form, and reiterating the simplicity without alteration of complication or extenuation, the witnesses reveal a profound understanding of the human psyche: they simplify Baretti to a state of innocence. By dominating the discourse of character during the trial, and by repeating in very similar language the audience is coerced to accept the dominant view. As Muir and Ruggiero write in “The Crime of History, “judicial texts serve as scripts in a theater of authority.” As Baretti stood before the audience and juries with tears his eyes, one wonders if he had in mind a proverb that he recorded in the Commonplace Book Manuscript: “A weeping eye indicates a gentle heart.”

The Baretti case from this point of view becomes a stunning example of Foucault’s concept of cultural hegemony. The courtroom is divided between the literate and the illiterate, and the cultural class possesses all the verbal ingenuity to create a seamless image of the writer/scholar whose behavior is, by definition of his profession, inconsistent with the behavior that Giuseppe Baretti is accused of displaying on October 6th. The dominance arises, not from a complicated or even accurate depiction of the moral character of Baretti, so much as the ability to control the economy of discourse, to repeat a series of phrases in the “language of authority,” by the force of the combined effect and their unanimity. Baretti shows how power is transferred along conduits of

---

dialogue and manufactured into truth. If anyone in the audience was disposed against Baretti, by the end of the four hours, it was necessary to be equally skeptical about the integrity of the most distinguished London artists and writers, several legal authorities of high repute, the Chief Justice, and the most charismatic actor of the day.

This becomes an “economy” of witness statements working as currency and as powerful as bribery. (D-11) The identity of Baretti becomes a creation of the conversation—however generalized it may be—about his character, character that is solidified through repetition. The witnesses control Baretti’s character, by arming themselves with the power and means of communication. By inundating us with images of Baretti the scholar, we are unable to imagine him as Baretti the killer. “At the trial, Baretti’s friends protested almost too much of his quiet, scholarly temperament and his social graces,” Duncan Robinson recently observed.135 Other observers at the trial had the same intuition. (D-13) The trial concludes with a gesture and ovation that suggests a night at the playhouse. (D-15)

Using the force of their network to sway the audience, they are able to exclude Evan Morgan from the courtroom. Evan Morgan is not only a very bad boy, he is cut off entirely from any upstanding human connection, as is Elizabeth Ward, a wayward prostitute who does even know the name the woman who was with her the night of the crime. The nightwalkers emerge as anti-social fleas, lacking fixed residence and regular employment, without the support system that, in itself, does not prove or disprove that Baretti killed Evan Morgan. The defense was calibrated in favor of Baretti, given that

Morgan was deceased and thus could not defend himself. Several very troubling articles written after the case suggests that the silencing of the prosecution was illegal. (D-32)

In the end, the deviant or outlaw in the case is not Baretti, who many thought acted with a vengeance and unnecessary force, as he is transformed by the powerful, literary elite into a “timorous” scholar, whose stable identity cannot and does not permit behavior inconsistent with this position. The criminal, instead, is the inarticulate, ashamed and immoral prostitute, whose course language and vulgar gesture articulate her “self,” which not only in the trial but in later commentaries is the true evil in the whole affair, the embodiment of corruption in London. The society is stabilized by the approval of Baretti’s behavior, and by the exclusion of Evan Morgan, who never is described.

Mrs. Piozzi told the following anecdote:” “When Johnson & Burke went to see Baretti in Newgate, they had small Comfort to give him, & bid him not hope too strongly; -- Why what can he fear says Baretti placing himself between ‘em—that holds two such hands as I do.”136 This gesture says a great deal about the workings of the legal system of the time, for Baretti’s fate in the absence of the concerted character testimony supplied by his friends and associates might very well have been different. The economic orchestration of his identity created a powerful argument in favor of his innocence, for it was not merely Baretti on trial but the entire circle of admired Englishmen, Dictionary Johnson, the most-admired English actor of the day, and everyone who cared more about the of the mind than that of the body.

CESARE BECCARIA AND TESTIMONI

Although the use of character evidence was widespread in the 1760s, jurists and writers increasingly called into question whether such evidence was valid. Two years before the trial, Cesare Beccaria’s *An Essay Crimes and Punishments* was translated into English (by an anonymous translator) to great acclaim. Beccaria expressed with clarity and precision objections to torture and capital punishment that were percolating throughout Europe: he had a sympathetic audience. Voltaire considered the work of highest political value and wrote a commentary on it that was translated into English and included in the first English edition. Beccaria exposed the evil of capital punishment in Chapter 28 by an argument *ad absurdum*. “Is it not absurd, that the laws, which detect and punish homicide, should, in order to prevent murder, publicly commit murder themselves?” (112)

There is no evidence of Beccaria ever contemplating *Baretti*, but he would have considered it a problematic case, in part because of the heavy and lopsided use on character evidence. He considered this species of evidence valuable, but believed that it should be used with extreme caution. Beccaria was not the only writer of the mid-1700s taken with the sentiments due process and equality before the law, displeased by unfair pardons based on association. Baretti liked the following proverb enough to record it for future reference: “*Friendship* must never give a byas against *Justice*.138

Beccaria devoted a chapter of his treatise to “Testimoni,” Witnesses. His observations occasion more skepticism with regard to *Baretti* than scholars have been inclined to show. Beccaria proceeds with care in distinguishing rational principles and axioms of evidence and procedure. The value of a character witness, he tells us, should

---

137 The first Italian edition (published in Harlem) and French translations were in circulation.
138 The Penn *Commonplace Book Manuscript.*
never be raised on the basis of his or her prestige or conduct alone, thus allowing a witness to be a moral surrogate for the accused. This measuring stick for the quality of a witness is simple: [The credibility of his evidence will be in proportion as he is interested in declaring or concealing the truth] “La vera misura della di lui credibilità non è che l’interesse che’egli ha di dire o non dire il vero.”

The legitimacy of a witness, Beccaria argues, should not be disvalued on the basis of gender or class. The singular disqualification, instead, should be some personal interest in giving false—to favorable—testimony. Beccaria’s equation should give pause to anyone quick to accept the Baretti verdict on the basis of unanimity of distinguished character witnesses: [The credibility of a witness, then, should only diminish in proportion to the hatred, friendship, or connections, subsisting between him and the delinquent.] “La credibilità dunque deve sminuirsi a proporzione dell’odio, o dell’amicizia, o delle strette relazioni che passano tra lui e il reo.” After the trial, in a series of letters he wrote to family and friends, Baretti never failed to lay heavy emphasis on the fact that his witness included the distinguished and titled. At the same time, some critics of the trial found this irrelevant. (D-34)

Basing their conclusions on Baretti’s work, literary critics have tended to accept the testimony of the learned without the any skepticism as to whether they might have had personal incentives to be less than entirely truthful. It is usually considered unacceptable for the crucial evidence in a murder case to be provided by close associates

---


140 Consider the Letter to his Brothers, October 17, 1769, (Epistolario, i. 414): “Lo scudiero Guglielmo Fitzherbert e lo scudiero Edmundo Burke, entrambi membri di Parlamento, il suddetto cavalier Reynolds, e il famoso Garrick.”
of the accused who, as was the case with Baretti, paid his legal fees. In Baretti, more so than in any other of the century, the level of friendship between the witnesses and the accused was very high indeed, and it is was confirmed many times on paper.

Beccaria would certainly have expressed reservations about the great deal of weight given to the character testimony of Johnson, for instance, who wrote warm letters to the Italian when he was away from London. Baretti, J. D. Fleeman reminds scholars, was “the most intimate of his friends,” and he assisted Johnson and promoted his works in Italy, getting in return prefaces, favorable letters, and literary advice. In the eighteenth century, as a general rule, the value of a character witness was gauged by length of acquaintance, and Johnson met Baretti many years before, ten years before he met James Boswell for the first time. Baretti’s “praxis of moral sentences,” which I mentioned in the Introduction, was extracted from Johnson’s Rasselas (London, 1759), a work Baretti translated into French but failed to publish. One of their first shared compositions was Zachariah William’s An Account of an Attempt to Ascertain the Longitude at Sea (1755), a pamphlet that Johnson introduced and for which Baretti supplied a parallel Italian translation. Joining of forces on a book project was very common in the period, the Beccaria/Voltaire duet being an example, and it almost always indicated bonds of great esteem and friendship. In the General Biography Vol. 2 (London 1801) we read that Baretti treated Johnson with “deference and veneration” and in the course of his life “omits of no occasion in his works of testifying his profound admiration of his illustrious friend.” (6)

---

141 Baretti’s translation is printed in Raffaella Carbonara, Giuseppe Baretti e la sua traduzione del Rasselas di S. Johnson (Torino, 1970).
142 Baretti did not always consider his position as translator as in any way inferior to the principal author. A copy of this title in the New York Public Library contains an inscription in Baretti’s hand: “L’Autore al Dottor Francesco Zanotti, Bologna.”
The *Old Bailey Defense*, though not included in the Johnson bibliography, has features that Johnson scholar, H. W. Liebert, thought suggested collaboration.\(^{143}\) This is impossible to prove, for Baretti learned to imitate Johnson remarkably well. Baretti denied vehemently that he was given any aid whatsoever in penning the defense, stating that the audience “knew I had a mind” and his statement demonstrated it. It was so well written, in fact, that in later publications the editor inserted a reminder to readers that Baretti had lived for many years in London. C. J. M. Lubbers-Van Der Brugge wrote *Johnson and Baretti* (Groningen, 1951), a monograph in which he analyzed parallel passages in the works of both writers, revealing similarities in style and content. While some critics have criticized Lubbers-Van Der Brugge for arguing that Baretti’s every thought and syntactical decision was based on Johnson, the similarities cannot be denied. Baretti said, “[I am indebted to Johnson for the major part of my scarce knowledge] “sono debitore [al Johnson] della maggior parte del mio scarso sapere.” Baretti’s *English Grammar* is based on the one in Johnson’s *English Dictionary*. I agree with James Clifford’s view that Dr. Johnson is today regarded as a quintessentially *English* writer, rather hostile to foreigners as a rule, but in fact was very interested in Italian culture from his boyhood. Baretti became a sort of Italian alter-ego for Johnson, and he regretted very much never having been able to travel to the Mediterranean with Baretti as his guide.\(^{144}\)

The other character witnesses had a similarly tight bond with Baretti through their mutual friendship with Johnson, while some, like Sir Joshua Reynolds, were particularly close to the Italian and beholden to him: a guilty verdict for Baretti would have looked very bad indeed for Reynolds, who had just secured Baretti a position as Secretary of

---


Foreign Correspondence at the Royal Academy, established just a year before the trial.

Baretti included his new professional title after his name on the title-page of the *Journey from London to Genoa* (1770), which he dedicated to the President of the Academy, Reynolds, as the “first work I have prepared for publication since I had the honour of belonging to you.”(iv) Reynolds had traveled extensively in Italy in the 1750s, but his Italian language skills were shaky at best. John Ingemells is surely correct when he notes that Baretti composed the various letters written in Italian and signed by Reynolds.145 Baretti would be an invaluable aid for translating not only correspondence, but the *Discourses on Art* (1778) as well, and Baretti would do so for the Italian edition, *Delle arti del disegno del cav. Giosuè Reynolds trasportati dell' Inglese nel toscano idioma* (Firenze, 1778).

David Garrick, likewise, had become quite close to the defendant when he visited Italy in 1764. With Baretti’s help, he was able to assemble collection of Italian literature which he prized as much as his English drama collection. Using Nicola Francesco Haym’s buying guide, the book Baretti used to make his *The Italian Library* (1757), Garrick assembled a huge collection of Italian books from the Renaissance, including plays, treatises, and Italian translations of Latin classics.146 During the trial, Garrick refers to the assistance Baretti gave him during his Brenta tour, referring not only to a very flattering letter of recommendation now at the Folger Library, but also various recipes for medicines that Garrick felt did much cure his seriously ailing wife, a former

---

dancer in the Italian Opera Theater. “Mrs. Garrick got a lameness, and we tried every
method in order for a remedy to no purpose; and Mr. Baretti was the person that restored
her.” Garrick, like Baretti, transforms the knife from bloody stiletto to something along
the lines of a piece of fine, superfluous jewelry. He testifies: “I cannot say I ever saw one
with a silver sheaf before. I had one, but I have lost mine. Mrs. Garrick has one now,
with a steel blade, and gold.” Based on other primary documents, I believe the following
response Garrick gave was done with a grin: “Q. When you travel abroad, do you carry
such knives as this? Mr. Garrick. Yes, or we should have no victuals.” One
contemporary accused Garrick of bribing the constable with a silver theater ticket. (D-
30, D-31)

Returning for a moment to Beccaria, we read in Chapter 13 that one witness
should *not* be considered sufficient, nor should we be gullible if a collection of witnesses
are members of a particular society or club, as the bonds of that private group should
invalidate or undermine the weight one would otherwise give to the witness; the legal
system should have checks and balances. Beccaria surely is not thinking of literary
circles, neither Johnson’s nor his own, when he writes this, but the point he makes could
be directed at *Baretti*. Beccaria writes, “Parimente la credibilità di un testimone può
essere alcuna volta sminuita, quand’egli sia membro d’alcuna società private di cui gli usi
e le massime siano o non ben conosciute o diverse dalle pubbliche. Un tal uomo ha non
solo le proprie, ma le altrui passioni.” [The credibility of a witness may also be
diminished, by his being a member of a private society, whose customs and principles of
conduct are either not known, or are different from those of the public. Such a man has
not only his own, but the passions of others.]
Such reservations about character should not be attributed only to Beccaria, for clearly other great minds were thinking alike. Sir Jeffray Gilbert (1674-1726), the father of the modern law of evidence according to John H. Langbein, established the same principle years early, in *The Law of Evidence* (London, 1717). In this groundbreaking work, which was in the second edition in 1760, Gilbert “excluded from all Testimony [anyone] for want of Integrity.” His “General Rule” would halt anyone inclined to give great credence to the *Old Bailey Speech*: “First, Persons interested in the Matter in Question, and here the General Rule is, that no Man can be a Witness for himself, but he is the best Witness that can be against himself.”(122) Unlike many scholars of the last century who resurrected the Johnson circle and simplified the trial, Gilbert is much more realistic: “Men are generally so short-sighted, as to look at their own private Benefit which is near to them, rather than to the Good of the World, that is more Remote.” (122)

While Beccaria’s position did not come directly from Gilbert, the similarities are very close and indicative of an intense concern in remedying a serious breach in due process. By examining any “certain Benefit or Disadvantage to the Witness attending the Consequence of the Cause,” the judge and jury should be able to dismiss, or at least moderate, the weight of evidence supplied by anyone with a “fixed and certain Advantage by the Event of the Verdict, and by Consequence his Attestation is to derive an Interest to himself.” (122, 124) Oddly enough, the judge in the Baretti trial, Sir Henry Bathurst, stated the same conviction: “No Person interested in the Question can be a Witness.”

How much was the testimony of the various Englishmen a careful construction to elicit a favorable result? Baretti wrote after the trial, “Those I had about me did their part

---

so well that they have made me an Englishman forever.” Given the reputation Baretti had for quarrelling, and the force of the combined witness, we could not agree more.

WILL THE REAL MR. BARETTI PLEASE STAND UP?

“Humane”? “Peaceable”? “Timorous”? Despite the appealing simplicity and the unanimity of the Johnson circle’s character description, adjectives such as these, before and especially after the trial, were very rarely used in connection with the critic from the Piedmont. As established in the opening of this study, many people who came in contact with Baretti could not forget the general outlines of his temperament. One of Baretti’s compatriots was so vexed by the application of such pacific epithets to Baretti that he composed a libel telling various stories, such as the time Baretti teased a hunchback dwarf so tenaciously that a fistfight ensued in the coffee house, as the dwarf climbed onto a table and thrashed Baretti with his walking cane. Rather than the image of the placid, professional scholar, Baretti was thin-skinned and hyper-sensitive, quick to defend himself by blaming others, and most definitely “addicted to quarrelling.” The image portrayed at the Old Bailey in 1769 was not far-fetched given Baretti’s age, professions, and friends, but it sure would have given pause to a lot of people who knew Baretti’s ways. The Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani article on “Baretti” begins by citing his character in the following line: “He had because of men and circumstances, but more than anything because of his restless and combative character, a life wayward and adventurous.”

149 DBI, Vol. 10: “Ebbe per causa di uomini e circostanze, ma più per il suo carattere irrequieto e combattivo, una vita errabonda e avventurosa.”
Anyone who met Baretti, either in London, Venice, or Milan, would have been surprised to hear Donald Gallup’s general claim that as a man Baretti “did his best to make himself agreeable.” On the contrary, almost everyone who met Baretti was taken aback at some point by his hostile, edgy and forceful character. He seems to have been mild only with little children.

In short, the defense was risky, for Baretti had established a reputation in Italy for a sullen or saturnine disposition. Pietro Custodi, in his Preface to the *Scritti scelti* (1822), describes Baretti as a brooding and intemperate man, “uomo torbido e intemperante.” (6) The reason why not every writing by Baretti is worthy of consideration, Custodi informs us, can be best explained by the difficult pulls of his choleric temperament, “gli imperti del suo collerico temperamento.” As he tried to separate the literary wheat from the chaff in producing his important edition, Custodi admits that it might seem biased, but “al carattere ed alle opere di lui” he was forced to choose the better parts. He attributes the inferior quality of certain writings not to the pressures of deadlines, lack of inspiration, or overwork, but to the weakness of human nature: “debolezza della natura umana.” Thus, Custodi recommends that posterity leave in oblivion all the writing that was the immoderate release of passion, some mental errors, and some vices of the heart, “lasciar nell’obblìo tutto ciò che fu effetto di uno sfogo smoderato di passione, degli errori della mente, o de’ vizi del cuore.” (7) What are we to make of “some vices of the heart”? It is simply hard to reconcile the image of the scholarly and mild-mannered teetotaler conveyed by the witnesses with the record of so many who met him, during his life, which tended toward this description in general terms:

The pitiless Baretti insulted in the Frusta Letteraria all those that were not of his party. He travelled Europe and could not find asylum except in London. He
compiled the best Italian-English Dictionary that had yet been seen. To appear free in everything, and original he showed himself savage. He was subjected to a criminal trial, he defended his case, and the jury stunned by the energy of his eloquence absolved him with applause.\textsuperscript{150}

The young Donald Gallup, hurrying to complete his dissertation under Chauncey Brewster Tinker, in a single paragraph describes his subject as “utterly charming,” with “a pleasing personality” and an “ingratiating personality.”\textsuperscript{(166)} By contrast, Custodi (who certainly did not want to defame a man whose works he was trying to resuscitate) called Baretti “militant, impetuous, angry, vindictive, of a ready courage and a resolute man to the point of pride.”\textsuperscript{151} It was well-known that Baretti had a “collerico temperamento.”

In the years following the trial, almost everyone upon meeting the Italian, attempted to assess his “general character,” sometimes recording first impressions insofar as they supported or conflicted with that advanced at the Old Bailey. Years later, for instance, John O’Keefe recalled meeting Baretti and the German painter Johann Zoffany, a meeting which stimulated immediately stimulated memories of the famous case, and an additional testimony, as if it were needed, to Baretti’s “humane disposition”:

In 1781 I passed some evenings in company with Baretti and Zoffani, in the back parlour of the Orange coffee-house, the corner of the Haymarket, which room was reserved for select company. I had long before read Baretti's Travels in Spain. The result of his trial in London was an honour to the English jury, and gave me a higher veneration for the memory of the Irish-educated Alfred the Great, who had founded in England the Trial by Jury. Baretti was an agreeable,

\textsuperscript{150} Nuovo giornale letterario d'Italia (1788-1789) Antologia. A cura di Elena Parrini Cantini. (Lecce, 2004): “lo spietato Baretti insultò nella Frusta Letteraria tutti coloro che non erano del suo partito. Trascorse l'Europa e non trovò che in Londra un asilo. Compilò il miglior Vocabolario inglese italiano, che finora si sia veduto. Per comparire libero in tutto, e originale si mostrò selvaggio. Soggiacque a un processo criminale: perorò la sua causa, e i giudici storditi all'energia della sua eloquenza, lo assolvevano con gli applausi.”

\textsuperscript{151} Pietro Custodi, Scritti scelti (Milano, 1822), 188: “millantatore, impetuoso, collerico, vendicativo, di un coraggio pronto e risoluto uomo fino alla fieranza.”
good-natured man, and, I am sure, of a humane disposition—large fine person—
concave, smiling Italian face.  

Although she did not appear at the trial, Mrs. Thrale will come to know Baretti better
than anyone else, including Johnson, for they lived under the same country house roof.
Hester Thrale, in whose company Baretti had passed many years and who supported him
financially, loathed the Italian, and despised her in return, referring to her repeatedly as a
“bitch.” When Baretti died one report noted “the cause of mutual disgust, which took
place between Mrs. Piozzi and Baretti, is before the public.” In fact, it was very
difficult to locate the reason for the animosity between the two close friends of Johnson.
In years following the trial, Baretti was employed as a tutor to the children of Thrale,
with whom he had a tortured relationship. An educated and highly literate woman, she
admired Baretti for “His talents, acquirements, and strength of mind must have been
considerable, for they soon earned him the esteem and friendship of the most eminent
members of the Johnsonian circle, in despite of his arrogance.” In the Autobiography
Letters and Literary Remains, Thrale insists that it is not merely a personality clash, so to
speak, between her and a man who “since October of 1773 [has] been our almost constant
inmate, companion, and, I vainly hoped, our friend.” Not wanting the reader to
believe that she was the instigator of the ill-will, Thrale brings eye-witnesses to testify:
“Mrs. Montagu, grieved to see my meekness so imposed upon, had thoughts of writing
me on the subject an anonymous letter, advising me to break with him.” Seward
“tried to reconcile us, confessed his wonder that we had lived together so long.”

153 See Annotations to Thrale’s Letters.
154 The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature for the year 1789 (London,
1792), 36.
Furthermore, she insists that it was Baretti who was always starting quarrels with Johnson who, emerging victorious over “a man who was his friend, a foreigner, and poor,” felt pangs of residual guilt. “Trampling on” is the expression that comes to Mrs. Thrale when describing how Baretti treated her. If there is one quality that comes across in Mrs. Thrale’s description of Baretti it is that he was “addicted to quarrelling.” “There was an instant appeal to Mr. Baretti, who was sure always to be against me in every dispute.” (104) “Baretti had a comical aversion to Mrs. Macauley, and his aversions are numerous and strong.” It is clear that Baretti’s hostility here—and elsewhere—emerges as nothing so much as laughing stock. Why should he be so hostile with Mrs. Macauley, and why should the hostility run so deep remains inexplicable. Thrale comments that “though I really liked the man once for his talents, and at last was weary of him for the use he made of them.”(103) In striking contrast to the friendly and sober Baretti described in the trial, Thrale describes him as “sullen and captious.” “His character is easily seen, and his soul above disguise,” according to Thrale, but it is hardly the “timorous” and meek character described before the jury, but rather that of an peculiar man, “haughty and insolent, and breathing defiance against all mankind.” Thrale described Baretti as a man full of pent-up rage: “Baretti is a stream damned up; if he could once get loose, he would bear down all before him.”155 At the end of his life, though the picture never was taken out of the library of Streatham, Thrale compared Baretti (with no irony) to Aaron the Moor in Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus and she “found too many aspects of the man simply appalling.” When describing him, violent imagery seems to have come readily to mind. When describing Giuseppe Baretti’s skills

---

in conversation and argument, Samuel Johnson selected a decidedly violent metaphor, remarking, “He has not many hooks; but with what hooks he has, he grapples very forcibly.”

Plans were made for a trip abroad to Italy in 1776 (a tour Johnson had long spoke of undertaking), and Baretti was to be the tour guide; his skills in French had been invaluable during an earlier tour of France, though he was annoyed at his travelling companions for ridiculing French customs and food. Late in life, Baretti remembered the occasion with little nostalgia, and appears to have retained some annoyance with regard to how much, or how little, he was paid. The Italian trip had to be cancelled due to, in Piozzi’s words, “an unforeseen and heavy calamity,” more than likely a medical problem. Baretti was furious, notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Thrale presented him with 100 guineas in compensation that “at first calmed his wrath a little, but did not, perhaps, make amends for his vexation.” (105)

Mrs. Thrale “had occasion to talk of Baretti with Tom Davies,” the bookseller who, we recall, was extremely upset the two weeks prior to Baretti’s trial. According to Mrs. Thrale, Davies, “spoke with horror of his ferocious temper.”(107) Trying to calm him down, Mrs. Thrale insists that Baretti is merely high-strung and overly emotional, and that she had “seen tears stand in his eyes.” “Indeed,’ replies Davies, I should like to have seen that sight vastly, when—even butchers weep.” Another revealing anecdote on Baretti’s character is recorded in Thraliana: “An Italian came one Day to Mr. Baretti, when he was in Newgate for Murder—to desire a Letter of Recommendation for the teaching his Scholars, when he, Baretti, should be hanged. You Rascal, replies Baretti in

---

a Rage—if I was not in my own Apartments I would kick you down Stairs directly.”

Did this actually occur, or was it part of the apocrypha of Baretti anecdotes? Baretti, oddly enough, though Johnson a terrible judge of character: “The most unaccountable part of Johnson’s character was his total ignorance of the character of his most familiar acquaintance.”

Today the law of evidence still allows for the use of character evidence, but in a much more limited way, and in some cases it is not admissible at all. “Evidence as to the character of the accused person is admitted in criminal cases as a sort of indulgence,” Sir James Stephen wrote, “though character is usually treated as irrelevant.” In 1863, the case R. v. Rowton raised issues about the problems implicit in character evidence. Rowton was a teacher arrested for sexually assaulting one of his students. He called witnesses who testified to his being “an excellent character as a moral and well-conducted man.” A witness was called to contradict the evidence, and he stated “I was only a boy at school when I knew him, but my own opinion, and the opinion of my brothers, who were also pupils of his, is that his character is that of the grossest indecency and the most flagrant immorality.” Sir James Stephens cited this case as an example of how character sometimes only proves the “reputation for honesty or morality by the grossest hypocrisy” that “cannot be contradicted by people who know the truth.” John Langbein, in The Origins of Adversary Criminal Trial (Oxford, 2003) discusses how

---

157 *Thraliana* Vol. 1, (Oxford, 1942), i,

158 Giuseppe Baretti, *Annotations to Thrale’s Letters*. This is a recurring observation: “What a knowledge of human nature! Johnson’s utter ignorance of the character of his most intimate acquaintance, was no less surprising than ridiculous”; “Poor Johnson! How careless in examining the nature and the conduct of his Friends!”

concerns “about whether evidence of character was material” led to the “exclusion of character evidence in modern times.”

Baretti in marshalling a defense “team” was able to construct a narrative of the events that, unless read with painstaking attention, was seamless and undisputable, and he conveyed it with all the aplomb of scholarly sophistication, a dose of theatricality, and a delicate handling of the cultural tensions of the moment. In order to become fully English, he must destroy the Italian in himself. We are left wondering if it was all a “willful misconstruction,” a phrase was coined by Baretti’s lawyer, the playwright Arthur Murphy.

Two hundred and fifty years after the fact, a tantalizing volume of conflicting evidence works toward making a circumstantial case against Baretti, one that is more nuanced and more troubling than that passed down through the generations. One of those pieces of evidence, a nasty book published in London in the early 1770s, would seek to ruthlessly undermine the courtroom verdict. It reveals, perhaps, that in the court of public opinion Baretti had been less than honorably absolved. That book and its author is the subject of the next chapter.

---

160 According to John Langbein, “even after a consensus had formed that a practice such as admitting character evidence was unwise, individual judges retained for a time some discretion to depart from such a “rule.” (196) CJ Holt asked, “Are you going to arraign his whole life? Away, away, that ought not to be; that is nothing to the matter.”
CHAPTER THREE

C. F. BADINI v. BARETTI: “A SPEAKING PORTRAIT”

The Italians are an agreeable people enough; but, too frequently, they are found vindictive and treacherous. Revenge and Treachery are the great sins of the Italians and the Easterns; and they poison the very mice in their houses.

Isaac Disraeli, Curiosities of Literature (London, 1791), 352.

A man's reputation is not in his own keeping, but lies at the mercy of the profligacy of others. Calumny requires no proof. The throwing out malicious imputations against any character leaves a stain, which no after-refutation can wipe out. To create an unfavourable impression, it is not necessary that certain things should be true, but that they have been said. The imagination is of so delicate a texture, that even words wound it.

William Hazlitt, "Characteristics" (1823)

Every-one endeavours to exculpate himself by blackening his neighbor.

Giuseppe Baretti, Commonplace Book Manuscript, 176. 161

The most damning evidence against Giuseppe Baretti never was disclosed during the trial. Several years after the case closed, while Baretti was preparing his three-volume folio edition of Machiavelli, another writer was designing a work that would unmask Joseph Baretti, showing him for who he truly was, a Machiavellian man. In this satirical biography in verse, Baretti is not painted as the humble, “timorous” scholar of his friend Samuel Johnson, nor a vulnerable foreigner, nor a defender of honor. This life of Baretti has never received scholarly attention. It is a rare surviving example of the intentional attempt to denigrate the reputation of one particular person and generate an extremely

161 From Samuel Richardson, Clarissa Vol. 5 (London, 1748), 189: “Good actions are remembered but for a day: bad ones for many years after the life of the guilty. Such is the relish that the world has for scandal. In other words, such is the desire which every one has to exculpate himself by blackening his neighbour.”
negative, unethical or unappealing perception. On first reading, this *ad hominem* attack that compares Baretti to devils in Dante seems to be the production of a vicious and talentless writer with a personal grudge, a work not worthy of publication and surely below the designation of literature.

Lurid and colloquial, but also learned and allusive, *Il vero carattere* is a fascinating remnant of power and resentment in the networks of literature in the multilingual London during the Enlightenment. It illuminates the extent of personal hostilities in the Age of Satire and how, in the protective suit of foreign language, a devastating and brutal personal attack could be launched with impunity. It is a rare surviving example of a libel with no apparent political motivation: it appears to have been motivated by pure rage. It is an example of the “sub-literary” class of invective satire with roots in antiquity and a textbook on the “verbal license of ancient invective.” The work gives us the foul taste of the diatribes and abusive poems that never appeared in print but more often circulated, by the 1700s, in coffee shop gossip, hastily composed manuscripts, vulgar song lyrics composed half-drunk. “While malicious gossipers spread all sorts of tales, all such stories were guaranteed to lower the victim’s esteem in his or her locale. They were designed, after all, to ‘take away the good name’ or belie ‘the Honour and Credit’ of the person slandered. Words themselves were seen as a form of abuse akin to assault.”

In this chapter we will look at a classic in the literature of character assassination.

---


163 See Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford, 200), Ch. 6 “Ballads and Libels” and Ch. 7 “Rumor and News.”

Although the paper and printing of the book are very good, one gets the impression that it contains what many were saying but few had the nerve, the money, or the time to print.

The style and other features of the work, as we will see in this chapter, clearly show that the opinions in it were circulating freely in the oral channels of communication. Notwithstanding the insignificance of the work as a piece of high literature, it is a masterpiece as cultural propaganda that reveals how acrimonious—and how petty—literary feuds could be in the Age of Satire.

It also profoundly alters our understanding of “The Haymarket Affair.” The Giuseppe Baretti in this testament, far from being the mild-mannered scholarly type, is a trouble-maker, loathed by the Italians in the London of the time. This fulsome Baretti is an incompetent and pretentious writer, a compulsive liar, a lusty syphilitic, and a cold-blooded killer.

The strangest fact about the work is that the author was not an angry Englishmen. He was an Italian by the name of Carlo Francesco Badini (1725-1813).

The title of Badini’s seventy-odd book left no room for misunderstanding: it alluded directly to the orchestrated courtroom defense of Baretti on the basis of his “humane,” “peaceable,” “studious” character. It is titled *Il vero carattere di Giuseppe Baretti* [The True Character of Giuseppe Baretti]. Intended for those who saw Baretti’s trial or read of it in newspapers, the book has a subtitle that announces its purpose: *per il disinganno degl’Inglesi e in difesa degl’Italiani*” [to undeceive the English and in defense of the Italians]. Written in Italian with a false Venice imprint, the book is clearly intended primarily for Londoners, Italians and English readers able to read Italian. Like
Baretti, Badini uses his foreign tongue as a way of legitimizing his thoughts. Badini’s contribution dramatically alters our understanding of Baretti, rendering the case even more baffling.

This “piece of evidence,” so to speak, did not emerged until several years after the case closed in the form a personal attack so violent and vituperative that some readers might have not find it funny at all, though some at the time found it uproarious.

CARLO FRANCESCO/CHARLES FRANCIS BADINI

Ironically enough, C. F. Badini’s life and temperament is almost a perfect mirror of Baretti’s own. He liked to write his name as Charles Francis, and sometimes Carl Francis. They could have been twins separated at birth.

Like Baretti, Badini was from Piedmont and was raised in a small town the early decades of the century. He arrived in London for the first time in the early 1750s to work in the King’s Theater in the Haymarket, like Baretti, and he probably did odd jobs as a teacher and translator, though before 1760 his life is a blur. The following account, perhaps not available to Busoni, contains some a great deal of revealing information about Badini’s early life:

A native of Alba, the capital of the lower Montserrat, in the dominions of the king of Sardinia. He is descended from a very respectable family; his father being profectus urbis, or chief magistrate of the place at the time of his birth; and his mother, a daughter of the famous Count de Gregory de Marcorengo, who possessed for some time, the favour of Charles Emanuel, and died superintendant-general of the finances at Turin. Seignior Badini was born to a very handsome fortune; but he contrived to dissipate it, and at least reduced himself to great distress. At a very early period of his life, he wrote a most scandalous poem of an atheistical tendency, which gave so much offence to the king of Sardinia, as well as to all of his own relations and friends, that he was obliged to abandon his native place. He sought upon this occasion, a retreat in Paris, where he resided for some time with the celebrated M. d’Alembert, and published several light
pieces in French and Latin. The gentleman recommended him to the King of Prussia, as poet of his majesty’s Italian theatre at Berlin; but Badini preferring England, repaired hither, and has gained a moderate livelihood by writing operas for the king’s theatre in the Haymarket. His productions of this description are numerous; and some of them have been performed both in England and in his native country with applause.  

Clearly, Badini had an extraordinary aptitude in foreign languages, especially French and English, although like Baretti he lacked formal academic training and his claims to having graduated from the University of Turin are probably false. Badini was very confident, and boasted that he knew English far better than Baretti ever did, as he could write not only agreeable English prose but poetry suitable for musical settings. As Baretti is a writer hard to categorize, so too is Badini. Is he poet, translator, journalist, satirist, or (as Lorenzo Da Ponte called him), a “puffmaster”?  

When Badini belittled Baretti’s English, he was not merely pointing out the ability he displayed in print. He was revealing a deep-seated rivalry and sense of competition that perhaps lies behind Il vero carattere. An accomplished translator, Badini was the first to render into Italian Blaise Pascal’s Pensées in 1767. Unlike Baretti, Badini successfully established a network of connections among composers, singers, dancers, writing a series of libretti throughout the 1770s. The majority of Badini’s printed works were musical settings, written in Italian for English audience and

---

166 The biographical facts that follow are taken primarily from Busoni’s article in the DBI, Vol. 5, 84-85. In addition to Busino, information on Badini can be found in the article in Groves Online Music by C. Price.  
167 Pensieri di Pascal sopra la religione, ed alcuni altri soggetti colla vita del medesimo, traduzione dal francese di Carlo Francesco Badini (Torino, 1767)  
168 Libretti Badini recently published included: Il disertore; a new comic opera; as acted at the King’s Theatre in the Hay-Market. Written by Mr. Badini (London, 1770); Le pazzie d’Orlando, a new comic opera, as performed at the King’s-Theatre in the Hay-Market. (London, 1771). Badini, Carlo Francesco. Il carnovale di Venezia, o sia, la virtuosa. A new comic opera, as performed at the King’s-Theatre in the Hay-Market (London, 1772).
sometimes published in dual language, such as adaptations of Metastasio’s *Alceste* or *Didone abbandonata*. Badini wrote a libretto for an opera of *Andromaca* in 1790; likewise, Baretti translated Racine’s version of the play by Euripides into Italian, but never finished it (the draft survives in the *Commonplace Book Manuscript*). Like Baretti, Badini was very fond of English literature, especially Shakespeare and Pope, writers he enjoyed quoting. Robert D. Hume calls Badini “the only King’s Theatre poet who showed much concern for English sensibility,” a writer with “pretensions to language and learning.”¹⁶⁹ In fact, Badini was evidently quite familiar with classical literature and obsessed with ancient mythology. Badini died sometime in the early nineteenth century, probably in London or Paris, though the place of burial is unmarked; we know he died outside of London, because in 1803 he was deported. In 1787, advertisements mentioned that Badini would be revising Baretti’s *Dictionary* for publication in Turin, though this may have been a hoax.

The long and prolific career of this “eighteenth century lampooner” has been studied much less even than Baretti’s, and a single scholarly article on him in English begins with an apology for disinterring the author: “The name of Carlo Francesco Badini is now buried in obscurity from which it should never have emerged, and some apology is necessary for disinterring it once more.”¹⁷⁰ On the other hand, Giovanni Busino, a very distinguished scholar, has written with more admiration, calling attention to the range of Badini’s accomplishments and describing him as rather intriguing.¹⁷¹ Toward

---

¹⁷⁰ See E. H. Bigg-Wrapper, “An Eighteenth Century Lampooner: Carlo Francesco Badini” *Italian Studies*. 2, No. 8 (1938), 153-70. In Bigg-Wrapper’s view, Badini is a “factious, back-biting, self-seeking poetaster” (170) is not “deserving of remembrance.”
¹⁷¹ DBI, Vol. 5, 84-85.
the end of Badini’s life, in the first years of the 1800s, Leigh Hunt ran into a man who “looked the epitome of squalid authorship. He was wretchedly dressed and dirty; and the rain, as he took of his hat, came from it as from a spout.” It was Badini, a throwback to the neoclassical age with all its exuberance and undeniable talent.

Hunt tells us, “He wrote a good idiomatic English style, and was a man of abilities. I had never before seen a poor author, such as are described in books; and the spectacle of the reality startled me. Like most authors, however, who are at once very poor and very clever, his poverty was his own fault. When he received any money he disappeared, and was understood to spent it in alehouses.”

But it is not merely in the events of life and literary output that the two men walked in step; they seem to have shared the very same peevish disposition. Badini had an “aptitude for making himself a thorn in the flesh of his acquaintances,” according to Bigg-Wither, a phrase fitting Baretti on many occasions. Badini’s fiery temperament did not preclude him, any more than Baretti, from full participation in the more refined literary circles of the time; that is, both had also charm and many friends. Badini was known (like Baretti) for frontal assaults, for exploiting enemies, for his skill in English, qualities conveyed in this graceful letter to the Duke of Dorset:

> It is not the splendour of your rank that directs my eyes to your Grace in dedication of this new entertainment. My Lord, I do but address your taste. The noble patronage you have been pleased to bestow on several brilliant talents especially on the composer of this piece, has given such ample proof of your exquisite refinement in the arts, that, I confess, I am proud of obtaining your Grace’s approbation. May the Opera deserve it. Your Grace’s suffrage will dignify the homage of my pen, the sincerity of which none will suspect; for even my enemies have always charged me with being too much averse from flattery.

---

My Lord, Your Grace’s humble, and most obedient servant, BADINI\textsuperscript{173}

Badini ruthlessly attacked works by Vincenzo Martinelli in the \textit{Bilancia di Pandolfo Scornabecco} (London: Bingley, 1768). Badini included a frontispiece portrait of Martinelli, his head on a scale being outweighed by a feather with an epigraph from Pope: “The Antichrist of Wit.” In the 1790s Badini did all he could to undermine the London career of the Lorenzo Da Ponte, the author of \textit{Il dissolute punito, ossia Don Giovanni} (1787). In short, Badini emerges as a kind of doppelgänger who, although he is almost entirely forgotten, during his lifetime he was often associated with Baretti, generally in unfavorable terms. “Signior Badini the comic poet is preparing his epigrams against Guigliemi; and Signior B------i on the other side, is preparing to roll Badini in the Kennel—It is to be wished that these needy foreigners would content themselves with filling their and picking our pockets without exposing their former lives and characters to the derision of a deluded public,” we read in \textit{The Oxford Magazine} (April, 1772). Like Baretti, trying to pay the bills often led Badini to be unscrupulous. The laudatory reviews of some of the operas for which Badini wrote the libretti, we have reason to believe, were written by Badini.

Impulsive and petulant, Badini was also, one gathers, considered a very amusing fellow. He liked to play practical jokes and once advertised in the newspapers that he was dead, all in a bizarre ploy to solicit money from his friends to pay debts.\textsuperscript{174} Badini


\textsuperscript{174}Badini’s death, brough on by “a violent sore throat,” is one of the great hoaxes of the eighteenth century. See Philip H. Hightfill, Jr., Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, \textit{The Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & other Stage Personnel in London 1660-1800} (Carbondale, 1973-1993), i. 208-210.
never made it into the *Dictionary of National Biography*, although he spent like Baretti
half a lifetime in London and was an admirer of Shakespeare and Milton.

How can we explain, given their similarities, Badini’s incredible hostility toward
Baretti? According to the Busoni’s article in the *DBI*, [Baretti had attempted in a
thousand ways to assure himself a sort of intellectual control over the activity of the
London theater, even to the point of irony and satire every single time a menace to his
position arose.]¹⁷⁵ Badini’s vicious rivalry (“competition” is entirely too polite a word)
began at least fifteen years before “The Haymarket Affair.” In 1754 Baretti published –
anonymously and in French – an attack on Badini’s that appears to have led to his failure
one of Badini’s Operas; moreover, Baretti ridiculed Badini’s friends, the impresario
Vanneschi and the prima donna Mingotti. “An insignificant quarrel between Baretti and
Badini, the former of whom having abused the opera called *Le Vestale* of the latter,
seems to have give occasion to this impertinent publication, which is prefaced by a
poetical eulogium on Giardini,” we are informed by the *Universal Catalogue for the Year*
(London, 1772-1774). Perhaps the attack can be traced to “quei motivi di gelosia,
d’interesse, che dividevano in due partiti gli Italiani a Londra” [those motives of jealousy,
of interest, that divided in two parties the Italians in London]. But would this have been
provocation gross enough to unleash the 88-pages of *Il vero carattere*? Was Badini
merely seeking retribution for a bad review? Was his libel vengeance for equally harsh
attacks in manuscript, now lost, from the pen of Baretti? Or was Badini simply trying to
capitalize on the misfortune, trying to advance his own still fledgling career “Few books
are so acceptable to the greatest part of mankind, as those that abound in slander and

sulle attività del teatro londinese, non disdegnando di ricorrere all’ironia e alla satira ogni qual volta
avvertiva una minaccia per la sua posizione.”
invective,” Baretti wrote in the opening line of his *Account of Italy* (1768). Or was Badini, along with many other Italians in London, genuinely outraged at a miscarriage of justice? Was he motivated by patriotic rage, petty envy, or personal animosity so intense that he felt obligated to leave a permanent record as testament? *Il vero carattere* raises so many questions. Why would a man in many ways similar to Baretti stigmatize him in such a relentless and cruel way?

We never would have expected the most hostile witness would be another Torinese, given Italian *campanilismo*. Even Badini himself was shocked to find himself the target of Baretti’s attacks, writing that it “seemed incredibile,” [so much more being himself also from the Piedmont, without the slightest provocation, wanted to vomit on a man from his own town his ferocious calumnies that one finds throughout his libel against Badini.]\(^{176}\)

One thing we can say for sure is that the Baretti-Badini relationship is a telling illustration of what Sigmund Freud called “the narcissism of minor differences,” the fact that “subtle distinctions rather than great differences between individuals and groups, occasion many conflicts and ruthless struggles.”\(^ {177}\) Freud observed that often individuals we might expect to be compatible and mutually supportive given their great similarities are, on the contrary, in a state of intense hostility. Anton Blok, in *Honour and Violence*, following Freud, observes that “the fiercest struggles often take place between individuals, groups and communities that differ very little—or between which the

\(^{176}\) Carlo Francesco Badini, *Il vero carattere*: “tanto più essendo egli pure del Piemonte, che il Baretti senza essere provocato da ragione veruna, abbia voluto vomitare addosso ad un suo paesano quelle ferocissime calunnie che si trovano sparse nel libello contro il Badini.” (15)

differences have greatly diminished.” For this reason, Blok contends, mythology and folklore are filled with Cains and Abels. Thus, it is not great but minor differences “that move people to exclude others, to discriminate against them, to stigmatize them and subject them to extreme forms of violence.”

Paradoxically, we reserve intense emotions - aggression, hatred, envy - towards those who resemble us the most. We feel threatened by those we mirror; the reflection imperils the individual’s sense of his own uniqueness, superiority, and self-worth. Badini and Baretti are both desirous of asserting their unique Italian identity in London, but “that identity lies in difference, and difference is asserted, reinforced and defended against what is closes and represents the greatest threat.” (123). Looking at each other, Badini and Baretti experience a narcissism that provokes them to want to destroy the threat to their unique talents and literary individuality. “Social identity lies in difference; and difference is asserted against what is closest, which represents the greatest threat.” (121) Baretti poses a great threat to Badini, not merely as a critic of his work; Badini feels humiliated, shamed, and embarrassed by not being so special after all, and he reacts with envy and aggression. The success of both writers depends, at the same time, on assimilating into the English world; that is, creating stress or antagonism against the English would put their literary careers in serious jeopardy, so it is directed against the familiar. Blok quotes Rene Girard: “It is not the differences but the loss of them that gives rise to violence and chaos.”

Although we might anticipate support for Baretti from the mouth of a compatriot, some English writers felt that this animosity was typically Italian. John Adams in his

---

Curious Thoughts on the History of Man (London, 1789) observed that “The Piedmontese and Genoese have an aversion to each other, and agree only in their antipathy to the Tuscans. The Tuscans dislike the Venetians; and the Romans are not over-fond of the Tuscans, Venetians, or Neapolitans.” (189) Adams continues, “very different is the case, with respect to distant nations. Instead of being objects of aversion, their manners, customs, and singularities greatly amuse us.” Il vero carattere is too contemptuous to be interpreted as mere lampoon. It is simply impossible to imagine that it was done merely for literary entertainment. But, in the end, we don’t know whether it is a reliable narrator genuinely wishing to clear the air, or a ruthless competitor of Baretti willing to resort to the foulest language in order to capitalize on his twin’s unhappy accident.

CICERO FURIOSO

A distinction must then be made between satire, which portrays universalized conditions, and lampoon aimed with destructive intent against a particular person. Scholars often present eighteenth-century satire as either Horatian (general, refined, moderate) or Juvenalian (biting and personal). During the 1700s, many poets (such as Johnson) argued that topical and venomous satire was ephemeral, and would in the end only hurt the reputation of the writer, not the reputation of the individual attacked. Baretti wrote in his Commonplace Book Manuscript, “The end of Satire is not to exasperate, but amend; and should never be personal. If it be, it may make an impartial Person suspect, that the Satirist has a natural spleen to gratify, which may be as great a
fault in him, as any of those which he pretends to censure, and expose in others.” Most scholarship on satire has focused, therefore, on less personal invective and libel. 179

In *Il vero carattere*, Badini’s model is neither Horace, nor Juvenal, but rather Cicero. Although Cicero is not a writer associated with satire by scholars today, historically he was known for vituperative satire and a particular blend of moral outrage and biting humor. And unlike the sort of Horatian satire which poets from Pope to Johnson would defend, written in a refined fashion and attacking general human folly, Cicero’s satire was directed at real individuals and does not pull any punches. Several scholars have pointed out that the satires of Cicero were actually meant to be funny, since the repertory of classical abusive satire, as John Dugan says, “exceed[s] the strictures of decorum particularly in the area of humor.” 180 Cicero in Oxford “his unbridled invectives tend to repel those brought up in a modern western society. “However much Cicero sought to disguise it, he had a reputation, both among his contemporaries and in subsequent antiquity, for oratorical impropriety.” *Il vero carattere*, distasteful it may be to modern sensibilities, follows an ancient Roman tradition and well-articulated rhetorical strategies. As Amy Richlin writes in *The Garden of Priapus*, “the pleasure of the audience comes from hearing home truths (or rumored truths) about the participants given utterance, but equally from the contest between the two speakers.” 181

---


laughter might surprise us today: *ad hominem* repartee, crude metaphors, and relentless mockery. Our tastes have so much changed—and we are so sensitive to hurt feelings—that it takes some effort to appreciate Ciceronian satire, satire that aims to abuse and to censure, “written not to reform but vex.”

*Il vero carattere* is full-scale Ciceronian satire, a direct and scathing invective, a headlong assault with no target reaching beyond the individual whose character Badini wants to denigrate at any possible cost to literary decorum or good taste. It is on the far Ciceronian side of the spectrum between polite and crude, toothless and biting, general and personal, intended to improve on the one side, and the other intended to injure, defame and denigrate. *Il vero carattere* would have left Cicero smiling, but it is not just a jestbook. It is a written testament to history of the “real” Baretti, in contrast to the image that the media of the time generated. The satire of *Il vero carattere* is on the other far side of the spectrum, coarse, denunciatory, abusive, and violent. Badini’s invective sets out publicly to denigrate a named individual, Giuseppe Baretti, so as to have him be rejected by his community. I have attempted a translation in the Appendix.

Badini opens his satire with two epigraphs chosen from Cicero’s satires, clearly wanting to position himself as a sort of Cicero reincarnate. The first epigraph is from *To Piso*:

[You are not Aristarchus, you are a Tyrant, and a miserable Grammarian that does not correct bad verses, but persecutes the Person of the Poets. Thou Ass, am I to teach thee thy Alphabet? You are not to be talked into this, you ought to be drubbed into it.]\(^{184}\)

---

184 “Tu non sei Aristarco, tu sei un Tiranno, e un Carnefice Grammatico che non i mali versi coreggi, ma perseguiti i Poeti. Che giova che io t’insegni o asino le lettere? Tu non hai bisogno di parole, ma di sferzate. Cicerone a Pisone.” The translation is based on William Guthrie’s in *The Orations of Cicero* Vol.
The second is from Cicero’s Against Vatinius. It makes clear Badini’s utter disdain for Baretti.

[No one looks at the face of him without displeasure; no one remembers him without condemning him. They avoid him, they flee him, they avoid hearing talk about him. They detest him like a bad foreboding. Relatives run away from him. The people curse him. Neighbors fear him. Assassins are embarrassed by him.]\(^{185}\)

Badini sarcastically explains that he did not include an engraved portrait of Giuseppe Baretti in order to save money, the subject not being worth much: “ci risparmia la spesa d’un intaglio” [it saves the cost of an engraving]. But there is another reason not to bother with a picture. The description by Cicero in Against Vatinius, Badini says, furnishes us with a “Ritratto parlante,” a speaking portrait, and the same words were applied to Baretti by Italians in Italy.

[The precise words above were applied in Italy to GIUSEPPE BARETTI; now we think it fitting to repeat them, because the application could not be more accurate, and in fact in Italy it met with universal applause: and we also wanted to do it so that with the so-called Ritratto parlante we would save on the expense of an engraving, which if made from life, there would be serious concern about it harming a pregnant woman.]\(^{186}\)

In this harsh passage, Badini refers to the ugly physical appearance of his rival, while at the same time unmasking him in front of the English audience. Badini’s aim is to denigrate the individual Baretti on the basis of moral and physical shortcomings, described in the most graphic and gross detail.

---

3 (London, 1743), 426-427. See also William Duncan. _Cicero’s Select Orations, translated into English; with the original Latin_. A New Edition (London, 1771).


\(^{186}\) “Le prefate precise parolette furono applicate in Italia a GIUSEPPE BARETTI; ora noi abbiamo pensato bene di replicarle, perché l’applicazione non può essere più giusta, e in fatti ebbe in Italia un applauso universale: e abbiamo anche voluto fare perciocché il sudetto Ritratto parlante ci risparmiava la spesa d’un intaglio, il quale se venisse fatto al naturale, vi sarebbe seriamente da dubitare, che potesse far torto a qualche donna gravida.”
Before the “verse” narrative of Baretti’s life begins, Badini writes a lengthy prose introduction, in which he attempts to establish a *provocation* for his work. He refers to a libel against himself “pubblicato ultimamente,” recently published by Filippo Mazzei, the same Mazzei who during this time leaves London for a distinguished career in Virginia, where he becomes a close friend of Thomas Jefferson. His libel—which Badini tells us was only “a half-sheet”—has never been located, and one cannot say whether Badini is not just establishing a fictitious instigation for his own work. To make the provocation even stranger, Badini argues that that Mazzei’s poetic attack on him originated, in fact, “della penna assassina di Giuseppe Baretti,” from Giuseppe Baretti’s assassin-pen.  

Any Italian would know this: “qualunque Italiano che abbia alcuna tintura di lettere, e tutti concordemente affermeranno essere quella un parto della penna assassina di Giuseppe Baretti.” [any Italian at all with the slightest tint of literacy, and they will affirm it to be a part Giuseppe Baretti’s assassin-pen.](14)

Through the introduction to *Il vero carattere*, ironically, Badini characterizes Baretti’s literary production as libelous, asserting that his works are immoral attacks on individuals. Thus with a sleight-of-hand, by thrusting this claim on Baretti, he extinguishes his own libelous intentions; it is sufficient that he show self-defense. The vituperative rhetoric that Badini uses forces the reader to be appalled by Baretti’s rude, myopic and inconsiderate behavior; paradoxically, Badini stands as defender of literary values, truth, and justice (despite his very strong and offensive language). From the start Badini’s hatred for Baretti is intense, but excusable, as the author creates an instigation that attributes to Baretti what we might otherwise see in him. Badini writes, “per lo meno

cinque anni, che Giuseppe Baretti va seminando nelle pubbliche conversazioni le calunnie che ha poi messo in iscritto contro il Badini.” (19) Baretti “avidò di sporcare con le solite sue contumelie la riputazione del Badini,” wrote the libel that forced Badini to respond in self-defense with *Il vero carattere*.

Perhaps Baretti’s libel was “published” only in manuscript, perhaps it was destroyed, and perhaps what Badini says was just a rhetorical springboard from which to launch his own attack. We just don’t know. In *Il vero carattere*, Badini writes that Baretti penned two satires, making up “un foglio,” written in Italian and including the line, “Fai tu bene or fai tu male,” the phrase “lo schiuma di canaglia,” and the word “bellamente.” Badini mentions these details to prove that the work is by Baretti. It is also suggested that the names Serafini, Bartoli, and Savoi are mentioned in the course of these satires. These are the only details that remain about the works; we cannot be sure they were printed or merely posted somewhere, but they have never been located. Toward the end of the introduction, Badini switches to the third person, suggesting that *Il vero carattere* is written on behalf of the Italians. Badini notes that, no matter how many times they have been lacerated by Baretti, they will respond only by laughing at him, as would have Cicero, Homer, and Democritus.

“A man may shoot the man who invades his character, as he may shoot him who attempts to break into his house,” Samuel Johnson once remarked. Badini work is an example of character assassination in the classical sense, in which the language is used as a weapon to injure, defame, and destroy. Badini invades the character of his nemesis, revealing the private embarrassments and Baretti’s particular misdeeds and deceptions. One gets the sense that Badini, imitating Cicero, wanted to make immortalized Baretti as
a embodiment of corruption and deception. On the one hand, this involves deliberate exaggeration and apparent excess; at the same time, *Il vero carattere* purports to be a realistic account of the behavior and reputation and is filled with specifics about Baretti’s life. Badini wants to convince us that image of Giuseppe Baretti conveyed at the Old Bailey was the fictional representation of the subject, the image truly offensive.

The work is a corporal, shaming punishment of Baretti, in which he wants to slay his opponent with words.188 The various elements of satirical attack in *Il vero carattere* follow the guidelines and traditions of Roman invective.189 As Cicero does in *Ad Vatinius*, Badini traces the salient moments in the life of Baretti (the moments of greatness) beginning with his youth and upbringing, presented as the obscure and shadowy and ending with his miserable death. In this rambling narrative, Baretti’s every action and decision reveals his vile nature, each book a sign of what will come in his miserable life destined for ignominy.190 “Dell’imputato ogni gesto, ogni parola, ogni sguardo viene soppesato, sviscerato e, se occorre, stravolto, rinfacciato. Persino la malattia diviene colpa.”191 The libel begins with classical references to Baretti’s ancestry and his base birth, described with vulgar language. Casting aspersions on Baretti’s parents, Badini calls attention to his father’s base profession (bricklayer, not architect),

---

188 “And all my weapons shall be directed at you in such a manner, that no one else shall be wounded (to use an expression of your own) through your side; my arrows shall stick in your lungs and in your entrails.” Cicero, *Invective Against Vatinius*. Translation taken from *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, literally translated by C. D. Yonge, B. A. (London, 1891) available at The Perseus Digital Library: [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu).


190 “And I will allow that dark period of your early youth to remain in obscurity. You may with impunity, as far as I am concerned, have broken through walls in your youth, and plundered your neighbours, and beaten your mother. Your infamous character has this advantage, that the baseness of your youth is concealed by your obscurity and vileness.” Cicero, *Against Vatinius*.

and mocks his physical appearance as that of a gargoyle or a Priapus. Even his birth is cursed, as Badini begins to weave through the satire references to Dante’s *Inferno*:

Ma direi che Lucantonio,  
Genitore del Baretti,  
Ispirato dal Demonio  
Inventassi li sudetti.

But I would say that Lucantonio  
The father of Baretti  
Inspired by the Devil  
Invented these gargoyles

E la madre Ludovica  
Con *pape satan aleppe*  
Concepì poi nella fica  
La figura di Giuseppe.

And the mother Ludovica  
With *pape satan aleppe*  
Conceived in her cunt  
The figure of Giuseppe.

Nè del burbero mostaccio,  
Che anche ai ciechi fa paura,  
A lui carico ne faccio,  
Sol n’incolpo la natura.

Nor for his ornery mug  
That frightens even the blind,  
Do I hold him responsible,  
I’d only blame mother nature.

E’ ben ver che un viso arcigno,  
Come disse il savio Omero,  
Mostra un animo maligno,  
Un cor fello, un rio pensiero.

And it’s true that a grim face,  
As wise Homer said,  
Reveals a malignant soul,  
A vile heart, a guilty thought.

Within the rhetorical/moral construction, the difficulties Baretti overcame in his youth are contorted into shameful flaws. The fierce independence that Johnson must have admired, for instance, is described as a state of perplexed isolation and anti-social confusion. In *Il vero carattere* Baretti is never shown in a scene of social conviviality or in any tranquil domestic occasion. He is always the outcast, a man on the run, in a constant state of escape from the individuals he has maliciously abused, and left without friends, without home, and without an ounce of dignity. The following three stanzas contain several of the classical tropes of invective that Badini adopted from Cicero’s invective arsenal. In the first stanza, we notice the use of ironic pity, as the great man Baretti is reduced to a man who steals from cats, whose every word and gesture are repulsive. Here, as
elsewhere, Badini condemns Baretti for his sullen nature (a classical trope), and for his offensive behavior that not only annoys but disgusts every other person. 192.

As the libel continues tracing each moment in Baretti’s life, his achievements are reduced crimes, thefts, and deceptions, as the “man well known in the literary world” is belittled to a common criminal, shunned by all. The ethical breaches (in Badini as in Cicero) are systemic and constant. That is, Badini does not isolate in his enemy a certain set of immoral actions and attack him through them; rather, Baretti is described as vicious in every move and moment, even to his friends and those who do him great favors. His hypocrisy is emphasized, as he is compared to a devil who breaths “hot and cold.”

In order to engage in this sort of verbal assault with impunity, Badini does far more than leave his name off the title page and position himself as the victim of an assault. He uses a variety of Ciceronian strategies. For instance, he accuses Baretti of the very anger, hostility and intemperance that he is showing, thereby strengthening his own. He wants to completely ignore Baretti—for that is what he merits—but has been

192 “And I now give you this warning,—not to mix up your own infamy with the high character of most eminent men. I, in whatever questions I put to you, will question you yourself only, and I will drag you forth not from the dignity of a great man, which you affect, but from your own obscurity and darkness.” Cicero, Against Vatinius.
provoked to silence him with anger, to return contempt with contempt. 193 Badini employs Ciceronian categories of abuse, attacking his adversary for frequenting prostitutes, for his modish dress, and his uncouth manner. The vices here, as in Cicero, can be contradictory, for the target is guilty of all sins. Baretti is violent and cowardly at once. “Repressing that ferocity of yours, and crushing your audacity, and checking your loquacity,” Cicero’s goal in Ad Vatinius, is Badini’s as well in Il vero carattere.

Although the prose introduction can leave no doubt who the author is, Badini follows Cicero in adopting the point of view of spokesman for all Italians. That is to say, in the dynamics of the satire, Badini situates himself within the community of Italians (both those in Italy and those residing in London), while banishing Baretti, excluding him from his country. 194 Baretti is detested by the entire city of London, shunned by all Italians abroad, and banished from civilization. 195 Laughing at Baretti’s financial woes, Badini shows his talent as the ironic pity Cicero liked to show. 196 Badini chronicles the literary career of Baretti, weaving into each achievement some embarrassment or including a snide remark about his immortal conduct. 197 With the line “E ogni Veneto

---

193 “The infamy of your life and the scandal of your private conduct, be possibly considered of the slightest consequence, I should have dismissed you without saying a single word to you. For not one of these men considered it worth my while either to refute you, as if you were an adversary of any importance, or to question you, as if you were a scrupulous witness. But I was, perhaps, a little more intemperate just now than I should have been.” Cicero, Against Vatinius.

194 “For from detestation of you, in which, although, on account of your wicked conduct to me, I ought to go beyond all men, yet I am in fact surpassed by everybody, I was carried away so far, that though I did not despise you at all less than I detest you, still I chose to dismiss you in embarrassment and distress, rather than in contempt.” Cicero, Against Vatinius.

195 “Foul and infamous and detested by all so I say that you, although you are a man of scandalous character, disgraced by every sort of foulness and infamy, still are detested by the city.” Cicero, Against Vatinius.

196 “For from detestation of you, in which, although, on account of your wicked conduct to me, I ought to go beyond all men, yet I am in fact surpassed by everybody, I was carried away so far, that though I did not despise you at all less than I detest you, still I chose to dismiss you in embarrassment and distress, rather than in contempt.” Cicero Against Vatinius.

197 “There were but few of us who were acquainted with those foul vices of yours; few of us who knew the deficiency of your abilities, your stolid manner, and your embarrassed way of speaking.” Cicero, Piso.
bordello/Gli die’ il titolo di bravo,’’ he passes from irony to sustained indignation, “all’ironia si alternerà l’indignazione sostenuta.”\textsuperscript{198} In footnotes, Badini further advances his claim that Baretti is “senz’altro un impostore,” without a doubt an imposter. (21). Unlike Badini, Baretti knows how to write only English prose (and not verse), prose so full of blunders that he “bisogna pure ch’egli si faccia correggere da una vecchia,” he needs his prose to be corrected by an old woman. Baretti’s \textit{Dictionary} is a disaster: “Signor Professo Vicentino Povoleri, Professor of Languages in the City of London, who knows perfectly well both English and Italian, has located in Baretti’s Dictionary twenty two thousand seven hundred and seventy seven howlers, which will probably sooner or later appear in print]. The crude, scurrilous and sing-song style of the piece, as well, may have been intentional, as this from of satire avoided circumlocutions and rhetoric for passion. “For my real sentiments will at times burst forth, and I cannot help saying without circumlocution what I feel,” writes Cicero in \textit{Ad Vatinius}. His syle is rough and ugly, like the invectives throughout the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{199} I. A. Ruffell calls this sort of satire “non-literary or “sub-literary,” arguing for the importance of this writing in classical antiquity. Such literature has survived in fragments for the most part, although there seems reason to believe these pieces are representative of what was once a thriving species of writing, though lacking the refinement and restraint of the tradition associated with Horace. As “literature,” there is little to recommend the verse biography of Baretti, but as an artifact in the literary gutter of the time, it is invaluable.

\textsuperscript{198} Cicero, \textit{Difesa dell’attore Roscio/ Contro Vatinio} (Milano, 1995), L. See the Mariangela Scarsi’s essay “Roscio o L’Ironia dello Humour/Vatinio o L’Ironia dell’Invettiva,” xlv-liiv.
Badini’s work is loaded with allusions to the “Haymarket Affair,” which he depicts as a case of extreme injustice. With references to devils in Dante’s *Inferno*, Baretti is depicted as false and treacherous, a man who literary accomplishments are best understood in when couched in the metaphors of murder and violence, “sanguinosa retorica” and “quello stile siccario,” bloody rhetoric and that vicious style. (22) Badini gives an ancient Roman twist to the idea of Baretti with a pen in one hand, a stiletto in the other.

Incomincia la gran puzza                       So began the great stench                       121
Del satirico a Torino,                        Of the Satirist of Turin,                        
Mentre arrotavi ed aguzza                     While he made pointy and sharp                      
Il coltello di Pasquino                        The knife of Pasquin.                            

Contro il Bartoli, che certo                  Against Bartoli, who surely                       125
E pur forza che l’ammiri:                     And who had to admire him:                        
Nel veder che del suo merto                   Saw in him the merits of                        
Il Procuste ed il Busiri                      Procustus and Busiri                             

Badini observes that Baretti refers to Italians in a libe as “canagliaccia, e chiamò *furfanti, e infami avanzi delle furste e delle forche,*” In fact, Baretti himself is the one who was tried for murder: “il che, a dir vero, per quello che riguarda se stesso, Giuseppe Baretti può sicuramente affermarlo, avendolo egli, come ognun sa, giuridicamente provato.” (18) When recounting the years in Guastalla, about which very little is known, Badini notes that Baretti worked “nel negozio de’ Sanguinetti, i quali io suppongo che fossero mercanti di coltelli,” in the shop of the Sanguinettis, who I suppose were sellers of knives. (33) The “penna sanguinosa,” bloody pen, is a recurring image, as Badini compares Baretti to Herod who “uccise gl’innocenti,” slaughtered the innocents. Baretti is drawn as a vile villain, self-serving and ferocious. The libel culminates in a direct and mocking allusion to October 6, 1769, and the “coltellate/Che si danno bellemente/Alle
genti disarmate/ In difesa solamente" [the stabbings/that he gave so beautifully/To unarmed people]. Badini includes a footnote that Morgan was “uno di quegl’infelici truciadati dal Baretti,” one of those unhappy men butchered by Baretti. (74) I quote at some length the closing imagery, in which the ghost of Evan Morgan appears before Baretti, pointing with a finger to the wound from which “sangue ha fatto un laco,” blood made a lake.

Non ti scoppia ancor il core?  
Ecco il MORGAN! Guarda, guarda  
Quello scheletro d’orrorre  
Che la mente mi sgagliarda.

Ei t’addita la sua piaga,  
Che di sangue ha fatto un laco:  
Va’, satollati, ed appaga  
In quel sangue il cor briaco.

Dello spettro in van la noia  
Fuggir pensi, ed il veleno  
Dell’interno, che tuo boia  
Ti piantò le forche in seno.

E l’Oracolo d’Apollo  
Ti predice un tal disastro,  
Che fra breve avrai al collo  
Una fune, e non un nastro.

Isn’t your heart bursting yet?  
There’s MORGAN! Look, look  
That horrifying skeleton  
That terrifies my mind.

His finger points to the wound  
From which poured a lake of blood:  
Go, fill yourself, and saturate  
In that blood your drunken heart.

In vain you think you can escape  
From the torment of the specter,  
And the poison inside, as the hangman  
Has already stabbed you with the fork.

And the Oracle of Apollo  
Predicts for your such a disaster,  
That shortly around your neck  
Will be a rope, and not a ribbon.

Badini uses a standard image of the slaughtered victim returning to haunt the murderer, predicting his death. According to Randall McGowean,” “Thwarted escapes, monitory ghosts, revelatory dreams and bleeding corpses all explained the failure of secret murderers to keep their crimes secret.”200 In *Il vero carattere*, the imagery is given classical weight with references to myth.

---

In an appendix to *Il vero carattere*, Badini continues to refer to Baretti as “l’oscuro assassin,” the dark assassin, mimicking Baretti’s use of the English phrase “bloody minded” in another lost libel, and bitterly mocking Baretti for “l’azione eroica delle pesanti e profonde coltellate che diede bellamente in sua difesa ad alcuni uomini diarmati,” the heroic action of heavy and deep stabs that he beautifully gave in his defense against some unarmed men. In the last three pages of *Il vero carattere*, Badini writes an “Avviso Finale a Giuseppe Baretti L’Assassino,” Final Warning to Giuseppe Baretti, Assassin (86-88): [Go right ahead and write, o glorious Assassin, as much as you know against Badini, and abuse him as much as you are able, that I ti accerto that he will never make a single line of response: the public will easily see that you are an ass and an imposter.]  

Repeatedly referring to his adversary as an “Assassino,” Badini claims that in the past he wrote “solo per maniera di scherzo” and “non fu mai aggressore; e ‘l nome non è registrato in nessun tribunale: ma tu, Giuseppe Assassino, hai palesemente cercato di assassinare la fama dei vivi e dei morti. (87) Baretti has been found infamous in the courthouses of Europe: “Infame ne ne’ tribunale di Milano: infame ne’ tribunale di Venezia: infamassimo ne’ tribunale di Portogallo, e ultimamente si è pure trattato della tua infamia ne’ tribunale di Londra” (87) “Finalmente la natura istessa ha scolpito l’infamia sopra quel tuo spaventosissimo cesso,” finally mother nature herself has sculpted infamy on that your hideously frightening face. Badini ends by quoting Seneca’s position in Epistle 76 that the infamous can never bring infamy on anyone—but not before noting that Baretti would not be able to understand it, because he

201 “Scrivi pure, o glorioso Assassino, quanto sai contra Badini, e calunniialo più che puoi, chi io t’accerto ch’egli non ti farà mai una linea di risposta: sarà ben vedere al pubblico che tu sei un asino e un impostore.” (88)
does not even know Latin. And so Badini will continue to “ridere delle tuo stomachevoli infamazioni,” laugh at your nauseating infamies.

As pedestrian and vulgar as the language in this libel is (I think it was probably composed hastily and sung Badini and his Italian friends, the animosity between these two figures is palpable. Badini will publish not only the *Il vero carattere*, but several other “poems” against Baretti. In the *Lettera dell’avvocato Frustabirbe* (*In Roma: Alla bocca della verità, 1774*), he included an epigraph on the title page is a wonderful example of how a knife wielding Baretti must have resonated at the time.\(^2\) Here Badini severely chastises Sacchini for trying to rob his honor for personal advantage, asking his enemy in vituperative strains why he did not use Baretti’s knife. The epigraph is clearly directed to Sacchini, but embedded in the verse—written in the style that combines coarse language and operatic diction—is a successful piece of anti-Baretti propaganda.

\[
\text{TORMI L’ONOR CERCASTI ED IL DENARO}
\]
\[
\text{SOLO PER ODIO, E SENZA TUO PROFITTO:}
\]
\[
\text{PERCHÉ NON M’HAI O PEZZO DI SOMARO}
\]
\[
\text{COL COLTEL DI BARETTI IL COR TRAFITTO?}
\]

\[
\text{MY HONOR AND MY MONEY YOU TRIED TO SEIZE}
\]
\[
\text{ONLY FOR HATRED, AND WITHOUT A GAIN:}
\]
\[
\text{WHY DID YOU NOT STAB ME, YOU JACKASS,}
\]
\[
\text{RIGHT IN THE HEART WITH BARETTI’S KNIFE?}
\]

Baretti’s name returns toward the end of the collection, where we find further musical diatribe in the form of a mock epitaph: *Elogio Funebre o sia Epitaffio di Giuseppe Baretti* [Funeral Elegy or rather Epitaph on Giuseppe Baretti]. The author once again delights in his enemy’s demise:

\[
\text{CANTATE TORINESI L’ALLELUJA}
\]
\[
\text{RIDA L’ITALIA, E SI RALLEGRI ’L MONDO;}
\]
\[
\text{CHE DEL BARETTI ALFIN L’ANIMA BUJA}
\]
\[
\text{ITA È D’ AVERNO AL DOLOROSO FONDÒ.}
\]

\[
\text{SING ALL YE TORINESI! HALELUJAH!}
\]
\[
\text{ITALY LAUGHS AND THE WHOLE WORLD REJOICES;}
\]
\[
\text{FOR AT LAST THE DARK SOUL OF BARETTI}
\]
\[
\text{SO IS IN THE PAINFUL DEPTHS OF HELL.}
\]

\(^2\) This volume, though nicely printed like *Il vero carattere*, is extremely rare. One copy is located online. (Harry Ransom Center).
Badini’s language and content here call to mind Dante, though Baretti is carried to Averno, a sulphuric lake near Naples that the Romans believed to be an entrance to the underworld. In a prose note that follows, Badini explains that in Italy no one has mentioned Baretti for so long that most people think he “abbia varcato il fiume dell’Obblio,” has passed the river of Oblivion. Baretti mockingly attributes Baretti’s silence to his complete loss of credit in England: “Vero è che questo silenzio potrebbe procedere dal sommo discredito in cui Giuseppe Baretti è universalmente caduto, e soprattutto in Inghilterra.” [It could have occurred from the enormous discredit to which he has fallen, above all in England] (90) Like Cicero in Against Vatinius, Badini’s character assassination shows the rejoicing of the populace at the wonderful event of Baretti’s death.  

Badini explains that Baretti did not have “il coraggio nè la forza,” the courage nor the force, to respond to Il vero carattere, but instead ran like a fool to the impresarios to calumniate against the author. This fact suggests that Badini’s libel had some effect; in this work the English are no longer hoodwinked, but have joined in the laughter. Baretti, left all alone, the laughstock of the English and the buffoon of the Italians.” “Tutti i letterati inglesi diedero a credere che ‘l Baretti dovesse arrotare il suo coltello.” [All the literate English made believe that Baretti should sharpen his knife] Interestingly, Badini finds literary allusions for Baretti this time, not in the various devils that circulate in the Inferno but “quel diavolo mentovato da Milton in que’ versi che si trovano nel quarto libro del Paradiso perduto.” He provides the English and a translation into a rima.

---

203 “If you are the object of general hatred to the people and the senate, and to all the tribes of the country; what reason can you have for wishing for the praetorship rather than for death? especially as you try to make yourself out a friend of the people, and as you cannot possibly do anything which would be more agreeable to the people than you would if you were to kill yourself! Cicero Against Vatinius.
incrociata: “The fiend reply’d not, overcome with rage;/But like a proud streed rein’d, went haughty on,/Champing his iron curb.” Badini concludes his comments with a cruel observation that the English, following the Italians, can now be happy that the man is dead. “Cosicché gl’Inglesi osservando questa ignominiosa taciturnità del Baretti, credono essi pure come gli Italiani che Giuseppe Baretti abbia realmente tirate le cuoji—Amen.” [And so the English observing this ignominious taciturnity of Baretti, believe also as do the Italians that Giuseppe Baretti had really kicked the bucket - Amen] (91) In this brief piece, Badini’s character assassination becomes almost literal, as he stabs Baretti with crude, virulent words.

The aggressive, devastating rhetoric of the piece make clear the purpose: remove Baretti from the literary world, quite literally. Furthermore, Badini seems to relish the fact that Baretti would not respond. His silence is not an indication of being above the level of *ad hominem* attacks and specious *tu quoque* arguments. On the contrary, it is further manifestation of his guilt and cowardice and, better yet, a sign that he died and no one even noticed or cared. Immediately after the Epitaph, Badini reprints a letter to Baretti that he had published in *The Morning Chronicle* of December 1, 1773, written in English and signed Charles Francis Badini. (D-19) Badini continues with an allusion to Juvenal’s Satire IV, comparing Baretti to Crispinus, “a monster redeemed from vices by no one virtue, sick, and strong in lust alone.” Again we see the technique of ironic pity and psychological intimidation:

Yet—*ecce iterum Crispinus*: Now, because you can no more libel me with your pen, you struggle to libel me with your tongue—O fy! Mr. Baretti! Altho’ you are old enough to be my father, let me however give you a bit of admonition to better

---

204 “Non risponde Satan; ma di veleno/Ed di superbia pregno, egli somiglia/Furibondo destrier tenuto in briglia/Ch’altero se ne va rodendo il freno.”

205 Translation from Juvenal, *The Satires of Juvenal, With the Original Text* (London, 1760), 44.
your future conduct—Be careful to not expose yourself any further in this country; I am told that you have already lost all your friends, and I pity you. It would be very easy for me to dissect your abilities in English, as I have already done in Italian; but I forgive you from the bottom of my heart all your backbitings, and clandestine defamations—and I am determined to follow Voltaire’s advice, who being asked why he did not take any notice of the gross, snappish aspersions thrown upon him in your accounts, and journey, answered: “shall I make use of Hercules’ arrows to kill—what?—an insect.

The last section of the letter is particularly biting, as Badini alludes to Shakespeare’s Macbeth, and compares Baretti to Lady Macbeth, raving mad, with the smell of blood on his hands:

I really think your [sic] continually raving; Nay, the distraction of your mind must at least be equal to that of Lady Macbeth.
Enter Mr. Baretti walking in his sleep, with the torch of Alecto in his heart.
“Yet there’s the smell of blood—Not all the perfumes of Arabia will sweeten the stink of my reputation. Oh! Oh! Oh! Exit
O poor Mr. Baretti!

JURY TAMPERING AND A SOCK SALESMAN

Before the trial, during, and after, Baretti was vocal about his choice to be tried before a jury of all Englishmen. If he were to be found innocence, he stated, it would be with his honor intact and there could be no implication of favoritism or bias. Baretti repeated the fact often enough that the one journalist suggested that it was using this choice as a propaganda device. (D-15) Here Baretti is writing to his brother, taking family honor into account:

[And yet I have such faith both in my innocence and in the generosity of this nation, that notwithstanding the horrible gang of witnesses that are swearing against me with such ferocity, I’ve already resolved, against the opinion of all the Italians that are here, to renounce my privilege of have among the twelve jurors six who are my compatriots. I would not run the minimum risk of life, putting
myself in the hands of six compatriots, but with my life I want also to bring forth
my honor intact, in respect to my family and to my country.]\textsuperscript{206}

Given the English character witnesses he assembled and what we learn from \textit{Il vero carattere}, it was probably advantageous for Baretti to be in front of an English jury; that is to say, the English juror is more convinced by the testimony of the celebrated actor Garrick, than an Italian. Baretti’s claim assumes that the Italians in London generally had a favorable impression of his character, enough so that he would “not run the minimum risk of life.” Secondly, Baretti also seems to be implying the English jury would be predisposed not to believe him, when during the trial there seems to be, to our surprise today perhaps, nothing said that one can read as prejudicial against him as an Italian; not a single word, in fact, is said in Italian. The transcripts do not present every word said, but it surely does not appear that he was held in an unfavorable light because he was Italian. After the trial, Baretti wrote to Charlemont that “the friends I had around me did their part so well that they have made me an Englishman forever. I am sure I will be buried in due time under that very ground which is trod by so many generous men.”\textsuperscript{207}

Baretti had assembled a group of prestigious and charming, in the case of Garrick, English witnesses who would have a much greater impact on a jury of Englishmen.

Other phrasing in the same letter give pause, for it seems lifted from and eighteenth century melodrama, rather than composed by a man whose life is at stake. “O perderò la vita e l’onore insieme, o salverò l’uno e l’altra: e la probabilità è in mio favor,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{206} Letter to his Brothers, October 17, 1769 (\textit{Epistolario}, i.414): “Pure ho tanta fiducia e nella mia innocenza e nella generosità di questa nazione, che malgrado l’orribile canaglia de’ testimoni che mi giurano addosso con feorcia, ho già resoluto, contro l’opinione di tutti gli italiani che sono qui, di rinunciare al privilegio di avere tra’ miei dodici giurati sei che sieno miei compatrioti. Non correrei il minimo pericolo della vita, mettendola in mano di sei compatrioti, ma con la vita voglio anche portar fuori l’onore intatto, per rispetto alla mia famiglia e alla mia patria.” Baretti adds that “firmly resolute, I want to put myself under great danger.”
\item \textsuperscript{207} Letter to Charlemont, October 25, 1769 (\textit{Epistolario}, i. 415-416).
\end{itemize}
egualmente che l’opinione pubblica. Se la mia prossima lettera non sarà suggellata di nero, apritela senza tremante mano. Addio.” [Either I will lose life and honor both, or I will save one and the other: and the probability is in my favor, equally with public opinion. If my next letter is not sealed in black wax, open it without a trembling hand. Goodbye.] The high rhetoric and theatricality of this sentence beggar description, as does his confidence in his chances and the role of “public opinion.” Together it make one wonder if it was not written after the fact and pre-dated, so as to leave a more “literary” testimony and elevate the drama of the occasion.

If what Badini’s says in Il vero carattere can be trusted, Baretti may have had more enemies than friends among the Italians in London. At several points in the libel, he criticizes Baretti for ingratitude to the Italians in London, implying that that in the days before the trial Italians came to Baretti’s aid with “danaro e amici”:

[Among those mentioned the Signor Doctor Dominiceti, who met Baretti when he went to visit him in the prison; so that he that was always a generous benefactor of his countrymen, of everyone close to him, attempted in every way, with money and with friends to pull him from that grim noose that already had set up for cursed Giuseppe. Similarly, the Abate Serafini, having in that grim circumstance of Giuseppe Baretti exercised many acts of charity toward him as well.]208

Badini “quegli amici che strapparono il Baretti dalle forche, gli ebbe unicamente per causa del signor Giardini.” Interestingly, in Camillo Ugoni claims that there were Italians in the audience of the Old Bailey, but they did nothing to help Baretti: “Fra i numerosi e scelti spettatori fu osservato che concorsero nella grande sale dell’Old Bailey i residenti di alcuni Stati Italiani, nessun de’ quali aveva mosso il menomo passo in pro di un lor

---

208 “Fra questi mentoveremeo il signor Dottor Dominiceti, che conobbe il Baretti quando ando’ a visitarlo nelle carceri; siccome quelli che e’sempre stato larghissimo benefattore dei suoi paesani, e di tutto il suo prossimo, si adoperò in mille modi, con danaro e amici a fine di troncare quell funesto laccio, il qual pare che il destino avesse già teso allo sciagurato Giuseppe. Similmente l’Abate Serafini avendo, in quelle scabrose circostanze di Giuseppe Baretti, esercitato molti atti di carità verso del medesimo.” (17) Dr. Dominiceti was a successful medical doctor who operated thermal baths in Chelsea.
nazionale costituito in si grave frangente: bensì inviarono a questo giudizio qualche impiegato di legazione, affine di riferirne l’esito a’ rispettivi governi.”

If we credit what Badini says with regard to the standing that Baretti had in the Italian community in London, it may have been more hazardous for Baretti to include his compatriots. Furthermore, Baretti’s layering into his decision a compliment to his countrymen for their loyalty smacks of insult, insofar as it implies that the Italians will find him innocent, whether or not he is, either because they are in bonds of friendship or indifferent to the rule of law. Clearly it is a calculated decision that Baretti sees as also being a winning one in the courts of public opinion; the flip side of his daring refusal of favorable jurors is his flattery of the English and their justice system, for its transparency and love of honor.

The earliest Italian biographies of Baretti written after his death, similarly, gave considerably attention to Baretti’s criminal past, often presenting it as the culminating event in the life of the writer, though he would live another twenty years. Camillo Ugoni, one of the earliest writers in Italy to attempt a general assessment of Baretti, noting that “Ma non è da tacersi un fatto principalissimo della vita di Baretti.” (x) In his version the story runs like this: “Recavasi egli una sera alla società degli Artisti, quando una sacerdotessa della Venere Pandemia il raggiunge” [One evening on his way to the Society of Artists, a priestess of Venus Pandemia overcame him]. Narrating in great detail the event of October 6th, Ugoni supplies a footnote to his sources; he received his information on good authority, not only from the English papers, but from an Italian who

\[209\] Camillo Ugoni, *Della letterature Italiana* (Milano, 1856), 18.
spend many years in London, as well as from other travelers.\(^{210}\) This gentleman, a certain Francesco Luti di Riva, informed Ugoni that Baretti said to the woman “Mind your own business” [Badare alle sue faccende.] She responded, “but this is my business,” and she followed him to engage him.\(^{211}\) Ugoni implies that the impatient character of Baretti—“di natura poco paziente”—had something to do with the events that precipitated the murder. At this point, Baretti “assalito si schermì con un temperatoio, e ferì uno degli aggressori, che poco dopo morì.”(239)

Ugoni inserts a detail related to the jury that does not appear in any of the English versions of Baretti, a particular that adds yet another mystery to the story. After noting that Baretti willingly placed himself in the hand of an English jury – “il Baretti si guadagnò il cuore de’ giudici, rinunziando al privilegio di trascegliersi sei giurati, e commettendosi con tutta fiducia alla giustizia degl’Inglesi” – Ugoni points out that this decision involved a private negotiation with the judge. He would do so, only provided that he could select one of the jurors. This suggests Baretti was being less than candid in his claim regarding the jury, and that, in fact, a deal had been struck. In exchange for a jury of all Englishmen, Baretti would be allowed to include among the jurors a stocking seller, with whom some days before he had a business encounter. “Solo ottenne, che fosse compresso fra’ giudici un venditore di calzette, a cui aveva dato prove della delicatezza della sua onestà pochi di’ prima di questo fatto." (239) Unlike Badini, Ugoni did not have any ill-will toward Baretti, and one wonders where he ever learned of such an unacceptable breach of due process. Ugoni did not, however, invent this incredible

\(^{210}\) “Questa particolarità, non notata dal sig. Franchi di Pont, biografo dell'A, abbiamo udita dal fu sig. Francesco Lutti di Riva, il quale la riseppi in Inghilterra, ove egli dimorò sette anni, e ci fu poi confermata da altri viaggiatori.” (239)

\(^{211}\) “La donna ripose, quelle essere appunto le sue faccende, e seguiva pure ad importunarlo.” (239)
anecdote, for it appeared thirty years earlier, in one of the first Italian biographies of Baretti. Giuseppe Franchi published Notizie intorno alla vita ed agli scritti di Giuseppe Baretti more than likely in 1789, the year Baretti died. Naturally, “The Haymarket Affair” did not escape his notice: “Tra le civili vicende poi, ed i colpi di fortuna più notabili, non si deve obbliare il pericolo, che dopo il suo ritorno in Londra egli corse di venir sottoposto al rigor delle leggi per grave delitto, di cui venne accusato.” (29) The event is described in detail: "Non ebbe mezzo di liberarsene se non col darle una guanciata. Accorsi alle gride di questa i suoi drudi, fu egli astretto per difendersi dagli assalitori di por mano ad un coltello dal quale fosse caso o necessità, uno rimase ferito, ed in breve tempo morì.” (30) Franchi writes that Baretti accepted the English jury only if a certain seller of socks who had proof of the delicacy of Baretti’s honesty shortly before this event was on the panel: “Aver rifiutato il privilegio de'sei giurati stranieri, oltre al procacciargli la benevolenza dei Giudice, fu cagione che nel numero di questi fosse compreso un calzettaio, che rendette di lui favorevole testimonianza.” This is what happened, according to Franchi:

Baretti having a short time before bought a pair of socks, and having given the seller a banknote to pay, the man in giving the change by mistake returned a few shillings too many. On the return home, Baretti looked at the account again, and he noticed those few shillings that he should not have gotten, and he returned the next day to the shop and gave back exactly than sum to the creditor, who had already forgotten the of the price.

How much impact did Baretti’s scrupulous accounting have on the verdict in the trial, we will never know, but Camillo Ugoni certainly thought it made some difference, as he

---

212 Giuseppe Franchi, Notizie intorno alla vita ed agli scritti di Giuseppe Baretti del conte Giuseppe Franchi (Torino, 1789?).
213 “Aveva il Baretti alcun tempo prima comperate da quello alcune paia di calzette, e datogli un biglietto perché si pagasse, il venditore per isbaglio nel restituire quanto avanzava dal prezzo lasciò correre qualche scellino di più. Baretti di ritorno a casa, riveduti i conti, trovò avere quel più che non se gli doveva, e ritornato il giorno dopo alla bottega restitui esattamente al creditor, che già se’ era scordato il compimento del prezzo.” (30-31)
wrote, “Questo giudice avrà certo giovato alla causa che delle difendere di per se stesso, perorando in inglese, e dalla quale usci interamente assoluto.” (229)

Could one of the jurors have been tainted? Would the honest act of returning a small sum in change for an incorrect transaction be sufficient evidence in the moral calculus of the period to override other evidence? One would be inclined to dismiss this as a mere piece of innuendo, if Franchi did not record it within a brief and straightforward account, in which he seems to have had, unlike Badini, no grievance against Baretti. We know the jury assigned to the Middlesex Jury on October 6, 1769: Charles Mills, William Jones, William Bayne, Richard Longbottom, Joseph Tidmarsh, Thomas Dormer, Thomas Monday, Joseph Hart, John Gee, William Kline, Richard Maddock, and Hans Jennis.

If Baretti was able to place a man on the jury, it is reasonable to think it was someone without jury experience. Mills and Jones had served together on juries going back to 1753, and with Dormer, Longbottom and Gee on December 11, 1765. Two years before Baretti, these five gentlemen served on the Middlesex Jury of October 21, 1767, along with Munday and Bayne. That leaves only five of the jurors on the Baretti case who served for the first time in this trial: Tidmarsh, Hart, Kline, Maddock, and Jennis. Maddock, Jones, Bayne, Longbottom, Tidmarsh, Gee, Jennis, were on the Middlesex Jury on October 23, 1771. Joseph Hart is the only juror who, on the online OPSP, appears only once. Could Joseph Hart have been a sock salesman?

NOT A CREDIBLE INFORMANT

What are we to make of the testimony of Baretti’s arch rival and literary twin? Paolo Risi, in *Observations on Matters of Criminal Justice* (1766), warned against taking
too seriously the testimony of a single person: “Law, divine and human, will not allow anyone to be convicted upon the evidence of a single witness...a single man, however honest, may have been misled or may be mistaken about the matter regarding which he testifies.”

He considered it essential to “the most careful examination of the standing, the character, the habits, and the seriousness of witnesses, in order than no testimony may be admitted against the accused which is vicious or perhaps evoked by malice rather than by the pure love of truth.”

Baretti is drawn repeatedly as the isolated wretch, shunned by the mass public of Italy, and chased from the urban centers of culture. But the author, as well, was not exactly writing from the standpoint of righteousness. As Juvenal says, Si natura negat, facit indignatio versum. [When talent fails, indignation writes the verse.] (Satire I. 79) Lorenzo Da Ponte spoke of the “satira sanguinosa” of “infame Badini,” the same way Badini spoke of Baretti in Il vero carattere. Like Baretti, Badini was extremely intense. The Morning Chronicle of Saturday, April 4, 1778 printed a noticed that “The article relative to Signor Badini savours too much of pique and resentment for us either to approve or publish it.”

One is inclined to be skeptical about the assertions Badini makes in Il vero carattere, given the rancorous past with Baretti, and the causes of self-interest, the gross obscenities that lace the work, the scurrilous quality of Badini’s verses. At points in the libel, however, Badini seems to call attention to this fact, by giving a scholarly basis for his claims, or reminding the reader in a footnote “ci sono moltissimi che possono far sicura testimonianza e render ragione di tutto ciò che viene asserito in questo libro,” there are a great many who are able to give testimony and support every single thing that is asserted in this book. In lambasting Baretti, Badini frequently notes that what he says is

---

universally acknowledged: “queste sono tutte verità palesi a cento e cento Italiani, che
dimorano tuttavia in Londra.” (47) Other claims Baretti makes about himself would
“farà scompisciar dalle risa tutto il Piemonte,” would make everyone in Piedmont laugh
till they pissed. (28) In short, _Il vero carattere_ contains too high degree of specific detail
which seems to lend credence to what Badini has to say. Many details are corroborated
by other historical evidence. Badini was by no means unique in pointing out negative
features of Baretti’s character. Achille Neri, writing in Italy in 1886, thought it odd that
“Baretti non sia venuto fuori con delle sementite categoriche.” [Baretti did not come out
with some categorical denials.] Acknowledging the vicious tone and terrible writing of
the satire, Neri felt convinced that there was something convincing in Badini’s candid
rebuttal of the character described at the Old Bailey.²¹⁵

Such details as these must alter our view concerning the veracity of Baretti, and
lend credence to the position of his adversary. Moreover, the work is peppered with so
many details and with personal names, references to facts in Baretti’s life that are
demonstrably true, facts verifiable in all sources today. Neri wrote, “vi sono
determinazioni e testimonianze troppo precise, che non ci consentono di credere tutto
falso.” [There are witnesses and particulars too precise, that do not allow us to believe
they are entirely false.] For instance, no one can deny Badini’s claim that Baretti lived
for two years under the charity of Giardini; it fits perfectly with all the evidence we have
of Baretti during that time period. Furthermore, although Badini may be exaggerating
slightly, it is impossible to deny that “Baretti’s Italian Library è un libro tutto copiato

²¹⁵ A. Neri. “Un Libello contro Giuseppe Baretti.” _Fanfulla della Domenica_ Anno VIII, no 10 7 Marzo
1886.; C. Mauro, Un libello contro Giuseppe Baretti” _Conversazioni della Domenica_ Anno I, no 49, 5 Dec.
1886. Acknowledging the vicious tone and terrible writing of the satire, Neri felt convinced that there was
something convincing in Badini’s outspoken, detailed rebuttal of the character described.
dalla Biblioteca del Fontanini.” Likewise, it is just difficult not to side with Badini when he speaks of “quanto perversamente costui turbi le ceneri del povero Altieri dopo di averlo interamente copiato,” though he perhaps added more than, in Badini’s words, “qualche sua balordaggine” [some of his twaddle]. These and other claims are well substantiated. The reader is caught between wanting to disbelieve (given the course language and crude), but unable to do so, as the author employs a strategy of corroborative witnesses and ingenious manipulation, and humor. What Neri says is certainly true: *Il vero carattere* “prende in nuovo e maggior rilievo un aspetto, certamente non buono, del suo carattere morale.”

Protecting himself in a cloak of literary tradition, Badini weaves throughout his ribald text allusions and references to a wide variety of literary material, showing himself to be actually a good deal more “scholarly” than the self-proclaimed scholar. Not only does he demonstrate familiarity with the voluminous production of his rival, he becomes the spokesman for the critical reaction the volumes generated; he also discloses details in the production of books that cast a sinister light on Baretti, while creating a bond between Badini and every writer that Baretti previously wronged, from Voltaire to Goldoni. As Badini incorporates a wide range of Italians—from Boccaccio and Dante to Povolari and Frugoni—he does so without a hint of envy, spite or criticism. He establishes a circle of literary talent and propriety, where Baretti emerges as an uncivilized barbarian.

Interestingly, furthermore, no reference is made in the work, either positively or negatively, to Baretti’s connections with the circle of writers whose testimony proved so seductive in the Old Bailey. Badini extinguishes the role of Baretti as the darling of the English, leaving off his pages any reference to Johnson, Reynolds or Garrick; he wishes
to break the illusion of the English, as they are innocent dupes of the same Baretti that has been chased from Milan and banished from Venice.

But even the best evidence against Baretti is unsatisfying and corrupt. Can we really trust the testimony of Carlo Francesco Badini? Is he not an “interested party” at least as much as Sir Joshua Reynolds? Like Baretti, Badini is a profoundly incoherent figure, course and civilized, literate and vulgar, deceptive and straightforward. And his productions include works that can only give pause to anyone wishing to accept Badini as the voice of reason, common sense, or honesty. It all calls to mind the expression “The pot calling the kettle black,” or better yet the Tuscan version, “Cencio dice male di straccio” [The washcloth saying bad things about the dish rag]. It is hard to take Badini seriously on account that because, like Baretti, he was not immaculate from any moral point of view.

In 1774 Badini published *La Priapeja di C. F. B: Nuovamente Corretta ed Ampliata per Passatempo dei Cazzi, e per Soddisfazione delle Potte* [The Priapiad: Newly Corrected with Additions for the Pastime of Cocks and the Satisfaction of Cunts], a collection of raunchy verse filled with classical myth and blasphemous Biblical references. Although there was a taste for erotic verse in the eighteenth century, nothing in the anthologies approaches the filth in Badini’s cycle of poems.²¹⁶ It may come as somewhat of a surprise the writer who sharply criticizes Baretti for frequenting prostitutes while in Venice is not the least bashful with regards to sexual escapades. The epigraph is taken from a book Baretti translated, Ovid’s *Amores*: “Happy the man, who dies in Love’s mutual battle/Let the gods make that the cause of my death!”

²¹⁶ Giosuè’ Carducci, *Poeti Erotici del Secolo XVIII* (Firenze, 1868) and *Poeti Erotici del ’700 Italiano.* (Milano, 1994).
II.10. Badini’s translation into Italian, which I have translated into modern English, seems to take some libertine liberties with the original Latin:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{FORTUNATA quell’anima che spira,} & \quad \text{FORTUNATE is the soul that dies,} \\
\text{MENTRE si sta fottendo, e ’il cassò tira:} & \quad \text{WHILE it’s fucking and the cock is pulled:} \\
\text{IL fil de’ giorni miei troncamì Giove,} & \quad \text{JUPITER CUT THE THREAD OF MY LIFE,} \\
\text{QUANDO dentro la potta il cazzo piove.} & \quad \text{WHEN INSIDE A CUNT MY COCK RAINS.}
\end{align*}
\]

It is very hard to give credibility to an informant who wrote the following:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ragazze i miei pensier non son politici} & \quad \text{Girls my thoughts are not political} \\
\text{Vi dedico il mio Cazzo, e non v’adulo;} & \quad \text{I dedicate my Cock and don’t worship you} \\
\text{Che se gradir non lo vorranno i critici,} & \quad \text{That if the critics will not be pleased, trust me:} \\
\text{Abbiansel pur ch’io mi contento nel culo.} & \quad \text{I would be happy putting it up the ass.}
\end{align*}
\]

Badini’s poetry is both pornographic and blasphemous:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Fresche pottine e cazzi d’adamante} & \quad \text{Fresh little pussies and diamond-hard cocks} \\
\text{Son de’ poeti il sospirato oggetto:} & \quad \text{Are the object that all poets desire:} \\
\text{Febo, che di Leucotoe è l’amante,} & \quad \text{Phoebus, that is the lover of Leucothoe,} \\
\text{Nella fica di lei si da’ diletto,} & \quad \text{Finds in her cunt the greatest delight,} \\
\text{Mirra dal Genitor fatta è pregnante,} & \quad \text{Myrrha gets impregnated by her dad,} \\
\text{Pasifè sfoga un suo cornuto affetto,} & \quad \text{Pasiphae showers affection on a horn,} \\
\text{La statua si fotte Pimmalione,} & \quad \text{Pygmalion fucks a statue,} \\
\text{Fotte la nube il petulante Issione.} & \quad \text{While petulant Ixion screws a cloud.}
\end{align*}
\]

To be sure, it is not unfair to call Badini, as Robert Hume does, “a sleazy character.” (ii. 208) For three more samples from Badini’s collection, see (D-20). Also relevant is the comical opera report, (D-21), which might also be a Badini spoof on Baretti.

In the same years of the Badini-Baretti feud, William Kenrick wrote *Love in the Suds; A Town Eclogue. Being the Lamentation of Roscius for the Loss of his Nyky* (London, 1772) in which he accused David Garrick of being homosexual. Garrick began a prosecution for libel, and Kenrick had to publicly apologize. Why did Baretti not pursue a case of libel against Badini? Badini and Baretti knew each other and must have lived in a state of mutual distrust and fear. Baretti mentioned Badini only once or twice. In a letter Baretti refers to his rival as a lazy pimp: “Ma certamente compatrioti bestie,
che non sanno dire due parole che stieno bene, o birbanti come il Badini, che non sanno o non vogliono far nulla, li lascio con le loro puttane, e non voglio neppure che mi salutino." In another, Baretti belittles a man who is friends with Badini: “certamente che ama di quella sorte di furfanti non deve lasciarsi vedere da me.”

In 1775, Baretti published a sort of Italian instruction manual in the form of colloquial dialogues, *Easy Phraseology, For the Use of Young Ladies, Who intend to Learn the Colloquial part of the Italian language* (1775), in which Badini appears briefly. Baretti is here identified as M (Maestro) and H refers to his pupil, the 10 year old daughter of Mrs. Thrale. Baretti, admitting that he is much older than Badini (in truth they were almost the same age), inserts a derogatory comment on his enemy, implying that his adversary has dishonored his mother.

H: The poet Badini was in the right when he told you were old.
Il poeta Badìni s’ebbe ragione quando vi disse che v’eri vecchio.
M: Very much in the right!
Moltissima ragione!
H: He has told it in print, that you could be his father!
E’ l’ha stampato, che voi potèvi essergli padre.
M: To be sure! I knew his mother when she was young and handsome: but she was a good woman! Poor thing! Little did she think that her cub would turn out the hopeful fellow that he proves!
C’èrtamente! Io conobbi la madre sua quand’era giovane e bella: ma la era una buona donna! Poverina! La non si pensava che il suo marmocchio sarebbe riuscito quel birbone che’egli è!

The final line is the final irony in the strange and twisted tale of Badini and Baretti. At some point in the printing of the book, the typesetter or someone else altered Baretti’s original English. Baretti had translated “birbone,” a scoundrel or rascal, as “hateful fellow,” but the typesetter, either believing it an improbable adjective given the context

---

217 Letter to Filippo Baretti, December 26, 1769 (Epistolario, i. 434).
218 Letter to Filippo Baretti, April 24, 1772 (Epistolario, ii. 108).
219 Baretti included the accent marks to help students with Italian pronunciation. (120)
or for a joke, changed “hateful” to “hopeful.” Thus, Baretti’s attempt to leave a trace of his low opinion of Badini backfired, and his arch-rival, the man who had called Baretti Crispinus, is praised in Baretti’s own English words as a young man of great expectations.

Before concluding this discussion of Badini/Baretti, I would like to look at one final classical trope. Badini is engaged in a satiric strategy deriving from classical antiquity of equating of the ugly-looking individual with the morally corrupt, contemptuous and vulgar.220 This repellent physical defects—heavy head and swollen neck— that Badini attributes to Baretti are Ciceronian images.221

Vedi ‘l torbido suo cesso
Quel pesante capo chino
Prota in fronte lo sberlesso
Ed il bollo di Caino.

Look at the thick-skulled man
His chunky head bowed down
A grimacing face and forehead
That reveals the Mark of Cain.

In 1773—soon after Badini produced *Il vero carattere*—two English artists painted portraits of Baretti considered among the finest examples of portraits of 1770s. They remain today the only likeness of the critic; there are many copies, but only two original images of Baretti. The more famous of the two is by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Referred to as the “Streatham Portrait,” Reynolds painted the picture for Henry Thrale who wanted to hang it in his library at Streatham Park, with other illustrious heads: Goldsmith, Johnson, Garrick, Burke, the musicologist Charles Burney, Arthur Murphy, Edwin Sandys, William Henry Lyttleton, and Sir Robert Chambers, a distinguished jurist. Baretti, the
only non-Englishman among the so-called worthies, is perfectly assimilated into the group. Baretti sits, three quarter length, in a comfortably upholstered armchair, directed to the right, and peering intensely at a small, leather-bound book.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Reynolds was indebted to Baretti for the success of his *Discourses* abroad, and he rewarded Baretti with an arresting portrait consistent with the character he years earlier had described, as very near-sighted “man of letters who deserves to be undisturbed as he engages in the life of the mind.” The picture is best understood, according to distinguished art historian Duncan Robinson, in the light of Reynolds’s earlier description of his friend as “a man of great humanity,” for the artist seems to have gone to great lengths to emphasize the sitter’s “quiet respectability.” Indeed, he writes, “the ample figure attests to his sedentary nature, to the immobility of the *vita contemplative.*” (82) Something of the intensity of his character is revealed by his fierce gaze. Nicholas Penny observes, “The vigorous characterization would have been indecorous in the portrait of a social superior, and unlikely except in the portrait of a friend.” (255) Curiously, some years later Mrs. Thrale composed some less than flattering lines of verse to appear below the portrait which call attention to the fact that Baretti was an “insolent” critic, a kind of literary wasp. Like Badini, she distinguishes her former friend by his unpleasant and sour face, a visage that seems entirely revealing of his stubborn character.

Baretti hangs next, by his Frowns you may know him,
He has lately been reading some new-publish’d Poem;

---

He finds the poor Author a Blockhead, a Beast,
A Fool without Sentiment, Judgment or Taste;
Ever thus let our Critick his Insolence fling,
Like the Hornet in Homer, impatient to sting.
Let him rally his friends for their frailties before ‘em.
And scorn the dull praise of that dull thing, decorum:
While tenderness, temper, and truth he despises,
And only the triumph of victory prizes.

In the Gentleman’s Magazine memorial piece on Baretti published the year of his death, a similar observation is made: “The person of Baretti was athletic, his countenance by no means attractive.” Interestingly enough, when Donald Gallup quoted this passage in his 1939 Yale dissertation, he corrected it to “by no means [un?] attractive.”(181) It seemed so strong that I had to be a typographical error.

The less famous portrait is by James Barry, an Irish-born artist who had studied painting in Rome with the financial support of Edmund Burke.223 In this depiction, Baretti appears much closer to the working-class lout described by Badini, thick-necked and unattractive, cut off from the viewer by several thick books and a sheet of La frusta letteraria. Robinson argues that the Reynolds’s portrait was, in fact, a response to Barry’s Baretti, an attempt to “silence” criticisms of Baretti that the picture—and Badini cohorts—had conveyed. Nicolas Penny notes that in this picture, a massive Baretti is depicted “as a scholar in a garret” rather than “a critic in a library chair.” (255) It is so distinct that Luigi Piccioni doubted that the man in the painting was Baretti. (96)

Barry—and Baretti by implication – had received some sharp criticism in the Morning Chronicle (May 19, 1773) by Fresnoy.224 The criticism leaves no doubt that the memory

---

of “The Haymarket Affair” was still very much in the popular imagination and some residual doubts about Baretti’s innocence were not limited to the vindictive Badini.

You ought to have buttoned his shirt after the string was about his neck, for that, it seems, is Tyburn Etiquette….I am told that he has made you a present of his knife for the pallet, that your colours may take a tincture from friction, and kill all beholders. I have often heard you talk of striking us dead with your pictures, and now I have discovered your reason for making use of this violent language….though he be fat and sleekheaded, there are as many daggers in his face as all Italy can shew.

Both painters include around Baretti’s neck a black ribbon on the end of which is a monocle Badini seems truthful enough, therefore, when he attests in Il vero carattere that Baretti wore just such a ribbon. However, Badini gives an entirely different interpretation of the symbol. This accessory was not an aid for Baretti’s myopia, according to Badini, but rather an affectation Baretti brought back from France, and for which he was justly subjected to frequent ridicule in London. Furthermore, once again, Badini weaves into his characterization a reference to the murder of Evan Morgan, for he states that Italians mockingly referred to Baretti as “The Cavalier of the noose”:

Baretti dopo il suo ritorno d’Italia si è messo al collo un larghissimo nastro nero, che pare quello di San Michele in Francia, a cui tiene appeso l’occhialino; la qual affettazione è causa che Giuseppe Baretti è comunemente chiamato Cavaliere dell’ordine del laccio. [Baretti after his return from Italy put around his neck a large black ribbon that seems that of Saint Michael in France, on which he attached his monocle, an affectation for which Giuseppe Baretti is commonly referred to as the Cavalier of the noose.]

Il vero carattere leaves us with more questions than answers. Was Baretti the self-effacing scholar Johnson and the “constellation of genius” knew, or an ugly and offensive villain capable of all sorts of deception and mocked for pretention? How could two

---

Painter” (Kinsale, 2005), “Baretti had had to sustain numerous racial taunts during the incident that led to his trial for murder,” and was “a victim of intellectual and racial bias.” (100)
pictures be so radically different? Does the work of Charles Francis/Carlo Francesco Badini expose Baretti as a shrewd and manipulative madman or does it simply prove the truth of Lord Chief Justice Mansfield’s observation about how often slander follows the honest and good: “The greater the truth, the greater the libel.”

Who was to blame and who started it all? It was the question at the heart of the Baretti trial several years earlier. Was Baretti a gentleman of refined manners and learning, or a bear of man with such vicious temper? What we do know is that the dynamics of Baretti’s life were inseparable from his writing life. The same structure of events in the narrative of “The Haymarket Affair” appears in Il vero carattere: Sudden Provocation > Offended Honor > Rag > Vendetta > Attack > Restored Dignity. The literary act was one of provocation and aggression, challenge and insult, self-defense and honor. It seemed a mechanism deeply rooted in the psyche of Giuseppe Baretti, and Carlo Francesco Badini

History appears to have given the victory in the duel of words to Baretti, but Badini felt that he had won, and in the years following “The Haymarket Affair,” Badini did have remarkable success in the Opera Theatre. “The diversion of baiting an author has the sanction of all ages and nations, and is more lawful than the sport of teizing other animals, because for the most part he comes voluntarily to the stake.”225 There can be no doubt that the Baretti trial was still very much in circulation long after the case closed. By helping to create such a spectacular trial, Baretti secured his innocence, but thrust his personal history into the collective imagination where scores of innuendoes, ironic comments, chit-chat, and scornful jokes would stigmatize him to the end of his life.

Descartes, in one of his Letters, writes thus—“Be not so desirous to live under Italian skies; there is a contagion that poisons its breezes; the heat of the day kindles a fever in the delicate frame; the evening airs are unwholesome; and the deep shades of the night conceal robberies and assassinations.


Who attempts to visit the wife, or mistress of any of the [Italian] trades-people, without their permission, is in no small danger of a coltellata."

(148)


Thus the STILETTO, as an ingenious traveler has recently observed, forms the police of Italy.

A Comparative Sketch of England and Italy, with Disquisitions on National Advantages (2 vols., London, 1793), ii. 100.

In July of 1769 Baretti was reading a guidebook to Italy recently published by a Frenchman named Joseph Jérôme Lefrançois de Lalande (1732-1807). In the work, Baretti found something written about himself, which he considered disparaging and a grave insult to his honor. He immediately wrote a letter to Lalande, who happened to be one of the finest astronomers of the time and a mathematical genius. This letter is today among the miscellaneous leaves bound in the Penn Commonplace Book Manuscript.

There are two versions, one in French and the other in English, both written hastily and containing corrections that seem indicative of a writer in a state of annoyance. A print transcription does not do justice to the ms.

You must think that it has much displeased me much to be falsely mention’d, and that it is infinitely disagreeable to me to see myself ranked amongst the number of those villains who have deserved to be driven out of a society; particularly as this
falsehood has already [crept] in to some of the public papers with which this capital abounds.--You Sir will answer me no doubt that you have been misinformed; but is that a good reason? And are people to be treated in so brutal a manner, upon information which you have not given yourselves the trouble of searching into?

The reference to which Baretti refers is hidden away on page 220 of the eighth volume. But Baretti is so ticked off that he threatens to challenge Lalande to swordfight, while casting aspersions on his virility, before (in the garbled English version) closing with a begrudging salutation:

If there are any cases in which a challenge be excusable this certainly is one, but I shall not send you one, as people who pretend to know you assure me that you are not made for the use of the sword, a thing that I should not dare to express, for fear in my turn of being misinformed, but what reparations will you make me, for the atrocious calumny that you have spread to my dishonor? This is what you wished to know from Monsieur de Leland [es?] Very Humble Servant Joseph Baretti

Clearly this was a preposterous letter, a letter one hopes Baretti wrote out of frustration, venting as we all do from time to time when overlooked or unappreciated; he thought better of it, and never put a neat copy in the mail. But, unfortunately, he sent the letter to Lalande at the l’Académie des Sciences à Paris. We know this because, when a second edition of the Voyage en Italie appeared almost twenty years later, the lines had undergone a very slight emendation.

Lalande also added a sentence to his earlier two, mentioning that Baretti had “settled in London, where he wrote a book on Italy in answer to that of Englishman Mr.

---

226 Joseph Jérôme Le Français de Lalande. Voyage d'un francois en Italie, fait dans les années 1765 & 1766. Contenant l'histoire & les anecdotes les plus singulières de l'Italie, & sa description (Paris, 1769). The offensive passage is the following: “Le comte Joseph Baretti, qui a écrit en vers & en prose; il a fait pendant quelque tems [temps] un journal très-intéressant, sous le nom de Frustra Letteraria [sic], le fouet de la littérature; il critiquoit avec une force, une liberté, une dureté, qui ont fait a la fin supprimer le Journal & exiler l’Auteur.” (220) [The count Joseph Baretti, who wrote in rhyme and in prose, made a newspaper in recent times called the scourge of literature, under the name of Frustra Letteraria; it criticized with a force, a freedom, a hardness, which in the end led the paper to be suppressed and the author to be exiled.]

Sharp, but it displayed an excess compared to that of the English author. ”228 This book, Mr. Sharp, and Italians with stilettos will be the subject of this chapter.

When the mild-mannered Samuel Sharp (1709-1778) published his *Letters from Italy* in 1766, he could never have anticipated what it would provoke. A distinguished surgeon whose seminal *Treatise on the Operations of Surgery* (1739) had been translated into French and Italian, Sharp had never before written a work outside of his field of expertise. Author of *A Critical Enquiry into the Present State of Surgery* (1750), a groundbreaking work in the history of medical literature, Sharp earned a fine reputation in Britain and the continent. He became friends with Voltaire, and he performed a cataract surgery on George Friedrich Handel. He invented numerous improved medical instruments, including a cranial saw, the cataract knife, and a superior suture needle. He is thought to be one of the two assistants of William Cheseldon, the foremost surgeon of the eighteenth century, shown on the frontispiece engraving of Cheseldon’s monumental *Osteographia, or, The Anatomy of Bones* (London, 1733). (ODNB, “Samuel Sharp”)

Like so many Londoners in the mid-eighteenth century, Sharp took a tour through Italy and, at the urging of friends, he published his letters home in the early spring of 1766. 229 Sharp was not too much interested in history, music, fine arts or the classical world, the standard subjects in the arsenal of travel writers. He was fascinated more by the economic and social life of Italians, as well as the usual concerns of tourists, the quality of the food and lodging. To be sure, he also wrote with some chagrin about


229 To get a sense of the numbers of travellers in Italy, see John Ingamells, *Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy, 1701-1800* (New Haven, 1997).
certain cultural phenomenon. He was dismayed by the presence of *cicisbeos* and some of rites and festivals of Roman Catholicism seemed to him like so much “pomp.” However, these letters home were not intended to incite great controversies, religious or otherwise. Samuel Johnson found in them “a great deal of matter.” But when Giuseppe Baretti read the *Letters* in 1767, he got very perturbed.

Indeed, even before reading the work, it seems, Baretti was set on defending the Italian national character against a wrong-headed and intolerant Englishman. He retaliated with a two-volume *Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy*, a corrective to the damage Sharp had, in his view, had inflicted on all Italians. Ten years earlier, in March 1756, Sharp met Philip Mazzei, just arrived in London from Florence, where he worked in the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova. When Mazzei spoke disparagingly about Italians to impress the Englishman, Sharp instructed him not to be so harsh: “Young man, more respect should be shown when speaking of our teachers. We owe our Lockes to their Ficinos, our Newtons to their Galileos, and as for Milton, I could show you many passages he took from Dante, marring them. Lastly, when the beauties in an author are such and so many, I should be ashamed to pick out his faults.” This hardly seems the sentiment of a bigot, but Baretti saw Sharp’s book (which went into a third edition within a year) as a provocation and he decided to retaliate or self-defend, as the case may be.

The contrast between the two authors was palpable: on the one side was Dr. Sharp, a passive and practical scientist, and on the other side was Baretti, an irascible and

---

230 *ODNB*, “Samuel Sharp.”
231 Baretti’s opinion that Sharp was prejudiced and anti-Italian has had remarkable staying power. Lorenzo Mondo, reviewing a recent Italian translation of Baretti’s *Account*, the first complete version in Italian, writes that Sharp was “nutrito di preconcetti e facilonerie sulla vita che si conduce nella penisola.” *La Stampa* (Sabato 3 Giugno 2006)
highly imaginative poet and journalist. Once described as “observant, judicious, a lover of simplicity, wisely doubtful,” Sharp must have been taken aback by the fury of Baretti’s criticism and by the impact of his first – and his last – foray into polite letters. When Camillo Ugoni recounted the unpleasant circumstances that gave birth to Baretti’s *Account* in 1820, he adopted a violent metaphor to describe Baretti’s hostile writing style that likely called to mind “The Haymarket Affair”: “Colà scrisse un libro inglese intorno all’indole degl’Italiani per confutare certe lettere del dott. Sharp, nelle quali gl’Italiani erano stati giudicati superficialmente ed ingiuriosamente. Ma il Baretti era più inclinato alle censure che alle apologie; però quando per combattere il Sharp esce in parte dal suo istituto, e assume la difesa de’ suoi paesani, nel furor della mischia rivolge spesso le armi contro i difesi e ferisce da tutte parti.”

For here as elsewhere in his literary career, Baretti had terrible difficulty extricating the book he disliked from its author; he lacked motivation or inspiration without a palpable enemy at which to direct his thoughts and feelings, this time in remarkably fluent English. Although in the opening pages, Baretti claims that his work (written in excellent English) was “not undertaken solely with a design to animadvert upon the remarks of Mr. Sharp,” the work is a two-volume book review, a rebuke of Sharp’s positions and of Sharp himself. Baretti’s *Account* depends so much on Sharp’s book that, in my view, it is impossible to value or critique without both books open. Perhaps for this reason is not widely-known to scholars today and was not translated in

---

*233 Della Letteratura Italiana nella seconda metà del secolo XVIII* (Brescia, 1820) [There he wrote an English book on the nature of the Italians in order to confute certain letters of Doctor Sharp, in which the Italians were superficially and harmfully judged. But Baretti was more inclined to censure than to apology; but when to combat Sharp he went against his instincts, and assumed the defense of his countrymen, in the furor of the battle he often turned his arms against the defenders of Italy and wounded them everywhere.] (238)
its entirety until 2003. Pulled from the book on which it fed, though, we end up hearing one side of the story, just as we did in the trial transcript. Indeed, Baretti’s _Account_ simply cannot be read as a contained composition, except at considerable cost to an appreciation of the grappling style which characterized his entire output. Sharp felt himself, oddly enough, the father of Baretti’s work: “Mr. Baretti in the English account has thrown out several animadversions on _Letters from Italy_; and indeed they seem to have given birth to that work.” Later Baretti will concur, admitting that had it not been for the “accident” of reading Smart, “I should probably never have written the _Account of Italy_.”

As was the case with so many of Baretti’s writings, the _Account_ cannot be fully appreciated without considering its retributive value. Like the unfortunate death of Evan Morgan, the _Account_ was the result of an offense, or a series of provocation, a misunderstanding perhaps, and certainly some desire to right a terrible wrong. Baretti relies often on a strategy of offensive response or defensive rhetorical protection. Literary critic Arnaldo Momigliano observed, “La vocazione polemica, che era in lui primordiale (un’idea o un giudizio egli non sapeva sostenere e, direi, concepire se non nel contrasto con un avversario.” [The polemical vocation, that was primordial in him (an idea or a judgment he didn’t know how to sustain and, I should say, conceive if not in contrast with an adversary] No more accurate comment on Baretti has ever been written.

Scanning the range of Baretti’s prolific achievement, we observe the predominance of books that have no autonomy: letters, reviews, translations,

---

235 An Appendix to the _Account of Italy_ (London, 1768), 64.
236 Quoted in _DBI_, Vol. 5, 330.
adaptations, speeches, and reference works. Moreover, there are his publications, like the *Italian Library*, that as Badini correctly says were literary clones. Badini mocked Baretti for claiming to be publishing new work in English when, in fact, he was merely recycling his already published Italian writing. Baretti was never more himself as a writer than when he could envision not only a set of pages to oppose, but the producer of them he could regard as his foe, whether it be Voltaire, Mrs. Thrale, C. F. Badini, Carlo Goldoni, or J. J. Lalande. William Hazlitt’s famous observation is apropos to Baretti: “Without someone to hate, we should lose the very spring of thought and action.”237

The *Account* was another production of Baretti’s parasitic pen, a demonstration of his perverse habit of attacking, and his inability to play by the rules of polite literary society and the protocols of deference and reflection. This tendency is apparent in his earliest pamphlets, in which he flayed opera theater, in his masterpiece, *La Frusta Letteraria*, and even in his highly derivative *Carmen Seculare* of 1779.238 Parasites in the literary environment of the eighteenth century, like parasites in the natural world, are necessary and fascinating and should be studied.

In a letter to a friend in Genoa, Baretti promised to produce a work that would metaphorically inflict bodily harm on his sneaky adversary: “Fra quindici dì uscirà in luce un’ altra cosa mia (un eighteen-penny pamphlet) in risposta ad una cavillosa apologia pubblicata dal furbo Sharp. Oh costui lo vo’ far crepare di stizza, se non ha un’anima come quella del sambuco.”239 Baretti went on to explain the situation as if it

---

239 Letter to Pietro Paolo Celesia, *Epistolario*, i. 390-392): [Within the next fifteen days another thing of mine will come to light (an eighteen-penny pamphlet) in response to a captious apology published by the shrewd and sneaky Sharp. Oh I want that man to die angry, if he does not have a soul like that of an Elder tree.]
were a battle involving factions or rival quarters of the city. Sharp’s side is “defended by all the champions of Grubstreet” but Warburton, Johnson, Burke, the Hays and many of that caliber are all mine,” together with “all the women, married, widowed and single.”

He promises not to be scared by the threats of his adversaries, such as the novelist Tobias Smollett, the poet Mark Akenside, and the historian William Guthrie. “Voglio ridurre costoro a parlare con qualche rispetto del paese che ha prodotto i Celesia e i Baretti, oltre a tant’altra gente nostra pari.” [I want to make him speak with some respect of the country that has produced the Celesias and the Barettis, as well as many others equal to us.] In the Letter to Jacopo Taruffi of April 20, 1767, Baretti reminds his friend in Bologna of what Sharp has done in “shaking Italy, treating all of our men like cuckolds, fanatics and fools, and all our ladies like cheap sluts and superstitious females.”

Clearly Baretti wanted to get the word out that he, on behalf of the Italy, was coming to the aid of Italy “against a certain Dr. Sharp who had mistreated our country and its inhabitants in a mode too bestial.”

It becomes a game of the Cicero/Badini sort, a game of who can out calumniate the calumniator. Furthermore, Baretti is in a self-defense posture not only against Sharp and the English: this defense of Italy will restore his honor wrongfully tarnished by the controversy involving the Frusta letteraria several years before.

Baretti has positioned himself not as an opponent to certain mistakes or biases, but as an enemy of someone who, like Lalande, has dishonored him in the most

240 Letter to Jacopo Taruffi, April 20, 1767 (Epistolario, i. 348-349): Sharp “strapazza l’Italia soverchiamente, trattando tutti gli uomini nostri di becchi, di fanatici e di ignoranti, e tutte le nostre donne di puttanacce e superstiziosi.” See also the Letter to Giovanni Antonio Battarra, April 20, 1767 (Epistolario, i. 350) and the Letter to Count Vincenzo Bujovich, May 13, 1767 (Epistolario, i. 352).

241 Letter to Chiaramonte, September 2, 1767 (Epistolario, i. 355-356): “un libro contro un certo dottore Sharp il quale…ha maltrattato il nostro paese e i suoi abitanti in un modo troppo bestiale.”
unforgivable way. The final line in the Taruffi letter is patented Baretti, as he applies to his literary endeavor the language of a bludgeoning: “La volete più chiara? E se non li ridurrò a questo, li bastonerò almeno e senza punto di misericordia.” [Can I make it any more clear? And if I do not reduce him to this, I will cudgel him at least and without one bit of mercy.”] Attributing to Sharp a sudden and rude insult—much like Ward’s name-calling—Baretti responds with equal, opposite hostility, set in a moment in time. “Fury is rarely continued,” wrote one of the pioneers in psychology. “It is intermittent, like the action of the causes that produce it.”242

The Baretti-Sharp feud is perhaps the most fascinating and prolonged of Baretti’s tempestuous career and, in the light of Baretti, incredible. It began with the publication of Sharp’s Letters late in 1766, a work so popular that a third edition was being advertised by the following February. Biographers tell us that Baretti overheard a woman make a disparaging remark about Italy (she having just read Sharp’s Letters), and at that instant set his mind to penning his Account. Within weeks of the publication of Baretti’s Account in April of 1768, Sharp constructed a fairly elaborate but level-headed rebuttal: A View of the Customs, Manners, Drama, & c., of Italy, as they are Described in the “Frusta Letteraria” (London, 1768). At first, Sharp had planned to publish this pamphlet anonymously, but later included his name on the title page, though the work remained printed in third person. Like other books I examine in this study, there are “hidden authors,” for there can be no doubt that the physician enlisted the aid of at least one Italian, and more likely a small corps. A perceptive reader, Sharp and his side located throughout Baretti’s other writings – in particular La Frusta Letteraria – statements about Italy and Italians remarkably in accord

242 J. E. D. Esquirol, A Treatise on Insanity (1838) (New York, 1965),
with his own sentiments, including those same positions Baretti had ridiculed him for in the *Account*. Using this *tu quoque* strategy, he would not only prove the validity of what he wrote, he would expose Baretti as a literary hypocrite and fool. Never one to let someone else get the last word, as we know from his marginal remarks to Mrs. Thrale’s *Letters*, Baretti published his own countercharges in *An Appendix to the Account of Italy, in Answer to Samuel Sharp, Esq. by Joseph Baretti* (London, 1768). This pamphlet first appeared as a separate publication, and then as the *Appendix* to the second edition of the *Account*, around June of 1769.\(^{243}\)

The paper-battle lasted a long period of time and was still in the air on the fatal night in October, 1769. These four texts present not merely a discussion on national character and cultural difference, but rather a heated battle, with Baretti engaging in *ad hominem* attacks, Sharp countering with a scalpel in one hand, the pen in the other. This squabble on printed pages, full of animosity, misunderstanding, hurt feelings and retaliations, foreshadows the dynamics on the city street, making the events of “The Haymarket Affair” seem the outcome of fate.

What makes literary feud relevant to *Baretti* is more than just the hostility, the sense of being dishonored, and the miscommunication between English and Italian culture. Sharp made some observations about violent crime in Italy that Baretti found inaccurate and extremely inflammatory. During his travels in Italy, Sharp was dismayed to hear reports of sudden acts of violence that occur with alarming frequency, especially in the big cities. One of the principle points of contention between Sharp and Baretti concerns, ironically enough, “the subject of assassination.” Baretti took umbrage at

---

\(^{243}\) The four volumes will be abbreviated with short-titles: *Letters, Account, View,* and *Appendix.* References are to the second edition of the *Letters,* the first of the other texts.
Sharp’s observation (as he saw it) that it is “an established fashion [in Italy] to murder Englishmen by way of amusement.” (Account, 50)

In a bizarre instance of life imitating art, the material at issue in this debate would be replicated a year later on the streets of London, when Baretti did what he insisted a year earlier Italians do not do. The similarities between the Baretti-Sharp debate and Baretti are uncanny. Sharp contended that Italians resolve ordinary, everyday disputes and sudden quarrels, often over minor disagreements, by reaching for lethal weapons. Furthermore, he declares that there is a specific weapon of choice: the pocket knife. In Baretti’s opinion, the English surgeon had maliciously “endeavoured to persuade his readers that the Venetian populace, like all other in Italy, are a set of abominable villains, who will treacherously stab on the least provocation.” (Account, 46) To make this case of life imitating art even stranger, Sharp is surprised by the reports he hears of the relative ease with which Italians escaped punishment for heinous crimes, such as stabbings, even when they are undeniably guilty. In his long and animated response on the subject, Baretti would reveal himself to be relatively well-informed on the finer points of English homicide law, such as the legal basis for the distinction between murder and manslaughter. There has never been a more literary trial than Baretti’s, not merely because of the cast of characters performing at the Old Bailey and Badini’s daring diatribe. The script of the entire event seems to have been written by the protagonist a year before it happened.

It is this curious dovetailing of the literary and the real, of fact and fiction, that make the Baretti-Sharp debate so fascinating. It would all be hard to concoct, if it were not documented in print and manuscript. In this chapter, I will explore the Baretti-Sharp
controversy, and attempt to give a ruling on the evidence, anthropological and literary, concerning angry Italians with stilettos on the mean streets and back alleys of eighteenth-century Italy.

A QUESTION OF LANGUAGE

Baretti opens his *Account* by pointing out that Sharp is incapable of accurate cultural assessments and, therefore, should have had the common sense not to publish his *Letters*, as they are full of hasty conclusions, ignorance, and bias. As an expatriate himself, Baretti knows from personal experience that travelers are naturally “too ready to condemn every thing but what they have seen practiced at home.” (*Account*, ix) After having spent ten years in England, he looked back over his first letters home, only to find them to be replete with hasty generalizations which he gladly demolished, page by page. They were “full of strange judgments on men and things, taken from sudden and superficial impressions, that I thought myself happy in the opportunity I had of tearing to pieces each leaf as I went on in the perusal of this series of observations.” (*Account*, ix) Baretti wants to expose Sharp’s foolishness in preserving and circulating harmful writing that should have been burnt. “An indiscriminate admiration of foreign manners and customs shows great folly,” he writes, “but an indiscriminate censure is both foolish and malignant.” (*Account*, viii) But it is not primarily his inexperience abroad that disqualifies Sharp from the right to write; Sharp’s unpardonable weakness, like that Baretti attributed to Voltaire in the Folger letter, is linguistical. Sharp lacks a deep familiarity with the Italian language, and it is this shortcoming that Baretti focuses on and attempts to expose to laughter and to scorn.
Only through facility and expertise in a foreign language, Baretti implies, can one arrive at an intimate knowledge of a foreign culture. Baretti begins by castigating Sharp’s “inability in catching sounds when orally uttered.” This shortcoming, according to Baretti, is evident “most glaringly in his miserable remarks on the Venetian dialect; a dialect very harsh and displeasing to the ears, and yet extremely smooth in itself, as it abounds in vowels even more than the Tuscan, which renders it delightful to all Italians.” (Account, 4-5) In Baretti’s view, Sharp’s comments on words and pronunciation are not merely shallow and inaccurate, but instances of “ridiculous” pretense. Baretti continues for several pages ridiculing Sharp’s specific errors in Italian, such as his assuming the word *palazzo* signifies a noble palace. Although Sharp never claims to be fluent (his letters were written, after all, to Englishmen), for Baretti the medical doctor’s oversights reveal “not the least knowledge of our language,” a phrase that rings in context with contempt. (6) Baretti surmises that Sharp learned his fragments of Italian from “some footman,” instead of consulting a reliable dictionary or grammar reference, revealing an implicit class-consciousness in his understanding of what constitutes “proper” Italian as well as his unshakeable habit of self-advertisement.

Baretti’s position is strengthened throughout by his (in contrast with Sharp’s) second language skills, as Baretti displays in this book his ear for English style and idiom. He is not for a moment to be confused with a newcomer to London from France. Implicit in the Baretti-Sharp conflict—as in the conflict a year later—is a great deal of anxiety regarding speaking properly a foreign tongue. The inability to master a foreign language becomes for Baretti sufficient not only to preclude Sharp from making sensible judgments about Italian culture, but reduces Sharp to laughing-stock. Baretti’s tone here
is unmistakable: it is precisely that he used in the commenting on Voltaire’s knowledge of English in the Folger letter. Baretti writes: “Mr. Sharp understands near as much Italian as many French barbers understand English after a month’s residence in London. I could easily point out the meagerness of his remarks on the gutterality of the Florentine and Sienese, and laugh at his acuteness in having discovered that they pronounce ce and ci as the English do che and chi.” (7)

It is important to notice, in my opinion, that Baretti does not disqualify Sharp from holding forth on Italian culture because his name is not Italian or because he is not Italian. Baretti never advances privilege on the basis of birthright. Nowhere does Baretti imply that Sharp, by not being a native speaker or having relatives in Italy, is precluded from commenting on Italian cultural matters; on the contrary, Baretti does not even consider it essential that Sharp have a large number of Italian acquaintances, nor a long residence in Italy, nor familiarity with art or music. For Baretti, Sharp’s only handicap is his shameless lack of knowledge of the Italian language, a failure he cannot overcome and, to Baretti’s mind, should have stifled him right from the start. Baretti concludes: “[Sharp’s] utter ignorance of the Italian language ought to have awed him into silence about the customs and manners of Italy.” (8-9) This is a curious—and surely excessive—claim to make, of course, particularly in a period in which many similar travel books by Englishman appeared.244 What I would like to call attention to here is not only the fact that he criticizes Sharp for his ignorance of Italian, but rather the vituperative strain of this criticism and the intensity of the delivery. Is he on the offense or the defense, one wonders.

244 See Robert Pine-Coffin, Bibliography of British and American Travel in Italy to 1860 (Firenze, 1974) and John Ingamells, Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy, 1701-1800 (New Haven, 1997).
Seemingly unaware that his opponent in not an Italian translator, but one of the most esteemed physicians in Europe, Baretti seeks to humiliate him. Indeed, there is a strong tone of sarcasm throughout the first chapter: “How is it possible for me to descend so very low, as to animadvert on the Italian language with this rare linguist, who talks though one fourth of his book of Cicisbeo’s, and never once spells the word right, writing for ever Ceesbeo’s or Ceesbio’s?” (8) The fact that Sharp makes no claim to knowing the Italian language never enters the discussion; furthermore, Baretti overlooks his own mistakes in print, such as place on the pages of the Frusta letteraria where he confused a thermometer and a barometer (see Il vero carattere, ll. 469-475). Sharp is “parading with his great knowledge of Italian customs,” when he doesn’t even have a basic comprehension of orthography. (32) Baretti cannot hold back his vitriol in lampooning his adversary as “a daring genius indeed!” (16)

Where did Baretti develop his firm position with regard to the connection between linguistic skill and cultural understanding? Perhaps from his friend Samuel Johnson, who according to James Boswell offered a very similar criticism of another travel book often cited today as one of the principal texts in the history of the Grand Tour, Joseph Addison’s Remarks on Several Parts of Italy (London, 1705). ”It would seem…Addison had not acquired much Italian learning, for we do not find it introduced in his writings. The only instance that I can recollect, is his quoting “Stavo bene, per star meglio, sto qui.”246 (II, 346) By learning, Johnson clearly is referring to language ability. In conversation with Boswell about the travels of Leandro Alberti on another occasion,

246 The quotation Johnson refers to is from John Dryden’s Dedication of the Aeneid: “Stavo bene (was written on his monument) ma per star meglio, sto qui.” (XIV, 149)
Johnson remarks that had Addison’s reputation to stand on his Italian travel alone, “his name would not have lived.” Johnson states, “Addison did not seem to have gone deep into Italian literature; he shows nothing of it in his subsequent writings.” (v. 310) Baretti, no doubt, had discussed the subject many times with his friend.

The striking contrast between Baretti and Sharp, in the eyes of early reviewers, was not really the difference of opinion about Italians, but rather in the manner of expression. The audience could not get over the contrast in temperament between the two writers, a stylistic gap as great as any cultural difference. Sharp wrote in a dispassionate tone, cited points of similarity with medical precision, quoting page numbers along the way. Baretti, on the other hand, seemed to have gone berserk. In *Prospettiva di una nazione di nazioni: “An account of the manners and customs of Italy” di Giuseppe Baretti*, Christina Bracchi observes that the Sharp-Baretti divide was over the question of literary propriety: “sembrebbero, prevalentemente, una questione di forma e di mancata osservanza delle buone norme comportamentali fra intellettuali.”

A journalist in 1768 (the press enjoyed this feud) cast the contrasting writers in terms now familiar, provocation, manhood, invective, acquittal, acrimony, and coarseness:

> The extreme acrimony with which the [Baretti], upon every occasion, treats Mr. Sharp, and which sometimes borders too closely upon coarseness, is to be lamented, and perhaps to be censured too. He seems himself in some places to plead his provocation as the excuse for his acrimony; and, indeed, there is perhaps nothing a manly spirit is more sensible to than an illiberal reproach and invectives cast on his own country; and of this we are sorry to say Mr. Sharp does not stand totally acquitted.”


While many Italian scholars in modern times assume that Sharp was, as a matter of fact, a biased individual with blinders on, the *Monthly Review* captured his reputation at the time by calling him “a man of acknowledged penetration and veracity.”

Like the fight with Badini (who, despite his vulgarity represents himself as a socially responsible, moderate, and dignified), the tension here is between two opposing forces, a laboratory scientist and an enraged Italian. “Mr. Baretti, who is a native of Italy, thinking his country most illiberally treated, and its customs and manners misrepresented in the grossest manner, stands forth a very animated champion in its defence.”

Even the French wanted to be at ringside: “Mr. S. a peint le people d’Italie & surtout de Naples avec des couleurs un peu noires. Mr. B. en bon Compatriote nous le représente tout différemment il est en général, cous di-il, humble, doux, soucieux, susceptible d’attachement, civil & extrêmement prévenu pou les étrangers.”

Some sided with Baretti, others gave Sharp the upper hand, some objected to Baretti’s excessive force, while others still praised him for defending himself and his country with dignity. Almost everyone who commented on the controversy used imagery from martial arts and the courtroom. “The Italian gentleman seems to have great advantages over his antagonist, who appears to have unwittingly engaged with an adversary of much superior powers: and in the course of the work, he, as well as some other modern writers upon the same subject, are most severely handled.”

Baretti, on the other hand, seemed unaware of the rules of polite literary exchange. He hit below the

---

250 *Gentleman’s Review* (April, 1768).
251 *Memoires Litteraires de la Grande Bretagne, pour l’An 1768*. Londres: Chez C Heydinger dans Grafton Street, 1768), 39:[Mr. S. painted the Italian people and especially those of Naples in the blackest die. Mr. B as a good patriot represented them entirely differently, as humble, obsequious, inclined to attachments, civil, and extremely prejudiced to foreigners.].
belt and displayed a lack of self-control, while Smart wrote a cool rationality that Baretti interpreted as “cold-blooded” cruelty and premeditated malice. Baretti used a rhetoric that depended for its force a great deal more on emotion, irony, and spleen. For example, Sharp noted his opponent’s use of Italics to give emphasis and quoting him out of context. *The Critical Review* sided with Sharp, who “proved absolutely to contradict the most material facts advanced by Mr. Baretti.” Other English reviewers, however, insisted that Sharp lacked coursework in cultural relativism: “Sharp had indeed written like a prejudice Englishman, incapable of making due allowances for the difference of tastes and habits.”

**THE GREATEST OF ALL CRIMES**

The year before “The Haymarket Affair,” one subject was on Joseph Baretti’s mind: murder, manslaughter, character, slander and self-defense

Baretti rejects Sharp’s suggestion that Italians are by nature violent, passionate, and prone to resorting to knives in the streets, and “naturally inclined to commit the greatest of all crimes.”

(Appendix, 28) The Italians are not as “Mr Sharp is pleased to call [them,] diabolical in their nature.” (Account, 59) With his characteristic irony and intensity of expression, Baretti presents his adversary as cruel, ill-intentioned and perverse. “Mr. Sharp wanted to give a body to the phantoms of his sickly brain. He wanted, in one of his fits of good-nature, to blacken the Italians; and could stick at nothing in order to prove his calumnious position, that our low people are all murderers and assassins.” (51)

---

254 Italics from here forward are Baretti’s.
In defense of his countrymen, however, Baretti praises the common Italian as "humble, courteous, peaceable, cheerful, hospitable, compassionate, and religious." (60-61) Amazingly, the very characterization he advances here—including the very word "peaceable"—will return a year later in the trial to be central to his own character defense. A year later he will recycle the same identity for himself that he had advanced for the Italian National Character, namely that they “are no rioters, and hate confusion.” (59) Baretti and his “constellation of genius” are insistent on the fact that he was not capable of doing the act of killing with premeditation, but rather acted out of character, not by a sudden unchaining of his fiery temperament but for fear for his life. Johnson’s “timorous” Baretti who wept at the Old Bailey, when discussing Italians in general, emphasizes their emotional sensibility and soft hearts: “The Italians are so tender-hearted, that they will shed tears at any mournful story; and when any criminal is executed, you will see the stoutest amongst them weep most cordially.” (59)

While objecting to Sharp’s general diagnosis, however, Baretti seems nevertheless to accept the notion that Italians do have a propensity toward murder, under a specific set of circumstances. Baretti contradicts himself by confirming that upon provocation, the Italian national is liable to “instantly kindle,” forgetting those very traits by which he is distinguished. When an Italian is “suddenly provoked,” he will pull from his pocket the Italian weapon of choice: the knife. “I have said in my Account of Italy, that our low people, far from being so desperately cruel and bloody as they appear in Mr. Sharp’s book, they are compassionate, kind, peaceable, and shuddering at the sight of human blood. I added, that, when provoked, especially by their equals, they will instantly kindle; and, forgetting these qualities, fall upon each other with their knives.”
(Appendix, 27) The very phenomenon that he attacks Sharp for pointing out, Baretti later in the debate admits to being present in Italy. “The only kind of assassination he ever heard of in Italy,” he hastens to add, “was their sudden falling upon each other with their knives, and stabbing each other when they are seized by anger.” (29) The homicides that occur in Italy resemble the sort of crime for which Baretti is brought to trial in London a year later. In his defense, however, the predominant emotion was fear, not a state of being “seized by anger.”

Even more astonishingly, Baretti continues his analysis of homicide by making some precise claims regarding class and gender relevant to the phenomenon of stabbings in Italy. Being “accustomed to a strict subordination,” the Italian might refrain from violence against someone socially superior; respect and deference, Baretti observes, has the effect of reducing the number of murders. While Italians are not “diabolical in their nature”, there is in Baretti’s view a “touchy temper in our low people” that will lead to violent fights. (61) These altercations occur “if there is any matter of love at the bottom, which is generally the only great source of quarrels amongst our common people.” Most murders committed by the “common people,” according to Baretti, are the outcomes of the infidelity of women and the rashness of men. “If he has room to suspect his mistress of fickleness, after she has given her consent to his courtship, she will be herself in danger.” (62) An occasional murder in a fit of passion does not give Sharp the right to jump to conclusions: “Though some Italian may sometimes be apt to give a stab to his rival or his mistress in a fit of angry jealousy, yet our author had no reason to represent the common people of Italy as having all the diabolical nature of murderers.” (Account, 74) The character of the Italian—like the character of Giuseppe Baretti—might be a
good deal more ambiguous than it seems as first glance, perhaps not as timid as one
might like.

In a truly remarkable moment, Baretti corrects the reader who might be inclined
to believe that “girls in Italy are frequently stabbed by their sweethearts.” (62) This does
not occur, Baretti notes, for the simple reason “they pique themselves of as much fidelity
to their lovers, as their lovers to them.” In other words, the opportunity simply never
arises. Once again Baretti seems to offer sudden passion or infidelity as a very powerful
mitigation for stabbing. He offers an example from his own experience in the
“neighbourhood of Ancona” that resembles his own misfortune, complete with the uppity
female antagonist and a generous jury. A peasant was sent “into the gallies by giving a
dangerous blow to a pretty wench.” He sees this as a perfectly justified action: “I found,
that both men and women were, upon the whole, rather favourable to the fellow, who had
given her no motive for fickleness, and thought his sentence too hard; not pitying the girl
much, as she had proved a jilt.” (63) Indeed, assassination is implicitly permitted within
his moral-legal paradigm. Furthermore, Baretti is already convinced of his innocent on
Haymarket Street, though on a very different basis than he argues for in his *Old Bailey
Speech*. The prostitute on Haymarket Street who jilts Baretti by implying with here
derogatory words that he lacks masculine vigor deserved to get what she got. And most
Italians would agree.

As if the parallels up to this point were not adequate to make his crime seem a
real life enactment of an established cultural phenomenon, Baretti also confesses that the
sufficient provocation to set an Italian off-kilter might appear to an English audience as
slight. Italians are imbued “such quick feelings, that even a disrespectful word or glance
from an equal will suddenly kindle a good number of them, and make them fall upon one
another with their knives.” (60-61) Baretti here is attributing the very kind of excessive
retaliation that, according to many writers of the time, he would display on the night of
October 6th. Baretti’s conviction that a desire for vengeance is a national trait of Italians
is supported in another bilingual moment. Charlotte Lennox’s *Shakespeare Illustrated*
(London, 1753-4) includes a comment on Shakespeare’s villain Iago. Donald Gallup
surnisues that Baretti wrote or helped write the following gloss: “Iago was a Soldier, it is
ture, but he was also an Italian: he was born in a Country remarkable for the deep Art,
Cruelty, and revengeful Temper of its inhabitants. To have painted an Italian injured, or
under a Suspicion of being injured, and not to have shewn him revengeful, would have
been mistaking his character.” While Baretti does not supply any examples of injuries,
one imagines he is thinking of affronts like being called a “women-hater” or a “French
buggerer.” At this point in the debate with Sharp, Baretti seems to have completely
reversed his views on the Italian national character as tranquil, passive and, returning to
the epithet from the Sessions paper, “humane.”

Even more remarkably, it seems to me, Baretti offers in his *Appendix* the first in a
series of arguments involving the legal philosophy and indicating a more than passing
interest in crimes and punishments. Baretti turns the focus of the argument from the fiery
temperament of Italians to the distinction in law between murder and manslaughter,
between “premeditated murder” and killing without *mal prepense*. Before Baretti had to
construct a case in his own trial for murder, he was evidently familiar with the
terminology of murder. He insists that by murder he has in mind (and, surely, Sharp did
as well) a specific crime, as “your law proceedings stile it, *killing with malice prepense*:

---

[when] they are given to kill in consequence of a slow blood-thirsty revenge, or from avarice, or from some other motives \(\text{(Appendix, 28)}\)

There may be murders in Italy, he grants Sharp, but they are excusable or justifiable insofar as they are done without planning, unlike the genuine murder, like the one Macbeth commits. In the next chapter, we will explore this distinction between two types of killing, a subject which was much in the minds of legal theorists in the 1760s and 1770s. For Baretti, there is a clear dichotomy between two ways of killing, the second presented as considerably more vicious and criminal than the first. Italians may be inclined to killing, but they are not given to murder, properly defined as the “consequence of long previous deliberations.” Baretti writes: “Their natural fieryness does not imply that they are, as [Sharp] says (p. 130 of his \textit{Letters} \textit{prone to murder}); and his emphatical repeating of the words \textit{assassin} and \textit{assassination} ought only to have taken place upon his proving, that they are of a treacherous disposition, and apt to stab each other in consequences of a long previous deliberation. \(\text{(Appendix, 27-28)}\) This is an excellent moment in the debate, because it shows Baretti throwing Sharp’s word, “assassination,” back in the face of his opponent in an attempt to embarrass or shame him, as if he deserves punishment.

Baretti’s disagreement with Sharp at this point hinges on a narrow set of operating terms. He now objects only to Sharp’s assertion that Italians committed murder without provocation or killed with a slow deliberation. This, he is certain, they do not do. “When a reader is told, that a nation is \textit{prone to murder}, and \textit{addicted to assassination},” Baretti continues, “he instantly understands, by the words murder and assassination, \textit{premeditated slaughter}.” \(\text{(29)}\) Baretti believes it false to say that the Italians are “a
people *prone to murder,*” but is willing to accept a modified view: if enraged by fury, Italians will be unable to resist the desire to get retribution, and to get it by stabbing. Here Baretti reveals yet more familiarity with legal distinctions that, a year later, he will have to reconsider even more attentively. “I am told, that some difference is made in the law of England,” he writes, “between such cases and murder upon premeditation.” (30)

Interestingly, Sharp never insisted on which of the two classes of murders occurred more frequently in Italy. Knives and bloody stabbings are still central, as Baretti is left only objecting to the motive for the crime. Baretti advances the idea that the Italian kills only when forced to by an uncontrolled passion, namely, when being “seized by anger.” Sharp, on the other hand, in the course of the debate clarifies his earlier position, concurring that the only kind of assassination he ever heard of in Italy was the sudden falling upon each other with their knives, and stabbing each other when they are seized by anger. (*View,* 29) Baretti concludes not by commending the “touchy temper,” but rather by seeing in the crimes the “extenuations,” and the circumstances by which the crime is justifiable and excusable. Baretti leaves the subject of assassination and turns to correcting Sharp’s mistaken impressions of Tuscany, but is pulled back to it once more, as if it is a topic he cannot let rest: “But let us come back to our *diabolical assassins,* as Mr. Sharp expresses it.” (*Account,* 68) Having dealt with the crime, Baretti was to discuss the punishment. He observes that the legal system in Italy is inefficient and sluggish: “Murderers in Italy are not brought quickly enough to punishment, through a want of activity in their prosecution” (70) Baretti demonstrates a familiarity with the issues that Cesare Beccaria presents in Ch. 19 of *Dei delitti e delle pene,* “Prontezza della pena” [On the Advantages of Immediate Punishment]. Since “Italy is parceled out into
many sovereignties,” Baretti observes, to escape punishment, one need only commit the crime on the border between two sovereignties, and then run away, escaping the “magistrate, be they ever so vigilant.” (69) If Baretti has not been reading Beccaria, he surely had some similar thoughts on the subject. He would agree with Beccaria when he writes: [The more immediately, after the commission of a crime, a punishment is inflicted, the more just and useful it will be.] “Quanto la pena sarà più pronta e più vicina al delitto commesso, ella sarà tanto più giusta e tanto più utile.”

In yet another remarkable irony, Baretti concludes his argument in the Account by observing that, despite the numbers of English men of dubious character in Italy on the Grand Tour, he has never read in a single paper of an Italian killing an Englishman.

Before long, Baretti himself will find his way onto the police reports, for assassinating an Englishman, the first such case that he read about in twenty years:

Let me then conclude this chapter with observing, that I have now been for seventeen years a constant reader of the English news-papers: that in this long space of time more than ten thousand Englishmen (masters and servants) have been running up and down Italy, and the greatest part of them certainly not the best men that this country produces with regard to morals and prudence. Yet can any of my readers recollect of having read in the news-papers, for these seventeen years past, of any Englishman treacherously murdered in that land, so famous for its frequent murders and customary assassinations? (75)

Though he is found innocent, his name will shortly be broadcast over the newspapers, as he becomes the most famous Italian murderer in London. Baretti brings up the issue of the death penalty, much in the air since the publication of Beccaria’s treatise, claiming that in England murderers are hanged, while in Italy they are “confine[d] to a galley.” He gives the illustration of a man wrongfully accuses of a murder with a breadknife that shows the origins of the opposition to the death penalty in Italy:
It happened once in Venice, that a baker was found near a man who had been stabbed. A knife was sticking into the corpse, and the baker happened to have a scabbard in his pocket which fitted the knife most exactly. Upon this the poor fellow was condemned and hanged, thou quite innocent of the murder, as it was proved a little time after his execution. From this accident, a custom arose in Venice, that before sentence was passed upon any convicted criminal, an officer, appointed for that purpose, cried to the judges, *Ricordatevi del povero fornaro*, Remember the poor baker.” (*Account, 71*)

Given this depiction of Italians as more sensitive to the complexity of criminal acts,

Baretti’s choice of a jury of Englishmen seems somewhat dangerous. This anecdote would indicate another reason why Baretti felt confident a jury of half foreigners would reduce his risk. He raises the question of the death penalty and the mandatory life sentence: “whether it is better to put to death all such criminals, or confine them in a galley, generally for life, as it is done by the law of Italy.” (*Appendix, 30*)

As he deliberates on punishments, Baretti is engaged in a constant reflection on cultural difference and national identity. For example, he notes that an Italian “is not so easily arrested as an Englishmen” when he is “conscious that he will be hanged or sent to the gallies.” (*Account, 69*) He will “fight in his own defense most desperately until he dies,” presumably the Englishman. Baretti even sites a recent event exposing the cultural diversity with regard to murder: “The English have lately had an instance of the Italian fury in such cases; and cannot, as yet, have forgot the terrible resistance made by two Italian sailors, who broke from Maidstone jail.”

Sharp had been shocked to discover that “the frequency of assassination is to be attributed to the great facility which delinquents have in finding sanctuaries, as every church and holy place there is a sanctuary, and because of the great remissness, both of law and persecution.” (*Appendix 47*) On this point, Baretti has not disagreements with Sharp: “I own, and agree, that murderers in Italy are not brought quickly enough to
punishment, through a want of activity in their prosecutions. Excepting Piedmont, where justice, in case of murder, is exerted with tolerable dispatch, in all the parts of Italy I have visited, the execution of the laws is too remiss, in my opinion.” (Account, 68) Perhaps Badini’s outrage was greater because he came from the Piedmont.

Clearly, a full year before the murder in Haymarket, the question of murder was very much on Giuseppe Baretti’s mind, and he had read—or heard—enough about the law regarding homicide to engage in heated discussions about crime rates, sluggish prosecutions, and the death penalty. Amazingly, Baretti’s former interest in and views on murder were never brought up in the case at the Old Bailey, though his emphasis on humanity (and the justification of crime by provocation) seem modeled on what he wrote down over a year before.

THE ENGLISH PRACTICE OF BOXING

What did Samuel Sharp really say in the Letters about the Italian national character? Sharp brings up the subject of violence and crime in only four of the Letters: Three letters from Naples (XXX and XXXII dated January 1766 and XXXVIII dated March 1766) and one written in May from Turin (LII). What provocation had he given Joseph Baretti? Had he really presented Italy as a nation of assassins?

Rather than being general comments on Italians, Sharp’s points relate to specific places, like Naples. “I have in some of my letters mentioned how often murderers escape unpunished, and have assigned it as the obvious reason, why murders are so much more frequent in Naples than London.” (Letters, 128) Sharp recounts how a gentleman he met

---

256 References to the second edition, Letters from Italy Describing the Customs and Manners of that Country, in the years 1765, and 1766 (London, 1767): XXX (128-133); XXXII (136-142); XXXVIII (170-177); LII (284-288).
in Naples questioned a local Magistrate about the murder rate in the city. The Magistrate observed candidly, “the preceding week the populace had been very orderly, for that only four murders had been committed.” (130) Aware that such a figure will seem an exaggeration, Sharp gives the reader his Italian source: “I have this account from very good authority, a Neapolitan, of great birth, and a high station, who attests it to be a fact.” Sharp attributes the number of murders also to the complex legal process, which involves “the intervention of a Scrivano (Attorney) both on the side of the prosecutor and the delinquent, the one of which states the accusation, and the other the defence.” The haphazard legal system involves “a very loose vague manner of deciding causes of this nature, and which must leave a door open to a thousand subterfuges, chicaneries, and villanies.” (131) Because of this procedure, “justice is often eluded, either absolutely, or for a length of time; and the delays of criminal causes become as tedious as the delays of civil causes.” Sharp provides a grim picture of Naples here, though London is also not a perfect place:

> It must be of the precariousness of punishment, that this city furnishes many more delinquents, in proportion to its dimensions, than our wicked London. I think there are in the prisons here, about four or five thousand (suppose two or three thousand) besides about two thousand in the galleys, lying in the harbour. Those in the galleys are chained two and two, and may be thought to suffer from lying on the decks; but their condition is far preferable to that of many of the poor, who lye in the streets. (128)

He apologizes for not being always able to “write panegyric” on “the morals of the lower people.” (132) Sharp is expressing a common opinion of his time, that London was by a very safe city by comparison.

Sharp points out, moreover, that there seems to be in the Italians a distressing indifference to the crime of murder, and though the lethal knife fight is done suddenly,
the killer shows no remorse, no fear of punishment. The surgeon observes a “cold-blooded” reaction to a murder done in the heat of passion:

Perhaps, however, prone the populace are to so atrocious a deed as murder, the relation may be exaggerated; yet certainly they do not here hold it in such horror as we do in the colder climates. A young Gentleman informs me, that, on the road to this place from Rome, he saw, at a distance, a scuffle amongst some postillions, in which it proved afterwards, one of them was stabbed dead. Upon an inquiry into the occasion of the tumult, his messenger was coolly answered, that it was a *colpo di coltello* (a stab with a knife). (131)

Like a scientist, Sharp wants to locate the causes of this behavior. Letter XXXII begins with a description of the burial practices in Naples, which involve displaying the diseased body through the public crowd to the church, a practice which Sharp argues hardens the hearts of “people, with so much brimstone in their veins as the Neapolitan mob have.” (137) Rather than finding ways to “terrify murderers,” “the police had cultivated this art; for the most atrocious parricides, are seldom punished here.” (137) Sharp’s observations suggest that capital punishment was rare even before Beccaria, at least in Naples: “I think the last four years have furnished but four examples of executions; and, as if a fatality were to attend all their judgments, two of the four proved afterwards to have been innocent. If a murderer touch a church wall (and many walls are a church wall in this city) before he is seized by the officers, holy church will not admit him to be hanged.” (138)

In Florence, the safest of the great Italian cities for Sharp, an “assassin and another delinquent” can be seen on church steps all day long, and “it was esteemed a matter of religion in the neighbourhood to supply these wretches every day with a sufficiency of provision.” (288) The Italians, in order to finally bring the man to justice, must enact martial law and close down the church temporarily:
Not long ago, there was a murder, of a very atrocious nature, committed in that city, and the perpetrator, as usual, flew to a church for his asylum; upon which, the magistracy caused it to be surrounded night and day, with a guard sufficient to present any one from going to Mass there, and consequently from carrying him any sustenance. In a few days, the criminal, from a certainty of present death, by starving, threw himself into the hands of justice, to take his trial, when he met with his deserts. (Letters, 288)

Sharp notes that Mr. Hamilton was sheltering no fewer than “five or six murderers” who had sought sanctuary within his wall, all of whom were discharged the next day. He argues that “the frequency of stabbing in these countries” is not the result merely of the “ungovernableness of the passions.” (288) The law itself is entirely too lenient: “Here, besides the sanctuary which delinquents find in churches and holy places, there is another still more open sanctuary, I mean, the remissness both of law and prosecution.” His analysis is directed to the legal system, not the innate character of Italians.

Sharp’s describes of a sluggish and bureaucratic court system, hampered by haphazard investigations and a pernicious code of silence:

A slow and tedious judicial system also discourages those who witness murders from participating in the apprehension of the evildoer: Then take with you, that if one man stab another in the sight of ten witnesses, they all decamp, and leave the coast clear to the assassin, because the murderer and all the spectators, who remain with the corpse, are indiscriminately carried to prison; and justice for many days, and sometimes weeks, does not enquire, or at least distinguish, which is the criminal, and which are the witnesses. You will not wonder at the difficulty of procuring evidence upon these occasions. (Letters, 138)

A soldier was executed a week ago, Sharp writes, though the “hardened dog” had spent six years in prison, “both he and his crime were forgotten long ago,” and clearly a more “recent example” would have “made more impression on this barbarous populace.” (Letters, 139).

Two months later, Sharp wrote on murder again in Letter XXXVIII, though this time finding the cause for assassinations not in the legal corruption or absence of
effective punishments. In this letter, Sharp proposes that the cause of the knife fights is not in the penal system, nor the innate character of Italians, but rather in the simple fact that Italians lack knowledge of the “English practice of boxing.” (Letters, 174) He is convinced that, if Italians simply knew how to box, they would stop reaching for stilettos. In what might be one of the earliest hints of the expression “fight like a man,” Sharp records the hysterical sight of an Italian engaged in a fistfight: “The other day I saw a fellow six foot high, and very brawny, assault another with his fist, but in so awkward and womanly a manner as made not only me but the ladies laugh. Were you to see such a man at Broughton’s, you would bet on his head, whoever was his antagonist; but, I dare say, an Etonean boy of seventeen or eighteen would have boxed him to a jelly.” (174)

Many sciences and arts began in Renaissance Italy, but boxing was not one of them.257 What Sharp says here in this letter is absolutely true, as the English are recognized by all historians of sport as the originators of modern boxing. When James Figg became English heavyweight champion in 1719, he could and he did hail himself Champion of the World. London was the location of the first boxing club, or Academy as it was called, and throughout the eighteenth-century fights were held at a theater on Oxford Street. Before Figg, boxing little resembled the sport understood today, but by the time Sharp and Baretti are slugging it out, the “sweet science of bruising” (as Henry Fielding called it) was a popular spectator sport and an English institution. The second heavyweight champ, Jack Broughton, not only invented boxing gloves, he wrote the first official book of rules and regulations in 1734. They outlawed some of the gorier aspects

that the sport had acquired, such as "hitting below the belt," during the "bare-knuckle era." Sharp was convinced that boxing was a step forward for civilization.

In Italy, on the other hand, the first boxing match in the modern sense occurred in Verona in 1909. The Figg of Italy was Pietro Boine, a Genovese who the first national club in Milan. The Federazione Pugilistica Italiana was not organized until 1916; the first National Championship was held in 1920. The first Italian World Champion was Primo Carnera, a hulk from Udine who immigrated to the United States under the sponsorship by Benito Mussolini.

Surely there were fistfights in Italy before the twentieth century, but all evidence suggests that Italians, like Baretti, neither knew how to box nor thought very much about the sport. In The War of the Fists: Popular Culture and Public Violence in Late Renaissance Venice, Robert Davis examines the guerre dei pugni fought on Venice’s bridges. Occasionally these fights involved two bare-knuckled brawlers, but usually the bridge was crowded with pugilists whose aims and methods were not Boughton’s. The goal was to dishonor the opponent by sending him into the canal, using whatever means possible. These matches, furthermore, are best viewed as part of larger factional rivalries; more commonly, they were fought between squads of fighters equipped with canes who were attempting to simulate a chaotic war. The fist wars occurred with a great deal of preparation and theatricality.258 Neither in Venice, nor anywhere else, was boxing approached as a professional sport, much less a way of personal self-defense. Beyond these bouts, there is little evidence of Italian boxing before World War I. In his attacks on Sharp, Baretti confronts every assertion the Englishman makes on violent

---

258 Robert C. Davis, The War of the Fists: Popular Culture and Public Violence in Late Renaissance Venice (New York, 1994). Although some individuals were singled out as champions, they fought for “the pride of the neighborhood.” (95)
crimes and punishments in Italy, but is completely silent on the point about boxing. On October 6, 1769, it would have been unlikely that an Italian like Baretti would have been able to defend himself with fisticuffs.

In fact, boxing was so much an English tradition by 1769 (and knife fighting so rare) that the Old Bailey Proceedings of the middle part of the century reveal almost no stabbings in London, except for a handful by Greeks, Portuguese, and Italians, such as the Antonio de Silva trial. (OBSP May 6, 1761) In another we see the contrast between England and Italy: “By giving him a stroke with a stick once, which he never resented; and once he was playing with one of his countrymen, his countrymen took out a clasp knife, and made use of some language that I did not understand. The contrast is between the knife, seen as a reprehensible continental weapon, and proper English boxing: “I will not use that thing, but I'll box you in the English way, and reprimanded his countryman for taking the knife out.” (OBSP, October 19, 1763) George Colman and Bonnell Thornton, writing for The Connoisseur, combined the anti-French prejudice we saw in Chapter One with this boxing-stabbing opposition, satirizing a Frenchman so effeminate that he is afraid to stab a beefsteak:

The dextrous use of the fist is a truly British exercise: and the sturdy English have been as much renowned for their boxing as their Beef; both which are by no means suited to the watery stomachs and weak sinews of their enemies the French. A Frenchman, who piddles on a fricassee of frogs, can no more encounter with an Englishmen, who feeds upon Beef, than the frog in the fable could swell her little body to the size of an ox… Indeed, we can never hope, that any of our modern heroes would attempt to fix a blow under the ribs, when they are afraid of plunging a knife into a surloin.

The use of English fists, therefore, as honorable as it seemed, was not on every occasion a cautious way to resolve a dispute. Thomas Forbes, a Yale Medical doctor specializing

\footnote{The Connoisseur (Thursday, August 22, 1754)}
in the history of forensics, examined the London coroner’s reports that have survived from the 1700s. His evidence clearly shows that stabbings were quite rare in London, even if he included stabbings with skewers, chisels, and pitchforks. In London in the time of Baretti, more deaths were caused by punches or kicks (or bad falls in the course of a fistfight) than with firearms or a pointed blades. On September 7, 1774, for example, Oliver Davis was branded and discharged, after being found guilty for manslaughter, after a consensual boxing match in a tavern went terribly wrong, as the proprietor testified:

They called for some rum and milk; I shewed them into a shuffle board room; they did not like it, but went into another room; when I brought the rum up they were stripped and got fighting; I thought the black had the advantage at first; he knocked the prisoner down and offered to strike him when he was down; the prisoner got up, and they went to it again, and the prisoner knocked the black down; the black got up again and said he would have another round; the prisoner then knocked the deceased down again, and he never rose any more. (OBSP, September, 7, 1774)

In another case, Richard Pritchard “was indicted for the Murder of William Fenwick, by beating, bruising, and throwing of him to the Ground on Nov. 25 of which he instantly dy'd.” This is quite a different situated transaction than “The Haymarket Affair,” as the participants “mutually began Boxing,” though the end result was a bloody death.

It appear'd that the Deceas'd being drunk at the Baptist Head-Tavern, in White-Cross Street; he begun a quarrel with the Prisoner. and they fought. The Prisoner beat him, notwithstanding which he challeng'd the Prisoner to fight him next Day. and Wagers being laid on both sides, they agreed. Moorfields was the Scene of Action. They enter'd, shook Hands, and mutually began Boxing...Thrice the Prisoner struck the Deceas'd down by a Blow near the left Ear, from the last of which Falls he was not able to rise again; but lay panting, never spoke more, lived but an Hour after. Mr. Smith the Surgeon depos'd, that he open'd the Head, and found above 2 Ounces of extravasted Blood spilt on the Brains; which was the Cause of his Death, and did believe the breaking of the Blood Vessel was occasion by a Blow. tho' such Effects are common in Apoplectic, Fits, but the

---

Blood is hardly every spilt in so large a Quantity. The Jury brought in their Verdict Accidental Death. (OBSP, March 2, 1726)

On other occasions, the boxing match would get out of hand, and the cause of death might be an accidental head injury was the end result of “a sudden Quarrel, the Occasion of which none of the Evidences could give any Account of”:

Richard Wells, of Kensington, was indicted for the Murther of Samuel Biggs, by throwing him against a Cart-Wheel, and giving him one mortal Wound in the Head, the That the Prisoner and Deceas'd were Boxing together, and that the deceas'd threw Wells twice before Wells threw him, that in their Fighting together the Prisoner threw the deceased against the Iron of a Cart-wheel that stood in the Yard, and his Head was cut very much, and he was not able to raise himself up, nor spoke any more after that Fall. (OBSP, June 2, 1731)

In Letter XXXVIII, Sharp seems to believe in a universal propensity toward violence and objects to the fact that, in Italy, this violent energy can find no outlet other than with lethal weapons. Violence is a natural human tendency, according to Sharp. “Men must have some kind of vent for their indignation, some salvo for their honour; and it is happy, when the worst thing a man does in his wrath, is the giving of a slap on the face, or a punch in the stomach, to the offending party:” (174) Unlike boxing, which can lead to accidental deaths, fighting with knives is almost sure to bring death; the violence is quick and lethal. “Here angry men immediately have recourse to the knife, and stab in an instant. It is amazing how many assassinations there are in Italy, almost all of them the effects of quarrels.” (Letters, 174-175) Sharp goes on to record a conversation he had with Voltaire on the same subject, in which the French author applauded the English for their sense of restraint, boxing regulations, and a kind of “mob” rule, which prevents any side in a scuffle from taking an unfair advantage, resorting to the use of deadly weapons, using a weapon against an unarmed man, or even hitting a man when he is down.
[Voltaire] appealed to me, whether it were not true, that when two fellows fight in the street, if one throw another down the other, the standing combatant do not permit his antagonist to rise, and come to a second attack, scorning any base advantage of him in that predicament; nay, continued he, is not this generous principle so well established amongst the mob, that were a revengeful man, by chance, to attempt any unfair cruelty, whilst he was superior, the spectators would fly to relief of the distressed combatant.  

(Letters, 175-176)

This could explain why a mob formed around Baretti that night in Haymarket. Boxing appears as a social sport of self-control, in which the sides compete on equal footing, while knife fighting is the outcome of loss of self-control and a dishonorable inequity with regards to weapons. It is particularly reprehensible, Voltaire and Sharp imply, when one of the two combatants is unarmed and the other has a concealed dagger, as seems to have been frequently the case in Italy (and a year later in London). “You may ridicule, said he, if you please, the manners of an English mob,” Sharp writes (quoting Voltaire), “but, in the very instance you have pitched upon, they shew a species of honour not known in any other part of the world.”

The next time the subject arises, Sharp finds himself in Turin at the end of his Italian tour, writing a letter on the “different geniuses of the Italian and the English common people.” (284) This analysis helps one appreciate how much the fact that Baretti engaged with his assailants using a knife became a matter of considerable debate. Sharp writes, “I find, by my experience here, that the sudden indignation and transports of a choleric man, must be immediately gratified, and when a bloody nose given on the spot, or the gentle and cooler method of challenging the offender to strip, does not satisfy, assassination will take place, and stabbing will be the substitute of boxing.” (284) Although he sees the assassinations as “owing to the ungovernableness of the passions,” Sharp returns to the subject of the corruption in the Italian criminal justice system,
recounting how the number of violent crimes diminished substantially, as soon as more rigid laws were established and criminals felt the risk of immediate and just punishments. (286) Sharp writes: “Mr. Murray, our late resident at Venice, upon his first arrival there, loudly proclaimed, that should any Englishman be assassinated during his residentship, no expence, no interposition, should prevent his bring the criminal to consign punishment: The Venetian common people are all apprised of his resolution, and that no Englishmen has been murdered, he ascribes to this measure.” (286-287) In Naples, a similar change of policy was instituted by Sir James Gray, who had been instrumental “in bringing the assassin of an Englishmen to the gallows, since which time there have been no more killings.” (287) Sharp ends his letter with an anecdote on the unusual efforts made in Florence, where “fewer crimes are committed than in any other city of Italy,” to bring a criminal to justice:

Not long ago, there was a murder, of a very atrocious nature, committed in that city and the perpetrator, as usual, flew to a church for his asylum; upon which, the magistracy caused it to be surrounded night and day, with a guard sufficient to prevent any one from going to Mass there, and consequently from carrying him any sustenance. (Letters, 288)

In the View, Sharp summarizes the entire debate relative to assassination (38-44). “Mr. Sharp has drawn heavy censures upon him from Mr. Baretti, for the account he has given us of the frequent murders in Italy.” Sharp “ascribes the frequency of assassinations to the protection of the Church,” to a legal system that allows those seized to escape, to the lack of capital punishment, but “above all the practice of drawing out knifes in their sudden quarrels and stabbing instantly.” (38) Mr. Sharp asserts, that this is the “only kind of assassination he heard of, and is known amongst the lower people only,” and he stands “far…from taxing the whole body of the people, with being
naturally inclined to murder, which Mr. Baretti upraids him with.” What is especially fascinating in the View is Sharp’s level-headed skepticism regarding any sort of discussion relative to the “character” of a nation.

I think Mr. Sharp has no where attempted to give a general character of the Italians. Probably he knew the difficulty of such an attempt, and how liable it would be to cavils, however well executed. Therefore he has neither said that the Italians are learned, or ignorant, witty, or dull, brave, or cowardly, merciful, or cruel, vindictive, or forgiving, handsome, or homely; in short, he has mentioned but one character, which he ascribes to the whole body of the people, from the highest to the lowest; I mean the universal practice of sobriety, even to a total exemption from the vice of drunkenness. (View, 59)

Sharp further argues that Baretti is the one given to making specious generalizations about a nation’s character. “If Mr. Sharp has avoided to give a general character of the Italians, Mr. Baretti has supplied that deficiency in page 374 of his Frusta Letteraria.” (60-1) Sharp then supplies a translation of a passage that effectively undermines Baretti’s stance as defender of the Italians:

But alas!—it is a truth that our Italy swarms on every side, with people, who not only mistake insolence and impudence for vivacity and courage; impoliteness and rudeness for frankness and sincerity; nastiness and beastliness in conversation, for pleasantry and gallantry; but even lies, falsehood, and sometimes treachery itself, for acuteness of parts, strength of understanding, and superiority of wisdom, or at least for superiority of knowledge of the world. I would bring, says Mr. Baretti, a thousand and a thousand proofs of this observation, &c. &c. (View, 62)

Baretti will try to defend himself on grounds that he was writing in the persona of the critic, but he seems to have already lost the argument on paper. Sharp paraphrases Baretti as “Italians have such quick feelings, that even a disrespectful word, or glance, from an equal, will suddenly kindly a good number of them, and make them fall upon one another with their knives.” (View 39) Furthermore, Sharp clarifies his position by pointing out that English men are as capable of rash actions, but fortunately they have developed a “method” that allows their “passions” to be released without bloodshed.” He
writes: “Englishmen must give a vent to their passions, as well as Italians; and had they no other method of gratifying their revenge but by stabbing, murder might be as common in England as in Italy.” (38-39)

I am not the first to realize that Baretti seems to have been struggling with an issue that he could not unravel or smooth out, for several attentive journalists of the time recognized the “inconsistencies of Baretti.”

“The Author seems more disposed to abuse and cavil with Mr. Sharp, than to give the reader the satisfaction which he might naturally expect from a native; and his too warm zeal for the honour of his country has buried him into several very palpable contradictions,” wrote the London Magazine.

One contemporary reader attacked Baretti for “absurdities, inconsistencies, and contradictions, which are to be found in every page.” Sharp, a gentleman and scholar, shows Baretti “a literary harlequin, but destitute of skill and abilities to perform the part,” wrote The Critical Review.

Sir James Edward Smith, in A Sketch of a Tour on the Continent, in the Years 1786 and 1787, Vol. 3 (London, 1793), captured the general consensus: “I believe the truth on the whole lies between Mr. Sharp and Mr. Baretti; but with respect to intention and temper, the work of the former gives a much more favourable impression than that of the latter.”

Samuel Johnson himself was undecided on which of the two books was more valuable: “‘What book of travels, Sir, would you advise me to read, previously to my setting off upon a tour to France and Italy?’ ‘Why, Sir, as to France, I know no book worth a groat: and as to Italy, Baretti paints the fair side, and Sharp the foul; the truth, perhaps, lies somewhere between the

---

261 See the “Animadversions on Mr. Baretti’s Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy, &c.” The London Magazine (April, 1768).
262 London Magazine (1768), 157-60.
263 The Critical Review (July, 1768).
Even Jane Austen had to take a side on the Baretti-Sharp battle, writing to Cassandra Southampton on February 20, 1807, "We are reading Baretti’s other book, and find him dreadfully abusive of poor Mr. Sharp. I can no longer take his part against you, as I did nine years ago.”

None of the literary irony in the Baretti-Sharp debate was lost to the writer of a commentary in the *General Biography* (London, 1801), who was no doubt expressing the views shared with than one spectator at the trial: “Yet [Baretti] did not escape censure for the readiness with which he had recourse to a mortal weapon to repel an assault, which, in so public a place, and at so early an hour (between six and seven), could scarcely have endangered his person; and the fact was though an unfortunate example of that propensity to stabbing which he had taken pains to refute, when brought as a charge against the Italians by Mr. Sharp.” (6) *The Annual Register* gave Baretti the benefit of a hearing, on account of his love for England: “Mr. Baretti has the most right to call for a favourable hearing of his country’s cause; because no foreigner seems so delighted with our own country.” (451) But Sharp didn’t realize the adversary he was up against: “Mr. Sharp, however, is peculiarly unlucky to have given his sentiments of this kind in writing of Italy, while such an Italian as Mr. Baretti was resident, whose attentive industry has enabled him to express all his Italian indignation in as good English as ever was wrote.” (452)

The first Italian translation of Baretti’s Account appeared as *Gl’Italiani o sia Relazione degli usi e costumi d’Italia*. Published in Milan 1818, it is a literal and accurate rendering and, although no indication is given to the reader that the work is abridged, these opening chapters, crucial as they are in setting up the attack on Sharp, are not
included. As was common in Italian-English translation, the work was produced through a French intermediary. By the third page, drastic editing begins. In what appears to have been a very conscious decision, the translator jumps from page 16 to the beginning of Chapter 5 on page 56, without any commentary and without mentioning that the work is abridged.

One may conclude that this portion, by then, had become either somewhat dated or otherwise no longer interesting. The entire section on Sharp’s lack of knowledge of Italian, proven by Baretti with textual details and footnotes, is eliminated, “senza sapere sillaba d’italiano” (3) What Baretti foregrounds as the principle discredit that should have “awed him into silence,” is glanced over. It is difficult to explain this omission of material that was considered interesting enough to be quoted at great length in the newspapers, an argument that would thread its way through all four works, and eventually cast a haunting literary quality to the subsequent events in Baretti’s life.

By 1818, was the subject of Italians with knives considered too volatile for discussion? Or was it a subject which the editor thought best to leave in silence? James Edward Smith, in A Sketch of a Tour on the Continent, in the Years 1786 and 1787 (London, 1793) would convey perhaps one explanation: “[Baretti’s] attack, though acrimonious, is not always ill-founded; but the author in vain attempts to rescue the reputation of Venetian morals, or of his country in general, on the heads of cicisbeism and assassination; two subjects on which the less is said by an Italian the better.” (264)

THE STABBING ITALIAN
In the Wadsworth Atheneum there is a work by the painter Gaspare Traversi (1722?-1770) known as La Rissa [the Quarrel]. On this canvas, two well-dressed young Italians have fallen out over a dispute resulting from some board game, probably chess, and the painter has caught them in action just after the instant of provocation. One man is pulling out his knife. “The background figures spring to the fray in a very notional space,” according to the catalog.264 The picture is quite distinct from the genre scenes one normally associates with eighteenth century art. It has nothing in common with Chardin, Longhi’s genre scenes or Watteau’s pastorals, and perhaps for this reason Traversi, “unquestionably one of Italy’s most important eighteenth-century painters,” remains largely unknown.265 Traversi’s work shows more in common with the Hogarth of The Progress of Cruelty or Industry and Idleness and, not surprisingly, there is evidence he studied Hogarth’s etchings. Traversi paints the scene in close-up, focusing on a range of emotions—from concern to fear to anger.”266

Probably painted sometime in the mid-1760s in Rome or in Traversi’s native Naples, the picture eventually found its way to England: it is entirely possible that it was painted for one of the many English on the Grand Tour or a gentleman in the entourage of Sir William Hamilton, British ambassador to Naples and volcanologist active in the same years.267 The Traversi painting is particularly ambiguous, as it quite early was

264 Jean Codogan, Wadsworth Atheneum Paintings II: Italy and Spain, (Hartford, 1978), 249-250.
266 Zafran, 86. Edgar Peters Bowron situates the painting in the context of 17th century paintings of card players, overlooking the knife as a icon. His suggestion in Naples the picture might have been “intended as comedy—light entertainment with a moral lesson” is in my view unlikely.
267 See Sir William Hamilton’s Antiquités étrusques, Grecques et romaines (London 1766–67) and Observations on Mount Vesuvius (1772).
bought by an Englishmen, and it was a staged scene perhaps constructed to satisfy the prejudices of English viewers.

During the 1760s Traversi was fixated on the subject of Italian homicides, for he delivered at least two other equally intense scenes of knife fights. Another Rissa is in the collection of the Museo Nazionale di San Martino in Naples shows a card table is upset as a dagger. A third is Traversi stabbing scene is in the Musée du Louvre. In the violent heat of the scene, the man to the left reaches to unsheathe his dagger. Traversi decides to depict the unpremeditated clash of emotions and sudden rage, erupting from within an innocuous pastime as harmless as strolling down the street slightly drunk and humming a favorite tune. Traversi designs the intensity of the glares with complete conviction, and the unsettling chorus of female faces adds a further drama to an already intense scene. The choice of the weapon, here at least, can hardly be thought of as casual. It was not only in literature that we find the image of the passionate Italian, provoked in the midst of a crowd, taking out the stiletto for bloody revenge. And it was not only in the work of English-speaking doctors with fixed ideas.

Carlo Goldoni, the most genial of eighteenth-century Italians, wanted convey the tribulations of fisherman and their wives from the lagoon-town of Chioggia, in the outskirts of Venice. He wrote in dialect Le baruffe chiozzotte [Quarrels of Chioggia]. In the uproarious comedy, first presented in 1762 just before the playwright left for Paris, Goldoni inserts several dramatic occasions to dramatize the habit of reach for knives during altercations. The following is an unsuccessful attempt to translate the funny dialect, with the final line a literal version of the local idiom for the verb to stab:

Beppo: Get out of here, or I’ll smack you.

---

268 Luce sul Settecento: Gaspare Traversi e l’arte del suo tempo in Emilia (Napoli, 2004), 122-123.
Toffolo: Holy cow! I’ll throw a stone at you. (gathering stones)
Beppo: At me, tough guy? (puts his hand to his knife)
Toffolo: Leave me alone, get lost.
Beppo: Get out, I’m telling you..
Toffolo: I’m not getting out of here, I don’t want to.
Beppo: Get out, or I’ll put a hole in you.269

When an illustrated edition of Goldoni’s *Works* appeared, three engravings illustrated the text. The artist or editor did not pick the scenes of repairing nets, the sewing circle, or the silly seller of the “zucca barucca.” He chose, instead, two of the knife-fight scenes. The third illustration was an interior shot of the lawyer character—Goldoni, too, was a lawyer by training—trying to resolve the disputes, surrounded by the various fed-up wives and knife-wielding fiancés. In another scene, Goldoni shows with comic verve the excesses of violence, as well as a moment of provocation much like we saw in Chapter One, in which denial competes with inquiry into what was said to give offence:

Toffolo: Holy cow they had some knives! Beppe Cospettoni had a fisherman’s knife. Paron Toni he came out with a sword that would chop off the head of a bull, and Titta Nane had one of those switchblades that you keep under your shirt.
Isidoro: Did they give you one? Did they hurt you?
Toffolo: Hell no. They just scared me.
Isidoro: Why’d they threaten you? Why did they want to give you one for?
Toffolo: For nothing.
Isidoro: Did you quarrel? Who said what?
Toffolo: I didn’t say nothing.270

269 The last line is a colorful idiom for “I will stab you.”
Beppo: Va via, che te dago una sberla.
Toffolo: Mare de diana, ve trarò una pierada (raccoglie delle pietre)
Beppo: A mi, galiotto? (mette mano a un coltello)
Toffolo: Lasseme star, lasseme.
Beppo: Va via, che te sbuso. (Act I, Scene X)

270 See also (Act III Scene XVIII). The word “sguèa” is both a dialect word and a unique common noun that signifies a particular knife sold in Padua.
Toffolo: Mare de diana se i ghe n’aveva! Beppe Cospettoni gh’aveva un cortello da pescaore. Paron Toni xe vegnuo fuora con un spadon da taggiare la testa al toro, e Titta Nane ch’aveva una sguèa de quelle che i tien sotto poppe in tartana.
Isidoro: T’hai dà? T’hai ferio?
Toffolo: Made. I m’ha fatto paura.
Isidoro: Per cossa t’hai manazzà? Per cossa te voleveli dar?
Traversi’s and Goldoni’s image of the passionate *stabbing Italian*, I will demonstrate in the pages that follow, was by no means confined to the debate between Baretti and Sharp, but returned again and again. It would crop up in a myriad of travel books in the eighteenth century, and the events in Baretti’s popular trial probably did little to diminish the prevalence of the image. The writers were not asserting, as Baretti argued Sharp did, a blanket statement about all Italians being assassins, at least not in every case. Some English writers considered stabbings part of a general moral corruption in Italy, part of the same world that produced the macaronis. For example, Jonathan Swift, writing in *The Intelligencer*, was not unique in recoiling from Italian opera as an “invasion” of Italian vice: “We are over-run with Italian effeminacy, and Italian nonsense. “ He continued, “An old gentleman said to me, that many years ago, when the practice of an unnatural vice grew so frequent in London, that many were prosecuted for it, he was sure it would be a forerunner of Italian operas, and singers; and then we should want nothing but stabbing or poisoning, to make us perfect Italians.” (14-15)

On the whole, however, the literary evidence shows that the image of the “Italian with a stiletto” did not arise from Anti-Catholic prejudice, nor was it merely a figment of the collective English imagination, residue from Renaissance plays. Generally speaking, the evidence does not biased reportage. What Sharp and others were observing occurring on the streets of the cities of Italy was not infused with general anti-Mediterranean fear. By using an abundance of quotations, I hope to convince the reader that this image was

---

Toffolo: Per gnente.
Isidoro: Aveu crià? Ghe xe stà parole?
Toffolo: Mi no gh’ho dito gnente. (Atto II, Scena I)
not a stereotype faithfully reproduce, while remaining safe from accusations that I wish to circulate bad publicity about Italy and Italians.

“Many are the Murders that are committed in the Streets of Rome; for except in the time of the Carnivals and High Festivals, no Light is to be seen all over the City after dusk,” wrote the anonymous author of *A Short Account of a Late Journey to Tuscany, Rome, and other parts of Italy* (London, 1741). He continued, “They who have occasion to go abroad at that time, run the Hazard of being assassinated; yet when Murder is committed; little Notice is taken of it, unless it should happen to some Person of pretty good Interest.” (59) The passage is marked with pencil in the British Library copy, an indication perhaps of one English reader’s pause over the salient point. If the Haymarket was dangerous, Italian streets were no better.

Many travelers who went far beyond Italy discovered that of all the European countries, Italy was the most unsafe. Thomas Nugent, in *The Grand Tour; or, a Journey Through the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and France*, Vol. 3, (London, 1778) urged wealthy travelers to proceed with great caution when on the highways of the continent, not so much in fear of thieves as of assassins: “If this be a salutary advice in all countries, ‘tis especially so in Italy, where tho’ the public roads are not much infested with highwaymen, yet there are a great many villains who are ready to murder or assassinate a stranger in private houses, when they happen to have a prospect of some considerable prey.” (38) Karl Ludwig Freiherr von Pöllnitz in his *Memoirs* (London, 1739) confirms Baretti-Sharp must have been already circulating: “Tis true, that the Populace are very apt
to make use of the *Stiletto*, but this is owing to the too great Indulgence of Justice.” 271

Many of the very points discussed above – crime and social class, problems with the justice system, sanctuaries, slow justice, Italian fury – were expressed far and wide a good thirty years earlier. Like Sharp, he attributes the high murder rate in part to infrequent capital punishment and light sentencing practices. “A Man convicted of Murder for the first Time is condemn’d to the Gallies,” he writes, “tho’ in some Cases indeed he is only banish’d from the City, and the Ecclesiastical State; and then, after two or three Years Absence, he pays 50 Crowns, and returns to Rome.” (74) But such behavior, we are assured in a claim that Baretti echoes, is limited to the “Dregs of the People.” (75)

Similarly, Johann Georg Keyssler, in his *Travels through Germany, Bohemia, Hungary, Switzerland, Italy, and Lorrain*, Vol. 3, (London, 1756-57), was discussing the peasants in Naples when he struck an unsettling note of caution: “A traveler should by all means carry fire-arms with him on these occasions; those people being trained up to rob and murder, and accustomed to wear at their sides large *couteaux*. (147) Keyssler was convinced that Italy was a particularly violent place to travel, and not only if one ventured in Rome or Naples, generally considered the cities of high risk. His position on crime in Venice is remarkably similar to Sharp’s, as he observes the effort Italians will make to exact revenge:

The inhabitants of Vicenza are charged with being of a more vindictive temper than the rest of the *Italians*; on which account they are commonly called *Gli assassini Vicentini*; i.e. “These Vicentian assassins.” This is certain, that travelers, and especially the Germans, who have here the character of being hot

---

and quarrelsome, should be very careful in every part of Italy to avoid disputes, and especially with the postillions, and other persons of the lower class; for the desire of revenge is such a predominant passion in them, that they have been known to follow a traveler six or eight stages to watch an opportunity of gratifying their malice and revenge.272 (200)

While Keyssler must be exaggerating for effect, his use of the Italian expression would clearly indicate that his viewpoint comes from within, and not from outside, the Italian culture. Likewise, his frank admission to the German tendency to be disputatious does not suggest bigotry. And the location he discusses seems an unlikely place to set a superfluous accusation of the inhabitants’ homicidal tendencies. Surely it is Baretti who is simplifying matters when he writes in the Account, “It is then an absolute fact, that no Englishman was ever assassinated in Venice, as far as living man can remember; and if one was at Padua, the murderer suffered accordingly.” (Account, 51) In Travels through France and Italy (London, 1766), Smollett writes, “I am informed, that both murder and robbery are very frequent in some parts of Piedmont. Even here, when the peasants quarrel in their cups, (which very seldom happens) they draw their knives, and the one infallibly stabs the others.”273

Most of the travelers agreed with Sharp, however, in finding the city of Naples the most dangerous and lax in terms of punishments for proven, heinous crimes. “With respect to the penal laws of Italy; they are so very relaxed, that there seems scarcely a restriction upon murder itself. Naples is an eminent proof of it, a city containing three or four hundred thousand inhabitants, for the most part, more flagitious than any in Europe,

273 Travels through France and Italy, (Dublin, 1766), i. 228.
where seldom a year passes without innumerable assassinations; and yet in this same city, a public execution in a public wonder.”

Some later writers tried to distinguish the more or less safe areas of Italy. Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz, in *A Picture of Italy* (London, 1791), translated into English by Joseph Trapp, asserted that knife-fights were much more common along the seacoast. “The stabbing with knives is a thing which belongs to the customs of the Italian; but they are now less frequent in Tuscany and the territory of the pope, than in Genoa, Naples and Sicily.” (245) Like Sharp, he feels that stricter laws would quickly change matters. “These murderous habits are at present much hemmed in Rome by Spinelli, the present governor of the city. The sbirri go upon patrol as soon as it grows dark, and they are empowered to search the pockets of every common inhabitant whom they meet with in the streets.” If he is found with a knife, he will be arrested, even if “his condition and character put him above every suspicion of this kind.” “This measure is absolutely necessary, for it is no little trick to an Italian to lay in wait for his enemy, and stab him secretly.” (245-256) Richard Joseph Sulivan, in *A View of Nature, in Letters to a Traveller Among the Alps* (London, 1794), writes, “In the kingdom of Naples, I have been confidently assured, and that from an authority I cannot doubt, that at least five thousand assassinations are annually committed.” (430) Some of the reports are very graphic and were meant to shock the reader, such as the following:

A gentleman of Naples, in passing occasionally before the king’s palace, had frequently noticed a man of singular appearance at work. He was chained to some others, and assisted in removing rubbish, and bringing stones for a new building, the foundation of which had just been laid. The man, by having often seen him pass, recollected his person, and always took off his hat, as he found an opportunity. The gentleman, not knowing how to account for his attention, was

---

induced, one day, to inquire the cause of his civility and of his chains. To the first part of the query he answered, in the Neapolitan style, that it was “il suo dover, his duty;” and to the second he said, that he was in that predicament for una minchioneriae, a trifle.” “Ho ammazzata solamente una donna,” said he, “I have only killed a woman.”

Baretti also considered Naples the most violent city in Italy, but argued that most crimes are the result of poverty: “Few of the Italian nations will suffer themselves to be seized by a violent and general rage once in a century, except at Naples, where the want of bread grows quite insupportable” (Account 59)

Various explanations for the number of murders in Italy – ranging from meteorological to historical – appear throughout eighteenth-century sources. In View (1768), Sharp quotes at some length Abbé Richard’s recently released Description of Italy (London, 1768), a work that seems to be addressing exactly what occurred on October 6th, observing that the provocation is frequently a “sort of quarrel” in which the opponents “begin with reviling each other in the most opprobrious manner,” until one of the two strikes. The passage ends with a religious metaphor that, in my view, is used more to highlight the horror of the incident than to tie the episode to some large anti-Catholic position:

The people here are quick and impetuous in their passions; either opposition or jealousy render them furious: One sees people of the lowest order poignard one another with the most determined resolution. They have no other way of fighting, to all appearance: They are more afraid of a punch in the stomach, than a dagger. In this sort of quarrel, they begin with reviling each other in the most opprobrious manner. When they are provoked to the highest degree, then he who is in the greatest passion, draws out his knife, and the other does the same; which of the two strikes first is usually the conqueror, and if he is not wounded, retires as tranquilly, with his nose in his cloak, as if he had just withdrawn from an act of devotion.” (View, 40-41)

Recording a personal experience in Rome in the early 1760s, Richard points out the inverse proportion between the number of murders and the level at outrage they kindle in the public. He adds, as well, another mitigation for murder that will seem very strange to his English readers:

> These bloody scenes are very common at Rome; at least there were twenty of them from December 1761, to May 1762. Passing by the square of the rotunda, I saw two peasants quarrelling, and in an instant one of them was murdered, without causing any extraordinary commotion amongst the numerous populace who were present. In the unwholesome season (Malaria) of July and August, the government takes no notice of these assassinations, imputing them to the effects of a violent fermentation in the blood. (View, 41)

Writers occasionally attributed this tendency to tradition, citing the stabbing (rather than, say, poisoning) of Julius Caesar or the Pazzi conspiracy in Florence Cathedral, in which Giuliano de Medici was stabbed nineteen times, while Lorenzo escaped with only one knife wound. In *A Letter on the Practice of Boxing, addressed to the King, Lords, and Commons*. (London, 1789), Edward Barry traced murder to its Biblical beginnings, out of which the various national preferred modes of killing emerged: “Cain is the first example we read of; he first glutted a malicious soul in his brother’s blood; and whether the Englishman with his fist, thinks himself a better copy of the original, than the Frenchman with his sword, the Italian with the stiletto, or the Spaniard with his poniard, is a matter of too base an enquiry.”(21) *A New and Literal Translation of the Satires of Juvenal, with Copious Explanatory Notes* (Dublin, 1791), the annotation to “ferro subitus grassator agit rem; armato quotiens tuta custode tenetur”(III.305-6) is revealing: “Perhaps the poet may allude to what is very common in Italy at this day, namely assassins, who suddenly attack and stab people late at night.” (123) No one familiar with classical history should be the least surprised by stabbings in Italy. Several historians suggested the indifference
to blood crimes filtered into the low people from a ruling class, a class merciless with enemies since the Renaissance. Sir Richard Joseph Sulivan, in *A View of Nature, in Letters to a Traveller Among the Alps* (London, 1794), writes that “stabbing should thus characteristically appertain to this country of Italy.” The phenomenon “as it is at present,” is nothing more than the result of what “has always been”:

> From the earliest periods of the Roman history, such bloody footsteps are to be traced. Roman writers, or writers dependent upon Roman liberality, have not given us all the truth upon the subject. Nor would a modern Italian annalist venture to consign names of his contemporaries to posterity as assassins. But, did not Romulus murder his brother Remus? And did not the senate murder Romulus? Fromm Virginia, the Gracchi, the murders of Sylla, and various other massacres, to the assassination of Caesar, the proscriptions of the Augustan triumvirate, and the almost endless list of atrocities of the emperors and the generals, the bloody knife as decidedly appears to have been an appendage [sic?] of the imperial city, as the eagle or the fasces.” (430-431)

Other commentators attributed knife-wielding among the working-class Italians to the inevitable trickling down of the behavior of those in power during the Italian Renaissance. Some English travellers were familiar, no doubt, with Machiavelli’s admonition in *Principe* VIII to those princes foolish enough not to follow his precepts:

> “Chi fa altrimenti, o per timidità o per mal consiglio, e sempre necessitato tenere il coltello in mano.” [He who does otherwise, whether out of timidity or bad advice, needs to have a knife always in hand.] Some travellers seemed to suggest that the tendency to reach for the knife was a tradition of such a long date that it would be silly to deny it, as Baretti does.

Like Baretti, Smollett thought that “such extremities” occur “when there is a woman in the case; and mutual jealousy cooperates with the liquor they have drank, to

---

276 Sir Richard Joseph Sulivan, in *A View of Nature, in Letters to a Traveller Among the Alps* (London, 1794),
inflame their passions.” Similarly, Maximilien Misson attributed the habit to Italian passion in *A New Voyage to Italy* (London, 1739): “The Stiletto’s of Milan are famous for the genteel Stab; and they do their work effectually. Love and Jealousy are the two Furies that shed most Blood in Italy. The Italians are said to be jealous without any Reason; and the least Suscipient puts ‘em into a Fit of Rage.” John Moore writes that the “assassinations which disgrace Italy” are no longer as common as they once were, and “now entirely confined to the accidental squabbles which occur among the rabble.” Like Baretti, he feels that “with regard to the stabbing which happen among the vulgar,” they are not the outcome of a “premeditated plan of revenge,” but “almost always proceed from an immediate impulse of wrath,” being “seldom the effect of previous malice.” (461)

Many observers felt that the frequent murders result from a dangerous combination of hot-tempers and the inefficient and indifferent legal system. John Moore noted the following: “That the horrid practice of drawing a knife and stabbing each other, still subsists among the Italian vulgar, I am persuaded, is owing to the scandalous impunity with which is treated.”(461-2) In short, the availability of sanctuaries in churches does little to curb men in the “height of passion” who have been “thrown into paroxysms of fury.” (463) Like Baretti, Moore here concludes that “these stabbings are always in consequence of accidental quarrels and sudden bursts of passion, in which men have no consideration about their future safety.” (463) Though he is less forgiving, his position is quite similar to Baretti’s:

277 *Travels through France and Italy* (Dublin, 1766), 1, 228.
278 *A New Voyage to Italy. With Curious Observations on Several other Countries: as Germany; Switzerland; Savoy; Geneva; Flanders, and Holland* (London, 1739), iv, 398.
The murders committed in Germany, France, or England, are therefore comparatively few in number, and happen generally in consequence of a preconcerted plan, in which the murderers have taken measures for their escape or concealment, without which they know that inevitable death awaits them. In Italy the case is different; an Italian is not under the influence of so strong an impression, that certain execution must be the consequence of his committing a murder he is at less pains to restrain the wrath which he feels kindling within his breast. (470)

Because the penal laws of Italy “are so very relaxed,” he contends, “there seems scarcely a restriction upon murder itself.” Like Sharp, he feels that Naples is particularly dangerous: “Naples is an eminent proof of it, a city containing three or four thousand inhabitants, for the most part, more flagitious than any in Europe.” This writer suggests that in the time of Beccaria capital punishment in Naples was very rare: “Seldom a year passes without innumerable assassinations; and yet in this same city, a public execution is a public wonder! (ii, 36-37)

Stories of ruthless violence in Naples reached over the Atlantic in the eighteenth century. In his article “Interpretation of Italy and the Italians in Eighteenth-Century America,” Howard R. Marraro cites a letter published in the *New York Evening Post* on June 17, 1751 that included a very violent report of a murder in Naples: Francesco Panizo was a servant from Naples working in Venice who seduced Angelica, a noblewoman who lived nearby. After being spotted scurrying packages out of her palazzo, neighbors investigated, only to find both Angelica and her servant stabbed. The next day, Panizo stole every valuable in his employer’s house. He ran toward Ferrara, then to Pisa, where he was apprehended, and brought back to Venice to stand trial. His punishment was as follows: “To be carried through the streets of this city, and to have

280. *A Comparative Sketch of England and Italy, with Disquisitions on National Advantages* (London, 1793), ii. 36.
his flesh torn off with pincers at five different places, then to have his hands chopped off, and to be dragged at a horse’s tail into the square, where he is to lose his head on a scaffold, and to be quartered; the head to be fixed on a pole, and the quarters to be set up in the usual place.” (62)

Some observers followed Sharp in attributing Italian violence to the forces of justice and the unwillingness of the populace to seize and revile malefactors. In John Trusler’s *The Habitable World Described* (London, 1788-97), for example, we read that “in England, and Germany, a man knows, that if he commits a murder, every person around him will, from that instant, become his enemy; and use every means to lay hold of him, and bring him to justice. He knows he will be immediately carried to prison, and put to an ignominious death, amidst the execrations of his countrymen.”282 Italy is entirely different in this regard, in part because of the passionate nature of Italians and in part because of the lack of unity in the country, according to the author of *A Comparative Sketch of England and Italy*:

’Tis from the co-operation of these causes that Italy is deluged with crimes, and the assassin too often blusters in her streets with perfect impunity. We may also remark, that the inhabitants are very irritable, with a susceptibility of the most generous gratitude for a kind action, and of the most implacable revenge for an affront. This is the obvious virtue, and vice of their nature; and violent passions produce violent acts. A wise legislature would wish to counteract the endemic evil; but even this would be impossible, unless there were an unity of government in that country.283

Johann Georg Keyssler, likewise, offers an explanation for the prevalence of “open violence,” observing a communal indifference to seizing criminals that one usually associates with later phenomenon, such as the rise of the mafia in the nineteenth century:

Murder is looked upon in Italy in a very different light from what is it in other countries. If a robbery has been committed, either in the streets or on the marketplace, in any of the towns of Italy, and the people are alarmed to stop the thief, there is always assistance at hand to pursue the criminal; but upon crying after a murderer, no body offers to stir; and the assassin saves himself by flying unmolested to a church, convent, or other asylum, where, to the great honour of the clergy be it spoken, the villain receives all possible assistance that he may escape the hands of the civil power. (200)

The following memory that Keyssler records does not ring false, even though the crime scene, even though it takes place in the town of Pistoia, not far from Florence. He writes:

“I remember, a postillion who once drove me was treacherously stabbed at the post-house of Pistoia; and though the fact was committed in the presence of more than ten persons, not one of them stirred a foot to seize or pursue the murderer. Similarly, while all men are equally “inflamed with anger and rage,” in London the tradition of “drawing a knife” has been displaced by the regulations of the fair fight, the force of public humiliation, and the infallibility of capital punishment.

Impressed with these sentiments, the populace of these countries hardly ever have recourse to stabbing, in their quarrels; however they may be inflamed with anger and rage. The lowest blackguard, in the streets of London, will not draw a knife against an antagonist, far superior to himself in strength. He will fight his fairly with his fists as long as he can, and bear the severest drubbing, rather than use a means of defence held in detestation by his countrymen, and which would infallibly bring him to the gallows.284

Trussler, relying on Moore, argues that the justice system of Italy makes it entirely different from other countries in terms of violent crime. Given the absence of police (or a public that seizes the criminal), the Italian is disinclined to restrain his anger when pressed, especially by a stronger adversary, and “does not scruple to extricate himself by the thrust of a knife.” Trusler suggests that justice was sometimes sought in a sort of private agreement between the murderer and the family of the deceased, after the criminal

had escaped to the sanctuary of a church or to a neighboring region. When in prison, the usual form of self-defense was through garnering sympathy with “tears and entreaties” the assistance of those in power, the murderer – or his friends and relatives – are usually able to secure a pardon.

The murderer therefore is pretty certain of getting to some church, or convent, where he will be protected, till he can compound the matter with the relations of the deceased; or escape to some other Italian state. Besides, when any of these assassins have not had the good fortune to get within the portico of a church, before he is seized by the sbirri, and when he is actually carried to prison, it is not a very difficult matter for his friends, or relations, to prevail, by their entreaties and tears, on some of the cardinals, or princes, to interfere in his favour, and endeavor to obtain his pardon. (33)

This seems, in fact, to have been precisely the technique that Baretti employed when in the prison. Particularly interested in issues of law and justice, many writers of the eighteenth century saw a tendency to generate ineffectual laws. Pierre Jean Grosley, in New Observations on Italy and its Inhabitants. (London, 1769), observed in Milan “the magistrate winks at the effects of private vengeance, and confines his care to the prohibiting of stiletto’s and pocket pistols.” (81)

Claims about stabbings in Italy are not exclusively English. Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz’s A Picture of Italy, Translated from the original German by Joseph Trapp (London, 1791) contains a contradiction that he feels is the key to understanding “modern Italians”: “To fear the living is nevertheless the character of the modern Italians. Hence their insidiousness, their stabbing with daggers, and disinclination to war.” Von Archenholz goes on to discuss the manner in which the Italians defended this system, by making a forced comparison between these stabbings in the street and the duels conducted according to an elaborate code. He writes: “Their sophistical arguments to palliate that diabolical crime are very singular: they compare the deed with a duel, and
say, that as soon as an offence is given, the conceited duel takes an immediate beginning, and that it is necessary, from the very moment, to be upon one’s guard not to be stabbed.”

(246) He continues to discuss the system of church sanctuary, where assassins stay “whole weeks, or whole months, until they find an opportunity to tire the vigilance of those that secretly watch them to make their escape from the city.” (247)

Isaac Disraeli’s father was born at Cento, near Ferrara, and he immigrated to London in 1748, where he began business on his own there in 1757 as an importer of Italian goods, especially the fashionable Leghorn straw hats. It was perhaps from his father that he learned of the bloody character of Italians; what can be said, for sure, is that he did not gather his evidence from exclusively English sources when in 1791 he wrote the following in *Curiosities of Literature*:

The character of the Italians, even so late as in the last century, presents a melancholy contemplation to the Philosopher. How are we to account for a whole nation being infected with some of the darkest passions that stain the human soul? Atheism and Debauchery pervaded every rank; and the hand of the Italian continually grasped the dagger and the drug. What yet heightens the enormity of these crimes, is the ‘immortal hatred’—to make use of a poetical expression—which characterizes this Nation of Assassins.285

Central to the image of the “stabbing Italian” is the notion of explosive revenge produced by the passion of hate, as well as deception, manipulation, and a theatrical virtuosity in the execution of the dreadful deed. Disraeli writes, citing as usual an “authority” to forestall the reader from dismissing his claims as mere anti-Italian prejudice, the following scene that captures all the malice and magnificence of the Italian assassin:

The following anecdotes of Italian revenge are of good authority. An Italian feigned to be reconciled with one who had offended him. One evening, when they walked out together in a retired spot, the Italian seized him by the back; and, drawing a dagger, threatened to stab him if he did not abjure, and curse the

---

Creator. The other, in vain, entreated that he might not be obliged to commit what he felt a horror in doing; but, to save his life, at length he complied. This assassin, having now completed his wish, plunged the poignard in his bosom; and exultingly exclaimed, that he had revenged himself in the most dreadful manner possible; for he had caused the body and the soul of his enemy to perish in a single stroke

The prevalence of this image of the Italian shed lights on the Griffith-Charlemont letter of October 12, cited above: “[Baretti] had been admitted to bail with difficulty, from the idea of an Italian and a stiletto.”

Many diarists and writers who were great Italophiles recorded the most heinous acts of violence or the brutality of tortures and punishments. The musicologist Charles Burney, a friend of Baretti, in *Music, Men and Manners in France and Italy* (London, 1770), was in search of opera and violin virtuosi but encountered a horrible scene of crime and punishment, perfectly fitting into what is now a common and bloody iconography: “There was a horrible execution here the morning before I came away. A wretch who was in an ale house quarrel had killed a man by stabbing him in 20 places was not broke on the wheel as in France and other parts of Italy (the people here value themselves upon torture not being practiced).” (20) Unlike Samuel Sharp, Burney was perfectly fluent in Italian, and improved his accent by singing Italian arias while on horseback; his personal Italian-English dictionary, which looks quite like those pocket dictionaries for travelers today, shows a thorough knowledge of the language. Burney had no ulterior motive for writing, with great irony, that the Italian assassin “was only pinched with red hot pincers thro’ several streets on his way to the gallows just out of the gates.”

---

286 *Dizionario portativo Italiano ed Inglese* (1756) at the Beinecke Library (Yale).
Another extraordinary writer obsessed with Italy, Goethe, was repulsed by the excessive violence: “What particularly strikes foreigners, and today again is the talk of the entire city—but only talk—is the homicides that take place so routinely. Just in the last three weeks four persons have been murdered in our district.” (November 24, 1786) Italian and English critics continue to consider any reference to homicide in the Italian eighteenth century, even from the mouth of an Italophile, as a precursor to the deplorable treatment of Sacco and Vanzetti.288 I do not believe anti-Catholicism is behind Goethe’s recording that, “Today a fine artist named Schwendimann… was attacked exactly like Winckelmann” (24 November 1786). Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), the German art historian and archeologist arrived in Trieste on June 1, 1768, and checked into the largest inn, to wait until a suitable ship departed for Rome.289 He was stabbed in the groin and killed.

Even during the Romantic period, during which time Italy was an escape from all that was wrong with England, poets were alarmed to see sights that resembled the Baretti case, as it was beginning to slide into the history books. Shelley’s first “impression” of Naples was a gruesome scene, which the poet described with dramatic detail in a letter:

On entering Naples the first circumstance which engaged my attention was an assassination.—A youth ran out of a shop pursued by an [a] woman with a bludgeon & a man armed with a knife. The man overtook him & with one blow on the neck laid him dead on the road. On my expressing the emotions of horror & indignation which I felt, a Calabrian priest who travelled with me laughed heartily and attempted to quiz me as what the English call a flat. I never felt such an inclination to beat any one, Heaven knows I have little power, but he saw that I looked extremely displeased & was silent.”290

Although this brutal occasion—with the horrid and cold-hearted priest—came much later than Baretti, many of the observers and newspaper readers were likewise “extremely displeased.” One gets the impression that the idea of the “stabbing Italian”—best seen through the eyes of the appalled foreigner—was imbedded in the iconography of the Grand Tour.

In short, among the famous motifs of Italy in the eighteenth century—the ruins, the volcanoes, the landscapes, the canals—there is also the image of the stabbing. The title-page of Letters from Italy in the Years 1754 and 1755, written by John Early of Orrery, appeared with an engraved vignette. The dramatic scene shows a flamboyantly dressed man, holding a stiletto and about to thrust, in between a woman (the wife) on the right who tries to restrain him, and on the right a defenseless man (the lover) cowering with arms raised. The scene is described within the book: “The time chosen for the interview was on Easter-day, at the great-duke’s return from church; the tender mother imagining, that, at such a season, all former resentment must be buried, and paternal affection restored. Garcias presented himself before his father in the manner intended; when, in a moment, without the least hesitation, Cosmo drew a dagger, (which he had concealed on purpose,) and stabbed Garcias to the heart.” (183) Fifteen year old Garzia had murdered his elder brother Cardinal Giovanni. The Duke banished Garzia, but later allowed him to return to the court, drawing out a dagger and stabbing him in the heart. “What cannot power do, when it could conceal and efface so atrocious a murder?” (183) The brutal moment in Italian history happened in 1599, but it had special impact when the volume was printed in 1771. “Reflect on every circumstance, the time, the manner, and the object,” the author implored the reader, and “you will scarce remember so strong
an instance of nature starting from her course and divesting herself of every spark of humanity.” (182-183)

The polemic on “The Haymarket Affair” was not an isolated event, but one that engaged many English writers who went to Italy, and some foreigners who travelled to England to investigate its customs, manners, and laws. (D-25, D-26) The year Baretti died, M. D’Archenholz published *A Picture of England* (London, 1789), and he made a passing reference to Giuseppe Baretti that shows how much he had been stigmatized by the events of twenty years earlier and the many murders on the streets of Italy:

The author [Baretti] does not belie the character of his nation. Entirely unacquainted with every thing that concerns the people among whom he has lived for many years; not devoid, however, of sense but yet superstitious in the extreme; this person has not entirely forgotten the use of the poignard; for some time since he assassinated an Englishman, in the open street, who according to his account had attacked him.

Such an atrocious action subjected him to a criminal prosecution: he however escaped punishment, because there was no witness to the transaction; and the dead man, who alone new knew the truth, could not appear to contradict him.*

The translator could not bear to include this comment without footnoting an objection. He included the other side of the story:

The Translator here begs leave to observe, that he should do violence to his own feelings, if he did not state, that an English jury, after a full investigation of this transaction, acquitted Mr. Baretti, who, instead of assassinating an unoffending man, as is implied by the text, only defended his own life against the assaults of a ruffian. Some of the first characters in the kingdom attended the trial, and gave the most honourable testimonies of the worth and goodness of a gentleman.291

---

In recent years, historians have successfully mapped the trends in violence in England since the Middle Ages, notwithstanding the difficulties in documentation. Although scholars differ in emphasis, they agree that there was a decided decline in crime from the Renaissance through the later eighteenth century. The level of all interpersonal violence, judging from the evidence of court records, was clearly on the downward trend. The eighteenth century witnessed a continual—though perhaps not steady—decline in the homicide rate, which by the Victorian period was lower than it is in London today. Historians have advanced many explanations for this: modernization, changes in manners, rise in sensibility, development of modern policing, changing of system of punishments, the rise of middle-class culture. The London Mob includes a chart displaying how in the course of the eighteenth century, the amount of violence on London’s streets declined considerably.”

Footnotes:


society” and so “for commercial purposes” publishers tended to include, if not embellish, “as many details of the bloody deed as possible.”

Was the image of the stabbing Italian a construct of the literary and artistic imagination? Did many of these writers simply fabricate new anecdotes from a model in wide circulations, perhaps adding a literary flourish or some bloody details from hearsay and scenes from Italian theater? Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, with its famous dagger scene, was popular in 1768 and Italian plays and operas, such as Goldoni’s *La Locandiera* (Act III, Scene XVII) and Metastasio’s *Didone Abbandonata* (in which Jarba tries to stab Aeneus) include knives. Was the idea of an Italian with a stiletto merely a myth built on improving papers and postal services. How much of the recurring image of the stabbing Italian was spun by intemperate novelists or jaundiced travel writers?

Italy had a tradition of *armi bianche* that reached back to the Renaissance manuals on fighting with daggers and rapiers. Harold Peterson, in *Daggers and Fighting Knives of the Western World*, the dagger or fighting knife had already been overtaken by the sword in the 16th century. In the 15th and 16th centuries, to “bear arms” meant to go forth with sword and dagger. “By 1700 the wearing of daggers and fighting knives had become restricted to a few specific areas of the Western world including Italy and “the frontiers of America where a scalping or butcher knife was both an important weapon and a general tool.” (47) Another Italian tradition is that of fencing, which can be traced to the fencing masters of the Renaissance. The greatest fencing book published in England during of the 1700s was written by Domenico Angelo (1716–1802): *L’Ecole des Armes* (London, 1763). One thing we know with regards to the subject of this study is that in eighteenth-century Italy was associated also with the production of knives.

---

Despite Baretti’s fierce denial in his Account of the frequency of knife fights in Italy, there can be no doubt that Italy developed nothing short of what Giancarlo Baronti calls a “cultura del coltello,” a culture of the knife. Baronti, a Professor at the University of Perugia, and Luciano Salvateci are authorities on the subject of Italian knife history; they have closely examined archival material from the eighteenth and nineteenth century Italy and, in the Tuscan town of Scarperia, a center of knife production since the Renaissance, they established a museum dedicated to the art of ferri taglienti, or cutting irons. Their scrupulous research can leave little doubt that the point asserted by Sharp—and supported by so many others—was not an small-minded fiction, nor was it based on the blowing out of proportion of relatively rare instances of criminal activity. Baronti and Salvatici prove that Italy has a long tradition of “fatti di coltello.” The quarrels that lead to stabbings are a matter of historical fact.

In the Italian tradition, knives served a wide range of purposes and assisted in symbolic rituals. Craftsmen produced knives of enormous beauty, for display at the table, for purposes of work, and not least for self-protection and for any occasion that might arise. Production centers, such as Scarperia, were located on principal highways and supplied the demand of travelers and foreigners. Scarperia had already achieved its claim to fame for the expertise of the knife forgers; the knives in the museum were not bought only for work and domestic chores. The fabrication of cheap stilettos was centralized in Rome and Naples, where knife production and distribution was notably less regulated in the major cities toward the south, Rome and Naples. In the mid 1770s,

[295Luciano Salvatici, I coltelli di Scarperia (Scarperia, 1992), Coltelli d’Europa in mostra a Scarperia (Scarperia, 1995), La passione di un collezionista: scritti di Luciano Salvatici (Scarperia, 1995), Posate, pugnali, coltelli da caccia del Museo del Bargello (Firenze, 1999), Fatti di coltello: negli Atti Criminales del Vicariato di Scarperia 1839-1849 (Scarperia, 2004). See also Lame da offesa e da parata (Scarperia, 2003).]
English artist John Brown was working in Rome, and he made a dramatic pen and ink sketch (Morgan Library) of a stiletto merchant. Seven sinister men surround an outdoor table on which a knife dealer is purveying his wares. It is a frightening drawing. The knives were not intended for the great chefs of Europe. William Wynne Ryland, a friend of Baretti, made an etching of an Italian stabbing scene. (Fine Arts Museum, San Francisco) Although Rome was the center of stiletto production, dangerous weapons were manufactured up and down the peninsula, from Bergamo (Lombardy) to Frosolone (in Molise) to Pattada (in Sardinia). Genova, for example, was recognized its characteristic “coltello genovese,” known for its extraordinarily sharp point. It was considered an *arma micidiale* and severely prohibited. Dozens of different knives with unique names could be identified in the early modern Italy: *sfilato*, *zuave*, *mozzetto* and *ronchetto*.

Baronti examined hundreds of weapons and archival documents for his extraordinary book, *Coltelli d'Italia: rituali di violenza e tradizioni produttive nel mondo popolare storia e catalogazione* (Padova, 1986). In his illuminating essay, “La cultura del coltello,” he explores the almost monotonous and obsessive presence of the knife, “la presenza monotona e quasi ossessiva del coltello.” (31) Baronti examined the criminal documents in the State Archives (Perugia) and discovered the “completa e tenace saldatura del coltello al modello dominante di confronto violento tra gli individui.”

Luciano Salvatici makes plain in his carefully documented study *Fatti di coltello: negli atti criminali del Vicariato di Scarperia, 1839-1849* (Firenze, 2004) that such knife

---

fights continued well into the nineteenth century: “anche in Toscana, naturalmente, ogni tanto qualche occasionale coltellata ci scappava” [even in Tuscan the occasional stabbing would break out]. Farming knives for Mugello contadini as well as stillettos were “capaci di infliggere facilmente ferite anche mortali.” (35)

Baronti and Salvatici make perfectly clear that the history of knives cannot be understood without a consideration of their symbolic importance in terms of violent altercations. Knives were carried as a kind of insurance policy, according to Baronti, “Fuori d’ogni dubbio, il coltello rappresenta lo strumento, non solo psicologicamente, ma anche materialmente più adatto, a partecipare alle concitate ed improvvise risse che sorgono confuse ed inaspettate nella stretta calca delle osterie e negli affollamenti intorno ai giuochi.” (35) In 1989, a special exhibition was held at the Museo dei Ferri Taglienti in Scarperia titled, “L’altra faccia del coltello” was dedicated to the use of the knife in bloody deeds. Many of the knives on exhibition were made for “stabbing” and specially designed for that purpose.297 In Rome and the insular south, an extreme susceptibility tied to the affirmation of the individual gave rise to frequent altercations that resolved immediately in stabbings.298

Baronti demonstrates that this phenomenon was particularly diffuse—even endemic. The situation was quite more radical and rooted in Italy, according to Baronti, and completely different than France (38-39), where violence was more often collective, or England where Boxing extinguished knife fights. “Questi coltelli sanguinari, lunghi e appuntiti, erano portati come oggetto personale carico di significato simbolico fin quasi a

297 “il lato oscuro di questo strumento, cioè il suo uso nei fatti di sangue. Molti degli esemplari esposti erano perciò specifici coltelli “da coltellate,” nati per questo uso.”

298 “territori dell’antico Stato Pontificio e dall’Italia meridionale e insulare, dove un’estrema suscettibilità legata all’affermazione dell’individualità personale dava origine a frequenti alterchi e risse che si risolvevano subito a coltellate.” Salvatici, I coltelli di Scarperia (Scarperia,) 34.
identificarsi con l’individuo stesso.” (34) The knife was extracted from the pocket and used with the same velocity of a poisoned dart; Although we assume a knife killing requires a bloody struggle and many slashes, the Italian stabbing was not this way at all. The knife was sharpened to such a point that it pierced clothing and flesh with little resistance. The evidence from Italian trials suggests that men involved in these knife fights understood well the best way to stab, using an underhand delivery, pushing back the enemies head with the left hand and, to expose the belly. These thin and very sharp stilettos—or a very sharp paring knife—entered flesh like it were a warm watermelon, and the bleeding was internal. The stilettos had no cutting edge, but an astonishingly sharp point, such that a stab wound went through the clothing and into the vital organs, not infrequently without the victim even noticing he had been hurt, until minutes, sometimes hours, after the attack. The technique was simple: with a very quick underhand motion, the blow was delivered on the left side of the body, the target being the vital organs or the guts. Knife fights, when they did occur in London, often ended in cuts to the face or legs. The fact that today—in knife crimes documented in the news—the scene is usually a bloody one with throats being slit; in the eighteenth century, the *modus operandi* was to create a deep puncture wound into the vital organs, and so allow the victim to “languish” and expire after some days before death. The best surgeons, the Dr. Sharps of Italy, would have scene such injuries often:

Dr. Bart shewed us the great hospital, one of the largest and most superb in Europe. It is open to the sick of all nations and religions, and contains from 1200 to 2000 patients. About 700 women and 1200 men are admitted in the course of the year from wounds with knives or stiletto; a dreadful fact, almost sufficient to brand the nations character with the general detestation of mankind. Yet the very
people whose quick passions urge them to such horrors, would shudder at the deliberate brutality of an English boxing match.299

A largely urban and exclusively male phenomenon, according to Baronti, many men went in search of this risk, by frequenting those very parts of the city where the likelihood of such an unpleasant encounter would be high. (36)

Baronti’s analysis of the nature of the “rissa” sheds light on Baretti, which seems to have happened by the same pattern which Baronti considered a cruel ritual. The encounter occurs at night and is often fueled by alcohol, takes place on the street outside a tavern. “Viddi che con il cortello il cuoco diede tre colpi nella panza al detto Andrea…dicendo: “Lascia che t’ammazzo”300 Frequently these murders occurred during hours of carnival time, or at least during idle hours of relaxation. There is no need for “incubation” and questions of honor lead to “spiral of provocations,” often including some pushing and shoving, and finally Il coltello si propone come l’unica, in quanto ultima residuata, arma di offesa e di difesa.” (40) Baronti gives many examples from archival reports:

Io fui ferito Domenica p.p. verso le ventidue ore passate, da un tal Cintio che non so di che ne che arte faccia per non avere sua pratica, con colpo di coltello, la causa non posso dirgliela, mentre io non ho havuto mai a che fare con detto Cintio, ne pure prima lo conoscevo. Volendo andare a bevere con alcuni miei compagni e giunto di rimpetto alla bettola del Sig. Perotti, essendomi incontrato con Cintio che andava verso S. Ercolano e questo non avendo neppure detto una parola, avendomi lasciato passare, di poi mi sentij arrivare una botta nel braccio sinistro e disse: “Così si fa alli smargiassi”; che voltatomi viddi il detto Cintio che teneva in mano un cortello ad uso di scortichino.301

---

300 Tribunale di prima istanza di Perugia, secolo XVIII, busta anno 1786, fascicolo 29: Città Omicidio, 11 agosto 1786.
301 Tribunale di prima istanza di Perugia, secolo XVIII, busta anno 1731, fascicolo: Vulneris cum cultro, proditione appensateque inflictii, cum aliquo vitae periculo, 9 aprillis 1731.
[I was wounded Sunday last, around ten, by such a Cinzio that I don’t know what
trade he practices or work he does, with a knife-blow, the cause I can’t tell you,
while I never had anything to do with such Cintio, never even met him before. I
was wanting to go and get a drink with friends and we arrived at the tavern of
Signor Perotti, when I ran into Cintio who was going toward San Ercolano and so
not having said not even one word, that I felt arrive on jab on my left arm and he
said: That’s the way one treats show-offs; and turning I saw the said Cintio who
was holding a knife in his hand for the use of scalping.]

According to Baronti, there is “un’attenzione continua e vigilante per poter cogliere nelle
parole, nelle inflessioni della voce, negli sguardi e nelle movenze del prossimo, la sia pur
minima e remota possibilità di una intenzione offensiva.” (26) Behind the stabbings
Baronti sees the sort of psychological hypersentivity that I spoke of in Chapter One: “un
accentuazione nevrotica della sensibilità dei singoli nei riguardi del proprio prestigio
pubblico e della propria immagine sociale.” The model is of resentment and ready
reaction, quick brutality done to right minor wrongs. [This egocentrism so inflated and
fragile so that it considered the slightest offense as a mortal blow to one’s insicure
prestige] “risentimento e della reazione pronta, sbrigativa e spesso brutalmente
irrefrenabile (chi mena per primo mena due volte).” (D-26) Even in Florence, I have
located a long trial ms that follows very precisely the pattern outlined in the travelogues,
in Baretti, and in the Perugia examples collected by Baronti. (D-28)

Special knife laws were enacted in some areas of Italy in the eighteenth century.
In early 1737, Francesco Stefano di Lorena enacted a law in Tuscany strictly prohibiting
the carrying of weapons so called that produce the effect of giving offense, “che
producono l’effetto di offendere per se medesimo.” This regulation touched on all
manner of weapons, from “bastoni di grossezza capaci di fare offesa notabile,” large
clubs capable of doing injury, to bows and arrows, slingshots and any arms that

302 Baronti could be commenting on Baretti when he discusses “questo egocentrismo talmente inflazionato e
fragile da considerare la pur minima offesa come un colpo mortale inferto all’insicuro prestigio.” (40)
“possono vibrare qualunque peso atto ad offendere” [are capable of vibrating anything heavy in such a way as to injure]. The legislation, however, intends by *armi bianche* to refer above all to those [that by their shape are not made but to hurt others, abolished by us as weapons of infamy, and so used to commit the most enormous of crimes; and desiring as much as possible to remove all of their grim consequences, we command that all the armi bianche with a point, or a point and a cutting edge].

Bands and prohibitions intended to reduce knife crimes were in effect in Florence much earlier.

Interestingly enough, the general prohibition targets specifically small knives that measure from handle to point less than “tre quarti di braccio di misura Fiorentina.” In fact, the dimension—roughly between 14 and 44 centimeters—often referred to in laws—indicates those knives long enough to kill but sufficiently short to be concealed. During the Baretti case, the positive publicity emphasized that he used a “small knife,” though an Italian of the time would not have been so persuaded that a larger knife was advantageous. Prohibitions, in fact, tended to be more restrictive of “le armi bianche di corta misura,” knives of a short measure, insofar as they could be easily hidden and more effective in surprising the opposition. In order to remove any occasion to use these “abominevoli instrumenti” it was expressly against the law to make, sell, or even ask for them. Naturally, the law allows for exceptions for nobility, for hunters (as long as they do not bring them “fuori dai confine delle Maremme”), and the military. Even those who can justify their carrying such weapons, we are reminded, must remember that if they

---

303 “Che per la loro figura non sono fatte, che ad offendere altrui, abominate da Noi come infami, e come messi, per commettere i più enormi delitti; e desiderando per quanto sia possibile di torre tutte le loro funeste conseguenze; comandiamo, che tutte le armi bianche di punta, o di punta e di taglio.”

commit a crime while with the weapons, they will not be given any special
consideration.”

It was particularly difficult to distinguish clearly and without confusion between
those that were permitted and those outlawed, daggers from dessert knives. Frequently
the differences were so small (millimeters) and involved such technical terms, according
to Baronti, that it was not difficult for someone who wished to possess a defensive
weapon to do so. (33) On November 30, 1786, the Reform of the Criminal Legislation
of Pietro Leopoldo was passed, softening the laws prohibiting knives in Tuscany, perhaps
due to economic pressure from Scarperia. The production of knives fell dramatically in
the later 1700s, though whether incidents of homicide fell is a matter scholars have not
yet decided. In 1768, there were ten knife shops in Scarperia and the annual production
was 72,000 knives; twenty years earlier, there were forty shops in operation, with
manufacturing upwards of 144,000, or about 370 knives a day. The use of a knife,
however, remained an aggravating circumstance in any crime such as homicide and the
punishment would be more severe than if the same homicide was committed with an
alternative tool.

Throughout Europe there was a concern with eating utensils being used as
weapons. In 1669, King Louis XIV of France decreed all pointed knives on the street or
the dinner table illegal, and he ordered knife points ground to blunt edge. Interestingly,
the blunt tipped knives of the eighteenth-century were a reaction to concerns over knife
violence erupting at the table, or just outside the tavern. The position taken during the
trial that Baretti was using a “paring knife” intended neither for offensive nor for defense,
would have perhaps been accepted with a great deal more skepticism on the continent,
where it was by no means unheard of—in the period of strict knife regulations and a growing taboos regarding the public display of knives—for individuals to carry innocuous knives for purposes of self-protection. As Salvatici notes, in the eighteenth century the line between a weapon and instrument for work or dining was not always clear. In his various learned essays, Salvatici calls attention to a “legal” knife with a removable blade that could hide a stiletto. Daggers were even concealed in crucifixes. Baretti was not killing with a stiletto. The knife, exhibited in the courtroom and kept by Baretti for the rest of his life as a conversation piece was most probably a French knife in a shagreen case. Although intended to cut fruit and sweetmeats, the knife is very similar in form to the “coltelli a stile” made for use as an offensive weapon. Baronti discovered among the homicide files at the Archives in Perugia the confession of one murders: “Era un coltello da tavola ma io gli feci fare la punta a fronda di oliva” [It was a table knife, but I made it as pointed as an olive leaf.]

One had a much greater likelihood of being stabbed in Rome or Naples in the mid-eighteenth century than in London. Clive Emsley, in *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900*, supplies interesting statistics. In the period from 1765-1774, of the 278 executions, only 29 were for murder, while 86 were for burglary, 20 for forgery and 79 for highway robbery. In the period from 1775-1784, of 414 executions, only 17 (4.1%) were for murder. The passing of the Murder Act in 1752 (25 Geo II, c. 37), by which convicted murderers were hanged and dissected, was a sign of the intolerance to

---

305 “La Lama Segreta,” 57. See also “Lama alla Roman” (7-8) and “I ‘coltelli a stile’” (19-20) in Luciano Salvatici, *La passione di un collezionista: scritti di Luciano Salvatici*, (Scarpa, 1995).
306 Knives like the one Baretti used are not rare. *Cutlery from Gothic to Art Deco*. Antwerp: Pandora, 2003. No. 389 (France circa 1785) appears to be a similar knife.
307 *Tribunale di prima istanza di Perugia, secolo XVIII, busta anno 1716, fascicolo: Gualdi. Super delatione cultri prohibiti, 17 maij 1716*.
homicide, not a crime wave.\textsuperscript{309} In Italy, the situation was much worse. Speaking of the character of the Romans, William Forsythe wrote in \textit{Remarks on Antiquities, Arts and Letters During an Excursion in Italy} (London, 1816). “In their quarrels I never saw any approach to fair fighting. Boys fly to stones and men to the clasp-knife; but the bloodiest ruffian abstains from fire-arms. To shoot your enemy is held atrocious; to plunge a stiletto into his back, a proof of spirit.”\textsuperscript{310} Forsythe’s claim, according to scholars, is not far from true.\textsuperscript{311} Daniele Boschi, in “Homicide and Knife Fighting in Rome, 1845-1914,” agrees with Baronti’s conclusions about the Roman predilection for knife fighting related to “the particular environment and traditions of the city.” (129) The homicide rate in Rome “was higher than that recorded for other European cities and urban areas of the same period.” (132-133) In 1864, murders in the Papal States show a yearly average of 10.6, while in London from 1851-70 the number never exceeds .5. Results later in the century are similar: 1880: 9 for Italy at a when France and German had 2, England and Scotland less than 1.\textsuperscript{312} Enrico Ferri included a chart illustrating the “Movimento generale del Suicidio e dell’Omicidio in alcuni Paesi d’Europa” that reveals similar trends.\textsuperscript{313} The murder rate was in London during the Victorian London was 1-1.5 (lower


\textsuperscript{310} “Aware of this tumultuary, assassinating spirit, the late pope sent his preachers about to disarm the people, before the French arrived here; and Fenaglia, who was then a simple monk, mounted a bench in the Piazza Navona, and soon covered it with the stilettos which his overpowering eloquence forced from the mob.” (401-402)

\textsuperscript{311} Domenico Zorzi, “Sull’Amministrazione della Giustizia Penale nell’et\textasciiacute;a delle Riforme: Il Reato di Omicidio nella Padova di Fine Settecento,”\textit{Crimine, giustizia e società veneta in et\textasciiacute;a moderna} (Milan, 1989); Luigi Berlinguer and Floriana Colao, \textit{Crimine, giustizia e società veneta in et\textasciiacute;a moderna}. (Milano, 1989); Luciano Allegra, \textit{Emarginazione, criminalità devianza in Italia fra ’600 e ’900: problemi e indicazioni di ricerca} (Milano, c1990);


\textsuperscript{312} Boschi, 128-129; See also Alfredo Spallanzani, \textit{Sull’Omicidio in Italia dal 1881-1911} (Torino, 1916).

\textsuperscript{313} Enrico Ferri, \textit{Omicida nella psicologia e nella psicopatologia criminale: nella psicologia e nella psicopatologia criminale}. (Torino, 1925), 725. Statistics for earlier years were not available for all countries before the mid-1800s. Three years from the chart give an clear indication of a much higher
than it is today), in northern Italy the rate was higher (3.6 in Milan), and in the more violent south much higher (45.1 in Palermo). “A great number of [the murders] apparently began over a joke, an arrogant reply, or other forms of sudden, gratuitous provocation,” Boschi writes. Agreeing with Baronti’s findings, Boschi states that “quarrels arising over trial matters and games were thus among the most common apparent causes of homicides.” (142) Ruff presents similar data in Violence in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge, 2001): “Districts in rural southern Italy produced homicide rates as high at 40 per 100,000 in 1881-83. Palermo exceeded 60 per 100,000 in the same period, and even Rome, capital of the unified kingdom, produced almost 40 per 100,000, thanks to an active knife-fighting culture.” 314

Boschi confirms many of the claims put forth in the travel writings: “Gratuitous violence was generally criticized, but a violent reaction to a serious provocation was considered legitimate; if this resulted in homicide, most people would probably consider the killing either an accident—a fatal event for which the killer was not entirely responsible—or a well-deserved punishment for the victim’s unjust behavior.” (150) Boschi provides one interesting statistic regarding the leniency of the criminal justice system in Naples: Of 1,133 malicious woundings reported in 1849, only 52 (or 4.5%) were punished.” (152) Other demographic studies done in Italy, though later than the Baretti case, offer similar statistics. 315

314 Julius R. Ruff, Violence in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge, 2001), 250
315 See Stefano Semogyi, Analisi storica delle caratteristiche demografiche, del fenomeno degli omicidi in Italia dal 1866-1979 (Roma, 1984). There is a steep decline in homicides from the middle of the nineteenth century, when reliable figures are available, till the period around World War I. Somogyi includes statistics on the cause of death. In his first year cited, 1897, 41% were killed with a pointed or cutting instrument.
Baretti’s acquittal came at the price of his becoming by far the most famous of the Italian men involved in knife violence. On October 6, 1769, the events of his life had undermined the advocacy for Italians which meant so much to Baretti. The idea of the Italian with the stiletto would have a long life. The image will reappear in E. M. Forster’s *Room with a View*. “Two Italians by the Loggia had been bickering about a debt. "Cinque lire," they had cried, "cinque lire!" They sparred at each other, and one of them was hit lightly upon the chest. He frowned; he bent towards Lucy with a look of interest, as if he had an important message for her. He opened his lips to deliver it, and a stream of red came out between them and trickled down his unshaven chin.” By this time, however, no Baedeker warns travellers to Italy about the number of stabbings that occur on the streets. That is, unless one is considering “The Haymarket Affair” in which, as Collison- Morley wrote in 1909, Baretti “lost his head completely and his Italian blood asserted itself.”

In recent years a rash of knife violence has upset London and give rise to attempts to stem the tide of newspapers are calling a “culture of the knife.” A knife amnesty was pronounced by the Home Office in 2006, and within a month’s time 40,000 lethal weapons were deposited. Some commentators went so far as suggesting that kitchen knives be produced with blunt tips, since there is virtually no advantage to having a sharp tip on a slicing instrument. In the early twentieth century, even pocket knives produced in Italy for boys had squared-off tips and a blade on which was stamped “permitted by law.”
CHAPTER FIVE

“WITH A FELL, FURIOUS, AND MISCHIEVOUS MIND AND INTENT”

MURDER is when a Person, of sound Memory and Discretion, unlawfully killeth any reasonable Creature, in Being, and under the King’s Peace; with Malice aforethought, either express or implied. This is Felony, without Clergy; punished with speedy Death, and Hanging in Chains, or Dissection.


Has a Murder been committed? Whoever beheld the ghastly Corpse of the murder’s Innocent, weltering in its Blood, and did not feel his own Blood run slow and cold through all his Veins?—Has the Murder escaped? With what Eagerness do we pursue? With what Zeal do we apprehend?

Henry Earl of Bathurst, *The Genuine Speech of the Hon. Mr. ------ at the Late Trial of Miss Blandy* (Patingham, 1752), 6.

If two persons should quarrel in France or Italy, both of them French or Italians, one of them should stab the other, and the person stabbed should afterwards come into this country and die; yet the stabber, though he afterwards was found in this country, could not be tried here.


We are in February of 1770: Mungo Campbell is riding on horseback across the Earl of Eglinton’s large estate in Scotland. The Earl had warned Campbell against hunting and fishing on his property, but on this day he would catch him for the last time. When the Earl found Campbell (who claimed to be just scouting for poachers), he was visibly angry and a heated argument erupted, there was a scuffle and when the dust settled Eglinton was dead. Campbell’s defense argued that he had the right to fire in protection of “his life, his property, and his honour.”316 After all, Eglinton had not only demanded

---

316 *The Independent Chronicle* (Wednesday, January 3, 1770).
Campbell’s hunting rifle, he called the former soldier some very offensive names. Surely this was a gross provocation, just the sort of inciting offence that Sir William Hawkins referred to in his *Pleas of the Crown* (1716). What Campbell suffered was surely as severe as when a law-abiding gentleman “finds a man in bed with his wife, or is pulled by the nose, or filliped upon the forehead…or [fights] in contention for the wall, or in defense of his person from an unlawful arrest.” The defense argued, furthermore, that in earlier murder cases a verdict of self-defence was handed down, even when the provocation was much less. “Baretti was very lately acquitted,” Campbell’s lawyers reminded the audience and jury, “though it was proved, and indeed not denied, that he had stabbed a man with a knife, and the only provocation was shoving him off the pavement into the street. The panel submits, if the provocation he received was not more than a fillip on the forehead, &c.” Andrew Crosbie, the attorney for Earl Eglinton, gave “a short history of civil society in which men surrender the right to private revenge. He said that Mr. Campbell’s life was not in danger…and that honour was not a word known in law.”

The jury brought in a verdict of guilty. In the morning of execution day, the prison guard found Mungo Campbell in his cell hanging from his silk handkerchief. He had killed himself to escape an “ignominious” public execution.

In the months after Joseph Baretti was found innocent, his case would not only resonate in tabloid papers and in hostile reviews, in coffee house gossip and in malicious

---

317 Campbell, Mungo. *Information for Mungo Campbell, late officer of excise at Saltcoats, now prisoner in the Tolbooth of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, [1770]): 42. See *Treatise of the Pleas of the Crown*, Vol. 1, 82.
318 *The Independent Chronicle* (Wednesday, January 3, 1770).
319 *Information for Mungo Campbell, late officer of excise at Saltcoats, now prisoner in the Tolbooth of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1770), 42. For “A Full Relation of the Singular and Affecting Case of MUNGO CAMPBELL, who was convicted of the Murder of Lord Eglantine, by Shooting Him,” see *New and Complete Newgate Calendar*, Vol. 4 (London, 1795), 385-394. The Mungo Campbell trial immediately followed Baretti, with which it had much in common, in this collection of celebrated trials.
invective. It would echo in the court chambers hundreds of miles away. The case became a *cause célèbre*, in part, because of the many cultural celebrities who were involved and whose participation touched off an intense literary reaction. In part, the cultural and social dynamics the case contained sparked the mix of curiosity, resentment, approval, and disapproval. Moreover, *Baretti* telescoped so many of the legal issues and obstacles facing Enlightenment thinkers during decades of continuous and intense legal scholarship and reform.

In this chapter, I will place the case in the context of the legal issues of the Age of Blackstone and Beccaria. The Baretti case came on the heels of the publications of two of the seminal works in the history of jurisprudence: Cesare Beccaria’s *Crimes and Punishments* (1765) and Sir William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769). The case occurred in a vital moment in a criminal justice system at once barbaric and enlightened, primitive and modern, brutal and humane. *Baretti* is interesting, insofar as it contains elements of the forward direction of Enlightenment thought on violent crime, as well as a certain procedures and uses of evidence increasing debated.

In the eighteenth century, nearly every aspect of legal procedure and philosophy was examined, discussed and evaluated against new standards of justice and liability. Martin Madan, in *Thoughts on Executive Justice* (London, 1785), was stating the obvious when he wrote, “Criminal jurisprudence has within the last twenty years become...

---

a very popular study throughout Europe, and the cultivation of it has been generally attended with very sensible and very beneficial effects.” (1) The criminal justice system that we are familiar with today began to emerge in the course of the middle decades of the eighteenth century. In an astonishingly short arc of time that coincides with Baretti’s lifetime, the world crime and court drastically changed and the forms and formalities of modern justice emerged.321

Many aspects of a court case that are taken for granted as if they always existed began in the later eighteenth century. A “jury of your peers” and the “presumption of innocence,” to cite the two most obvious, are relatively recent developments. Before the later decades of the eighteenth century, as John Langbein and Allyson May demonstrate, the burden of proof rested not on a professional class of lawyers, but on the ability of the accused to assemble his or her own case; the courtroom “battle” waged between two opposing lawyers representing silent clients, begins to emerge during the time of Baretti. As I discussed in Chapter Two, Baretti and his friends are directly involved in the presentation of evidence and argument, and Baretti commits the one of cardinal sins by “testifying on his own behalf.” As the “adversary trial” became the standard operating procedure, critics of the old school insisted that such a change would only cause problems.322

Professional lawyers were not the only new arrivals in the period. In the course of the century, legal scholars articulated a more rational theory of evidence, calling into

question the evidence of character, as discussed in Chapter Two. It is the period of the
During the eighteenth century, scholars have argued that the code of honor changed
considerably. The art of the duel continues into the nineteenth century, but already by
the early eighteenth century there was strongly voiced opposition, in works like John
Cockburn’s *The History and Examination of Duels. Shewing their Heinous Nature and
the Necessity of Suppressing Them* (London, 1720) and Timothy Hooker, *An Essay on
Honour* (London, 1741). When they were fought, duels were less bloody and the subject
raised heated opinions. (D-58) While urban violence remained a concern, there was a
notable decline in the homicide rates and, as we saw in Chapter Four, but increased
concerns about the “right to bear arms.” The development of a police force begins in the
1700s as well, although “citizen’s arrests” like happened in “The Haymarket Affair” are
still common. For the first time, there is an effort to record of crime and maintain very
careful court records, allowing scholars to statistically analyze crime rates with some
degree of confidence.

in All Times and Countries* (1868); F. R. Bryson, *The Sixteenth-Century Italian Duel: A Study in
Renaissance Social History* (Chicago, 1938); Robert Baldick, *The Duel* (1965); Donna T. Andrew, “The
Code of Honour and its Critics: The Opposition to Duelling in England, 1700-1850,” *Social History* 5:
409-34; V. G. Kieman, *The Duel in European History: Honour and the Reign of Aristocracy* (Oxford,
1988); François Billacois, *The Duel: Its Rise and Fall in Early Modern France* (New Haven, 1990);
Robert Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (New York, 1993); Barbara
Holland, *Gentleman’s Blood* (2003); Markku Peltonen, *The Duel in Early Modern England: Civility,
Politeness and Honour* (Cambridge, 2003), especially Chapter 4 on the anti-duelling campaigns 1660-1720
(201-262). (Shoemaker 530) opposition to dueling (Andrew)

324 In recent years have witnessed a boom in the scholarly study of crime in the eighteenth century. See J.
1996); Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000); Peter King,
English Society, 1660-1800* (Cambridge, 2002).
The end of the century brought major changes in the punishments, including the demise of public executions, physical punishments like whipping and the stocks. While “shaming” punishments continued to be used, by the end of the century we see the change in the philosophy of punishment that Michel Foucault wrote about as “the birth of the prison.” In the early eighteenth century there were about two-hundred offenses punishable by death, according to historian Greg Smith. Almost all of these criminals would be sentenced to prison in the nineteenth century, as society began to disapprove of, to use our phrase, are “cruel and unusual punishment.” The Baretti case cannot be properly understood without placing it in the context of the death penalty. Cesare Beccaria’s *Of Crimes and Punishments* appeared in Italian in 1764 and was immediately translated into French and English to great acclaim. It went into six editions in the first eighteen months. In the preface to the anonymous English translation, we read that “perhaps no book, on any subject, was ever received with more avidity, more generally read, or more universally applauded.” While Beccaria did not treat the specifics of homicide in his treatise, his concern with due process and the transparency of the courts sheds light on *Baretti*. His powerful arguments against capital punishment must have emboldened the defense in its attempt to use every available argument to free Baretti from an inhumane and useless “ignominious” death on the gallows.

* * *

Although the principle players in *Baretti* were figures in the world of arts and letters, many were equally interested in law. Baretti, whose father urged him to pursue a career in jurisprudence, was interested in the fundamental terminology of homicide law.

---

and issues relating the Italian penal system. Dr. Johnson’s literary expertise was equaled by his familiarity with the history and the theory of common law.328 In fact, in the years prior to the trial, Johnson was assisting Sir Robert Chambers in the composition of his Vinerian Lectures on Law.329 The study of law for Johnson involved primarily the writings of authorities like Grotius On the Laws of War and Peace (1625) and subsequent commentaries of Pufendorf, Burlamaqui’s influential Principles of Natural Law (1747), and Montesquieu’s Spirit of the Laws (1748), all in circulation in the original languages and in translations.330 Dr. Johnson was primarily concerned with fundamental issues of human rights, international law, the concept liberty, due process, and justice.

Before October 6th, he probably had never given much thought to constructing a homicide defense, though he had written against the death penalty in the early 1750s.

A meeting was held in the office of the Solicitor Cox an evening before the trial. Arthur Murphy, as well as Johnson, George Steevens, the editor of Shakespeare’s Works and Edmund Burke attended the conference to refine the case for the defense. That evening, the group helped Baretti in composing his Old Bailey Speech, notwithstanding the fact that Baretti claimed he penned it himself without too much deliberation shortly before the trial. The language reveals a close acquaintance with law and a dramatist’s eye for stimulating feelings. How was the defense constructed? What legal issues were

328 Duncan McNair, Dr. Johnson and the Law (Cambridge, 1948); E. L. McAdam, Dr. Johnson and the English Law (Syracuse, 1951); Curley, Thomas. Sir Robert Chambers: Law, Literature, and Empire in the Age of Johnson (Madison, 1998).
329 See Duncan McNair, Dr. Johnson and the Law (Cambridge, 1948); E. L. McAdam, Dr. Johnson and the English Law (Syracuse, 1951); Sir Robert Chambers Johnson and the Law.
debated that evening? At some point, a heated argument broke out between Johnson and Burke, Boswell notes, perhaps under the stress of the situation. What was the source of the disagreement between these two formidable minds? Was it the question of character? What commentaries and cases did they consult in articulating the justification for their friend Baretti’s actions? The period’s continuous exploration of matters of crime and punishments manifested itself in a stream of texts on jurisprudence, works often intended for students and common readers, not reference sets for the shelves of professional lawyers. The authors on law wrote with style and clarity that betrays our assumption that legal writing must be opaque, full of jargon, and wooden. Some of these books were tremendously popular throughout the eighteenth century. Giles Jacob (1686–1744), whose interest in litigation as well as literature was sufficient for Alexander Pope to relegate him a place in *The Dunciad*, wrote several very successful compilations of English common law. His *A New Law Dictionary* (London, 1729) was “the first published guide to English law that combined an abridgement of statute law with a dictionary of legal practice and terminology,” a forerunner of the present *Black’s Law Dictionary* (ODNB, “Giles Jacob”). His other legal help books, *The Common Law Common-Placed* (London, 1726) and *Every Man his Own Lawyer* (London 1736), leave no doubt that law was a subject the general reader at this point need, and wanted, to know more about. By 1769, similar guides directed to the educated class were in competition, but a revised edition of Jacob’s book remained the standard through the early nineteenth century. *A Treatise of Laws: or, A General Introduction to the Common, Civil and Canon Law*, was widely read as well, written in a colloquial style and, unusual for the

331 James Heath’s *Eighteenth Century Penal Theory* (Oxford, 1963) is an excellent collection of English and Italian sources, with a fine introduction.
subject it covers, generally free of footnotes to legal precedents. It was also succinct (two pages are enough to cover homicide).

Solicitor Cox bookshelves, one could find Thomas Wood’s *Institute of the Laws of England* (London, 1720), another work “not for professional use, but as a subject of general study” (*ODNB*, “Wood”) which as in its ninth edition by 1763. He surely owned an edition of Sir Matthew Hale’s *Historia placitorum coronae*=The History of the Pleas of the Crown (London, 1736) and Sir William Hawkins’s, *A Treatise of the Pleas of the Crown* (London], 1716-21), perhaps the fourth edition from 1762. As they thought about Baretti and the death penalty, they consulted or knew, without question, the works of Sir William Blackstone, the second edition of the *Analysis of the Laws of England* (Oxford, 1757) and, especially, Book IV of the *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (Oxford, 1769), in which the greatest English jurist of the century examined questions of private wrongs and homicide. Another work that perhaps was perused that night was Sir Michael Foster’s *A Report of Some Proceedings on the Commission of Oyer and Terminer* (Oxford, 1762), a beautifully written, lucid commentary by a jurist Blackstone considered “a very great master of the crown law.” (*ODNB*, “Michael Foster”) These are the principal works that are hidden behind the defense of Baretti, and it is the law as presented in these volumes that we have to consider, if we wish to fully appreciate the complexity of this perplexing case.

How is the Baretti case to be viewed in the light of contemporary commentaries on homicide? Was it an example of the expeditious and human legislation that for some critics characterized Britain? Or was it, on the contrary, a vivid example of a miscarriage

---

of justice for within a rigid legal system easily manipulated by the great and the good? In this chapter, I will provide answers to these questions.

We shall see furthermore that many of the issues which gave rise to such divided opinions in the time of the trial remain with us today, as legal theorists and practitioners in England wrestle with the same issues.

INJUSTICES, CAPITAL PUNISHMENT AND PENAL REFORM

“The absurd and barbarous notions of justice, which prevailed for ages, have been exploded, and humane and rational principles have been adopted in their stead,” wrote Martin Madan in *Thoughts on Executive Justice, with Respect to our Criminal Laws* (London, 1785). He was not the only one who noticed a paradigm shift from the period of barbaric tortures and haphazard justice to a world that aspired to a more democratic notion of justice. Madan had seen the changes since the firestorm created throughout Europe by Cesare Beccaria’s *Dei delitti e pene*. Beccaria’s treatise deconstructed arguments for capital punishment and torture, confronting a whole series of abuses, contradictions, and inefficiencies in the criminal justice system. For Beccaria—and for the many writers throughout Europe — the problem was quite distinct from the issue of capital punishment in later historical periods.

In the 1700s, the available punishments were very limited and were applied with a high degree of prejudice and irregularity. The common punishments – exposing the stocks, whipping through the street, and execution by hanging – were public spectacles. The punishment considered most cruel was hanging in chains and dissection. William Hogarth in mid-century made a satirical engraving on the barbarity of the legal system,
the guilty man shown, surrounded by doctors and lawyers, with his entrails flowing off the operating table to a mongrel dog. The problem was the manifest the cruelty of the punishments for the most serious offenders. In the sentencing phase, if a person accused of any crime was found guilty (and had lost all chances for a reprieve), the judge was left with very few options. The mandatory punishment for murder – there were grades of murder – was death, although many reprieves were granted. The related issue, in the absence of prisons, was that the same sentence was levied on those found guilty of crimes manifestly less serious, particularly if the criminal was a repeat offender. John Turner was indicted for assaulting “Tho. Air, Esq; on the Highway” and “taking from him a Purse value 1 d and 3 Guineas and 1 Half Guinea in Money.” Turner stopped Air’s coach on the highway, “held out a Pistol, and said, I must have your Purse, I answered, How do you know I have a Purse? He said, You look as if you had; and after I delivered it; he asked my Pardon, and said, he could not help it.” (OBSP, October 17, 1727) Air told Turner to look at them men hanging in chains; the robbery took place “on Hounslow Heath, in Sight of the Gibbet.” This did not deter the criminal, and he was later executed.

This case gives one a sense of the severity and the omnipresence of capital punishment, as well as the reason why many thinkers considered it an inefficacious way to prevent crime. The punishment summary from the OBSP gives an indication of the narrow range of punishment for serious offences, ranging from treason to theft (over a certain amount).

There were in all Eight Persons that received Sentence of Death; Ralph Markland to be drawn and Hanged, being convicted of High-Treason, for Clipping. Francis Nicholson, for Murdering the Gentleman at Hampton, to be Hanged till dead, and his body hung up in Chains on Hounslow-Heath. John Watkins and Edward Whitwick for killing the Watchman by Ivy-Lane, which the Law made Murder. John Neal for the said Burglary. Eliz. Hull, and Katherine Johnson, for several Felonies. There was no person this Sessions Burnt in the Hand, one Gentleman
Had the scheme of punishment for the crimes not been so limited, there would not have been so much anxiety in the office of Solicitor Cox. The death penalty led to acts of abject desperation or suicide, as was the case with Mungo Campbell, or the Frenchman Thomas Gardelle.

Tried several years before Baretti, Gardelle’s case was similar to the Italian’s in some particulars, which vividly captures how the severity of capital punishment had the effect of encouraging further vice. Thomas Gardelle, a Frenchman, wanted very much to have some snuff on April 1, 1761, but he had already given his last pinch to Mrs. King, the landlady in the boardinghouse where he lived. He urged the maid to run to the store for him, while he passed the time reading a French Grammar. Mrs. King came downstairs, they got into a quarrel: I said to her, “impertinent woman, in English, for want of understanding the language.” When this miscommunication occurred, Mrs. King could not hold back, and “grew in a passion, grew red in the face, and gave me a blow here (putting his hand to his side below his left breast) which was more violent than I could have expected from the hand of a woman.” “Rather out of contempt than intending to give her a blow,” Gardelle gave King a shove, “her foot hitch'd in the oil-cloth that was nailed to the floor, and she lost her perpendicular posture, she was still within the door between one and the other, she had a violent fall, not keeping an equilibrium, and her head hit against the corner of the bed.” Being asked why the sentence of death should not be past upon him, Gardelle appeared penitent and confessed that “the accident was not voluntary. I had no intention to murder this woman, it came by accident. What I did afterwards with the body I look upon to be more wicked than what I did by giving her the
Desperate and fearful of what would be an almost certain death by hanging, Gardelle attempted to dispose of the body as best he could, hiding intestines in the cupboard, a breast in a crawl space, and burning some bones in the garret. He was executed in the Hay-market, near Panton Street, and his body hang'd in chains on Hounslow-heath.” Three days later his body was dissected and anatomized.

Other legal writers felt that the system was not too strict, but rather entirely too lenient. Baretti was not the only instance that critics pointed to in which the English legal system seemed to be yielding to the demands of “pious purgery,” mitigation, and soft sentencing. Martin Madan, in Thoughts on Executive Justice, with Respect to our Criminal Laws presents many instances in which criminals were captured only to be given a reprieve, or in some way evade a just punishment. Following closely the train of Beccaria’s thought, Madan continues, “The primary object of the legislature should be to prevent crimes, and not to chastise criminals; that that object cannot possibly be attained by the mere terror of punishment.” (2) Convinced that brutal physical punishments “have not produced any melioration of the system of our penal laws,” Madan forcefully argues that to inflict the “same punishment on a pick-pocket as on a parricide, confounds all idea of justice, and renders the laws objects, not of veneration and love, but of horror and aversion.” (4) Madan criticizes the current habits of juries that sat late in the day after the men at big meals; he observed that some jurors and judges were barely awake during proceedings. “That criminal prosecutions ought always to be carried on for the sake of the public, and never to gratify the passions of individuals,” Martin insists, recommending a “just proportion” between crimes and punishments and greater vigilance in preventing collusion and favoritism in the courtrooms. Almost all the legal writers of
the 1760s and 1770s agreed that the legal system was in need of change, for it was manifestly corrupt.

Although writing some decades after the period explored in this study, Thomas Wontner successfully captured the exasperation of many social commentators during the time of Baretti. Wontner is more outspoken than earlier writers on the abuses in the criminal justice system. In *Old Bailey Experience: Criminal Jurisprudence and the Actual Working of Our Penal Code of Laws* (London, 1833), Wontner wrote an exposé of the cracks in the foundation of the Old Bailey. “The impression a perusal of [the OBSP] made on my mind, was as if all the business had been done by lottery.” (48-49) Wontner not only read the case law and studied the transcripts of trials, he visited various prisons to paint a realistic picture of how prisoners awaiting trial felt about crime and courts. He is astonished at what he found: “I do not mean to say they complain of the sentences being too severe generally; for that would be natural enough on their parts, and not worth notice.” He continues, “They believe that every thing done at the court a matter of chance; that in the same day, and for a like crime, one man will be sentenced to transportation for life, while another may be let off for a month’s imprisonment, and yet both equally bad characters.” (45) He adds: “’The greatest crimes come off the best.’ This is an aphorism among the thieves.” (50) This maxim arose, Wontner explains, from and great number of criminals whose cases are simply dismissed unheard, as well as the capricious assigning of pardons. Reliable documentation does not exist for the number of pardons in the eighteenth century, but historians have in recent years shown that Wontner is applicable to the 1700s: the severity of punishments in the 1700s did not preclude a number of mechanism allowing for “mercy,” “clergy,” and out-of-court settlements. “Of
these nothing can be said, as they must be considered innocent of the crimes with which they were charged, there not being *prima facie* evidence to send them on their trials.” (44)

Interestingly enough, Wontner is not primarily concerned about combating crime when he observes the mass of prisoners. Rather, he is shocked by a lack of regulation and oversight in terms of sentencing: “The inequality of sentences for crimes of a like nature—to which may be added the many instances of mistaken, or rather *mis-directed* leniency, compared with others of enormous severity for trifling offences; all which may tend to induce the London thieves to entertain a contempt for that tribunal.” (45)

Referring to the Old Bailey, Wontner records that the “opinion prevails throughout the whole body, that justice is not done there.” We are told that the scene on the day that the final sentences are delivered to the prisoners held at Newgate “defies any description or paper”: “Some will be seen jumping and skipping for joy at the very unexpectedly mild sentence passed on them; others are cursing and swearing, calling down imprecations on the Recorder, for having, as they say, so unfairly measured out justice; all agreeing there is no proportion in the punishments to the crime.” (50) In the following passage, Wontner shows that character evidence continued to have a powerful impact in court cases, though he regard it with suspicion:

I remember the case of two butchers, whose briefs I wrote, which occurred last year. One was an old, the other a young man, both having been in the employ of the prosecutor. They were charged with stealing a breast of mutton from their master: both were found guilty. The old man had persons to speak as to his character for honesty for forty years past (his former masters) the young one had not a solitary witness to say a word for him. The former was sentenced to fourteen years transportation; the latter to six months in a house of correction. When the prosecutor heard of the circumstance, he got up a petition to the secretary of state for the remission of the sentence, in which he stated that on the trial he himself had given the old man a good character, and not the other. (50)
The overall impression one gets from reading Wontner is that “no person, however acute and experienced, [can] form the slightest opinion of what the judgment of the court will be.” (49) In 1772, a journalist took a “peep into futurity,” after some recent court cases, and saw everything Wontner would write. One of the cases he had in mind was Baretti. (D-38) Dr. Johnson was discussing the evil of the death penalty when he made a similar observation to Wontner’s eighty years before. He noted, “so many disproportions between crimes and punishments, such capricious distinctions of guilt, and such confusion of remissness and severity, as can scarcely be believed to have been produced by publick wisdom, sincerely and calmly studious of publick happiness.”

Baffled by capricious verdicts, Wontner harshly criticizes the bonds of friendship between the various players in the legal system: judges, lawyers, jurors, constables, witnesses, and so forth. He points out that these personal connections lead to inevitably favors given, and cases being decided not on the facts but rather on the ability to elicit sympathy from the audience, the judge, the jurors, or audience. Judges are expected to look into the facts with no partiality, with an emotional detachment, but this is not the case at the Old Bailey: “There any wish may be expressed to a judge regarding a prisoner, and story told without the accused having the opportunity to rebut it—any enormity softened down to a venial offense, or any peccadillo swelled to a most atrocious crime.” (56) It seems obvious that we would not wish our judges, any more than the jurors, to have “conflicts of interest” with anyone in the courtroom; that is, if a judge did

---

333 *Rambler* 114 (Saturday, April 20, 1751)
have such a relationship, naturally he would, he recuse himself. In Italy, the situation was no equally dire, according to some critics. Paolo Risi, in *Observations on Matters of Criminal Justice* (1766), “no one can doubt that there are a good number of judges with very little enlightenment, and a number of others who are very far from impartial.”  

Although Wontner is confident about the transparency of justice in clear capital cases, he is convinced that “no one unacquainted with the business of the place can possibly have a conception of the number of persons who influence the judges.” (52) Watching the Baretti trial, the audience would not have expected such transparency and independence of the particular participants. The judge, Henry Bathurst, summarized the evidence on both sides and was probably inclined to give instructions to the jury. When Baretti read his account of the affair, he moved the audience to tears, he wrote later, pleased with his ability to stimulate the sensibility of his viewers with the force of his expression. “The monstrous acts of carelessness, and consequent injustice, emanating from the Old Bailey court, are incredible to persons who have been accustomed to consider it, like others, pure and unvitiated by patronage and influence.” (50) Newspaper accounts suggest that Baretti, dressed all in black and overwrought with emotion, so convincingly displayed himself as the victim of indecency, the pillar of society, that the judge himself was touched and wiping away tears.

The most devastating portion of Wontner’s critic occurs when he speaks of an intervention in the courts that calls to mind *Baretti*. He objects to the use of character evidence, but he prefers not to argue against the practice, offering only unsettling first-hand evidence. “I only state the fact, knowing it to be so, through the prisoners

---

themselves, who, in many instances have apprised me beforehand that they must decline incurring any expense for a defence, having such friends to write to the judge, &c. &c.” (57)

Those who can write and have money exert a power over any objection, be it hearsay or irrelevance. He admits: “I have known many offenders get off with a nominal punishment, by having letters written to the judge, at the Old Bailey, from some person of consequence. These are generally procured through some relation, who having access to the parties, excite their feelings on behalf of the prisoner.” (57) “Such letters, if from what, in common parlance, is called a great man, are always influential over the minds of the judges.”

Several contemporary newspapers reports, undocumented by scholars and historians, give another side to the case. These articles demonstrate a great deal of manipulation of the justice system during the Baretti trial. There can be no doubt that these letters were composed by competent lawyers very upset by the verdict. (D-32, D-34) To read these arguments is to realize the opposition to Baretti cannot be attributed to personal grudges and anti-Italian sentiments. “It is not a postulate, but a demonstrable fact” that the judges at the Old Bailey are subject to influence peddling, and the “internal machinery of Newgate and the Old Bailey”

A linen draper’s shopman was committed for robbing his master’s till, marked money having been found upon him. A few days after his committal he was recognized by one of the turnkeys, who had formerly been servant to his father, an officer in the marines. The man took an interest in the young linendraper’s fate, and four days previous to his trial told him, in my presence, that he had managed his business, but could not get him off for less than three months’ imprisonment. He was subsequently sentenced for precisely that term. In this instance we begin with the lowest instrument, a turnkey! (53)

Two letters, one written in October and one in July, 1770, are among the most dramatic and well-written texts about the case. (D-17, D-37) The documents are brought to light
with this study. They narrate in great detail what occurred to prevent a fair trial. One is written by “A Lover of Truth and Justice,” the other by “A Friend of Truth and Justice.” The information they contain is plausible and realistic, so these letters cast more serious doubts on the verdict in Baretti than anything in Badini’s diatribe or other anecdotes about stabbings. The first letter gives voice to Evan Morgan through his brother Richard, a school-teacher who tried desperately to construct a case against “a constellation of genius.” If what is written in this letter is true, no one can accept the verdict in this case without feeling deeply troubled. They were written by a lawyer or lawyers familiar with crown law and very familiar with the case.

In this period, the work legal theorists, who happened also to be quite gifted writers, refined the language relating to murder. I will illuminate the Baretti case in this chapter by positioning it in context of a homicide law that during the period. This should help us understand why Baretti left some people delighted and the “Lover of Truth and Justice” so upset. Some were convinced that the verdict was just, while others insisted that justice had been breached. Not least among these debates were considerations regarding three issues relevant to the Baretti case, issues likewise at the center of the trial of Mungo Campbell: (1) the distinction between murder and manslaughter, (2) the provocation defense, and (3) the definition of self-defense.

Throughout the eighteenth century, these points were discussed and evaluated, and all three are central to Baretti.

MALITIA PRECOGITA AND 2 JAM. I. C. 8
If the men in Cox’s office were not specialists in criminal law, they surely were quite familiar with the major issues concerning homicide, less complicated than other branches of law and little changed since the Renaissance. Murders were so infrequent in eighteenth-century London, and so often done by ruthless villains, that not a great deal of change was made in homicide law. As Clive Emsley writes, “Anxiety about murder and a perceived increase in violent robbery in London led to more severe legislation in 1752, but there were only ten convictions for murder during the year and this was exceptional; the annual average for murder convictions between 1749 and 1771 was four.” Many legal issues were in the air—from capital punishment to torture to issues of international law—and so it is not surprising that there was some refinement to the law of murder, which Sir William Blackstone called “the highest crime against the law of nature, that man is capable of committing.” According to Law Commissioner and Professor Jeremy Horder, the seventeenth and eighteenth century brought the “critical formative years for the law of homicide.” Throughout the 1760s and 70s, the legal commentators discussed the topic of murder.

The central most feature of English homicide law was the distinction between murder and manslaughter, the fundamental difference Baretti brought up in his controversy with Sharp between premeditated killing and killing in the heat of passion. The history of this distinction has been traced to the Middle Ages, but the development of manslaughter as distinct from murder was resulted as a way of mitigating murders much

---

336 Clive Emsley, *Crime and Society in England, 1750-1900* (New York, 1987): 41-42. In the period from 1765-1774, of the 278 executions, only 29 were for murder, while 86 were for burglary, 20 for forgery and 79 for highway robbery. In the period from 1775-1784, of 414 executions, only 17 (4.1%) were for murder. (256-257). The murder rate was in London during the Victorian period was 1-1.5 per 100,000, lower than it is today in London

like the one for which Baretti was indicted. Frequent quarrels over honor led to killings during the Renaissance with enough frequency that a distinct class of homicides developed that made such crimes, committed according to set codes of masculine honor, less blameworthy under the law. Murder came to be defined as killing a man with forethought, while on the other hand manslaughter was done in a temporary state of anger or passion. Baretti’s position conveys a historically accurate division between killings done with premeditation, in “cold blood,” and those committed in an act of sudden passion, designated as “hot-blooded.”

Baretti’s interpretation of the law is fascinating, since it implicitly endorsed the cultural position with regard to murder. That is to say, the homicides in Italy generally followed quarrels, so Baretti’s legal reasoning allows him to exculpate Italians from Sharp’s accusations, reducing assassinations to manslaughters. Forced by Sharp to admit to the frequency of killings in Italy, Baretti defends them on the basis that they are not premeditated, assuming of course that any murder done in a moment of fury is of a distinct category and categorically less blameworthy than any murder whatsoever committed with forethought or deliberate planning. Baretti was asserting a position that he felt was not the least controversial: he was stating, rather, a matter of common sense. That a premeditated murder involved a greater moral evil than one committed on impulse was, for Baretti and for many others, not only advantageous but axiomatic. Why is the inflamed killer treated more leniently than the calm killer?

During the eighteenth century, many jurists questioned the implicit assumption that any pre-mediated killing is necessarily far more heinous, more blameworthy, and should be punished much more severely. Jacob put the distinction is simple and clear

---

terms, though he was not as forgiving as Baretti was of manslaughter: “Homicide
without Deliberation is committed on a sudden Quarrel, and in Passion, raised upon great
Provocation. It lies upon the criminal to prove, that he had no Fore-thought or Design;
and if he proves it, his Life shall be spared; but he is to be treated with Severity.” (316)
The sanguinary metaphor was perhaps an unfortunate one, for it seemed to imply a binary
opposition between the two crimes, a dichotomy further strengthened by the leniency of
punishment for manslaughter (branding of the thumb, sometimes done “lightly”) relative
to the punishment for murder, hanging or hanging and dissection.

The distinction that Baretti discusses—and the underpins his defense—underwent
a number of salient changes, in order to clearly define murder, as Blackstone wrote, “in
it’s several stages of guilt, arising from the particular circumstances of mitigation or
aggravation which attend it.” (177) When Henry Dagge penned Considerations on
Criminal Law (1772), unlike Baretti, he cautiously observed that there exists “nice
circumstances and distinctions attending this crime…[the] many niceties respecting the
presumption implying malice, and many other points, for which we refer the curious to
Coke, Hale, Hawkins, &c.” (344) Some of the modifications to the murder-
manslaughter distinction, we shall see in this section, are very relevant to Baretti.

Baretti’s position on homicide remains today the popular understanding of the
murder in England and America, notwithstanding the fact the law was not so simple two
hundred years ago. This two-tiered approach to murder has remained to this day in
England, to the dismay of many legal theorists who regard it as too rigid a scheme.339

339 See A New Homicide Act for England and Wales Consultation Paper No. 177 (Overview)
“1.14 The expression “malice aforethought” continues erroneously to exercise great influence over the
public perception of murder. Most people believe that murder is either a deliberate premeditated killing or,
at least, a deliberate killing. In fact, its scope is much wider. There does not have to be an intention to kill,
Historians are also mistaken, according to Jeremy Horder for a duel did not necessarily warrant a murder verdict (if, as was not always the case, one of the individuals was killed). Some duels were fought premeditated (and so potentially murderous), while on other occasions the duel involved “taking to the field” immediately, and so any eventual killings would be considered manslaughter; while the codes of honour demanded that the duel be premeditated (prepared for following a rigid set of advance rules), other duels were “spur of the moment combats” referred to as taking the field. (422) Thus, Horder observes, “a duel or combat could be premeditated or unpremeditated in the heat of blood, as Hawkins and Blackstone recognized.” (422) Just as not a duel could be considered hot blooded manslaughter, occasional quarrels that led to a death were not automatically judged hot-blooded killing (as Baretti would have it), and consequently reduced to manslaughter, a crime that allowed for a much more lenient sentence.

The earliest newspaper reports indicate that Baretti would be indicted for manslaughter. (D-1) His defence team argued that he did not anticipate the encounter and the killing was done in a moment, but a certain statute removed the possibility of a manslaughter charge.

They were not successful in getting the indictment reduced on account of a statute in the English law called the “Statute on Stabbing.” Formulated in 1604, this statute “took away benefit of clergy for killing by stabbing, where the deceased had no weapon drawn, even if at common law the killing was but manslaughter.”

Fielding (who charged Baretti) quoted it in his *Extracts from Such of the Penal Laws, as Particularly Relate to the Peace and Good Order of this Metropolis* (London, 1762):

“Stabbing or thrusting any Person that hath not then any Weapon drawn, or that hath not then first stricken the Party which shall so stab or thrust, so as the Person so stabbed or thrust shall thereof die within six Months then next following, although it cannot be proved that the same was done of Malice aforethought, is Felony without Clergy, as in cases of willful Murder.” Baretti must not have been aware of this aggravating circumstance when he wrote the *Account*. The fact he killed Morgan with a knife not only stigmatized him as *an Italian with a stiletto*, but also forced on him an indictment for murder and, thus, put him at risk to die. Had Baretti pushed Evan Morgan in front of an oncoming carriage or killed him with a club, for instance, he would have been in a much less problematic position from the legal point of view. William Auckland, in *Principles of Penal Law* (London, 1771), explains the background of the Statute: “The offence of mortally stabbing another upon sudden provocation, not then having a weapon drawn, nor having first stricken at the party killing, [as] a peculiar species of manslaughter, which is punished as murder…consisted in the manner of doing it, because the Scots carried short daggers, and frequently, upon differences arising at table, stabbed others unprovided.” (232) Clearly, the “Statute Against Stabbing” (as it was also called) was designed for murders done with table knives, as well as murders committed with daggers in the street.

Sir Michael Foster, who considered the Statute a sort of historical anomaly, spoke of the crimes we read of in travel accounts of Italy as part of a remote and distant past: “This Statute was made at a Critical Time, and as tradition hath it, upon a very special
Occasion. It is supposed to have been principally intended to put an effectual Stop to
Outrages then frequently committed by Persons of inflammable Spirits and deep
Resentment; who wearing short Daggers under the Cloaths were too well prepared to do
quick and effectual Execution upon Provocations extremely slight.” (297-298)
According to Foster, furthermore, the statute “was made for preventing the
Inconveniences arising the Forwardness or Compassion of Juries.”(298) Foster
concludes that the Statute was enacted as a means of dealing with overly sympathetic juries “apt to consider provocation for extenuating Murder.” Foster and Blackstone both thought the “Statute Against Stabbing” had little legal value, and was a temporary remedy for a particular social ill during the reign of James I. At a time when frequent quarrels were resolved in violent knife fights, fights that would continue to occur with alarming frequency into the nineteenth century in Italy, the law was a necessary stop-gap measure. By the middle of the eighteenth century, judging from the legal commentaries, it no longer seemed necessary or reasonable in England to single out knives as a particularly lethal weapon. Strangely, an English statute of 1604 appears to have been designed with Giuseppe Baretti in mind, for he clearly (and incorrectly, according to Foster) believed that a crime committed in a state of anger or outrage was, ipso facto, not murder. He recorded a similar conviction in a list of proverbs and maxims in his Commonplace Book Manuscript: “Passion is universally allowed extenuator of violence.”

341 Quoted from Samuel Richardson, Clarissa, Vol. 6, Letter XXXIV: “Can I have a better?--If I am in a violent passion upon the detection, is not passion an universally allowed extenuator of violence? Is not every man and woman obliged to excuse that fault in another, which at times they find attended with such ungovernable effects in themselves?” Interestingly, Baretti recorded this line as a statement, not a question.
During the trial, Baretti and his witnesses discuss at some length the weapon he used for the crime, insisting that it was not a weapon, but a utensil for cutting “fruit and sweetmeats.” The knife is repeatedly removed from the scene of the crime and neutralized by creating “soft” connotations, such as when Topham Beauclerk testifies to having seen knives just like Baretti’s for sale “in toy shops.

Convinced that “passion” is the “universal” mitigation, Baretti overlooks a central concept to discussion of the crime of murder in the eighteenth century, a concept that in the course of the century would gain weight and legal significance: the evil mind or, technically, \textit{mens rea}. To distinguish whether a homicide was done in hot or cold blood, it was necessary to inquire into the intention of the criminal, and to make a determination of whether he acted with malice. Baretti is familiar with the term \textit{malice prepense}, but his understanding of the term in the \textit{Account} is not accurate to the homicide law. In Baretti’s definition, malice attaches to the murder insofar as it is planned, organized and the result of rational forethought.

However, by the early seventeenth century, malice aforethought was presumed to be an essential element in all killings, and the burden was on the slayer to display evidence that he acted under some necessity. One common way to prove this necessity was by evidence of provocation, as in \textit{Baretti}. The central point in the distinction on murder and manslaughter was not whether it was planned long in advance. Even provocation was found to be an ineffective defense for murder, when it was done with “an abject disregard for the life of the individual” or an “evil intention to hurt.” Frequently the legal writers argue that the seriousness of the killing depended far more on the slayer’s \textit{intention} than on the particular timing of the deed or how much it was
carefully planned. Indeed, the original distinction between murder and manslaughter was based on a similar moral position: a mind premeditating murder is manifestly more vicious, more perverse, and therefore more deserving of capital punishment.

Refiners of homicide law in the eighteenth century opposed this facile cold-hot distinction, however, by insisting on a more careful consideration of the particular situation of the violent act and an attempt to ascertain the intention of the slayer. Juries were instructed to watch the defendant’s gestures of body language, hoping to see telltale signs of penitence or a vengeful spirit. If the killing was done with a purely evil mind, it was argued, the period of reflection or preparation need not be long at all in duration; if a slayer acts with “evil intention,” he does not deserve any special accommodation, such as that provided by the manslaughter indictment. According to Justice Wood, murder (as opposed to manslaughter) is committed whenever there is this intention of doing evil, a blatant disregard for the value of human life.342 “He that doth a cruel and voluntary Act, whereby Death ensueth, doth it of Malice Prepense and Fore-Thought in the Eye of the Law, tho’ he doth it of a sudden.”

Indeed, it was not even necessary in law that the slayer intended to kill; rather, it is essential that the act of killing (or doing grave bodily harm) was done with a cruel, malicious heart. Wood writes, “When a Person in cold Blood maliciously and deliberately beats another, or doth other corporal Damage in such a manner that he dieth thereof, he is guilty of Murder by express Malice, tho’ he did not design to kill him.’(346) Malice can be “Express,” says Wood, revealed by “a sedate Mind, and formed Design to Wound, Poison, or do some Injury to him that is kill’d” (345) It might also be “implied,” for example, evil assumed by the law in the absence of evidence of

planning or prior ill intent. “The unlawful Act must be without Deliberation, and without Intention of doing a personal Hurt, to make it Manslaughter. For it the unlawful Act is deliberate, and tends to the personal Hurt of any immediately, or by way of necessary Consequence, and Death ensues, it is Murder as before observe.” (349)

Baretti’s defense attempts to prove that he had given no planning to what occurred on that night, emphasizing the “suddenness” of the quarrel (he was on his way to meet friends, after all), and stressing not only his general character (responsible and hard-working), but the mental state of Baretti (in fear and not desirous of doing harm). “A man who had lived full fifty years, and spent most of that time in a studious manner, I hope, will not be supposed to have voluntarily engaged in so desperate an affair,” Baretti says in his Old Bailey Defense. What occurred that evening was totally unanticipated, out of keeping with the tenor of his life and his character, and done regrettably without a scintilla of malice or hostility. The defense insists that he was not engaged in a willful action, that he had no animosity toward the victim, whose death is presented as his own, unfortunate fault.343

In short, Baretti’s actions that evening were not, to use the wording of Sir Michael Foster, “attended with such Circumstances as are the ordinary Symptoms of a Wicked, Depraved, Malignant Spirit.” (256) Foster and Blackstone in mid-century insisted on the importance of evaluating malice when “collected from the Circumstances,” By looking at all the particulars of the crime, they argued, the judge and jury could determine if willful

343 Blackstone notes that malice is not necessarily directed at the one killed: “This is the grand criterion, which now distinguishes murder from other killing: and this malice prepense, militia praecogitata, is not so properly spite or malevolence to the deceased in particular, as any evil design in general.” (199) Foster, similarly, distinguished general malice from mere anger against the victim: “The Legislature hath likewise frequently used the Terms Malice and Malitiously in the same general Sense, as denoting a Wicked, Perverse, and Incorrigible Disposition.” (257)
murder was done from some “Wicked or Mischievous Incentive.” (257) Looking at excuses, Foster eliminates the defense of prior anger. “If A. intendeth to Beat B. in Anger or from preconceived Malice, and Death ensueth, it will doubtless be no Excuse, that he did not Intend to all the Mischief that followed. For what He Did was Malum in se, and He must be answerable for the Consequences of it.” (259) He also insists that the killer should not be absolved for lacking the “Degree of Circumspection which common Prudence would have suggested.” (260)

Granville Sharp, a prolific social critic and staunch opponent of slavery, followed Foster’s position on the need to examine all the particulars in order to ascertain any malice. 344

In Remarks on the Opinions of Some of the Most Celebrated Writers on Crown Law, Respecting the due Distinction between Manslaughter and Murder (London, 1773), Sharp argues that the law must consider all the specifics of the case, how the murder was committed and, quoting Foster, whether the slayer “knocked his brains out with a bill or hedgstake, or had given him an outrageous beating with an ordinary cudgel beyond the bounds of a sudden resentment.” (1) Sir William Blackstone saw no reason why the choice of weapon should aggravate the crime: “For, in point of solid and substantial justice, it cannot be said that the mode of killing, whether by stabbing, strangling, or shooting, can either extenuate or enhance the guilt; unless when, as in the case of poisoning, it carries with it an internal evidence of cool and deliberate malice.”345 Foster

---

345 Thomas Wood gives a list of the techniques of the murderer: “The killing may be by a Weapon, Poyson, Crushing, Bruising, Strangling, Drowning, Burning, Famishing, citing a Dog, Bear &c. to bite or hurt, whereby Death ensueth; and by laying a sick Man in the cold Air against his will, by reason whereof he dieth.” (345)
agreed, but other legal commentators felt that the presence of a knife, like the use of poison, implied cruelty. Giles Jacob, for instance, wrote that due consideration should be given when assessing the charge to the nature of the weapon used, for when “one kills another in a Quarrel, if he struck him with a dangerous Weapon, it will be interpreted deliberate Homicide.” (316) Sharp feels that the weapon used is sufficient proof for willfulness, be it a “merely with his hand” or a small stone, as opposed to “a stone wherewith a man may die,” “meaning such a stone as from its shape and size might be deemed a sufficient weapon to occasion death.” (28)

Coke, Hale, and Blackstone, according to Sharp, have all wrongly reduced provoked murders to manslaughter, when in fact “killing is pardonable only in cases of inevitable necessity.”(xv) Central also to Sharp’s argument is the idea of murderous intention. Sharp recognizes that a murder done in hot blood is generally viewed as less blameworthy, as the killer acted without intention, without malice; however, he contends that evil intentions can be behind sudden attacks. He argues that no distinction should be made and malice must be presumed, unless “ex necessitate, especially if the fatal blow be willfully given with a weapon” with the clear “intention to do harm.” In cases where the “outrage is considered as flowing rather from brutal rage or diabolical malignity than from human frailty,” then the slayer must be found guilty of murder. Although Sharp referred to a great number of cases to support his points, he never mentioned the Baretti case, perhaps in deference to the esteemed witnesses involved in it. No extenuations, according to Sharp, should be granted, as has often been the case in corrupt courts that have “indiscriminately” set bad precedents by reducing “willful murder” to “manslaughter. (15)
Sharp goes on to examine the Hebrew law, arguing that here as well the type of weapon was taken into consideration (“if he smite him with an instrument of iron, so that he die, he is a murderer”). (28) He contended that the use of a knife necessarily implied an evil intent. “He ought to have moderated his passion, and could not be ignorant that such an instrument was capable of inflicting a deadly wound.” (38) Thus a murder committed in hot-blood cannot be excused, if the choice of weapon indicates that the killer knew in advance that death was a very likely result. Granville Sharp felt that “some allowance ought to be made for heat of blood upon sudden provocation, in consideration of the extreme frailty of human nature…[if a man] in sudden anger, should strike another merely with his fist, or a small cane, or stick, meaning only to correct.” (37) He observed that malice was never mentioned in the Old Testament laws, since in “all such sallies of sudden anger, the malice was necessarily implied, or presumed, from the weapon.” (37)

Sharp was not alone in taking a decisive stance against “private revenge.” John Cockburn wrote:

He does not wisely consider things, who places his Security in a jealous, touchy and vindictive Temper, in a Resolution to revenge every Injury, and to resent all approbrious Language. He who thinks thus, and is thus resolv’d, is ill advis’d, and has consulted neither Law nor Gospel, Reason nor Religion, Human Philosophy nor Experience, but only the Sentiments of Corrupt Nature, which renders one heedless and inconsiderate.346

Returning to Baretti, it is clear from newspaper reports that many observers and critics made a great deal of the particular circumstances of Baretti’s crime and the importance of the murder weapon. Contemporary observers of the Baretti case, unlike modern scholars of Baretti, were well aware of the legal implications involved in killing with “an instrument of iron.” As one contemporary journalist put it: “It seems evident, from the

depositions made on his trial, and from the substance of his defense, that he had been assaulted by people of abandoned character; but the question is, whether he had a right to defend with such a weapon as he made use of: however, we shall not presume to decide on this question, as the jury solemnly determined that he had, by the verdict they gave.”

Baretti’s defense argues that the only reasonable method for defending himself was to use his knife, as he lacked a stick or club. The implication here, of course, is that Baretti was not armed for violence, and if he were he would have chosen the more humane, blunt instrument. When Samuel Johnson was threatened by James MacPherson, he wrote, “Whatever insult is offered me I will do my best to repel, and what I cannot do for myself the law will do for me. I will not desist from detecting what I think a cheat, from any fear of the menaces of a Ruffian.”

“Johnson then provided himself with a weapon in case Macpherson lived up to his threats. It was a thick oak stick, says Hawkins, almost six feet high, with an immense knob at the top, the size of an orange, which he kept near his chair and his bed, within ready reach should Macpherson break in on him.” On January 20, 1775, Johnson wrote a letter to MacPherson: “I received your foolish and impudent letter. Any violence offered me, I shall do my best to repel; and what I cannot do for myself, the law shall do for me. I hope I shall never be deterred from detecting what I think a cheat, by the menaces of a ruffian.” The club was exposed, and like a raised fist or threatening word, did not contain the kinetic violence of the sword or dagger. The result of being struck by the club would be bruising or broken bones, but the effects of a stab wound

---

348 Walter Jackson Bate, Samuel Johnson (New York, ), 552.
were decidedly more lethal. Johnson’s club in the hands of an enormous man could inflict quite serious injuries, but knives were viewed as quite different weapons.

Indeed, the Italian knife was viewed as particularly heinous insofar as it did not threaten or provoke fear or retreat. Oliver Goldsmith, after being attacked in the newspapers, went after the publisher of the paper and struck him with a cane, which led to legal proceedings, and Goldsmith eventually issued a written apology. Baretti’s weapon and his use of it, however, were entirely different. An early newspaper account described the knife in precise detail, with language that suggested that it was not so innocent an instrument as Garrick and Beauclerk implied, with their laconic observations about it being the sort of object bought in a “toy shop” or something in the realm of a piece of lady’s jewelry. While forks and knives were brought to the table in Italy, some critics observed that Baretti was not in Italy, and a “Birmingham knife” would have been brought to him promptly by one of the wait staff. (D-32) A letter signed by a Member of the Grand Jury,” likewise, cast doubts as to the harmless nature of Baretti’s knife. (D-16)

Sir Michael Foster was especially interested in the importance of how the murder was done and what specific weapon was employed. He instructed juries to consider carefully whether the defendant killed his provocateur with “a Box on the Ear, or had struck Him with a Stick or other Weapon not likely to Kill, and had Unluckily and against his Intention Killed, [in which case] it had been but Manslaughter.” (290-291) Foster believed that the weapon could give telltale signs of malice. By attentively examining all of the details with regard to the manner of killing, according to Foster, one could reasonably conclude in many cases whether the killer “intended to chastise for piece of

---

Insolence which few Spirits can bear” or had acted with “the Heart bent upon Mischief.”

Such analysis, he points out, is absolutely necessary in homicide upon questionable provocation, for reasons he explains:

And it ought to be remembered, that is all other Cases of Homicide upon slight Provocation, if it may be reasonably collected from the Weapon made use of, or from any other Circumstance, that the Party intended to Kill, or to do some great bodily Harm, such Homicide will be Murder. The Mischief done is irreparable, and the Outrage is considered as flowing rather from brutal Rage or diabolical Malignity that from Human Frailty. And it is to Human Frailty, and to that Alone, that Law indulgeth in every Case of Felonious Homicide. (291)

Furthermore, an “apparent Malignity of the Heart” is sometimes exposed not by the weapon, but by the manner in which it was wielded. The knife is not, in itself, evidence of “wicked vindictive disposition,” Foster points out, for a ruthless murderer could use a tool not meant for murder. Having killing with a so-called “non-lethal” weapon, however, was equally a murder, and not manslaughter, if the slayer “knocked his Brains out with a Bill or Hedgestake, or had given Him an outrageous Beating with an ordinary Cudgel” The questioner in the courtroom should be investigating whether or not there was a “deliberate Act and savoured of Cruelty.”(292) One Gallup ms is the coroner’s report that describes in great detail the wounds inflicted; this information was never brought up in trial, nor was it released to the presses. (D-39) Blackstone referred to Halloway’s Case, in which a boy stealing wood was killed, though it was argued that the defendant intended only to chastise the boy: ”It had been executed with such cruelty to someone offering no resistance, the prepensed malice was implied.”351

351 For Blackstone on Malice see 198-199. In Halloway, Blackstone see “an express evil design, the genuine sense of militia. As when a park-keeper tied a boy, that was stealing wood, to a horse’s tail, and dragged him along the park.”
The coroner’s reports in the Baretti case would include a detailed description of the weapon. However, the extent of the wounds is documented on a page of the Gallup mss, which describes with the language of warrants the specifics related to Baretti’s knife and the wounds he inflicted on Evan Morgan:

Jos: Baretti with a certain knife made of Iron and Steel with a Silver Case upon the same Val 6d. which he in his Right Hand had and held in & upon the left side of the sd. Evan Morgan divers times feloniously did strike and thrust giving to him with the knife afsd. Upon the left side of the sd. Evan Morgan near the left Arm pit one mortal Wound of the Length of half an Inch and of the Depth of three Inches also in & upon the sd. Left Breast of the sd. Evan Morgan one Mortal Wound of the Length of half an Inch and of the Depth of three Inches. And also in and upon the sd. Left Side of the sd. Evan Morgan near the Groin one other mortal Wound of the Length of half an Inch and of the Depth of three Inches Of which said mortal Wounds the sd. Evan Morgan on sd. 6th of Octobr. And continually afterwards until the 8th of the sd. Month at the pish. Afsd. And at the pish. Of St. Mary le Bon did Languish on which sd 8th. Of Octobr. at the sd. Pish. Of St. Mary le Bon he of the mortal wounds afsd. Died.

The question is whether Baretti, a portly and sedentary man, could have inflicted these wounds while running away or whether it was, in the words of Foster, “an Action showing a Wicked or Corrupt Motive, a Thing done Malo Animo.” (256)

Law regarding homicide and protocols for duels insisted on the enemies using similar—even identical—weapons. It was considered dishonorable to defend oneself against an unarmed man. For years after the verdict, Baretti would be criticized for fighting against “unarmed men.” At the same time, however, Baretti and his advocates argue that he argued that he was vastly outnumbered and his life was at risk.

THE PROVOCATION DEFENSE: ANGER, HONOR AND RETALIATION

Although some of the “circumstances” of in the Baretti case may lead one to believe he had acted with an evil heart, the defence passed over the details of the
stabbings in coroner’s reports. This crucial information was not rebroadcast in most newspaper reports (left out of the OBSP, it may have been also left out of the trial). Instead, the defense focused the attention on proving that Baretti was provoked. In presenting Baretti’s case, the defense emphasized, instead, was the *provocation*. This history and significance of this term—one that resonates throughout the writings of defendant—must be understood to appreciate the way *Baretti* played out in the courts as well as in the public sphere.

Given the mandatory sentence of hanging for murder, life or death frequently depended on the ability to prove in court that the slayer acted “upon a sudden affray” with no premedication. In the eighteenth century, establishing provocation became increasingly central to homicide defense, according to John Baker, who observes that “the test of manslaughter in such a case came to be, not hot bloodedness, but the presence or absence of ‘provocation.’”352 Celia Wells, an authority on the law of provocation in England, clarifies the origins of the defense: “Provocation was born out of a violent society and a criminal justice system with relatively primitive theories of individual culpability which nonetheless began to differentiate between those homicides deserving of punishment by death and those which did not.” (88) Jeremy Horder’s influential *Provocation and Responsibility* (Oxford, 1992) examines the historical background and moral assumptions of the defense that, in the Baretti case, was instrumental in bringing forth an acquittal. “It was during the seventeenth century that the foundation of the modern doctrine of provocation were laid,” explains Jeremy Horder, “that is to say, threshold conditions for the availability of the mitigation provided by the doctrine were

---

developed.”353 Legal specialists trace the current homicide law, in which provocation remains a partial defence, to the early modern period, locating “early analogues of the present combination of factual and subjective, and evaluative or objective, criteria for desert of mitigation. (23) For the writers of Crown law of the 1700s, the subject was a central concept in the law of homicide, but also a concept that required precision and could be misapplied.

Phrases like “no former Quarrel or old Grudge,” “no colour for premeditated malice,” “no former malice,” appear as a matter of course in the defense for murder during the period. As we saw in Chapter One, often more effort was spent trying to establish a previous provocation than in trying to iron out the particular facts surrounding the killing itself. The court assumed malice (and thus murder punishable by death), unless the defense was able to establish some necessity: in cases of sudden quarrels or street confrontations, this necessity came to be synonymous with provocation. As Sir Michael Foster wrote, “When it appears that one hath kill’d another, it shall be intended at first that he did it maliciously, unless he can prove that he did it upon a just Provocation.” (349)

Although Baretti is indicted for murder—manslaughter being removed with 2 JAM. I. C. 8—his defense still placed a great weight on the presentation of provocation evidence, as we saw in Chapter One. One interesting mechanism in the eighteenth century provocation defense (which is clearly at work in Baretti) is the way provocation would not only cancel out the original insult or assault, but would also aid in clearing from the defendant any questions with regard to character. “If a man kills another

353 Jeremy Horder, *Provocation and Responsibility* (Oxford, 1992). Horder’s brilliant and far-reaching analysis discusses concepts relevant to the Baretti case, such as honor, anger, duels and retaliation. For the history of the defense, see also works by Ashworth, Coss, and Wells.
suddenly without any, or without a considerable, provocation, the law implies malice,“
William Blackstone stated, “for no person, unless of an abandoned heart, would be guilty
of such an act, upon a slight or no apparent cause.” (200) On the other hand, Baretti’s
good character served to imply provocation. The tight intertwining of provocation,
character, malice, murder, and manslaughter is articulated by Thomas Wood, in An
Institute of The Laws of England:

Manslaughter is the Killing of another without Malice, in a present Heat on a
sudden Quarel, upon a just Provocation, or in the Commission of a voluntary and
unlawful Act, without any deliberate Intention of doing Mischief. There is no
Difference betwixt Murder and Manslaughter but that Murder is upon Malice
forethought, express or implied; and Manslaughter upon a sudden Occasion, or
without an ill Intent.354

On occasion, even the most brutal killer was let go free, if he succeeded in proving a just
provocation.

While the provocation defense has “an emotional, almost instinctive, appeal and
fascination,” it has in recent years come under constant criticism by legal scholars. To
some legal scholars, it seems odd to mitigate a serious crime by proving it was the result
of another, much less serious offence. Furthermore, scholars today ask, why should this
defense be available only for those accuses of murder? The doctrine of provocation arose
largely as a way of dealing with sentencing, which seems odd, and in the nineteenth
century it led to the concept of the “reasonable man,” that seems slippery at best. Should
we not expect people to control their emotions (and seek other means of addressing
wrongs), rather than acting on their sudden rage? Does this entire defense not rest, some
critics ask, on concepts of vengeance and retaliation? And, finally, is there not something

patently wrong about “blaming the victim”? Provocation has been called “an anomaly in the law” by the current Law Commission.

By the eighteenth century, those features which came to mark the modern law of provocation were formed, but the cracks in the law were also being exposed. Many of the problems critics detect in the provocation defense can already be observed in *Baretti*; the case exposes many of these uncertainties, and presents a particularly rich example of why provocation is a highly problematic defense. These troubling questions (all of which can be applied to *Baretti*) show that the provocation defense is not seamless. They knew this back in the 1700s, as highlighted words in the passage from Wood show, for provocation had very precise legal definition; it required doing much more than asserting with conviction, “You started it!” Sir Michael Foster, concerned that the idea of provocation becoming too loose, hastens to remark, “Whosoever would shelter himself under the Plea of Provocation must prove his Case to the Satisfaction of the Jury. The Presumption of Law is against Him, ‘till that Presumption is repelled by Contrary Evidence. What Degree of Provocation, and under what Circumstances Heat of Blood, the *Furor brevis*, will or will not avail the Defendant [must be] considered.” (290)

In *Provocation and Responsibility* (London, 1992), legal philosopher Jeremy Horder examined the history of provocation in the early modern period and the transformation of the defence as it became cemented into the “highly distinctive legal superstructure…rather different from that which now governs the law.” (23) According to Horder, during the Renaissance and through the seventeenth century, provocative

---

355 For the history of the doctrine of provocation, see Andrew Ashworth, Graeme Coss, "God is a Righteous Judge, Strong and Patient, and God is Provoked Every Day." A Brief History of the Doctrine of Provocation in England," *Sydney Law Review* 13 (1991):570-604;
conduct was regarded as a serious offence to honor, and thus the anger that gave rise to retaliation was deemed not merely defensible but just in the circumstances. In general, the reaction of the injured, therefore, was not presented as the hostile reaction of an individual who has lost self-control or “gone berserk.” Rather, the killing was situated in a moral framework in which honor demanded angry retaliation and anything less would be deemed cowardice: it was consistent with Aristotelian morality and not an “irrational” excess. In the later eighteenth century, Horder argues, a decisive shift arises in defenses on the basis of provocation. The defense comes to involve being pushed outside of our normal selves, irritated such a degree that we are “beside ourselves” with hostility and thus act on that temporary impulse, with little or no regard for a calculus of honor or just retribution. This marks the beginnings of defenses of “temporary insanity.”

The Baretti defense was neither one nor the other of these two types. Baretti is not a man insulted by an inferior, whose reputation requires (in fact, demands) that he responds according to the praxis of honor, masculinity, and individualism. In the early modern period, “the killer launched a unilateral attack on the provocative victim, respecting which the victim might have been quite unprepared to defend himself. No martial courage was thus in any sense displayed by the killer in his actions, because he ran no risks to himself.” Although Baretti in letters suggested that he “launched” the attack, during the trial emphasis is placed on the “risks,” his fear rather than courage, his uncertainty in response, and his desperation. He remains the agent, however, and is not presented as acting in a state of inexplicable rage, as might have been the case some decades later. The emphasis is on the physical, rather than on the moral or ethical, injury that he has suffered. The gross provocation is against his dignity, to be sure, but Baretti

does not argue that he acted in a state of passion or hot blood, his earlier assertions about this tendency in Italian notwithstanding.

Though it is very probable given what is known of Baretti’s violent tendencies that he “flew off the handle,” this is excluded from the presentation. The defense maintains that he was always acting in “character,” not beside himself or out of control. When Baretti and the witnesses state that his would not be the behavior of “a man of fifty,” they surely are not arguing that Baretti, sparked by the provocation, acted in an odd or unusual way. Instead, they seem to be arguing that the actions, whatever they were, must have been in keeping with his scholarly character; that is, they manipulate the story so that the reaction itself does not need to be defended on grounds of either anger, or on grounds that Baretti, momentarily, became another person, lost his reason, gave vent to baser instincts.

Baretti falls between the two positions with regard to provocation so well-articulated by Horder. The operative word in this presentation is not anger, but fear, an emotional state which (and this is a crucial point) subordinates Baretti to the attackers, placing him in the defensive position in terms of his psyche. Baretti does not appear or present himself, however, as being beside himself, or acting blindly. On the contrary, all the pressure is placed on the aggravating circumstances that include Baretti’s myopia, the rainy weather, the dark night, and the fact that he was Italian. Baretti does not need to defend his own honor, nor does he need to justify his behavior on the grounds that he went ballistic (this would cast doubts on the “character” evidence of Baretti as, in the words of Johnson, “timorous”). In Baretti, the defense seeks not to isolate the provocation, but rather to enlarge it. Baretti’s behavior was justified, furthermore, insofar
as it was righting a social ill that was too serious and too gross to be ignored. His behavior becomes a surrogate for the actions that were justified by all the men who suffered similar abuse, but lacked the vigor to respond. Only a defense of this sort will retain the cohesive identity of Baretti as lexicographer, tirelessly revising his most recent production in the peace of his study. In the social world of the eighteenth century, the sins of the community are placed on Baretti, a parody scapegoat, whose rescue from the gallows restores order to a town blackened by whores and drunken pickpockets.

Throughout the eighteenth century, judicial commentators became increasingly concerned with regulating what qualifies under law as a “gross” or “just” provocation. As had always been the case, it had to result from a “sudden Quarrel,” and the offenses had to be isolated within that “situated transaction”: the response had to be, as it was in Baretti’s case, immediate and fleeting. Although body temperature was not taken, the jury had to ascertain that the slayer’s blood had not cooled before the stroke was given. Michael Foster pointed out that there could be no pause, reflection, or deliberation between the insult and the act: “The Provocation…in the Case of Homicide must be something which the Man is conscious of, which He feeleth and resenteth at the Instant the Fact which would extenuate in committed. (315) Secondly, jurists agreed that there would have to be a threshold of provocation, for killing without provocation was no worse that killing “upon slight Provocation.” They made a distinction between “mere words,” which increasingly were regarded as insufficient, and the words and actions (or actions alone) which would make the provocation achieve the period’s threshold of tolerance, thus reducing the charge—and the mandatory sentence. The slight offense, punctilio, or breach of decorum that gave rise to the, at least partially, defensible
bloodshed in the seventeenth century by the eighteenth century had lost its force, as judges restricted what could be considered provocation. Most agreed with Wood, who stated categorically that “No affront by bare Words or Gestures is sufficient Provocation.” (347) “Words of Reproach, how grievous soever, are not a Provocation sufficient to free the Party Killing from the Guilt of Murder. Nor are indecent provoking Actions or Gestures expressive of Contempt or Reproach without an Assault on the Person,” Michael Foster wrote. (290) Like other jurists of his time, William Blackstone, in the Institute of the Laws of England, carefully weeds out those causes that, given the effects, can never be held just, dismissing one of the most powerful instigators of duels, “calling the lye”: “No Breach of a Man’s Word, or Trespass on Lands or Goods, no Affront by Words or Gestures will excuse the Killing of another, from the Guilt of Murder, or be thought a just Provocation.” (349) In Baretti, the defense emphasizes both types of assault, language and action, both the physical hurt and the series of nasty insults.

Generally speaking, however, provocation meant not only insulting words are accompanied by a illegal action or physical assault.357 Legal experts, such as Sir Matthew Hale, frequently referred to the precedent of Watts v Brains (1600): “Watts came along the shop of Brains, and distorted his mouth, and smiled at him, and Brains kills him, it is murder, for it was no such provocation, as would abate the presumption of malice, in the party killing.” (455) J. H. Baker, points out that in this case the provocation was initially considered “gross” or “just,” a shopkeeper became so incensed with a customer who had ‘flirted’ him on the nose and made faces at him from the street that he came out of his shop and hit him so hard that he died. The widow brought an

appeal and the judges held it to be murder, because there was insufficient cause to start a quarrel. Another important and much-discussed case was Mawbridge (1707). CJ Hale, in his commentary on the case, narrowed down the “provocation as will take off the presumption of malice in him that kills another” to four illegal actions.

Vinian Professor of Law Andrew Ashworth observes, “There was more than a hint that people ought not to yield to certain types of provocation, and that if they did the law should offer no concession to them.” (D-33) Affronts considered grave offences against natural honor by early modern men lost much of their impact in the eighteenth century,” as society increasingly condemned the revenge or retaliation that would have in the past been acceptable as a way to “cancel out” the offense. “By retaliating with a box on the ear to the threat posed to one’s natural honour by a verbal insult, one not only averted the threat to oneself, but turned the tables on one’s provoker.” The “balancing of harms” and determination what response is reasonable under the circumstances, today termed “the proportionality standard.”

Horder explains the genesis of swordfights: “The slightly greater injury done by the box on the ear posed a threat to the provoker’s own honour, who would thus in turn have to respond with a still greater injury, a blow; and so the dispute would lead ultimately to a duel offered to the person in receipt of the blow.” In the eighteenth century, the proportions in provocation defenses were shifting, as the threshold for what warranted a murderous response was raised considerably. Many jurists insisted strenuously that

---

359 See Mawbridge (1707).
deadly force can only meet deadly force (or genuine fear of death). Michael Foster, for example, pointed out that the threat to one’s life may be contained in small precipitant provocations. In his *Old Bailey Speech*, Baretti follows Foster in arguing that, had he not responded with the force he did, he would have been “a lost man.” Many later newspaper columns, including one signed “A Crown Lawyer,” disputed Baretti’s claims, reducing the provocation to being jostled about, pushed into the street, or kissed by a woman.

During the Baretti trial, one unusual “period detail” is repeated questions as to whether the woman threatened to “cleave” Baretti with her patten, a metal platform attached to her shoe.363 “Clark. The young woman said, he deserved a knock over his head with her patten. Q: Were not the words, to have his skull cleaved? Did not you make use of the words cut or clove down with her patten?” Curiously, one of the most important cases in the legal commentaries on provocation in the eighteenth century turned, in fact, on this precise violent act. The case is called *Stedman’s Case*, and every lawyer in eighteenth-century London would have been familiar with its particulars. Foster summarized the case as an important illustration of just provocation.

There being an Affray in the Street, one *Stedman* a Foot-Soldier ran hastily towards the Combatants. A Woman seeing him run in that Manner cried out, “You will not murder the Man will you?” *Stedman* replied, “What is that to You, you Bitch?” the Woman thereupon gave Him a Box on the Ear, and *Stedman* struck Her on the Breast with the Pommel of his Sword. The Woman then Fled, and *Stedman* pursuing Her stabbed Her in the Back. *Holt* was at first of Opinion that this was Murder, a single Box on the Ear from a Woman not being a sufficient Provocation to Kill in this Manner, after He had given Her a Blow in return for the Box on the Ear. And it was proposed to have the Matter found Special. But it afterwards appeared in the Progress of the Trial, the Woman struck the Soldier in the Face with an Iron Patten, and drew a great Deal of Blood, it was held clearly to be no more than manslaughter. The Smart of the Man’s

---

363 Clark. The young woman said, he deserved a knock over his head with her patten. Q: Were not the words, to have his skull cleaved? Did not you make use of the words cut or clove down with her patten?
Wound, and the Effusion of Blood might possibly keep his Indignation boiling to the Moment of the Fact.364 (292)

When the question of the patten comes up in Baretti, the defense surely wants to imply that Baretti was at risk not to be bruised, but to be bloodied, to hang the defense on the precedent of Stedman. Granville Sharp comments on famous case, but states emphatically that even a physical assault of this sort is not a sufficient provocation. “But I think myself obliged to add that an assault upon the person is NOT a Provocation sufficient to free the Party killing from the guilt of murder.” (5) Another case on the OBSP contains parallels with the Baretti case. In the William Whiteway case, we read testimony that “She took off her patten and she hit me on the nose, it cut me, I had a stick in my hand, and gave her a slap, not to do her any harm.” (OBSP, October 24, 1787).

“A prudent Man should watch circumspectly, and be on his Guard against Provocations and Injuries,” John Cockburn advised his readers, “for his Mind should be firm, steady, well instructed, and quick to divert the Strokes of Fortune, and to frustrate the Snares of evil Men.”365 (251) In the later part of the century, a number of legal writers started to question whether violence is ever a justifiable reaction to provocation. Blackstone expressed reservations about mitigating murder on the grounds of slight physical assaults and vague claims of imagined doom. He objected to John Locke, who argued in the Essay on Government, “that all manner of force without right upon a man’s person, puts him in a state of war with the aggressor; and, of consequence, that, being in such a state of war, he may lawfully kill him that puts him under this unnatural restraint,”

364 Old Bailey April 1704 MSS Tracy and Denton; OBSP (April 26, 1704): “cut him on the Eye-brow, then he struck her on the Brest with the Point of his Sword, and he getting away, he ran after her, and by the Railes gave her the Wound in the Back.”

Blackstone wrote. (181) Granville Sharp was one of the first and most articulate opponents of the provocation defense. Not only did he believe words, insults, and “filipping on the forehead” insufficient provocation, he argues that even a physical assault does not give one license to kill another. He comments on the Stedman case: “In the case of a woman who struck a soldier in the face with an iron patten, the weapon the soldier is guilty of murder if he stabs her in the back as she is running away.” (10-11) “If he had struck her merely with his fist, or with a small stick unlikely to kill, and had unluckily, and against his intention, killed, it be but manslaughter.” Similarly, if he had give the “other a box on the ear, or had struck him with a stick or other weapon not likely to kill,” and had unluckily and against his intention killed.” (12)

The Law Commission of England and Wales recently announced that “the law governing homicide in England and Wales is a rickety structure set upon shaky foundations. Some of the rules have been unaltered since the seventeenth century.”\textsuperscript{366} In the first review of the Law of Homicide since 1957, the doctrine of provocation comes under particularly harsh scrutiny. The Law Commission report states, “Provocation provides an example of continuing uncertainty in the law.” Examining the history of provocation as well as the case law, criminal law experts find gender bias, opportunities for deception, “blaming the victim,” and injustice in sentencing. More than one eminent scholar has called for the abolition of the defense. “We should cut our ties with a defence rooted in a criminal justice system we would hardly now recognize, in an era where punishment as (at least in its officially pronounced forms) crude and vengeful, and in a

social, economic, and political world informed by entirely different values. Many of the concerns exposed in reports in England, Australia and Ireland were already contained in the debates surrounding the Baretti trial in 1769.

Provocation is the central term in Baretti and Baretti, a concept that informed his decisions as a writer, features of his style which that evade interpretation or explanation. Baretti’s crime was not merely the unfortunate action—the stabbing of the unarmed man—but the psychological state that gives rise to this, his unprovoked fury and anger. Provocation will not be adequate to ensure a positive verdict for Baretti. As is often the case even today in such trials, the defense slips into a justification on the grounds of self-defence. Baretti lacks sufficient justification—either in terms of wronged honor, outrage, or gross provocation—to be found innocent. Instead, their tactic was to slide this argument into an equally forceful claim that Baretti was acting in self-defense. The language of self-defence was, however, very specific, and by looking at it we can clearly see how the narrative of the event was articulated in such language as to satisfy the legal requirements of this defense.

SE DEFENDENDO AND EXCESSIVE DEFENSE

It would have been morally wrong, in the words of Henry Dagge for Baretti to “yield himself a tame sacrifice” and make one a “criminal in the highest degree; for should he neglect to defend himself, he would become a felo de se.” Although the right to protect yourself and your belongings was considered profoundly important, commentators realized there were only certain occasions in which lethal force could be

used in self-defence against an aggressor. Giles Jacob, in *A Treatise of Laws*, summarized the basic requirements for self-defence, showing its connection to provocation:

Necessary Homicide, is when one for the Defence of his own Life, kills another. And this may be done without expecting that the first Blow for that may render a Man incapable to make any Defence. But a Man must not kill another, if by any Means he may escape; (and Flight in this Case is not esteem’d Ignominious, even in a Soldier) nor may he follow the Aggressor (316) when he is running away; for that is Revenge, not Defence. And if a Man defends himself with a Sword against a Stick, the Killing the Aggressor will exceed the Bounds of Self-Defence. If the Bounds of Self-Defence are not observ’d, he that kills may be punish’d, but not with Death, by Reason that there was a Provocation: But otherwise, he that kills the Aggressor is subject to no Punishment. (317)

Baretti would have to show, first of all, that he was provoked and not the aggressor, that he that he acted as It was usually, though not always, the case that the man attempting to prove innocence by reason of self-defense was forced to prove three things: (1) there was a just provocation, (2) he was not the aggressor or instigator, (3) he attempted to retreat or escape as safety allowed, (4) he was in corporal fear and danger of his life, (5) he “had no other possible Means of preserving his own Life” and acted on “an inevitable necessity,” and (6) he did not use excessive force that would display an evil mind intent on mischief. Baretti could have had, in Foster’s words, “intention to Kill or to do some great bodily Harm at the Time the Death happened at least, but did it for the Preservation of his own Life.” (276)

The Baretti case presents problems on every point of self-defense. Recently, historians have demonstrated that murders were much less frequent on the streets than we might assume, and that only a very small number of murders occurred outside of the family. John Clark testifies claiming all the three did was tell Baretti he was ungentlemanly and bump into him in such a way that would “not hurt any body.” Another witness from the hospital repeated the account which he had received from
Morgan who seemed to think himself wounded without sufficient provocation.” (434)

Boswell mentions Johnson and Baretti walked the street and commented on the ladies, and it was a popular enough and wide enough street that it seems rather odd that Baretti would become so close and exposed to abuse. It was the usual way of soliciting or encouraging, and it seems rather odd that Baretti would have reacted quite so violently.

Several years after Baretti, Frenchman Pierre Grosley observed a scene very similar to that of October 6th, but the spiral ended in spitting:

> My French air, notwithstanding the simplicity of my dress, drew upon me, as the corner of every street, a volley of abusive litanies, in the midst of which I slipped on, returning thanks to God, that I did not understand English. The constant burden of these litanies was, French dog, French ______: to make any answer to them, was accepting a challenge to fight; and my curiosity did not carry me so far. I saw in the streets a scuffle of this kind, between a porter and a Frenchman, who spit in his face, not being able to make any other answer to the torrent of abuse which the former poured out against the latter without any provocation.368 (i., 84)

Giuseppe Baretti actions seemed way out of proportion to the offence. It is not surprise, therefore, that many observers of the time were suspicious as to whether Baretti had sufficient cause, simply because he was in a large public street, an unlikely location for a gang murder. One newspapers writer wryly remarked, “Baretti, that peaceable Italian, for murdering a youth who set a girl to kiss him, a thing so inconsistent with his nature.” (D-38)

Nor does it seem perfectly apparent from the trial transcript that Baretti was acting “against an aggressor.” The scuffle that ensues happened “directly” and Baretti “ran eight or nine doors up Panton-street, the way where he ran into the house,” looking back, with the three trailing him. It all depends on whether Baretti was about to be killed,

---

or whether the three men, two seriously wounded, were chasing Baretti as the murderer.

Indeed, it seems arguable that he himself was the aggressor, as this account in Tyburn Chronicle suggests:

Patman deposed Morgan and Clark pushed the evidence [meaning Patman] (in a slight manner) against Baretti, who gave him a blow on his left side, and immediately the blood ran down to his shoe: he cried our he was stabbed; One of the patients in the hospital with Morgan, testified that Morgan said he saw a gentleman assault a couple of women, on which he went, without meaning any offence, to their assistance, and was stabbed by Baretti in two places, who afterwards turned round and stabbed him again, which wound hurt him more than the first.  Baretti would claim that he did not resort to stabbing his assailant until was trying to escape, fearing for his life.  Baretti retreated; Morgan pursued him half way up Panton street, and there Patman saw Morgan receive a wound from him and fall.” (361)

Self-defence is when the” slayer hath not begun to fight, or (having begun) endeavours to decline any farther struggle, and afterwards, being closely pressed by his antagonist, kills him to avoid his own destruction.” (184) Nor can “as the necessity, to which he is at least reduced, originally arose from his own fault.” (185-186)  William Blackstone was concerned about just this sort of happening, in which a murderer “under the colour of self defence” might attempt to “screen himself from the guilt of deliberate murder.” (185)

Baretti’s defense team was clearly aware of the third point, explained by Justice Blackstone: “The party assaulted must therefore flee as far as he conveniently can, either by reason of some wall, ditch, or other impediment; or it may be so fierce as not to allow him to yield a step, without manifest danger of his life, or enormous bodily harm; and in his defence he may kill his assailant instantly.” (185)  Baretti’s “wall” is the dangerous street and a large pothole prevents him from further retreat. In other accounts, he insists that he is surrounded on all sides, while some of his friends claimed that he was pinned on the ground when the stabs were given; “A Man in Flight falleth to the Ground, there
his flying to the Wall is not necessary,” Foster notes. (352) Throughout the trial and in later documents, Baretti and his defenders emphasized that he was vastly outnumbered and had no time to retreat, in accord with the law as articulated by Foster and others:

“The Party is not to be excus’d, unless he gives back to the Wall, Hedge, River &c, beyond which he cannot go before he kills the other; but if the Assault is so fierce, and in such a Place, that giving back would endanger his Life, he need not go back.” (352) Not everyone was convinced by Baretti’s argument, as some wondered why he did not just ran into the sanctuary of a store or public house.

William Blackstone was concerned about deception in testimony on this point, and noted that the retreat must not be made “fictitiously, or in order to watch his opportunity, but from a real tenderness of shedding his brother’s blood.” (185) The following analysis, tied to duel fighting, reveals his cautionary approach to claims of self-defense:

For if two persons, A and B, agree to fight a duel, and A gives the first onset, and B retreats as far as he safely can, and then kills A, this is murder; because of the previous malice and concerted design. But if A upon a sudden quarrel assaults B first, and upon B’s returning the assault, A really and bona fide flees; and, being driven to the wall, turns again upon B and kills him; this may be se defendendo according to some of our writers. (185-186)

The case such as Baretti’s could turn on determining the moment in which the first blood was shed, when he wounded Patman, for “if he gives him no mortal Wound till he gets thither, he is guilty of excusable Homicide, and Se Defendendo only; but if the mortal Wound was first only given, then Manslaughter,” writes Foster. If one assaulcts another on Malice prepense to kill him, then flies to the Wall, &c. and there in his own Defence kills him, it is Murder. For he is the original Cause of killing. But if there is Malice betwixt A. and B. and A. strikes first, and B. retreats to the Wall, and there in his own
Defence kills A. this is *Se Defendendo* notwithstanding there was Malice between them.”

Matthew Hale agreed in *The History of the Pleas of the Crown*:

If A. be assaulted by B. and before a mortal Wound given, A. gives back till he comes to the Wall, and then in his Defence kills B. this is se defendendo. But if the mortal Wound first given, then Manslaughter. If A. upon malice prepense strike B. and then fly to the Wall, and then in his own Defence kills B. this is murder.  

Blackstone further argues that self-defence should never be confused with attacking. It is never offensive and it should be done only as a last resort, in violent cases “in sudden and violent cases; when certain and immediate suffering would be the consequence of waiting for the assistance of the law.” Otherwise, “men need only have recourse to the proper tribunals of justice. They cannot therefore legally exercise this right of preventive defence.” Granville Sharp also emphasized this element of the defence, quoting Matthew Hale, and “all writers ancient and modern agree on the fact that it must be “of an inevitable necessity.” The manslayer must be able to prove, that he retired; and that he was obliged, ex necessitate, to strike; in order to save his own life; a plea which cannot be admitted in favour of a Man, who has accepted a challenge; or who has drawn his sword, in sudden anger, merely to revenge an affront.”

Baretti’s testimony seems unconvincing with regard to whether he could have feared his death. He seems to have fears more being pushed into a puddle or having his hair-tail pulled.

---

370 Granville Sharp, *Remarks on the Opinions of the Most Celebrated Writers on Crown law Respecting the Due distinction between Manslaughter and Murder* (London, 1773), 44. Sharp adds, “It is necessary that, the person, that kills another in his own defence, fly as far as he may to avoid the violence of the assault before he turn on his assailant.” (39)
Hale said “private persons are not trusted to take capital revenge one of another” (Sharp 3) Sharp argues, furthermore, that the mere fact that “an assault upon the Person is not ”a Provocation sufficient to free ‘the Party Killing from the Guilt of Murder.’” (64) As Blackstone observed: “The law intends that the quarrel or assault arose from some unknown wrong, or some provocation, either in word or deed: and since in quarrels both parties may be, and usually are in some fault; and it scarce can be tried who was originally in the wrong; the law will not hold the survivor entirely guiltless.” Thus, thinking over the trial—then and now—one must consider the delicate balance between action and reaction, which in human affairs is hardly as precise or mechanical as Newton’s laws of motion.

The law sets so high a value upon the life of a man, that it always intends some misbehaviour in the person who takes it away, unless by the command or express permission of the law… As to the necessity which excuses a man who kills another se defendendo, Lord Bacon entitles it necessitas culpabilis, and thereby distinguishes it from the former necessity of killing a thief or a malefactor. ….The law besides may have a farther view, to make the crime of homicide more odious, and to caution men how they venture to kill another upon their own private judgment; by ordaining that he who slays his neighbour, without an express warrant from the law so to do, shall in no case be absolutely free from guilt.

Baretti retained throughout his life that he was entirely innocent, and never admitted that he had some part in the quarrel on October 6th.

By the early nineteenth century, presentations of the event tended to embed the narrative with a more convincing justification of self-defense than appeared in earlier documents, emphasizing certain all the legal prerequisites; Baretti’s stabbing was done in a state of flight for his life. A good example of this line of reasoning is found in James Northcote’s Memoirs of Sir Joshua Reynolds (Philadelphia, 1817). A man “began to assault Mr. Barretti [sic] in the most outrageous manner,” after which “Some more of the
gang then approached, and attempted to hustle him, when he was obliged, in his defence, to pull out a small knife, warning them not to use him ill, that he would not bear it, and would strike the first person that should come near him” (97) Unlike Baretti himself, who cannot well recall anything about the initial blows, Northcote makes it clear that Baretti used a “small” knife only a last resort, after giving a fair warning. Northcote then envisions with the way Baretti escaped, though it is rather difficult to imagine a man of his size and age—given the slippery pavement—being able to actually run in such a way “He then ran, and as they pursued him, he kept moving his hand backward and forward in running from them, to defend himself, and thus wounded two of his assailants, one of whom died afterwards in the Middlesex hospital.” There was no intention of giving injury, not even when he reached for the knife. “The knife was drawn only to terrify, and not to wound, though the pressing of the populace in his retreat had, in a moment of agitation, led him further than he at first intended. Northcote ends with the sort of the scene that will survive for generations. “This was confirmed by some most respectable eye-witnesses; and the host of brilliant evidence, in favor of his general character, immediately drew forth a verdict of acquittal, to the complete satisfaction of the public at large.” (98)

As to the final point, excessive defense, the defenders are adept at placing the emphasis in the affair on the preliminaries to the critical moment (which Baretti himself cannot recall and which the other witnesses tacitly ignore. By focusing on an assortment of provocations, both real and potential, the defense takes the coroner’s report off the table and leaves unspecified the moment of first blood. Did Baretti use what in our day is called “reasonable force” or did his reaction “savour of cruelty”? It surely was not an
easy question to answer. The case fascinated the audience and kindled debate because doubts remained concern whether Baretti executed (in the words of Justice Hale) “his revenge upon a sudden provocation in such a cruel manner, with a dangerous weapon, as shews a malicious and deliberate intent to do mischief?”

DURKHEIM AND THE BARETTI CASE

In a famous essay *On the Normality of Crime* (1895), Emile Durkheim observed that “no phenomenon [besides crime] presents more indisputably all the symptoms of normality, since it appears closely connected with the conditions of all collective life,” “an integral part of all healthy societies.”371 There is no society in which “an act that offends certain very strong collective sentiments.” And the various voices that spoke out on the criminality of this event—every illegality from slander, to murder, to collusion, to bribery—were signs of the progress in the justice system of the time. Despite all the violence embedded in this episode, it helped expose the evils of knife crimes, the death penalty, and judicial corruption. The Baretti case helped create a consensus against certain kinds of violence as a reaction to breaches of honor codes that, as this is removed from the discussion, became outmoded and unacceptable. Baretti’s “deviance” is as important to the well-being of society as it engendered a careful questioning of due process and doubt regarding judicial powers.

When a law is violated, especially within small communities, everyone talks about it. The opposition following the verdict in *Baretti* reveals a growing disapproval of violence in the hands of individuals, even in cases of honor. Stepping back from the

case, one could argue that the case served as a deterrent, further strengthening the taboos against violent, drunken quarrels and the carrying of concealed weapons. When Baretti broke the social norm – putting up with prostitutes and pick-pockets—he created a force that caused society to bristle, to question the bonds and the norms, the justice system itself, as for some of the public the unacceptable justice system was a crime as unacceptable as the stabbing with knives. The violation of the stabbing was necessary exposed and confirmed—in the public outrage as well as in the travel controversy with Sharp—the opposition to violence as a mean to settle private squabbles. As Durkheim puts it, “the traditions by which they had lived until then were no longer in harmony with the current conditions of life' (874).

Recognition the violations inherent in Baretti, it may be argued, was a sign of the health and the reforms of the time. Where crime exists, collective sentiments are sufficiently flexible to take on a new form, and crime sometimes helps to determine the form they will take' (874),

Crime actually produces social solidarity, rather than weakens it. Durkheim also proposed that crime and deviance brought people in a society together. In the court of public opinion, as Jeremy Bentham wrote, “Publicity is the very soul of justice. It is the keenest spurt to exertion, and the surest of all guards against improbity. It keeps the Judge himself while trying, under trial. Under the auspices of publicity, the cause in the court of law, and the appeal to the court of public opinion are going on at the same time.”

---

372 Bentham, Jeremy. *Draught of a new plan for the Organisation of the judicial establishment in France: proposed as a succedaneum to the draught presented, for the ...* [London?], 1790. 25.
While capturing many of the troubling issues and legal dilemmas of the Enlightenment, the trial foreshadows many of the issues that are facing legal philosophers and policy makers in London today. “Evidently criminal records can never be simple windows into the past; rather, they are highly crafted images fashioned in accord with legal procedures, statutes, precedents, and the cultural and power dynamics of the past.”

The trial of Baretti is a great deal more complicated when placed in context of legal thought of the distinguished eighteenth century writers on Crown Law. It also reveals contradictions that legal philosophers in England and in Australia are still debating today with regard to what William Eden called “the crime at which our nature shudders.”

---

CHAPTER SIX

“IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT HE WAS ACQUITTED”

For the *striking* abilities of Signor Bear-hate-ye are well known to this Court, and it is a matter of public notoriety, that he has such a *sharp* and *pointed* way of arguing, as never fails to *knock down* his adversary and to *cut him to pieces*.

*The Remarkable Trial of the Queen of Quavers* (London, 1777?), 53.

Evil fame and scandal are always new. When the offender has forgot a vile fact, it is often told to one and to another, who having never heard of it before, trumpet it about, as a novelty to others.

Giuseppe Baretti, *Commonplace Book Manuscript*.374

I know you will say, that this is pure invective, the language of malignity, a mere effusion of ill-will, on account of the villainous falsehoods you have told of me in your daily converse…No, no, Mr. John Bowlie! You deceive yourself. I am not like you in any thing! I never say of a friend or foe, but what I think, and I say it, when violently urged to it, as I am now.


* Aude aliguid brevibus Gyaris et carcere dignum/si vis esse aliquid; probitas laudatur et alget.375

Juvenal, *Satires*, i. 72-3.

The courtroom audience was so impressed by Baretti’s marvelous speech in English and so sympathetic to his suffering at the hands of criminals that Baretti became an even more admirable figure in the literary world of his time. His friends in the Johnson circle admired him even more, and he was about to embark on what Franco Fido’s description of the period from 1768-1779 as a period of “intense and happy productivity.” (77)

Biographers and critics from Custodi (146-151) in the early nineteenth century, following what Baretti himself said in various letters – that after being vindicated in the courtroom,

374 Baretti is quoting Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*, Volume 6 (Letter XXXIV).
375 [If you want to be somebody today, you must dare a crime that merits narrow Gyra or a gaol; honesty is praised and left to shiver.] Trans. G. G. Ramsay.
he suffered not in the least. “His trial in 1769 and his entirely creditable behavior,” with
the commendation he received from the most important people in the literary world,”
Donald Gallup concluded, “set him higher in the public opinion.” (176) “The evidence
was overwhelmingly in Baretti’s favor, and he was discharged,” observed Walter Jackson
Bate. (431) Baretti said as much himself, but it was not the whole truth.

Indications from the press at the time, as we have seen, suggest that the horizon
was somewhat cloudier. After the trial, Baretti’s next publication, A Journey from
London to Genoa (1770), was a success, but he left London on August 4, 1770, ten
months after the crime, perhaps to escape the aftershocks of the verdict. His literary
prospects beyond the revised Dictionary (1771) promised in his Old Bailey Speech, and
the Journey published by Thomas Davies, were few.376 As Donald Gallup admits,
“Much of his time during the three years following the publication of A Journey was
taken up with various projects, few of which saw the light of day, and with Italian
editions, which did not contribute materially to his English reputation.” (176-7) The
subsequent years are a story in literary frustration, as Baretti found the market drying up
for Italian works, When Gallup writes that “from 1770 on, Baretti, I fear, rested too
much upon the oars, trusting the current of his reputation to carry him on,” he is being too
generous, for his reputation was not helping matters. (176) The fact is, though, that
many of the friendships on which reputation in part is based were beginning to rupture,
and embarked on various ill-considered translation efforts, literary humiliations, and

376 Baretti, Giuseppe, A Journey from London to Genoa, Through England, Portugal, Spain, and France.
Baretti, Giuseppe Marco Antonio. A Dictionary of the English and Italian Languages. Improved and
augmented with above ten thousand words, omitted in the last edition of Altieri. To which is added, an
Baretti, Giuseppe. Easy phraseology, for the use of young ladies, who intend to learn the colloquial part
of the Italian language. By Joseph Baretti, Secretary for Foreign Correspondence to the Royal Academy of
Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture (London, 1775).
letdowns, and produced a number of other works that brought more controversy than admiration.

He negotiated an agreement with the Thomas Davies to translate *Don Quixote*, but when he wrote to his brothers on December 11, 1770, he revealed that it involved too much work and he was not up to the task.³⁷⁷ Davies proposed a history of Sardinia, but this too never came to fruition; evidently they could settle financial terms. Soon after that, there was a falling out between Baretti and his publisher. Johnson wrote to Boswell, “Baretti and Davies have had a furious quarrel; a quarrel, I think, irreconcilable.” The provocation was never very clear, but it might have involved Davies paying him 10 guineas a month toward the Cervantes. Whether the feud with Davies involved mixed signals regarding a publication is unclear, though Davies later spoke of Baretti’s “ferocious temper.” *An Introduction to the Most Useful European Languages* (1772), a strange polyglot anthology intended for students, received hostile reviews. One critic wrote that the author “is a man not thoroughly acquainted with the genius of the language in which he pretends to write.”³⁷⁸ Baretti might have expected no better, for some years later he wrote a letter to his friend Bicetti in which he would describe the volume as a “libercolo in quattro lingue, che non vale un fico, e che non è se non una di quelle tante coglioniere che sono obbligato a scrivere per tanti danari in fretta e alla diavola.” [A dumb book in four languages, that is not worth a fig, and that is one of those many books of bullshit that I am obliged to write for so much money, in a rush and not giving a damn.]

He would also return to the work for which Johnson thought him best suited, teaching Italian to children, but it was an occupation that Baretti had trouble reconciling with his literary aspirations. Baretti wrote Small Talk for the Use of Young Ladies that Wish to Learn the Colloquial Part of the Italian (1775), a work which Franco Fido sympathetically and accurately interprets as a peculiar mix of didacticism and “nonsense” in the Edward Lear sense of the term. Critics of the time were merciless with this work, occasionally suggesting that the author was manifestly suffering from a mental illness. (D-40) Comments on Baretti tended toward the unsympathetic, to put it mildly, though his name circulated much more widely and readily than it ever did in the 1760s.

Reviews after Baretti frequently alluded to trial not as a display of the vindication of a wronged foreigner but as a travesty of justice enacted by a wily and deceptive imposter. Baretti’s actions on October 6th became for many a revealing metaphor of his literary techniques and immoral tactics. His pen, of course, was not infrequently compared to a sword wielded by a notorious villain. Baretti’s violent response seemed to become his defining characteristic, and critics frequently seized the opportunity to criticize his style on grounds that, like his actions in life, it lacked a sense of fair play and control. Even his rhetorical figures—*anafora*, *polypton*, repetition—have this quality of being assertive or violent. When critic Emilio Bigi cites Baretti as being unique in the Italian *Settecento* for his “aspra e ossessiva aggressività,” he has in mind only his rhetoric.379 Aesthetic philosopher Benedetto Croce was describing Baretti’s style, not his moral character or personality, when he accurately described the writer as fiery, violent,

---

impatient, rude and grouchy, “focoso, violento, impaziente, burbero, bisbetico.”

Baretti firmed up this image in the 1770s.

Baretti would face innuendos and allusions to the event repeatedly, and not flattering ones. A review of Baretti’s *Small Talk* that appeared in *The London Review* made a pointed comment on Baretti’s now infamous past, noting that he “was glad to admit a plea of his own consummate cowardice, to exculpate him from willful murder, in an affair of accidental assassination.” (October, 1775) Baretti’s careful construction of a defense that would preserve his honor had backfired: he earned a reputation for cowardice. A capsule review of Baretti’s *Discourse on Shakespeare*, published in *London Review of English and Foreign Literature*, ridiculed him for including a title after his name, for his arrogance: “Impertinent effusions of the vanity of a self-conceited foreigner; who would be thought to know every thing, and hardly knows any thing!—We know of no Royal British Academy in England, unless the Royal Academy for painting may be so called; and what use they have for a secretary of foreign correspondence we know not. And the writer of the concise review cannot let pass the opportunity for a final crack: “Not but that Mr. Baretti is otherwise well known—too much so, indeed, to be safely trusted! (December, 1777). Baretti’s authority as master of many languages had become—partly by his own actions—highly suspect, in a period becoming less and less monolingual. “It is a strange undertaking; slippery ground, I think; an Italian author, to write about our divine English dramatist, and that in the French language!”

Baretti’s acquittal in 1769 did little to strengthen his public reputation, despite what he announced soon after the trial in private letters. Although he wrote of having

---

“preserved his honor,” once the case reached a mass audience this would not be possible.
It became increasingly a moment symbolic of a lifetime of behavior that many felt was
deceptive, self-serving and manipulative. In this chapter we will analyze the aftershocks
of the Baretti trial in four of the most vocal controversies, the first with Sir Joshua
Reynolds, one of his most ardent supporters after the incident. The second involves some
unnamed adversary or adversaries with a taste for savage irony, the third involves a John
Bowle, who some claimed Baretti actually led to an early grave, and the last is James
Boswell. Before looking at each of these, however, I will discuss the circulation of the
trial in the popular press.

“SE MI ASSOLVONO, TUTTO SARÀ FINITO”

“If they absolve me, it will all be over,” so Baretti confidently wrote to his
brother, expressing yet again the mixture of myopia and self-confidence. Little did he
know that the trial he had made such a public event—with the outstanding performances
of such public figures as Garrick—would have an unexpected and ugly consequence. To
be sure, it was “uncommonly impressive” to hear testimony by Samuel Johnson and be in
the same hall with the recently-knighted Joshua Reynolds. Their celebrity status had at
least as much drawing power as Baretti’s innocence or guilt in the death of Morgan.
When the audience came to see and hear the trial, one imagines, it was as much to see
how the great Johnson or the charismatic Garrick would perform in this peculiar stage,

---

382 Letter to his Brothers, October 17, 1769 (Epistolario, i. 412-415):“Se mi condannano, morirò due giorni
dopo, e procurerò da uomo forte, perché so d’essere innocente. Ho ragione di lusingarmi di una sentenza
favorevole, ma non ne ho sicurezza, perché i giudizi umani sono giudizi umani.” [If they condemn me, I
will die two days later, and I will suffer it like a strong man, because I know myself to be innocent. I have
reason to flatter myself with a favorable sentence, but I have no assurance of it, because human judgments
are human judgments.]
more than for a genuine concern for the either Baretti or Evan Morgan. Assembling such a stellar cast and involving so many distinguished gentleman (the court saw it unnecessary to call all the witnesses Baretti supplied), Baretti convinced himself prematurely that the incident would be quickly forgotten. On the contrary, not only did residual suspicions survive, but Baretti became famous now, not so much for his English-Italian Dictionary or travel writings as for having been on trial for murder.

He would brag for the number of sympathetic spectators at his trial, without pausing to consider that in front of this mass of viewers, he had become more famous than ever before. But by assembling such a stellar cast, to update Boswell’s astrological imagery, it heightened an already dramatic spectacle, pushing it to become a recurring topic in coffee-house conversation and cheap pamphlet literature. He survived, yes, but residual suspicions remained, and he became more famous for having appeared in the trial than he ever was in England for the venom of the Frusta Letteraria or the workmanlike Dictionary. For each member of the audience who now associated Baretti with this sordid adventure, there were two or three who, having heard or read about it, formed a judgment on the Italian/English author. If you were not there on the day of the trial, or if you could not see or hear for the crowd, copies of the trial transcript were available very soon after in the newspapers. (D-18)

The newspapers summarized the trial, focusing on Baretti’s speech and the character testimony by the next day, and by the end of the month advertisements appeared for the November Sessions-Papers (London, 1769), calling special attention to the inclusion of the Baretti case. Ironically, this is the “rare” pamphlet that, in 1959, a group of Johnsonians had printed in a fine-press limited edition to commemorate Dr.
Johnson birthday.\textsuperscript{383} Whether Johnson himself would have wished this pamphlet discussed on his birthday is unlikely, and he surely would have been surprised to hear that a record of the Baretti trial was difficult or expensive to obtain. The first printing cost a shilling to buy and it would be reprinted and circulated far more than any of Baretti’s other writings, all of which were heavily advertised. (D-18) It will appear in such collections as \textit{The Cambridge Magazines, or Universal Repository of Arts, Sciences, \& the Belles Lettres} (1769) and \textit{The Annual Register} (London, 1770), as well as Ireland and Scotland in \textit{The Historical, Political, and Literary Register} (Dublin, 1770) and the \textit{Aberdeen Magazine, Literary Chronicle and Review} (Aberdeen, 1789).\textsuperscript{384} Baretti’s death in May of 1789 was another occasion celebrated with the reiteration of this celebrated case. Although William Vincent, the author of the Baretti biography in the \textit{European Magazine} (May, July, August, 1789), tried to temper some of the residual hostility toward Baretti, he could not entirely overlooked “an event took place which hazarded his life at the time, and probably diminished, in future, some of the estimation in which, until then, he had been held amongst his friends.”\textsuperscript{385}

Through the 1770s, public opinion on Baretti and “The Haymarket Affair” was either expressed in—or created by—the inclusion of the trial transcript in publications

\textsuperscript{383} \textit{For the Murder of Evan Morgan Held at Justice-Hall in the Old-Bailey, on 20 October 1769: Now First Reprinted from the Original Record of the Proceedings with an Introduction and Notes to Commemorate the Two Hundred and Forty Ninth Birthday of Samuel Johnson}. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958. The colophon states the following: “Two hundred copies on Arches mould-made paper printed at the printing-office of the Yale University Press for the annual dinner of The Johnsonians at The Grolier Club, 20 September 1958.”


\textsuperscript{385} \textit{European Magazine} (August, 1769).
such as *The Tyburn Chronicle: or Villany Displayed* (London, 1769), *The Annals of Newgate* (London, 1776), and *The Malefactor’s Register* (London, 1779). We can say with certainty that popular interest in murder was inversely proportional to its incidence, and even as the ranks of England’s notorious murderers thinned out towards the end of the seventeenth century, pamphlets and ballads about their lives and deeds continued to pour off the London presses.”

Such popular productions were promoted with promises to improve the morals of the reading public, but perhaps aimed more at “public amusement” and a very strong taste during these years of almost obsessive discussion of laws and punishments of “true crime.” “The Crimes related here are great and True,” proclaimed an epigraph on the title-page.

What is peculiar about presence in these scurrilous publications—the early forms of tabloid journalism—is that almost everyone else on these pages was a found guilty. Not surprisingly, Baretti and his defenders frequently were forced to reminding others that he, in fact, was not guilty, but absolved of any wrongdoing in the court of law in front of a jury of Englishmen. Part of the pleasure gained by reading these accounts of documentary personal history came from knowing that the villains in the end suffered appropriately. Thus another volume puffed its inclusion of “THE MOST NOTORIOUS OFFENDERS WHO HAVE SUFFERED DEATH OR OTHER EXEMPLARY PUNISHMENTS.”

Baretti’s case seemed to call attention to itself, even when surrounded by hardened

---

criminals engaged in high-treason, footpad and highway robbery, not to mention
“unnatural crimes.” It is more literary than the other reports, which usually involved a
case of illiterate or working class individuals who have vanished into the whirlpool of
history.

The appearance of Baretti on these pages suggested that in the court of public
opinion Baretti was seen as possibly a shrewd manipulator of the justice system. In these
publications, the transcript was not altered from its form in the Sessions papers, though
sometimes it was slightly condensed. Baretti became associated with criminal
wrongdoing, notwithstanding his claims that he had emerged with honour intact; indeed,
at the end of the century, some columnists felt obligated to remind the readership that
Baretti had been found innocent, in a fair trial before an unbiased jury. *The Malefactor's
Register; or, the Newgate and Tyburn Calendar* (London, [1779]) included a short
“reading” of the case after the transcript, dealing with such issues as how an Italian was
able to speak so brilliantly the English language, the question of excessive self-defence,
and the issues of provocative language. “Those who would consult their own safety
should avoid giving offence to others in the streets,” the editor writes in Baretti’s favor,
noting that “the casual passenger has, at least, a right to pass unmolested; and he or she
that may insult him cannot deserve pity, whatever consequence may follow.” 389 While
the author of this commentary may have read a great many crime stories, he was well
versed in English law, for provocative language alone was under no circumstance
considered a sufficient cause for killing by any authority from Coke to Blackstone.
While this printing presents Baretti as clearly justified in his retaliation, the presence of

389 *The Malefactor's Register; or, the Newgate and Tyburn Calendar*, Vol. 4. (London, 1779), 383-385.
this comment suggest equally as much an editor trying to give moral clarity to a situation in which so much was ambiguous or uncertain.

Baretti’s case and character became the subject of scurrilous pamphlets and literary spoofs. The innuendos that Badini relished would continue to appear for quite a long time, long after the event (one might have thought) would have fallen out of collective memory or been superseded by more titillating crimes or notorious criminals. It would by no means disappear from the popular imagination, but rather would be repeated over and over again for the rest of Baretti’s life, in more than a dozen separate publications of the trial transcript alone. (D-35) His subsequent behavior did not seem always to reveal a man as penitent as he assured the jury he was. Some assertions printed after Baretti died would be disturbing if true. “It is asserted too, that, so far from shewing any remorse for the fatality of the action, he was brutal enough to present his knife to a young lady for the purpose of cutting fruit, with the preface—This is the weapon that stabbed the villain!”

There is every reason to believe, furthermore, that for every published comment on Baretti’s character, there were many more words circulating in rumor mills, mocking poems, and even pointed jokes. Indeed, one has survived which was reprinted in several later century jest books, including The Temple of Mirth; or Fete of Co & Bacchus (London, [1800?]). When Mr. Baretti, the Italian lexicographer, was tried at the Old Bailey for stabbing a pickpocket by whom he was attacked in the Haymarket, a numerous body of noblemen and gentlemen appeared to speak to his character: among the number was his very particular friend and companion Dr. Johnson who, on being asked if he

---

391 The Temple of Mirth; or Fete of Comus & Bacchus, Containing a Most Extensive Collection of Original Bon Mots, Jests (London, 1800?), 110.
knew Mr. Baretti, replied, in his energetic manner, “Yes, I do know him to be the arrantest coward that ever lived!”

Baretti’s literary style—jarring, controversial, impetuous—gave additional ammunition to his literary enemies. No matter how much his friends claimed Baretti was peaceable on October 6th, his literary style spoke louder; his violent behavior, sudden and impulsive, seemed to symbolize what his literary posture had always been.

The subject of the case appears to have come up frequently in conversation, particularly when Baretti demonstrated his habit of being inconsiderate or tactless in conversation. The following reminiscence is a particularly good attempt to capture the way in which the Baretti case would crop up in common conversation, without any premeditation.

I never heard a man blaspheme but one, and that was—Baretti!" He described him as "a villainous looking fellow, like a murderer;" and said he was once in company with him after the trial in which Baretti very narrowly escaped by a verdict of manslaughter. Notwithstanding the presence of a churchman, Baretti began indecorously ridiculing the superstitious of his own country; next, religious worship in general; and lastly, denied the existence of a Supreme Being. Dr. Parr, having meditated his plan of attack, appeared (waving all professional privileges) most ready for free and fair discussion. "Mr. Baretti," he said, "I will go upon your own ground—I will give up a particular revelation to God's own people—I will admit (for the sake of argument) that the Christian religion is unfounded:—I give up all religions, all churches. You see, Mr. Baretti, I make pretty large concession for a churchman. But, Sir, in civilized society there must be some restraint—there is such—there does exist a being who has power over you—a person whom you must look up to—whom you must reverence—whom you must fear!" He paused; and when expectation was wound up to the highest, resumed, in a voice of thunder—"It is the hangman! it is the hangman, Mr. Baretti. When you have get rid of all religious responsibility, you still must stand in awe and tremble before him." This, to one who had but just escaped the rope of the executioner, was, to be sure, a thrust not to be parried. 392

392 “Recollections of Dr. Parr,” Monthly Magazine (February, 1826).
The sudden impulse, deprived as it was for forethought and of moderation, seemed like nothing more than the manifestation of what Baretti’s literary style of parry and attack “Yet he did not escape censure for the readiness with which he had recourse to a mortal weapon to repel an assault, which, in so public a place, and at so early an hour (between six and seven), could scarcely have endangered his person”; it was hypocritical as well, for Baretti ”had taken pains to refute, when brought as a charge against the Italians by Mr. Sharp.”

The jury had declared him innocent, but it could not control what the presses would release, what public opinion would say, or what residual doubts would remain.

SIR JOSHUA IN MICHIEVOUS MOOD

In 1778, Baretti’s translation of Sir Joshua Reynolds’s Discourses was printed in Florence, Italy, roughly two years after the painter gave the seventh discourse on December 10, 1776. This publication, as with so many other works by Barettii, was to be marred by misunderstanding, anger, and retaliation. Baretti sent his manuscript, through his step-brother in Livorno, to Luigi Siries, a noted Florentine who had offered to print it; when it appeared, however, the editor had altered the title, suppressed Baretti’s preface, and made numerous alterations, writing that the volume, informing the reader that the book “è preso nuova forma sull’Arno, quanta l’eleganza e alla correzione dello stile,” took new form on the Arno, both in elegance and to the correction of the style. He also left Baretti’s name off the title-page, a last-minute decision evidently, as a white

---

393 Delle arti del disegno del cav. Giosue’ Reynolds trasportati dell’Inglese nel toscano idioma (Firenze, 1778).
space sticks out where the type had been removed. This was a gross insult to Baretti, who wrote a letter on December 13, 1778, which he then printed in many copies to be distributed throughout Florence and the other Italian cities. The opening is quintessential Baretti: “That you are anything but literate, Signor Luigi Siries, you need not bother to tell me.” [Che Voi non siate punto letterato, non occorre, Signor Luigi Siries, vegniate a giurarmelo.]

The letter begins with a series of exasperated questions: “Realizing, as you did, your lack of training and your ignorance of the colloquial, to say nothing of the literary language of your country, how could you have been so bold as to put your hand to my translation? [Conscio però del vostro non avere studiate mai alcuna cosa, di non sapere ne anco mediocremente la lingua comune del Paese vostro, non che quella degli Uomini letterati, come poteste essere temerario a segno da metter mano in quella mia traduzione?] How could you have had the impudence to heap upon me all your blunders, vulgarism, and barbarisms?” [Come poteste avere la sfrontataggine di stivarmela tutta di solecismi, di volgarismi, e di barbarism?] Baretti accuses Siries of “bad faith,” mala fede, in commissioning a translation that, after the fact, the “asino superlativissimo” tried to pass off as his own production. The changes, all considered relatively minor, but to Baretti they amounted to “degrading the language, corrupting the style, distorting the thought, and polluting the whole with your imbecilities” [degradandone la lingua, corrompendone lo stile, storpiandone i pensieri, e contaminandola tutta colle sue scimunitezze].

---


395 Lettera scritta da Giuseppe Baretti a Luigi Siries a Firenze (Londra, 13 dicembre 1778).
He was angry to be separated from Reynolds: [Why, stupid and spiteful little dolt, why not allow the names of two old friends to remain coupled, so that the world might reasonably suppose the translator unlikely to have departed a whit from the author’s conception.] He calls Siries a pickpocket and a “disreputable swindler.”

He then informs Siries that now he knows why his brother referred to him as “sickly, debauched, full of vanity, tricks, and mischief, he is a toady to every gentleman in his native city” [tristanzuolo mal costumato, pieno di vanità, di raggiri, e di malizie, a detta d’ogni Galantuomo della sua Città.] (57) Toward the end of the letter, Baretti hints at pursuing legal avenues: “What punishments the laws of Tuscany might mete out to you for an offence of this unusual sort, were I to appeal to them, I know not. I do know, however, that I shall take pains, even though far away, to make you known as a complete rogue.” [Qual castigo le Leggi della Toscana vi volessero dare per una malvagità di questa strana spezie, s’io me ne richiamassi a quelle, non lo so.” (57) Realizing the difficulties in this from such a distance, Baretti decides to “farò colle stampe il vostro perfido carattere all’occhio de’ vostri Compatiroti], and “farvi conoscere per un perfetto furfante“ and a “birbone.” Oddly enough, two years later Baretti wrote to his brother, dispraising Reynolds’ book, and confesssing, “Tuttavia non avevo sparmiato fatica per renderlo degno d’essere letto dalle nostre genti.”396

How Reynolds felt about this slight against his translator and friend? A possible answer is found in an unpublished manuscript written at the same time, first recorded and transcribed by Derek Hudson in Joshua Reynolds: A Personal Study (London, 1957). The piece was composed sometime after the publication of Baretti’s A Journey from London

---

to Genoa, though England, Portugal, Spain and France (1770), the volume Badini thought exposed Baretti’s literary hypocrisy, insofar as much of the work had already appeared in Italian (in the Lettere familiari some ten years earlier), thought Baretti delivered it as a new production. It was this work that Baretti was referring to during his speech at the Old Bailey. He dedicated it to “The President and the Members of the Royal Academy of Painting,” several who we know were among the witnesses at his trial.

Reynolds, using the pseudonym Rinaldo, viciously parodies Baretti’s travel book, exposing Baretti as a literary oaf, a self-indulgent and pompous individual. As Hudson writes, Baretti is here presented as an “embarrassing character,” “vain and overbearing.” (112-113) He appears like a buffoon character out of Goldoni, Don Marzio in La Bottega del Caffe or Sior Todero Brontolon. He is lampooned as an impetuous and inaccurate writer. Reynolds mocks not merely Baretti’s improvisatory writing style, but imitates the Italian “talking all manner of confident nonsense,” writes Hudson. (114) Never intended for publication, these pages indicate that Baretti, even for the man most instrumental in securing his acquittal, had become a laughing-stock. Reynolds pokes fun at Baretti’s efforts to sound Johnsonian: “How very few writers of Travels among the great number with which the world swarms, seems to have any conception of the nature and disposition of mankind; and yet surely one of the first things requisite, before a man sets about entertaining the public, is to know what will entertain them; what it is they expect to find, what it is they desire to know.” (239)

In a scene toward the end of the manuscript, in which Baretti is abruptly ejected from a tavern, there is “more than a hint of Baretti’s notorious skirmish in the Haymarket.” (115) In fact, the work is filled with darkly comic innuendos regarding the
“Haymarket Affair.” In the following passage, the characterization that so aided in
Baretti’s acquittal, being sedentary and studious, gains an ironic weight, as Baretti
dismisses all other travel writers, in a patois of Johnsonian English and dull
colloquialism, noting that no one cares about what these writers report, such as the
system of police in foreign countries:

A man of Studious recluse life sets out to see foreign parts, as the phrase is, and
when he returns thinks he has done wonders if he discovers any more expeditious
method used in manufactures or an improvement in agriculture, in short their
works are stuffed with accounts of the state of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce,
the Police of Nations and I know not what, which nobody cares one pin about.
(239)

Baretti is satirized for being a pompous dolt, believing everything he observes is of
interest to others, arrogantly dismissing other authors, and revealing a comical interest in
the manners and behavior of domesticated animals. For instance, in this passage Baretti
seems to have the learning of a lesser macaroni: “Hammersmith we soon arrived at the
famous plain called Turnham green, from this to that there was no adventure good or bad,
except that of a flock of Pigeons flying over our heads, by which I guess’d there might be
a Pigeon house somewhere near, and upon enquiry I count that I was right, but I had no
time to look into it.” (244) Throughout this satire, Reynolds displays Baretti as absurdly
confident and barely intelligent, quoting Horace but making dull observations: “A
complete account of these houses and their inhabitants would in my opinion prove one of
the most entertaining that ever was written: but non omnia possumus omnes, and the
desires and schemes of everyman, always go much beyond his powers, tho I could not do
all I have done something.” (245) Reynolds also satirizes the Italians tendency toward
self-promotion: “I think I may boldly say I have not forgot myself throughout that whole
work, and flatter myself that I have agreeably entertained my readers by giving them an
account of the names of the Inns the Landlords and even the names of the Horses with every other information that I thought would prove entertaining to the public.” (240)

In Knightsbridge, Baretti has an encounter that contains echoes of “The Haymarket Affair.” He writes: “The Inhabitants of this town have a barbarous amusement, they tye old Lanterns or something of that kind to a poor dogs tail and then hoot and hollow and frighten the animal through the streets. I relieved one of these poor dumb creatures by giving a boy six pense to set him at liberty and was happy the whole day after from the conscious satisfaction of having relieved a fellow creature from misery.” (241) Like Badini, Reynolds gives to Baretti a coarse and vulgar streak:

On the left hand a little beyond Knightsbridge are many pleasant Villas pretty continuous to each other and looking something like a street or Row of houses & are call’d Rotten Row. I was inquisitive to know why it was call’d Rotten as they appear’d to be new houses, I was informed that at Portsmouth there was a place which was call’d Rotten Row from being the repository of old ships unfit for service, and that those houses were built for old whores. (242)

But he is also a heavy-handed, incoherent moralist: “You know Brother a person is respected as he respects himself, man naturally indolent and cowardly gives to him who claims, without troubling himself to examine his pretensions.” (243)

In Hammersmith, Baretti enters a room where a dance is taking place. When it ends, all the audience asks, “Who is he? Who let him in?” “My ears were stunn’d with a thousand sounds, hissing hooting and hallowing, out with him, out with him, throw him out of the window, kick him downstairs, tumble him in the Kennel. I cannot say how I looked on the sudden hearing of such an uproar.” (243) The Captain escorts Baretti to the door, and “with a vigorous exertion of his foot against my posteriors push’d me forward with all his might. I made but one step to the bottom, however I disappointed the brute for I pitch’d on my legs with a dexterity I will venture to say that would have done
honour to a Cat. It was lucky I was not hurt, I wonder how I escaped. I hastened to the Calash & was soon out of harms way, as none attempted to follow me into the streets.”

(243-244) There can be no doubt, here, that Reynolds is making a stinging reference to the fact that anyone who might follow Baretti into the streets could end up like Evan Morgan.

In a later passage, Reynolds pokes fun at Baretti’s crude language, the Italian musicians, as well as Baretti’s tendency to dispense unwanted medical advice and believe in silly remedies.

About fifty yards from the Packhorse, all carriages stop for a few minutes and their drivers whistle a tune, I enquired what all this meant and what was the cause of our stoping and why the Calassero whistled, he answered with an arch leer that they [stopped] that the Horses might p—s and whistled that they might p—s to some tune. It is amazing and appears incredible that those drives have certain diuretic notes which when a horse hears he cannot contain his urine for affection, this tune I have learnt to whistle and will get my friend Gardini to prick down the musick that it may be publish’d, for perhaps it may have the same effect upon Christians, and as far as I know may be an effectual remedy for the Strangaryt, tis worth trying, if it should succeed I shall thing myself as great a benefactor to mankind as he that found out the Cure for the bite of a Tarantula.”

(245)

“I cannot say much in favour of the courtesy of the inhabitants, no man pulls off his hat, nor does any she drop me a courtesy. No waggoner, pedlar, no rustick do I see at his victuals in the Inns which I enter, will beg me to partake of his meal tho he catches my eye fixed on him whilst he is eating, and tho I express the usual wish that much good it may do him.” (247)

Many of those qualities which Badini points out seem reiterated in this piece, which mocks Baretti as an egotistical braggart, with an inflated view of his own talents, a sour disposition regarding others, and a writer whose attempts to imitate Johnson’s style
lead him into complete nonsense. However, Reynolds probably wrote the spoof, according to Hudson, for William Chambers, one of Baretti’s closest friends.

He certainly does not emerge as a “gentleman of good temper,” but rather a testy and pompous fool.

THE QUEEN OF QUavers SATIRE

It was not only Sir Joshua Reynolds who was using Baretti as laughing stock. Sometime between 1774 and 1777, a peculiar work with the title *The Remarkable Trial of the Queen of Quavers* appeared. The author has never been identified—the title page claims that it was “Taken in Short Hand, by Joseph Democritus and William Diogenes.” Features of the work would suggest that one hand in the production was C. F. Badini. On pages 93-115, there is an amusing parody of the Baretti trial, filled with allusions to the original trial transcript. From the first lines, the author’s intentions are clear: to lampoon Baretti’s short temper, high self-regard, ignorance of English (Baretti’s spoken language is laced with malaprops) and perverse inclinations. A masterpiece of innuendo and double entendre and loaded puns, the work opens with a direct reference to the Old Bailey trial, as Baretti takes great umbrage to at Councilor Cunning’s recognizing him from a previous offense. Baretti flies off the handle, threatening violence at the same time he describes himself as a “poor, defenceless” witness:

C: I think I saw your face before this time?
B: That may be.
C: Was you not once at the Old-Bailey?

397 Few scholars have discussed this work. Ian Woodfield explores the work in Chapter 12 of *Opera and Drama in Eighteenth-Century London: the King's Theatre, Garrick and the Business of Performance* (Cambridge, 2001) comments briefly on Baretti section 178-179, focusing on the quarrels between Garrick and Frances Brooke.
B: Pray Mr. Concealer of the Law, don’t begin to be insolent, crack your saucy jokes with others, they won’t do with me.
C: What? What? This is mighty impudence!
B: I am not to be frightened by the scarecrow of your busy Wig, nor by your black Dominò, I assure you.
C: Did you ever hear any thing like it? To make a jest of my Wig, to abuse a Limb of the Law!
B: I know it is your custom to treat a poor defenceless evidence with the same rudeness as you would a felon; but I warrant, you’ll find me too hard for you Mr. Certiorari.
C: Is then the Majesty of the black Robe to be thus violated, and are we to be bullied by a lousy Foreigner, a Jew-looking _ _ _ _ _ _ _ (93)

The comic allusions continue through the work, as do references to legal-language, knife-fighting and sexual promiscuity. At one point, Baretti warns “Mr. Writ-of-error” that he has “something in my pocket, that never fails to do quick execution.” (94) Tipstaves search Baretti and discover “a knife half a yard in length,” but when asked why he is carrying “such a deadly instrument of destruction,” Baretti responds with language from the trial, contorted into an anti-Baretti and anti-Italian double-entendre:

B: My Lord, I only make use of it to carve sweetmeats, that’s all. In my native country every well bred gentleman wears the same in his breeches, and there is not a fashionable lady among us, but you’ll find that very thing under her petticoat.
B: Most assuredly.

The Lord Chief Baron recognizes that this is “Bear-hate-ye,” though Baretti demands to be referred to by his proper title, “Secretary to the famous Academy, Esquire,” though he has to admit to getting no mail, having no stipend, and having really no work.

Ld: I am told that you stood very high in the President’s favour, but that he begins to hate himself for it.
B: Why, he is still as fond of me as Caligula was of his Horse. He has made my portrait, in order to transmit to posterity my pleasing countenance, and has placed it in his Gallery among his best pictures.
Baretti’s response to the poem is highly ironic, as he inanely attempts to rebut the claim he is an ass, all the while revealing that the character that he and the Johnson circle painted of him was not accurate at all. “B: I see that I am called an ass, but sure there must be a mistake: Why an ass is a meek, submissive and very good natured creature: where it is well known that I am quite the reverse. Besides, it is possible that Joseph Bear-hate-ye, Esquire, should be an ass: for my own part, I shall never believe it.” (97)

Baretti is ridiculed for the series of vices and excesses heaped on him by Badini in *Il vero carattere*, and the vituperative humor and classical learning suggest that Badini may have a hand in this work as well. Baretti pretentiously claims to being “bred at the University,” to suffering from syphilis and believing himself a “worthy Disciple of Par-ass-hell-us.” He arrogantly believes he “can cure anything” and “eradicate the most inveterate disorder in the quickest way, especially the venereal distemper.” He makes the following statement to the jury: “If your Lordship, or any Gentleman of the Jury, should happen to be *frenchified*, I am ready to give a specimen of my abilities, and non cure no money.” (98) When the Lord inquires as to where Baretti got his medical training, Baretti responds, “upon living bodies of men, after the manner of ancient dissectors, and the great astonishment of the lunatick nation, I found out the peritoneum in the dark.” (99) The evidence “instanced by my friends as an unanswerable argument of my singular *humanity,*” is a clear reference to the “constellation of genius.”

B: Why, my Lord, I am the wonder of this age; I have wrote books in several languages, and discoursed upon every science: I possess the assurance of Gorgias Leontinus, the art of Raymundus *Lullus*, or Nullus, the impertinence of Jack Crito the Scotch imposter, and the impudence of Claveri, the famous Italian Mountebank. I am a Poet, a Divine, a Philosopher, an Historia, a Romancer, and a Fortune-teller. My head is a real *in-sickly-pay-day,* and I am a true *paltry glutton.* (100)
Baretti admits that the “Greek and Latin are both exploded, and quite useless languages” (100-101). B: If I may be allowed a witty allusion, like the serpent compared by Tasso to the hand of Rinaldo, I have three tongues in my mouth, Italian, French, and the Brtitish language in particular. (101) His knowledge of French is not quite as good as he claims, for he brags about being flattered by the French nation with an epigram that “cannot but call up the marks of shame in my maiden cheeks” (101):

\[
\begin{align*}
&A \text{ Monsieur Joseph Bear-hate-ye} \\
&Monsieur, \\
&\text{De Paris au Perou, du Japon jusqu’ à Bloi,} \\
&\text{Le plus sot animal à nôtre avis c’est toi.}
\end{align*}
\]

To Master Joseph Bear-hate-ye
Monsieur,
From Paris to Peru, from Japan to Timbuktu
The stupidest beast in our view is you.

The author ridicules the character witnesses during the trial for having been duped. Baretti assures the court that Garrick, when in Italy, was assured that Baretti “was the standard of the language,” for “it was myself who told him so.” Garrick mentioned,

Ld: Apropos: Did not Mr. G-----k prove, in many instances, your most generous Benefactor? Did he not mend your dirty situation a number of times? And was it not entirely owing to his influence, and efficacious patronage, that you had once the good luck of slipping your neck out of the collar?” (102)

The author of the satire reveals his knowledge of Baretti’s ill-conceived criticisms and ridicules Baretti for creating so many enemies: “[You called] Voltaire an imposter, Swift a filthy scribbler, Pope an author full of puerilities and idle conceits, Hume a bad historian, Milton an indifferent poet, Cardinal Bembo, Bonfadio, Menzini, Father Buonafede, Frugoni &c.” (104-105) Baretti’s precious relationship with Johnson is also mocked: “For my own part, as I always write like a Johnileman, so whatever principle I please to lay down, I think my word is quite sufficient for it, without giving myself the trouble of looking after proofs.” (104)

When the Lord brings to Baretti’s mind his attacks on Voltaire, Sheridan, and others, Baretti prepares for an attack, feeling that “disarmed, you mean perhaps to take
advantage of my situation.” “But I may still be even with your Lordship, I promise you, for my pen is as sharp as my knife.” (106)

Ld: I know that you have a particular talent for scandal and defamation.
B: I always made Aretine the pattern of my life.
Ld: But though you may surpass him in impudence, I am afraid you fall infinitely short of his wit
B: I see that you never read my libels.
Ld: I read more than twenty libelli famosi, said to be written by you.
B: That’s a downright falsity; for I wrote only fifteen

Baretti’s Travels have ruined Thomas Davies, while Baretti shows not the slightest
gratitude toward the bookseller; in Italian writing, Baretti has done no better, as the
Frusta Letteraria is filled with “gross and snappish aspersions” filled with an “incredible
number of gigantick blunders.” (114) The satire includes a comic poem on the portrait by
Reynolds. (D-42) The satire on Baretti concludes with a Badinian mockery. Baretti
reading of Martial’s Epigram (11.19) reveals Baretti haphazard knowledge of the
classics, as the original sexual double-meaning (“My pen/prick is constantly making
mistakes”), in Baretti’s version, suggests his impotence. As Baretti is found guilty of
being a “Literary Swindler” and sentenced to an Irish bludgeoning:

B: You are too rigid, my Lord, you have no mercy, no sort of compassion. Your
Lordship should consider, that we are all liable to mistakes, our head cannot
always go right, it is but lined with flimsy stugg, and, as Martial wittily observed,
it is sometimes as soft as cream-cheese.
Saepe solaecisinum mentula nostra facit.

Ld: Mr Joseph Bear-hate-ye, if you call to your mind the petulant, ferocious and
disingenuous manner, in which you treated your betters in all your productions, I
am sure that you cannot expect any mercy at the hands of a candid judge. I think
I have shewn you much more indulgence, than you really deserve. The
punishment I have inflicted on you is but a metaphorical caning, bacula
Aristotelico: which is too slight a correction and too much honourable for a
person of your merit. Instead of the stick of Aristotle, you ought to feel on your
shoulders the ponderous bludgeon of an Irish chairman: nay, to do you strict
justice, you should be prosecuted as a Literary Swindler, for raising reputation
upon false pretences. (115)
BARETTI V. JOHN BOWLE AND JAMES BOSWELL

In *Tolondron: Speeches to John Bowle about his Edition of Don Quixote* (1786), Baretti once more engaged in writing a parasitic book, as he engages an opponent in a battle of wits. This time Baretti confronted the Reverend John Bowle, whose edition of *Historia del Famoso Cavallero Don Quixote de la Mancha* (Salisbury, 1781) contained 300 pages of scholarly annotations written in Spanish. (*ODND*, “John Bowle”) In fact, today R. W. Truman, the Oxford Professor of Spanish, notes that Bowle is one of the founders of modern Cervantes scholarship and highly lauded in Spain. Baretti, however, had a much lower opinion of the bookish Bowle, writing in *Tolondron*, “I would rather be cut into quarters, and broiled on a green-wood-fire by a New-Zealand cannibal, than give my sanction to your Spanish, if asked my opinion in earnest by my supposed friend Bowle.” (228) As so often before in his writing life, Baretti badly miscalculated the effect of his writings: his self-defense after receiving a slight from Bowle, seems as always rather excessive.

What could have provoked Baretti’s outrage? It all started when he heard Bowle confess to not being able to “utter a syllable of Spanish, nor understand a word of it, when spoken.” (6) When Baretti saw a manuscript filled with errors in the accent marks, he was even more alarmed. He would have been, maybe, less interested had he not attempted—and then gave up on—his own edition of *Don Quixote*. This certainly did little to make Baretti sympathetic, though in *Tolondron* he asserts that, at first, he was more than willing to help. Once more, Baretti takes his opponent’s linguistic

---

shortcomings as a moral corruption, and seems to have lost control, claiming that “every accent was either wanting, or misplaced.” (8) Baretti had earlier offered to help Bowle by correcting his drafts of the “forty or fifty errors (that I may not say sixty or seventy) in every page.” (13) Tolondron shows that he had not lost any of the intensity he expressed against Samuel Sharp in the intervening twenty years, as he tells Bowle that “no Spanish esophagus could swallow a spoonful [of your work], without vomiting the bowels.” (227) Surely Bowle had done something more insulting than expose himself as a less than diligent linguist. In fact, in two short works published before Tolondron, Bowle raised doubts about Baretti’s expertise in matters of Spanish language and literature. In the Letter to the Reverend Dr. Percy. (London, 1777), Bowle dropped a passing criticism that did not go over well with the Italian, any more than Lalande’s years earlier. Baretti was not a man who appreciated having his knowledge called “egregiously defective, and erroneous.” An earlier work entitled Remarks on the Extraordinary Conduct of the Knight of the Ten Stars and his Italian Squire. (London, 1785) – only one copy is recorded (Bodleian) – was even more unkind to the Italian. Baretti decided to confront Bowle and “teach him to leave off his Ourang-Outang tricks for the future.”

Comparing his pen to a stiletto, Baretti ironically writes that he has “a superabundance of gall in my ink, and that my pen is dipt in double poison, which makes me write with acrimony, rancor, and virulence.” (12) He denies being stimulated to write by Bowle’s petty insults, however, and he expresses concern that his substantive criticism be reduced to a personal gripe, rather than what he regards as a disastrous display of Spanish that is a gross provocation to a literary man. Baretti anticipates that his response will be dismissed as the rantings of a satirist in the Badini mold:
I know you will say, that his is pure invective, the language of malignity, a mere effusion of ill-will, on account of the villainous falsehoods you have told of me in your daily converse, in your epistolary correspondence with more than one, in your Letter to the Divinity Doctor, and in your four scraps to Mr. Urban. No, no, Mr. John Bowle! You deceive yourself. I am not like you in any thing! I never say of friend or foe, but what I think; and I say it, when violently urged to it, as I am now. (227)

What are the “four scraps”? Baretti is referring to four very brief, anonymous letters written to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* editor Mr. Urban; they were published one per issue from July to October of 1785. These “rascally scraps” set Baretti on a literary rampage, for they brought back to the public press the controversy surrounding Baretti’s acquittal nearly twenty years before, and one of these letters implied in no uncertain terms that even Dr. Johnson had some residual doubts about the Italian’s innocence. In “Speech Five,” Baretti discusses at great length the accusations that he is convinced were made by “milky John.” To expose the “petty rascalities that they contain,” Baretti decides to hide nothing: he reprints much of each letter, interweaving his “remark,” sometimes at great length. “Why do you term Baretti’s accidental misfortune,” Baretti asks, “an atrocious offence, when you know that, after a trial of six hours, an English Jury, found he had committed no offence at all?” (117)

Baretti sarcastically tells Bowle to “drink less porter, friend,” as he rebuts the letter writer’s criticism of Samuel Johnson’s character evidence, noting, “He said upon oath what he knew of me, so did five or six of those gentlemen, whose friendship I had had the good fortune to merit by my good behaviour, not by my power, or my riches, as I was then poor and powerless, just as I am now.” (124) He points out, moreover, that there were many other witnesses willing to come forth on his behalf, then addresses the most offensive and decisive lines in the letter: “When his defence of Baretti was
mentioned to Doctor Johnson, the Doctor replied, *I was not alone in that affair.*” The original letter implies that Johnson, in saying this, was admitting that Baretti was not entirely innocent, and confessing that the “constellation of genius” was collusion. Baretti responds: “No more he was, you blasphemous villain! How dare you, by this hellish innuendo make a Doctor Johnson charge himself with want of veracity and willful perjury, and in the same breath accuse of these same crimes, half a dozen of the most respectable men in this land? Was ever such an Ourang-Outange among us?” (127) The orangutan is, of course, Bowle, though the letters are unsigned and authorship remains uncertain. *Tolondron* makes plain that Baretti still provoke intense arguments and invectives couched in unsupportable claims and delivered in unsigned epistles. And once again the reader is left uncertain as to who is telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth: that is, we do not know how seriously to take Bowle’s testimony regarding some final, cryptic words of Dr. Johnson. On the one hand, the bad blood between Bowle and Baretti that could have provoked the Reverend into making such a strong, public claim; on the other hand, some evidence suggest that Bowle and Johnson were friends, and just such a conversation may have occurred. In fact, we read in Boswell’s *Life* that he was a good conversationalist, and Bowle was a member of the Essex Club, a “club established in the 1784 to cheer up Dr. Johnson during his last days.” This fact suggests that Bowle could have told Johnson, “Your own conduct was no better for that circumstance, unless you would have been guided by your fellow deponents in every thing else.” But would a good friend of Johnson, after he died, bring up a subject from the past – the death of Evan Morgan – about which nothing could be done. Johnson left no further comments on the trial of Baretti or the “character” of a Giuseppe Baretti; in
fact, all the witnesses were quiet about the case after it closed. Baretti himself, oddly enough, left traces in his *Annotations to Thrale’s Letters*: “Poor Johnson! How careless in examining the nature and the conduct of his Friends!”

It was not only with Mrs. Thrale that Baretti had almost entirely discredited himself, as we saw earlier, but his perpetual hostility seems to have estranged him from even his most loyal friends and admirers. Almost all the “personalities” involved in the defense team would part company with Baretti by the end of his life, often on less than amicable terms. Even the meek Oliver Goldsmith, had lost patience with Baretti. Boswell recorded a telling conversation between himself and Johnson, when Baretti was not present. “I added that this man said to me, “I hate mankind, for I think myself one of the best of them, and I know how bad I am.” JOHNSON: 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.”

Baretti is so furious with Bowle for impugning Johnson’s veracity that he makes an add accusation. He accuses Bowle of being a heinous criminal for offenses against literature: “Ay, you criminal! You culprit! Did you not blot Don Quixote’s margins? And is not that blotting ten thousand times more atrocious than murder and forgery? What business had you to teach your pupils to spell Spanish the right way?”

Turning to the August letter next, Baretti is surprised to see that Bowle can “crowd so many lies in so narrow a space.” (136) “How gleeful you look, my dear man of milk, when you harp on the string of stabbing and murdering.” (139) Each “Speech” begins with a poetic epigraph, such as Shakespeare’s “Methinks thou art a general offense and every body [man] should beat thee.” The Sixth Speech, which analyzes the letters of

---

399 The forger is Dr. Dodd,
September and October, begins with a “poetic” epithet signed by the poet Peppe Titreba.

Anyone who has read Baretti realizes instantly that it is an anagram of Giuseppe Baretti.400

Di darmi una ferita,  
Lousy priest, you want so much
Pretaccio, hai la gran voglia!  
To give me a wound!
Ma la t’andrai fallita,  
But you’re going to fail,
Povero e pazzo Coglio,  
Poor and insane Nut,
Che nulla sai di scherma,  
Who knows nothing of swordfights,
E t’hai la mano inferma.  
And your hand is weak and sore.

The libel that sparked Badini to write Il vero carattere years earlier may very well have been of a similar sort of verse. In the prose afterword, Badini upbraids Baretti for a poetic libel that contained a very similar, vulgar line: “Oh che Coglio! Oh che testicolo!”401 In the epigraph to Tolondron, Baretti once again employs the imagery of stabbing and swordplay to render himself powerful as a writer and in order to mock his adversary as delicate and lame. Furthermore, in this speech it is Baretti himself who is calling the reader’s attention to the events of a dreary October night by engaging Bowle as if he were under cross-examination and employing legal language, such as onus probandi, the Latin term for burden of proof.

The reviewers of the Tolondron discussed the publication of the book as if it were a violent altercation on the city streets. The Critical Review wrote that “Baretti triumphs with reason; and his triumphs are pursued with little mercy. We cannot commend his moderation in the hour of victory,” adding “personalities never add weight to the cause of truth.” (June, 1786) It was impossible to comprehend what seemed like excessive hostility against Bowle, except in terms of a self-defense against an unexpected and

400 Pebbe Titreba [anagram of Giuseppe Baretti]. Baretti signed other works as Giuseffe Titreba.
401 In Il vero carattere, Badini mocks Baretti for using similar language and moral logic: “Ora il Badini è bello e annichilato perche’ quel grand’uomo del Baretti ha esclamato solamente che è una coglio, ed un testicolo.”(85)
terrible provocation: “Baretti certainly thought Mr. Bowle the author of those charges, and took therefore this severe, though perhaps unwarrantable, mode of retaliation. It is not even good of its kind, but must appear far more reprehensible to those who are not aware of the provocation.” (35) The metaphor that Baretti had chosen for the pen, when he wrote in the name of Aristarco Scannabue came back again, as it had to, given the distemper of Tolondron: “If those letters in the magazine were the writing of Mr. Bowle, he deserves every severe lash Mr. Baretti could bestow upon him.” Another reviewer could have been speaking of October 6, 1769, but he was referring to a scholarly edition of Don Quixote. “Mr. Baretti in this volume shews himself very much hurt, and has suffered his anger to carry him very great lengths” wrote the The English Review (September, 1986).

“This is a severe and pleasant attack upon Mr. Bowle’s translation of Don Quixote; but the work is far too voluminous for the subject.” Town and Country Magazine (August, 1786) Baretti was in the right, some felt, but did he have to go to such an extreme length to prove he was? Some reviewers had trouble deciding – as did onlookers at Baretti – who was really to blame for the affair. “The grossest abuse upon Mr. Bowle, which nothing could justify, unless Mr. Bowle was the author of the publications in the Gentleman’s Magazine, imputing the crime of murder to a man assaulted by pickpockets in the streets of London.”402 (D-43 to D-48)

Boswell’s brief summary of the Baretti trial in the Life of Johnson, read in the light of the foregoing literary material generated by the incident, perhaps is worth a second look. Unlike modern biographers of Baretti, Boswell does not record that Baretti was being robbed, nor does he say anything about Baretti’s studious habits and

402 Whitehall Evening Post (Thursday, May 28, 1789) Gentleman’s Magazine (May, 1789)
“humanity.” He reserves comment on the verdict, which he states in the simplest way:
“It is well known that he was acquitted.” Boswell’s construction might suggest that, though the verdict was “well known,” it was not necessarily just; in contrast with many of those who later defended Baretti, Boswell makes no attempt to align himself with the Italian or otherwise endorse his innocence. There is something missing in the passage, something suspicious that led H.W. Liebert, the great Johnsonian, to write the following: “It seems strange that his dramatic scene, with so many of Boswell’s principal players on stage, did not move him to the kind of brilliant reporting of which he was capable.”\(^403\) (3)

Why, one wonders, does Boswell not state emphatically that Baretti was innocent? Why does he not attempt to sure-up the innocence, or the honor, of Johnson’s “most intimate” friend?

Is Boswell’s use of the word “constellation” meant to imply that Baretti’s innocent verdict was already pre-ordained – written in the stars – that even going into the trial his destiny was assured? Is Boswell referring merely to the intelligence assembled in the Old Bailey, or is he making a veiled allusion to the fact that genius was required to prove Baretti was innocent? Or, perhaps, Boswell considered the whole grim case something better avoided, a tale far less edifying than modern scholars have presumed. Maybe the affairs of the gouty and cantankerous Italian simply dwindled by 1791 so as to shrink a *cause célèbre* to a passing reference.

Baretti and Boswell never got along, despite the Italian’s offer to exchange conversation with Boswell in letters did little to assuage. The relationship between the two close friends of Johnson would be worth long reflection, though for the moment it is sufficient to say that Boswell’s aversion to Baretti was a personality clash that, it seems,

the criminal event helped to remedy. Dr. Campbell wrote on April 1, 1775 the following entry in his Diary about an evening spent at Thrale’s: “There was Murphy, Boswell, and Baretti, the two last, as I learned just before I entered, are mortal foes, so much that Murphy and Mrs. Thrale agreed that Boswell expressed a desire that Baretti should be hanged for that unfortunate affair of his killing.” Frederick Pottle thought it very possible that it was Boswell, and not Bowle, who wrote the first “scrap,” the one that criticizes Johnson’s defense of guilty outlaws. The letter is signed QUERIST, a name Boswell used in letters. In the Appendix, I suggest that several other letters may have come from the Boswell’s pen.

“On 16 March 1776, Boswell imagined “that there was a shade of murderous blood upon his pale face.” At several points in the *Life of Johnson*, Boswell records an interesting difference of opinion he had with Dr. Johnson on the role of the lawyer.

“BOSWELL: But what do you think of supporting a cause which you know to be bad?

JOHNSON: Sir, you do not know it to be good or bad till the Judge determines it….It is his business to judge; and you are not to be confident of your opinion that a cause is bad, but to say all you can for your client, and then hear the Judge’s opinion.” Boswell asserted that such professional duplicity would lead the lawyer into vice outside the courtroom. Johnson disagreed, expressing faith in the “the artifice of the bar.” A lawyer must argue all he can for a client, true or not, and this is not a sign that he is otherwise an immoral person, any more than "a man who is paid for tumbling upon his hands will continue to tumble upon his hands when he should walk on his feet.” It would be

---

404 *Johnson Miscellanies* (New York, 1897), ii. 44.
406 *The General Correspondence of James Boswell 1766-1769* (New Haven, 1997), 114.
interesting to know if during these conversations Boswell was just debating legal theory, or whether he had the Baretti case in mind.

Boswell wrote a letter in which he admitted to being persuaded by the testimony of Ward, Clark, and Patton: “I thought you guilty of murder. I allowed the three first evidences to keep possession of my mind without attending to their infamous characters so that all that the others said did not make an impression.” Later, Boswell writes that he agreed to a meeting with Garrick and Bennet Langton, who convinced him (Boswell does not specify how) that Baretti had the right to defend himself. After this encounter, Boswell accepted that Baretti was not a vicious criminal, but he apparently returned to his original position sometime later, for on the manuscript in Boswell’s hand we read the following gloss: “a weak absurd letter.” He pens the following obituary:

(Hic Jacet) (Her lies) Joseph Baretti,
Josephus Baretti An Italian and a fugitive from Italy,
Italus Italia Profugus Who, while living for many years in England,
Qui per multos annos in Anglia Among the English, and under the
Inter Anglos Anglorum Generous protections of the English,
Pretectione generaosa vivens In a barbaric fury
Rabie Barbara in platea Barbarically killed an
Anglum barbariter interfecit Englishman in the street.
Hic Forcam feliciter evasit He luckily escaped the gallows (M 14)

Toward the end of his life, Baretti expressed once more the combative nature, regretting that he lacked the “sufficient soul” to end his life “with a noose or a pistol.”

On May 5, 1789, Giuseppe/Joseph Baretti died.

---

407 The letter was written between Tuesday, October 24 and Friday, November, 10, 1769. This manuscript is at the Beinecke (MS. Yale L32).
408 Letter to Gambarelli, September 10, 1785 (Epistolario, ii. 291-292): “Io ho combattuto col mondo tanti anni, e sempre con tanta mala fortuna, che sono stanco e non ne posso più; e non avendo mai avuto animo sufficiente da finirla a un tratto con un laccio o con una pistola.” [I fought with the world for so many years, and always with such bad luck, that I am tired and I can’t do it anymore; and I never have enough soul to finish myself off with the noose or a pistol.]
An obituary was published in *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (May 11, 1789):

“Old Baretti, who died on Tuesday, has been a literary *fag* for many years. He was long in habits of intimacy with Dr. Johnson, Garrick, and the Literati of the times—None of his publications have had much fame annexed to them. His later performance was several trimming letters addressed to Mrs. Piozzi, who had, by his death, got rid of one of her most troublesome *friends.*” Indeed, without the presence of Samuel Johnson in his life, it seemed very likely that nothing would have become of Giuseppe Baretti. Another journalist wrote the following:

He was a snarling old brute with some literature, but wholly destitute of genius and literality. His works are poor miserable things, unworthy of critical notice. If this man had not contrived to obtrude himself into an acquaintance with Dr. Johnson, who was very credulous with all his great parts and knowledge, he would have ended his days in a garret.

Baretti was “for some years past, bolstered up by men of too much eminence, in the republic of letters” men willing to accept “the fulsome encomiums of so contemptible a parasite.”

“Dr. Johnson, however, detected him in a lie and discarded him, but not till his countenance had given Baretti a passport into the republic of letters.” Till the end he was viewed, though certainly not by all, as the Italian with a pen in one hand and a stiletto in the other: “Thirty-five years he lived in a foreign country, in whose language he was such a master, that he would wield it in attack on its inhabitants, sometimes better than they could in their defense.”

---

410 *Gentleman’s Magazine* (1789), 469.
It would be difficult to find a harsher assessment of a man’s life than the following: “The death of Baretti has, perhaps, excited regret in no human being.”\textsuperscript{411} (D-50 to D-56)

\textsuperscript{411} \textit{Morning Post} (Monday, May 11, 1789).
CONCLUSION

GIUSEPPE/JOSEPH BARETTI’S “SATIRICAL MADNESS”

A mind has reached the farthest limit of insanity, when cruelty has changed into pleasure and to kill a human being now becomes a joy. Hot upon the heels of such a man follow loathing, hatred, poison, and the sword.

Seneca, *On Mercy*, I. xxv. 2-xxvi. 1

Fury is a violent excitement, caused by an error of the mind or heart. We call that man furious, who, transported by delirium, or some passion, exhausts himself by talk, by threats and actions; seeking at the same time to injure himself and others.


Good actions are remembered but for a day: bad ones for many years after the life of the guilty.

Giuseppe Baretti, *Commonplace Book Manuscript* 412

The events of October 6th 1769 would have repercussions to the very end of Giuseppe Baretti’s life encapsulating his tormented life as a writer. An event that, on the one hand, was purely a “horrible accident” was, on the other, the key to unlocking how he wrote and who he was. We return to where we began this story.

With few Italians at his side at the Old Bailey, Baretti had in his own words, “become an Englishmen,” as he wrote to Lord Charlmont, reflecting on the day he would be laid to rest in England. At his deathbed, there were no Italians, but there were loyal friends who had known Baretti at least since 1768. Baretti was comforted by outstanding artists, including the landscape painter and Secretary of the Royal Academy John Inigo Richards (1731-1710), “the most distinguished sculpture of his generation,” John Wilton

412Quoted from Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*, Vol. 6: “Good actions are remembered but for a day: bad ones for many years after the life of the guilty. Such is the relish that the world has for scandal. In other words, such is the desire which every one has to exculpate himself by blackening his neighbour.”
Baretti died drinking drafts of hot and cold water and refusing medical treatment. He was buried on the May 9, 1789, in the cemetery of Marlybone. The Dean of Westmister William Vincent, the well-to-do John Milbanke, and John Cator also attended a small funeral. For years he was estranged from his three brothers in Italy. The last letter to his family in Piccioni’s *Epistolari* is filled with familiar anger. Baretti writes, “La vostra ignoranza del cuore umano v’ha fatto sbagliare il mio carattere.” It is dated June 30, 1780.413

Some days later, William Vincent attempted to galvanize the strengths of Baretti and his remarkable accomplishment in anecdotes about his life published by *Gentleman’s Magazine*. He tried to downplay the question of character that had hounded him but that he never did much of anything in the final years of his life to quell. It is no surprise that other newspaper obituaries discuss the event Baretti never lived down. “That his exertions in the cause of literature were useful, almost every Englishmen who possesses any knowledge of the Italian language will bear testimony; and that some of his works are entertaining, we need refer only to his Travels and his Controversies.”414 Of course, Baretti never wrote a work called the Controversies, but it seemed a most fitting title for many of his writings, maybe for all of them. An attempt to solicit funds to erect a monument to Baretti evidently finds few benefactors.415 A plaque in Rivalta Bormida is the only memorial to Baretti in Italy or England:

413 Letter to his Brothers, June 30, 1780 (*Epistolario*, ii. 245-247). Baretti is very upset in this letter, claiming his brothers lack the human heart to understand his character. They want to “mettermi dentro e fuora come un cazzo; ch’io non sono un cazzo, ma sono un uomo.” There is some bitter resignation: “Ma la mia fottuta sorte l’ha voluta così.”
415 “A monument is about to be erected by subscription in Mary le Bonne burying-ground, to the late ingenious Mr. Baretti, Secretary for Foreign Correspondence to the Royal Academy. Mr. Baretti was
Papers were burned “without inspection,” an action intended to give relief to posterity.

The closure of this story resembles nothing so much as a quiet battlefield where fighting was once done for honor and for survival and for naught. Many of the major players in this drama have already left the stage. Oliver Goldsmith died of a kidney infection in 1774, at the age of forty-five. Garrick died in 1779, leaving his estate and Italian library to his wife Eva, a former dancer in the King’s Theatre. Before his death in 1780, Topham Beuclerk was taking up to 400 drops of laudanum a day and battling venereal disease. (ODNB, “Topham Beauclerk”) “The summer of 1789 was indeed the nadir of Burke’s career,” writes his biographer F. P. Locke.416 One of Burke’s friends records in a diary an “intemperate attack [Burke made] on me, for a difference, which he had forced me to declare, on the affairs of Baretti.” Although he left no specifics as to why, Burke’s friend “endeavour[s] to obliterate from my mind, the impression, which passion so unreasonable and manners so rude would be apt to leave.” In 1791 Samuel Johnson becomes the subject of the extraordinary Life by his friend Boswell, who is selected to be Secretary for Foreign Correspondence for the Royal Academy, filling the post left vacant by Baretti. The post will never again be held by an Italian.417 When John Bowle dies in 1788, and a friend records in his diary, “it may be truly asserted that

perhaps one of the best linguists that ever united to speaking and writing equally well, Italian English French, and Spanish. In three of them he wrote dictionaries; and his memory will be endared to Englishmen by the letter he wrote to Voltaire in defence of Shakespeare, whom he had grossly attacked, and most certainly never understood.” Public Advertiser (Thursday, July 21, 1791)

Baretti’s *Tolondron* was the efficient cause of the Death of poor John Bowle.” (ODNB, “John Bowle”)

The Kings Opera House burns to the ground in 1790. Carlo Francesco/Charles Francis Badini’s final opera libretto, *Orfeo and Euridice* written for Haydn, is never brought to the stage; it will not be performed until 1951, when Maria Callas sings the lead at the *Maggio Musicale Fiorentino*. On October 31, 1798 the irrepressible surrenders to the bankruptcy court in Guildhall. In 1803, a messenger of the State escorts Badini to Dover, where he is “sent out of the kingdom by the first vessel.” He continues to write in Paris, producing a treatise on detecting false banknotes that is “very curious, in certain ways enjoyable and even interesting,” before he dies outside of Italy sometime in his nineties. Lorenzo Da Ponte writes the libretto for Mozart’s *Cosi fan tutte* the year of Baretti’s death, but it will be the last of his masterpieces. He transfers to Amsterdam to find work, but by 1804 is bankrupted and contemplating opening a grocery store; soon after he immigrates to the United States, where he becomes at Columbia University the first professor of Italian. Filippo Mazzei returns to his native country, where he dies in 1816, leaving a legacy that Badini would have never imagined from the owner of the wine shop at the corner of Suffolk Street, Haymarket. Constable John Lambert continues to work in law enforcement for ten years, apprehending in 1776 John Clifton and William Kelty in the act of stealing a bacon-ham, twenty pound weight, value ten shillings. One of the men who assaulted Baretti, according to a newspaper report, is hanged at Tyburn for highway robbery. Elizabeth Ward is transported, after being found

---

418 *E. Johnson’s British Gazette and Sunday Monitor* (Sunday, February 6, 1803).
419 *DBI*, Vol. 5, 86.
guilty of stealing a man’s watch, while he was in a bedroom with her, engaged in “correction with a bunch of rods.” (OBSP September 11, 1771)

In the years that followed, the Baretti case, if not a short circuit of the justice system, came to be viewed as an event in which the Italian’s writing and his life were one. “Mr. Sharp’s representation was certainly extravagant, and perhaps taken on too slight grounds. It excited Mr. Baretti’s resentment, and it is well known that he seldom expressed himself in gentle terms when he felt himself entitled to shew his anger.” The earliest Italian lives of Baretti written after his death, similarly, gave considerably attention to Baretti’s criminal past, often presenting it as the culminating event in the life of the writer. Pietro Custodi’s “Memorie della vita di Giuseppe Baretti,” would recall, “The most interesting epoch of the story of Baretti, an epoch of terrible and glorious memory.” Baretti is surrounded by a wild mob, as Baretti himself insisted, but he is well past the corner of Panton Street when three men approach him. Custodi avoids any extenuating details that might suggest any hint of wrongdoing, but cannot deny his subjects “collerico temperament” and the fact that he was “smoderato di passioni.”

If they wanted to talk about Baretti’s words and writings, if they wanted to let the accomplishments of his pen be his legacy, they could not avoid calling attention to that.

---

422 Biblioteca Oltremontana (1789), 106-136; Mazzucchelli’s Gli scrittori d’Italia (Brescia, 1753-1762), i. 345-349; Giuseppe Franchi’s Notizie intorno alla vita e agli scritti di Giuseppe Baretti (Torino, 1789?), 1-36; Camillo Ugoni’s Della letteratura italiana nella seconda metà del secolo XVIII, Vol. 1, (Brescia, 1820-1822), 233-269; Pietro Custodi’s “Memorie della vita di Giuseppe Baretti,” Scritti Scelti, con nuove memorie della sua vita (Milano, 1822), 145-151; Ugoni’s different version of in Della letteratura italiana nella seconda metà del secolo XVIII (Milano, 1856-1857), 4-74. Two other sources which were not consulted are Paroletti, Vita di sessanta illustri piemontesi (Torino, 1824) and Storia della poesia in Piemonte (Torino 1841).
423 “L’epoca più interessante delle vicende del Baretti, epoca di terribile e gloriosa ricordanza” (145)
moment in his life: "Era altresì il Baretti spavaldo, ardito, irritabile e prode della persona. Il fatto tragico, che abbiamo narrato essergli occorso in Londra, ne somministra una prova." (268) Felice Daneo writes the following analysis, combining character and literary criticism:

Le vicende della vita e più gli scritti del Baretti, dimostrano assai chiaramente qual fosse l’indole sua senza che ci si mestieri di molte parole a farne il ritratto. Piacevole, arguto, pronto dell’ingegno così come nel parlare, ma di una cotale asprezza e soverchia acrimonio non punto lodevole; facile ad inasprirsi e ad oltrepassare i limiti, talché nemmeno negli scritti fu temperato. [The events of the life and the writings of Baretti demonstrate very clearly what would be his nature, without it being necessary for us to waste many words in painting a portrait. Pleasant, witty, as quick with expressions as in speaking, but of such bitterness and overweening acrimony that was not at all admirable; easily irritated and quick to pass all limits, such that not even in writing was he temperate.424

Giacomo Leopardi, Discorso sopra lo stato presente dei costumi degli’Italiani (1824), made a harsh assessment of Baretti, as being a man “alien from truth”:

Gli Italiani stessi non iscrivono ne pensano sui loro costumi, come sopra niun’altra cosa che importi e giovì ad essi o agli altri: eccetto forse il solo Baretti, spirito in gran parte altrettanto falso che originale, e stemperato nel dir male, e poco intento o certo poco atto a giovare, e sì per la singolarità del suo modo di pensare e vedere, benché questa niente affettata, sì per la sua decisa inclinazione a sparlare di tutto, e il suo carattere aspro e iracondo verso tutti, il più delle volte alieno dal vero.425

Another biographer concluded, “Tale fu Giuseppe Baretti, al quale gli stessi difetti e i nemici crebbero fama [Such was Joseph Baretti, whose defects and enemies increased his fame].426

FAMILY MATTERS

424 Felice Daneo, Piccolo Panteo Subalpino, (Torino, 1858), ii. 74.
425 Giacomo Leopardi, Discorso sopra lo stato presente dei costumi degli’italiani (Venezia, 1992), 123.
426 Camillo Ugoni, “Giuseppe Baretti,” Della letteratura italiana (Brescia, 1820), 269.
In 1857 another biography, the *Vita di Giuseppe Baretti da Torino*, appeared in Italy, written by G. Battista Baretti, the grandson of Baretti’s brother. Its author was living in Rivalta Bormida, a small town about 100 kilometers south-east of Turin, the town his illustrious ancestor ran from a century before. The biography, introducing a two-volume selection from Baretti’s writings, was published in the country’s capital soon after Camillo Ugoni’s second, expanded essay on Baretti, but should not be taken as a sign of a boom in Baretti studies. G. Battista, who admits his limited skills as a textual scholar, was inspired to bring back into circulation works, thus scattered and because of the voluminous work disperses, “così scarse e per voluminose opera così disperse.”

Although Baretti’s *Dictionary*, updated and corrected, would continue to be published through the 1900s, but few of his other works were available. “Very few in Italy knew his good qualities, mora, his tireless perseverance in studies and the many works he published in London in various languages,” Pietro Custodi had pointed out to Italian readers in 1822. Many of his English works, in fact, had never been translated, such as *Tolondron*, a work that displays his irascible and emphatic English style. The title page suggests that he was still best known for *La Frusta Letteraria*. Baretti was badly in need of editorial assistance and, what is even more remarkable, of damage control.

The author, who describes himself as “povero di istruzione e di lettere,” announces on the title-page a special feature of his work, “l’aggiunta del processo ed assoluzione dell'omicidio da lui commesso in difesa di se medesimo in Londra, 1769, ridotto in ottava rima: he has reduced Baretti’s trial into the meter of the Italian epic

---

poem. There can be no doubt that the intended audience of the work was primarily Italians, and the fact that Baretti’s own relative wishes to rekindle this story suggests, does it not, that this event in Baretti’s life had still a lot of life left in it, was still circulating in stories and reminiscences, was still holding a central place in any consideration of the authors literary achievements. Moreover, when G. Battista stops to contemplate the life’s work of his ancestor, he is drawn to this anecdote and stimulated, astonishingly, to pursue the vocation of poet. The poem would have nauseated Baretti, or have moved him to vomit, by its inflated style, sluggish rhythms, and linguistic guesswork. He would not have wanted to read it twice. Why, one wonders, does G. Battista direct his fledgling literary ambitions on such a troubling moment in his subject’s life? Why choose an occasion that, readers of this study, created as much headache for Baretti as it ever did honor?

His verse rendering of the trial and absolution, the author promises in his preface, was composed with historical accuracy in 37 stanzas, “con verità storica di 37 stanze.” He wishes to set the historical record straight and enlist Giuseppe Baretti, at whose trial representatives from Italy were oddly silent, into the project of nation building. Ironically, in this work Baretti’s becomes an embodiment of all the values of Cavour. In the trusty hands of G. Battista Baretti, the debate between Sharp and Baretti, which found Baretti bound in contradictions, is warped into a straightforward political affair, as Sharp is “Skarp, che aveva mal parlato dell’Italia nostra,” G. B. Baretti writes, in a transparent effort to defend Baretti’s worth by association with the effort to unify Italy. (29) Baretti is placed as the victim trying, as best he can under the circumstances, in a noble act of defending his country against the charges of a small-minded and prejudice foreigner.
In the introduction, G. Battista painstakingly reconstructs the timeline of October 6th, when in the “cinquantesimo anno di sua vita gli avvenne un caso orribile.” In this redaction, Baretti saw himself surrounded by many female prostitutes (“videsi circondato da molte femmine prostitute”), making their usual requests about wine.429 Recalling perhaps Manzoni’s *I promessi sposi* (1842), Patman, Clark, and Morgan become *bravi* and the women “sciagurate,” while “the poor Italian” had his hands in his pockets. Finding himself reduced to such dire circumstances, Baretti pulls out a small knife that he kept with him (no mention of apple peeling in this epic battle) and he kills “Everardo Morgan,” one of the first assailants.430

Although G. Battista Baretti’s relative does not read English very well, his reaction shows that Baretti’s shrewd bilingual strategy still had its power, as his English ability so astonishes the audience that it bursts the possibility that the speaker could be a cold-blooded killer, or at least makes the very thought seem in bad taste. He comments: [The defense excited the admiration for his facility in speaking the English language, for the acuteness of the idea, the subtlety of the arguments, that it merited him being declared innocent and placed in liberty.]431 As he discusses this “disgustoso avvenimento,” G. Battista never passes an opportunity to stress the protagonist’s rugged independence, noting for example that Baretti – chiaro, ma troppo infelice parente mio” – refused not only a jury of half foreigners, but even the advantage of legal assistance: “Invitato a

---

429 “Il sei di ottobre 1769 andando alle nove di sera alla riunione dei pittori, e passando per la via di Hay- Maket [sic] videsi circondato da molte femmine prostitute; una di esse si avanzò baldanzosa facendogli la solita loro inchiesta di pagargli un bicchier di vino, ed esso la ributtò colla mano per allontanarla.”(30)
430 “Costei si mette ad urlare con alto grido. Accorsero i bravi e sconci amici di quelle femmine sciagurate, circondano e percuotono il povero italiano, che a sua volta se ne sta colle mani in saccoccia, ma vedendosi ridotto a mal punto, impugnato un piccolo coltello che teneva presso di sé, uccise Everardo Morgan, uno dei primi suoi assalitori.” (30)
431 “La difesa eccitò l’ammirazione per la facilità del dire nella lingua inglese, per l’acutezza delle idee, la sottigliezza e giustezza dell’argomento, e gli meritò di essere dichiarato innocente e posto in libertà.”(31)
scegliersi un difensore per suo dibattimento, rispose esser fermo nel suo proposito di
difendersi da se medesimo.” (31) With all the conviction of Tasso, G. Battista invites the
courteous reader, “il cortese lettore,” to reflect on this piece of history, “questo brano di
storia,” in his sacred poem written in honor of ancestor and patria. “Per essere
condannato (oh dura sorte!)/De’ suoi misfatti, e poi subir la morte.”

Clearly, the events of October 1769 were by no means forgotten, but had mutated
into a kind of simplistic and patriotic ballad. Clearly based on the various published
accounts filtered through Ugoni and others, the poem contains occasional alterations that
are curious and revealing. G. Battista is very interested in making the Old Bailey an
international courtroom, as the poem opens, emphasizing the unity of “un Giuri tutto d’un
medemo Stato,” which he describes arriving dressed in uniforms! Much of the narrative
closely follows Baretti’s Old Bailey Speech and the testimonials, though the language is
elevated to a heroic strain: “E sol con disperata resistenza/Pote’ far salva la sua
esistenza.” The poet eschews the sordid details of the crime scene, such as the
references to genitalia and buggery. Three men arrive on the scene; “E calpestato testa,
mani e dosso.” throw the “poverello” to the ground reminded that the “poverello”
(Baretti would not have approved of being so easily pitied). Throughout the poem,
Baretti is portrayed not as a friend of esteemed cultural icons, but a simple man, rejected
by his beloved country (“La cara Italia, ahime’! dovei lasciare,/Abbandonar la dolce mia
nazione), sitting without “ostentazione” in “quella vasta sala.”

Undoubtedly using Baretti’s Old Bailey Defense as his source, perhaps filtered
through family legend, the poet dramatizes Baretti in the middle of so many assailants,
“in mezzo a tanti assalitori.” There can be no doubt about the moral character of Edward
Morgan: “uccidendo con colpo di coltello/Everardo Morgan ruffiano e fello” [killing with a knife thrust, Edward Morgan, villainous pimp]. In fact, Morgan was “il più ostinato/Di tutti questi accorsi malfattori” [the most obstinant/Of all these evil-doers].

The best moment in this poem comes at the end, after Baretti has read his Old Bailey Speech “con somma dignità, calma e ragione.” The calm jury leaves the room in suspense, as Baretti awaits in “il destino preparato.” The crowd is silent, intent, and hearts are pounding, as the jury returns with the verdict: “Assolto senza colpa l’accusato.” Then something amazing occurs, something never seen before in a courthouse: “Batteveno le man tremila astanti/Cosa mai vista nei processi avanti.” It is a great moment in history, as Baretti stands in front of three thousand applauding spectators. Where did G. Battista Baretti come up with this image? From his ancestor, of course, who in a letter to Conte Vincenzo Bujovich, which G. Battista footnotes, wrote that the verdict was met with “general shout of approbation” from the three thousand present.\(^{432}\) A week earlier, Baretti wrote his brother Filippo that, despite the fact that he is being mistreated by licentious Englishmen and “anonymous scoundrels,” he consoles himself with the memory of the “universal applause” of the “more than two thousand” spectators.\(^{433}\) Even as a young critic, Baretti had a tendency to exaggerate with numbers.

In the final stanza, a scene is added that appears nowhere in any of the source material I have been able to locate.

\(^{432}\) Letter to Count Bujovich, November 14, 1769 (Epistolario, i. 424-425).
\(^{433}\) Letter to Filippo Baretti, November 17, 1769 (Epistolario, i. 421-423). “È vero che, secondo la licenziosità inglese, sono ora alquanto maltrattato da alcuni anonimi furfanti nelle carte pubbliche; ma me ne consolo agevolmente, quando me ricordo l’applauso universale e il gran battter di mani di più di due mila spettatori fatto ai giudici al pronunziare della favorevole sentenza.”
After hearing the verdict announced
His friends embraced all around him
Great joy and greater exclamations
Made the Hall of Justice resound.
And thus the ancient union
And the great BARETTI more honored
Led in still and solemn procession
To his house triumphant.

In this version, there can be no doubt of the verdict, as Baretti returns home to the Piemonte, metaphorically, as a patriot. Baretti conforms to the archetype of the nineteenth-century man of letters, well-behaved and civil, industrious and professional. If G. Battista knew the range of public opinion as to the character Baretti, his poem would seem a propaganda effort to exculpate a criminal. Surely he knew nothing about the unkind parodies of Baretti that circulated during the last two decades of his life, nor had he heard of the venomous Badini.

Of course the story was simplified. It had to be, for there is no adequate way of capturing in 37 stanzas an event as strange as this one. If this trial helps us understand the biography and the psychology of the least of the Johnsons, it does even more, because it exposes the cultural tensions. Forty years after Giuseppe Baretti’s death, the events of the night of October 6th remained the defining moment of his literary life. It had become an exemplum of the foreign writer in Enlightenment London, an event to be manipulated to favor or discredit Baretti, and even translated into a romantic legend by his first editor.

By the end of the nineteenth century, far worse than becoming a family legend, Baretti becomes a dry footnote. Enough time had passed and Baretti’s reputation had so much evaporated that when scholars began to re-assess his importance to literary history, they did not need did not pay any consideration to this trial and Baretti’s tribulations. They could for the first time examine his literary merits without any innuendoes about poison-tipped knives, or pens.
The principle custodian of Baretti’s works was Luigi Piccioni, also from Turin, who gathered Baretti material, a task made particularly difficult as so much of the material was lost, ephemeral, or in England. He collected the scattered letters and archival documents and initiated an incomplete collected edition of the author’s works. The documents relating to “The Haymarket Affair” were not readily available to Piccioni, so the unpleasant subject could be passed over, though Piccioni did translate for the first time the text of Baretti’s defense at the Old Bailey. Piccioni wanted to consider Baretti as a literary stylist, and rightly so, and paved the way for future academics specializing in Baretti. Piccioni had in mind stabilizing and give value to the literary achievement of Baretti, his style, his critical acumen, his prolific output in so many genres. Outside of the dynamic social world of duel-language exchange in which the “Haymarket Affair” occurred, it lost much of its appeal and resonance: it seemed like so much unseemly gossip.

However, the important bilingual and bicultural conflicts we have examined in these pages were frequently washed over or simplified. In this admirable scholarly project, which has led in recent years to entire conferences devoted to Baretti, there is little attention either to the question of character tied to “The Haymarket Affair,” nor the literary implications of what Walter Binni noticed as central to Baretti’s work, a “violenza sanguigna” and an “intolleranza inquisitoriale.” He gave little attention to the violent caliber—and paradoxes – of the exchange, and reducing Sharp (by reliable accounts a modest, unassuming man) becomes an enemy of the Italian nation. In discussing Baretti’s Account, Piccioni wanted to defend the merits of Baretti’s point of

---

434 Binni is quoted by Fido in Opere di Giuseppe Baretti (Milano, 1967), 11. For conferences on Baretti see
view, writing that the author “combatteva un’altra nobile battaglia contro i detrattori del nostro paese” [fought a noble battle against the detractors of our country.] Baretti’s position is trusted implicitly, another rejected as biased, small minded, or opportunistic. Piccioni, though a forceful advocate of Baretti’s literary achievement, was committed to painting over or touching up the original portrait of the man.

For much of the twentieth century, an oil painting by Pierre Subleyras (1699-1749) that represents a writer at his desk in the same position as the Reynolds portrait has been presented as a portrait of Giuseppe Baretti. The author is represented as the epitome of the poise and calm reflection, a man of “great humanity,” no doubt. There is a copy of the Subleyras on view in the Museum of Civic Art in Turin and the picture has been used for the cover art of a collection of essays on Baretti. As recently as 2003, this image accompanies an Italian encyclopedia article on Baretti. The original oil on canvas is today on display in the Musée du Louvre. It is not Giuseppe Baretti. The model has been positively identified as a close friend of the artist, Jacques-Antoine de Lironcourt. The picture is dated no earlier than 1745, when Baretti was still an unpublished and struggling writer, very much a different person than Jacques-Antoine de Lironcourt. One wonders what Baretti would have said, had he lived to see himself mistaken by posterity for a Frenchman.

Piccioni, ironically, had doubts about whether the man in the James Barry portrait – husky, without make-up, and with his shirt unbuttoned – was Baretti. This is yet
another example of the “repackaging” of the image of Baretti, this time by the appropriation of a false image of French elegance and refinement, all traits decidedly in contrast with the thick-skulled Italian in the two English pictures, a man who seems to be attacking the volume in front of his nose.

FINAL REMARKS ON BARETTI’S FURY

The case of Giuseppe/Joseph Baretti as explored on these pages has exposed “unspoken cultural assumptions” and attempted to “disclose the discontinuities” of the century in which it took place. The case helps us to appreciate the circumscribed world of the literary clubs in the 1700s, the cultural politics across two languages, and the workings of the law courts of the time. It exposes some very unflattering aspects of the Enlightenment, the backstabbing and hostility within a new market driven literary economy.

Critics and historians have often presented the violence in Baretti as the studied postures of a satirist: they have defended his work by defending his life. I believe that we begin to understand Baretti as a writer by accepting his violence and his bizarre intelligence. Indeed, before Baretti had even invented Aristarco Scannabue, he was alert enough to see his linguistic gifts as inextricably linked to a stormy brain and an explosive disposition. In a letter written very early in his career, Baretti described himself as [a choleric man, that for nothing turns into a beast and puts his hand to the sword; a man that speaks the various dialects of Italy very agreeably].

---

“Che il personaggio in quel quadro sia proprio il B., v’e’ forte dubbio, specialmente se si pone a confronto questa figura con quella ch’e’ nel dipinto autentico del Reynolds.

439 Letter to Conte Zampieri, May 6,1747 (Epistolario, i. 75-77): "un uomo collerico, che per poco va in bestia e mette mano alla spada; un uomo che parla diversi dialetti d'Italia assai piacevolmente."
get a start in Venice, Baretti was admitted to a literary academy. All members of the club chose a pen-name, and Baretti’s choice was Severo Fuggitivo. The abusive and attacking quality in the retorica barettiana was not only on his page, but in his mind. The Baretti case, I believe, is also a psychological case study.

“Every instance of opposition or resistance roused him to acts of fury. He assaulted his adversary with the audacity of a savage; sought to reign by force, and was perpetually embroiled in disputes and quarrels.” The author of this quotation is not a literary critic commenting on life of Giuseppe Baretti. It was written by Dr. James Prichard, one of the earliest psychologists to try to understand what is today called Anti-Social Personality Disorder; he was writing in A Treatise on Insanity in 1822. 440 The individual Pritchard was trying to understand was not the raving lunatic or the melancholic madman, but the individual who is able to function, even excel, but does so with a peculiar way that strikes others as very odd or unacceptable. “There are many individuals living at large, and not entirely separated from society,” wrote Pritchard, “who are affected in a certain degree with this modification of insanity.” (20) I would like to suggest that Baretti was affected by a “modification of insanity” that could help explain why Evan Morgan died and how an ordinary boy from a provincial town in the Piedmont rose to become “well known in the literary world.”

Jean-Etienne Esquirol (1772-1840), in Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity, also investigated individuals who retained their intellectual capacity, and in many ways were perfectly functional, but evinced behaviors that were otherwise harmful, destructive, irrational and inexplicable. Esquirol discusses “one of the most alarming symptoms of insanity” relevant to this case in his chapter on the mental state of “Fury,” a state in

which, repeatedly, we find Baretti. I am speaking here, of course, of the violent, passionate reaction after the encounter with the prostitute on Haymarket Street, but not only that occasion: there are countless examples of Baretti “flying off the handle,” resorting to extreme violence in a instant, both in his life and in his printed works. Mrs. Thrale records an anecdote of his imprisonment, when an Italian approached Baretti for a letter of reference, hoping to gain Baretti’s pupils after his imminent death. Baretti is said to have cursed the man and threatened to “kick him down the stairs.” As we have seen often in this study, “Fury is a “violent excitement” “transported by delirium, or some passion, exhausts himself by talk, by threats and actions; seeking at the same time to injure others and himself.” (121)

The Baretti case, in every sense, is a puzzle that creates a picture more alive and more fascinating than the fuzzy or flattering portraits previously drawn by literary historians. It seems to me that a deep understanding of Baretti, and the fruits of his brain, requires the reader to appreciate “the extreme state of the passions which deprives a man of reason, and conducts him to the most fearful resolutions, leads, often enough, to mental alienation.” (122) The individual Prichard was referring to in the quotation above had something else in common with Baretti, for in “an act of notoriety put [he] an end to his career of violence. Enraged with a woman, who had used offensive language to him, he threw her down a well.” (22)

Those who came into contact with Baretti even briefly were repulsed by a gruff and argumentative temperament, put off by a demeanor that seemed strange and antisocial. Miss Ellis Cornelia Knight, for instance, in her “Memoirs of a Tory Gentlewoman,” recalled as a girl being “disgusted by the satirical madness of manner of
There is no denying the profound psychological violence in the mind of Baretti. Pritchard, again, could be speaking of Baretti when he write, “They are reputed persons of a singular, wayward, and eccentric character. An attentive observer will recognize something remarkable in their manners and habits, which may lead him to entertain doubts as to their entire sanity.” (20) “Now when Baretti once despised or disliked anyone or anything, that person or that thing was doomed in his eyes; it had no merit, no excuse, it was to be abused, calumniated, scoffed at, annihilated.” Benjamin Rush (1745-1813), in *Medical Inquiries and Observations of the Mind* (1812), used the term "alienation of the mind" to describe those patients who lacked impulse control, often raged when frustrated, and were prone to outbursts of violence.

Most scholars of psychiatric history see in Esquirol, Pritchard, Pinel and Rush the first clear articulation of the contemporary concept of Antisocial Personality Disorder. This disorder is characterized by a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others, as failure to conform to social norms, manifested by repeated unlawful behaviour; deceitfulness, repeated lying or swindling for pleasure or personal gain, impulsivity or failure to plan ahead, irritability and aggressiveness involving frequent assaults or fights; reckless disregard for the safety of self or others, consistent irresponsibility involving failure to hold down jobs, and lack of remorse for the mistreatment of others, as indicated by indifference and rationalization. Baretti could very well be the first case of this ailment that we can document.

Massimo Bontempelli admired Baretti (as we must) for the man and the mind that we feel on each page, not for the accuracy of his critical judgement or works of great

---

441 *Fraser’s Magazine* (1878)
beauty. Baretti’s voluminous writing allow us to explore a figure in turmoil, with serious psychological problems that did not prohibit but perhaps stimulated his literary life.

The dark side of Baretti presented in these pages makes him more—and not less—a figure of his age, one who could never have achieved his ambiguous position at any other time in literary history, whose self-promotion and self-invention, through a web of literary alliances, enabled him to bridge two cultures simultaneously, something that very few writers have done.

Emphasize Baretti’s alarming mind might be a key to unlocking his literary style, his thought, the aggressive way he approached the task of writing. This study was not constructed to tarnish the legacy of Baretti, a figure who looms even larger, in my view, when we accept him with his faults. Baretti had also many excellent qualities as a writer and as a man. In the abuse he suffered at the pen-wielding hands of his adversaries, Baretti was probably given a just punishment for the shortcomings in his tortured life.

* * *

Baretti sat in Orange’s Coffee House writing to an old friend on the afternoon of October 6, 1769. Reflecting on his extraordinary accomplishments, little did he know how his life would change by day’s end. As he reflected on the differences between London and Imola, little did he know what would happen very shortly thereafter to “break his thought.” (D-60) “I will recount all the details of that ugly case, or perhaps you will read about them, because I intend to put them all in writing ad eaternam rei memoriam. If I am every able to compose my mind in a way to be able to write this
thing, you will see a description of English justice, of which one has no idea in our cities.”\textsuperscript{442} He promises to write it all down, but he never does.

\textsuperscript{442} Letter to Bujovich November 14, 1769 (Epistolario, i. 425): “Vi racconterò tutte le particolarità di quel brutto caso, o forse ve lo leggerò, perché intendo di metterlo in iscritto ad eatum rei memoriam. Se potrò mai comporre la mente in modo da poter fare questa cosa, vedrete una descrizione della giustizia inglese, di cui non si ha idea ne’ nostri paesi.”
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Internet Sources

17th and 18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers (British Library)
Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO)
Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)
Proceedings of the Old Bailey: www.oldbaileyonline.org

Manuscript Sources

University of Pennsylvania
Baretti, Giuseppe. Commonplace Book Manuscript (1752-1772)
Shelfmark Ms. Codex 975

Princeton University
Baretti, Giuseppe. Poems: Manuscript (1754)
Shelfmark C0199 (no. 88)

University of Cincinnati
Baretti, Giuseppe. Remarks on the Italian Language Manuscript (1748)
Shelfmark PQ4683.B19 Z5

British Library
Baretti, Giuseppe. Annotations to Thrale’s Letters
Baretti’s annotated copy of Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D. Ed.
Shelfmark C.45.e.5-6.

Copeland-Griffith Collection
Sir Joshua Reynolds unpublished manuscript parody of Baretti transcribed by Derek
Hudson in Appendix A of Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Personal Study.

London Metropolitan Archives
Coroner’s Report OB/SP/1769/10/021A
Manuscripts (destroyed during World War II) transcribed by Donald Gallup in Giuseppe
Baretti’s Work in England Appendix.

Biblioteca Braidense, Milan
Fondo Autografi: Aut. B. XXXIII. 76
Archivio di Stato, Firenze
Supremo Tribunale di Giustizia Filza 2447 Straordinario dall’anno 1787 all’anno 1790

Archivio di Stato, Perugia
Tribunale di prima istanza di Perugia, processi criminali, secolo XVIII:
Busta anno 1716, fasciculo: Città Porta S. Angelo. Ferita con qualche pericolo, 16 septembris 1716.
Busta anno 1731, fasciculo: Perusia. Vulneris cum cultro, proditio appensateque inficii, cum aliquo vitae periculo, 9 aprilis 1731.
Busta anno 1733, fasciculo: Terrae Diruti. Vulsus cum periculo mutilationis, s.d.
Busta anno 1749, fasciculo n. 35: Trebij. Vulneris cum cultro de genere prohibitorum illusque delationis, 24 junij 1749.
Busta anno 1786, fasciculo 29: Città Omicidio, 11 agosto 1786.
*Busta anno 1790, fasciculo numero 36: Perusia Super vulneris, 12 septembris 1790.

Primary Periodical Sources

The Aberdeen Magazine, Literary Chronicle, and Review
Annual Register
British Magazine and General Review
The Cambridge Magazine or Universal Repository
The Critical Review
Daily Advertiser
Dublin Mercury
English Chronicle or Universal Evening Post
English Review or An Abstract of English and Foreign Literature
The European Magazine and London Review
Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser
General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer
General Evening Post
Gentleman’s Magazine
Independent Chronicle
Literary Magazine and British Review
Lloyd’s Evening Post and British Chronicle
The London Chronicle
London Evening Post
The London Magazine or Gentleman’s Monthly Intelligencer
London Museum of Politics, Miscellanies, and Literature
London Review of English and Foreign Literature
Middlesex Journal or Chronicle of Liberty
Monthly Review
Morning Chronicle
Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser
Morning Post
Public Advertiser
Public Ledger
St. James Chronicle or British Evening Post
Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer
World

Printed Primary Sources


Anon. *The remarkable trial of the queen of quavers, and her associates, for sorcery, witchcraft, and enchantment, at the assizes held in the moon, for the County of Gelding, before the Rt. Hon. Sir Francis Lash, Lord Chief Baron of the Lunar Exchequer*. [London]: Taken in short hand, by Joseph Democritus, and William Diogenes, [1777?].

Badini, Carlo Francesco. *Il vero carattere di Giuseppe Baretto*. In Venezia [London], [1772?].


---. *An Introduction to the Italian Language. Containing Specimens of both Prose and Verse with a Literal Translation and Grammatical Notes for the Use of Those who Attempt to Learn it without a Master*. London: Printed for A. Millar, 1755.


---. Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy with Observations on the Mistakes of Some Travelers with Regard to that Country. London: T. Davies, 1768.

---. An Appendix to the account of Italy, in Answer to Samuel Sharp, Esq. by Joseph Baretti. London: T. Davies, 1768.

---. Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy... with Observations on the Mistakes of some Travelers with Regard to that County. With Notes and an Appendix added, in answer to Mr. Sharp. London: T. Davies, 1769.

---. An Introduction to the Most Useful European Languages, Consisting of Select Passages, from the Most Celebrated English, French, Italian, and Spanish authors. With Translations as Close as Possible; so Disposed, in Columns, as to Give in one View the Manner of Expressing the Same Sentence in Each language. London: Printed for T. Davies and T. Cadell, 1772.


---. G'l'italiani; o sia, Relazione degli usi e costumi d'italia tradotta dall'inglese con note del traduttore. Milano: G. Pirotta, 1818.


Fielding, Sir John. *Extracts from Such of the Penal Laws, as Particularly Relate to the Peace and Good Order of this Metropolis: to Which are Added, the Felonies*. London: Printed by H. Woodfall and W. Strahan, 1762.


Sharp, Samuel. *Letters from Italy Describing the Customs and Manners of that Country, in the years 1765, and 1766*. London: Printed by R. Cave; and sold by W. Nicol, 1766. [Second Edition 1767]

Sharp, Samuel. *A View of the Customs, Manners, Drama, &c. of Italy as they are described in The Frusta Letteraria; and in The Account of Italy by Mr. Baretti: compared with The Letters from Italy Written by Mr. Sharp*. London: W. Nicoll, 1768.


Secondary Sources


Castle, Egerton. *Schools and Masters of Fence from the Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century.* London: Bell & Sons, 1892.


APPENDIX A: TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1766-1768</th>
<th>The Literary Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Samuel Sharp, *Letters from Italy Describing the Customs and Manners of that Country, in the years 1765, and 1766. To Which is Annexed, an Admonition to Gentlemen who Pass the Alps.* London: printed by R. Cave; and sold by W. Nicol, 1766. (October, 1766) [Second Edition. 1767] (December, 1766) [Third Edition. 1767] (February, 1767).


Samuel Sharp. *A View of the Customs, Manners, Drama, &c. of Italy as they are described in The Frusta Letteraria; and in The Account of Italy by Mr. Baretti: compared with The Letters from Italy Written by Mr. Sharp.* London: W. Nicoll, 1768. (May, 1768)


Joseph Baretti. *Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy... with Observations on the Mistakes of some Travelers with Regard to that Country. The Second Edition, Corrected; With Notes and an Appendix added, in Answer to Mr. Sharp.* 2 vols. London: Printed for T. Davies, 1769. (June, 1769)\(^{443}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>October, 1769</th>
<th>“The Haymarket Affair”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Friday, 6 (between 9 and 10 p.m.):** Brawl in Haymarket and Panton Street. Baretti is transported to Justice Fielding and committed to Tothill-fields Bridewell.

**Saturday, 7** Visits from Johnson, Burke, Molini and Low, among others. Evan Morgan dies shortly after midnight.

**Sunday, 8** First Session of Coroner’s Inquest Five witnesses make affidavits.

**Tuesday, 10, until 10 p.m.** Second Coroner’s Inquest held “on the body of Morgan.”

\(^{443}\) There were also two Dublin editions: *An Account* (Dublin: Printed for W. Colles, 1769) and *Letters* (Dublin: Printed for P. Wilson, 1767?).
Newspapers report: “Brought their verdict manslaughter.”

Wednesday 11
Third Session of Inquest.
Witness examination finishes late at night.
Character witnesses in the trial are present.

Grand Jury at Hick’s-hall. Baretti is indicted on two counts, murder and the statute against stabbing.

Thursday, 12
Baretti is admitted to bail posted by Reynolds, Fitzherbert, Burke, and Garrick at House of Lord Mansfield.

During the week
Meeting in office of Solicitor Cox in Southampton-buildings, Chancery-lane. Steevens, Johnson and Burke are present.

Friday, 20
Trial: Acquittal.

November, 20

1772/3?-1857

[Giuseppe Baretti], [Filippo Mazzei]. Two libels in Italian written in Italian verse.
(unlocated)

[Carlo Francesco Badini]. *Il vero carattere di Giuseppe Baretti*. In Venezia [London]: {1772-6?}.


[Anon] *The remarkable trial of the queen of quavers, and her associates, for sorcery, witchcraft, and enchantment, at the assizes held in the moon, for the County of Gelding, before the Rt. Hon. Sir Francis Lash, Lord Chief Baron of the Lunar Exchequer*. [London], [1777?].


On Friday, the 6th, I spent the whole day at home correcting my Italian and English Dictionary, which is to actually reprinting and working off, and upon another book in four volumes, which is to be published in February next, and has been advertised in the Newspapers. I went a little after four to the club of Royal Academicians in Soho, where I stopped about half an hour waiting for my friends, and warming myself in the club-room. Upon nobody's coming, I went to the Orange coffee-house, to see if a letter was come for me, for my letters come there, but there was none. I went back to go to the club, and going hastily up the Haymarket, there was a woman at a door; they say there were two, but I took notice of but one, as I hope God will save me: there might have been two, though I only saw one: that is a fact. There was a woman eight or ten yards from the corner of Panton street, and she clapped her hands with such violence about my private parts, that it gave me great pain. This I instantly resented, by giving her a blow on the hand, with a few angry words. The woman got up directly, raised her voice, and finding by my pronunciation I was a foreigner, she called me several bad names in a most contumelious strain; among which, French bugger, d - ned Frenchman, and a woman-hater, were the most audible. I had not quite turned the corner, before a man made me turn back, by giving me a blow with his fist, and asking me how I dare strike a woman; another pushed him against me, and pushed me off the pavement; then three or four more joined them. I wonder I did not fall from the high step which is there. The path-way is much raised from the coach-way. A great number of people surrounded me presently, many beating me, and all d - ning me on every side, in a most frightful manner. I was a Frenchman in their opinion, which made me apprehensive I must expect no favour nor protection, but all outrage and blows. There is generally a great puddle in the corner of Panton-street, even when the weather is fine; but that day it had rained incessantly, which made it very slippery. I could plainly perceive my assailants wanted to throw me into the puddle, where I might be trampled on; so I cried out murder. There was a space in the circle, from whence I ran into Panton-street, and endeavoured to get into the foot-way. I was in the greatest horror, lest I should run against some stones, as I have such bad eyes. I could not run so fast as my pursuers, so that they were upon me, continually beating and pushing me. Some of them attempting to catch me by the hair-tail: if this had happened, I had been certainly a lost man. I cannot absolutely fix the time and place where I first struck: I remember, somewhere in Panton-street, I gave a quick blow to one who beat off my hat with his fist. When I was in Oxendon-street, fifteen or sixteen yards from the Haymarket, I stopped and faced about. My confusion was great, and seeing a shop open, I ran into it for protection, quite spent with fatigue. I am certainly sorry for the man, but he owed his death to his own daring impetuosity. Three men came into the shop, one of them cried to me to surrender myself to him, who was constable. I asked them if they were honest men, and friends; they said, Yes. I put up my knife, desired them to arrest me, begged they would send for a coach, and take me to Sir John Fielding. I appeal to them how I behaved, when I surrendered, and how thankful I was for their kind protection. Sir John heard what I and the men had to say. They sent me into a room below, from whence I dispatched a man to the club in Gerrard-street; when Sir Joshua
Reynolds and other gentlemen came to me. A messenger was dispatched to the Middlesex hospital, where they said Morgan was carried. A surgeon came, and took his oath that Morgan was in danger. Sir John committed me to Tothillfields-Bridewell. Two gentlemen, as well as the constable, can witness to my behaviour when the coachman lost his way, which forced us to alight in the rain and darkness, in order to find the way to Tothillfield-Bridewell. I humbly conceive this will shew I had no intention of escaping. That woeful night I passed without rest. My face had been observed to be hurt, while I was at Sir John Fielding 's; and the constable was the first who took notice of a blow I had received on my chin. But when the heat and fear had subsided, I found a great pain in divers parts of my body. Mr. Molini and Mr. Low being with me, desired me to let them see what was the matter with my back, which I had complained of, I stripped, and they saw several bruises. This, my Lord and Gentlemen of the Jury, is the best account I can give of my unfortunate accident; for what is done in two or three minutes, in fear and terror, is not to be minutely described; and the Court and the Jury are to judge. I hope your Lordship, and every person present, will think that a man of my age, character, and way of life, would not spontaneously quit my pen, to engage in an outrageous insult. I hope it will easily be conceived, that a man almost blind could not but be seized with terror, on such a sudden attack as this. I hope it will be seen, that my knife was neither a weapon of offence or defence: I wear it to carve fruit and sweetmeats, and not to kill my fellow-creature. It is a general custom in France, not to put knives upon the table, so that even ladies wear them in their pockets for general use. I have continued to wear it after my return, because I have found it occasionally convenient. Little did I think such an event would ever have happened. Let this trial turn out as favourable as my innocence may deserve, still my regret will endure as long as life shall last. A man who has lived full fifty years, and spent most of that time in a studious manner, I hope, will not be supposed to have voluntarily engaged in so desperate an affair. I beg leave, My Lord and Gentlemen, to add one thing more. Equally confident of my own innocence, and English discernment to trace out truth, I did resolve to wave the privilege granted to foreigners by the laws of this kingdom: nor was my motive a compliment to this nation; my motive was my life and honour; that it should not be thought I received undeserved favour from a Jury part my own country. I chose to be tried by a Jury of this country; for if my honour is not saved, I cannot much wish for the preservation of my life. I will wait for the determination of this awful Court with that confidence, I hope, which innocence has a right to obtain. So God bless you all.
APPENDIX C: TRANSLATION OF C. F. BADINI’S _IL VERO CARATTERE_

_Il vero carattere di Giuseppe Baretti, Pubblicato per amor della virtù calunniata; per disinganno degl’Inglesi e in defesa degl’Italiani._ In Venezia: per ordine dell’ECCELLENTISSIMO SENATO.

_The True Character of Giuseppe Baretti. Published for the Love of Virtue Calumniated; to undeceive the English and in Defense of the Italians._ In Venezia: per ordine dell’ECCELLENTISSIMO SENATO.

Footnotes in square brackets are translated from Badini’s originals. Footnotes not in brackets have been added.

---

Troppo sciocca petulanza
È il far pompa del natale;
Perché noi siamo in sostanza
Tutti figli d’un cotale.

It’s inane and petulant
To puff one’s noble birth
Because we’re all basically
Offspring of the same pecker.

Ne’ farei mai così pazzo
Di gonfiarmi d’albagia,
Se venissi anche dal cazzo
Di Sansone o di Golià.

I would never be so mad
As to swell myself pretentious
If I had come from the cock
Of Samson or of Goliath.

E però circa il Baretti
Mi cancello dall’idea
I parenti suoi abbiets
E la stirpe sua plebea.

Therefore with regards to Baretti
I’d let the thought perish
His relatives are ill-bred and
His family tree is rotten.

Non derido il genitore
Della sorte sua tapina;
Nè gli reco a disonore
Che portasse la calcina.

I would not deride his father
For his son’s disgraceful fate;
Nor would I consider it an insult
That he carried bricks and mortar.

Anzi, voglio, se mi lice,
Mascherar questo difetto
E vo’ dir com’egli dice,
Che faceva l’Architetto.

I would, instead, if allowed,
Put a mask on this defect
I’d want to say like he does,
That my father was an Architect.

E incalzando l’impostura
Voglio spingerlo alle stelle,
E chiamarlo a dirittura
Il Vitruvio di Babelle.

And giving legs to the imposture
I’d push it right to the stars
I’d call him nothing less than
The Vitruvius of Babel

Io non so se sia il Vignola
Il Palladio, o ’l Bonarrotti,
O se venga dalla scuola
Dei famosi Visigotti

I don’t know if it would be Vignola
Or Palladi or Buonarotti
Or if he came from the school
Of the famous Visigoths

---

444 Baretti’s family, like Badini’s was from a provincial town outside of Turin. His father, Luca Antonio studied architecture at the University. According to Badini, Baretti lied about his father collaborating with the baroque architect Filippo Juvarra. Anna Caterina Tesio, Baretti’s mother, was from humble origins.

445 [So he said in his travels written in English: not only that, a Cavalier recently asked me if it were true that Baretti came from the noble family of Carretto, that is, from the Marchesi di Ceva, because he spouted this all around. This would without a doubt make everyone in the Piedmont bust a gut laughing.]
L’usar quelle labbia attorte
Id est que’ visicidazzi,
Che si metton sulle porte
Per ornato de’ Palazzi.

Ma direi che Lucantonio,
Genitore del Baretti,
Ispirato dal Demonio
Inventassi li sudetti.

E la madre Ludovica
Con pape satan aleppe
Concepì poi nella fica
La figura di Giuseppe.

Nè del burbero mostaccio,
Che anche ai ciechi fa paura,
A lui carico ne faccio,
Sol n’incolpo la natura.

E’ ben ver che un viso arcigno,
Come disse il savio Omero,
Mostra un animo maligno,
Un cor fello, un rio pensiero.

Quand’io leggo di Tersite
Ch’era largo nelle spalle,
Con le guance illividite
Dall’invidia, aride e gialle;
Goffo, sporco gobbo e losco
Ne’ misfatti ognor più baldo;
Pien la lingua e ’l cor di tosco:
Che soffiava freddo e caldo;
Dico allora che ’l Poeta,
Che tracciò questi difetti,
O doveva esser Profeta,
O Tersite era ’l Baretti.

Vedi ’l torbido suo ceffo,
Quel pesante capo chino
Porta in fronte lo sberleffo
Ed il bollo di Caino.

Nel descriver di costui
La protervia e ’l mal talent,
Non calunnio come lui;
Poiché ho prove cento e cento.

---

446 Badini begins to display his cultural knowledge with references to architects Vitruvius, Giacomo Vignola, Michelangelo, and Palladio.
449 Genesis 4:2.
Prima sappi che chercuto
Fu il Baretti, e di que' cherci
Che nel baratro di Pluto
Son di spirito si guerci.

Non saprei ben dir quant’anni
Ei sé quest’uffizio pio;
So che stava a San Giovanni,
Quel che nomasi di Dio.

E dai frati ignorantelli
Ricevè l’educazione:
Manca al Conte Mazzuchelli
Questa buona erudizione.

Dice pur questo Scrittore,
Ch’ei fu giovane di banco;
Ma io trovo un altr’autore
Che di lui parla più franco:

Che ’l Baretti fu a Guastalla
Servitor d’un uom dabbene:
Se in cucina, oppure in stalla,
Ora più non mi sovviene:

E che quindi fu scacciato;
Ma di male altro non fece,
Fuorchè aveva un po’ imbrattato
Le sue mani nella pece.

Dopo questo, oh meraviglia!
Scrisse satire e strambotti,
I quai fecero le ciglia
Inarcare a molti arlotti;

E vedendolo linguista,
Senza mai aver studiato,
In Italia ogni esorcista
Lo credevo indemoniato.

Cosa giova che si sudi
Delle scienze per la via;
Di confonderci agli studi
E di Padova e Pavia?

Maledette sien le scuole,

---

450 Baretti’s father seems to have directed him to the priesthood. Badini informs us of the church where
Baretti studied. Baretti, in his turn, mocked Badini for being a defrocked Jesuit.

451 [Count Mazzuchelli in the second volume of his Writers of Italy p. 345, says that the parents of Baretti
were Lucantonio and Ludovica, that he was tonsured, and that then he served in Guastalla in the shop of
Sanguinetti brothers, who I suppose were knife sellers: but the said Count did not know, or did not want to
say, everything.] G. M. Mazzuchelli, Gli Scrittori d’Italia (Brescia, 1760?). Badini begins the many
innuendoes to the “Haymarket Affair,” “sangue” being the Italian word for blood.

452 [Piccata manus.]
Maledetti i lor precetti;  
Queste sono tutte sole:  
Imitiamo il gran Baretti,  
Che fè 'l servo, e 'l chiericone;  
Benchè questo sia un portento  
Di vedere un mascherone  
Fatto dotto in un momento.  
E' una cosa che si sa,  
Che 'l Poeta sempre nasce;  
E costui per verità,  
Versi fè fin dalle fasce.  
Per iscrivere libelli  
Quelle Muse gli dier l'estro,  
Che già al Franco ed al Trivelli  
Procacciarono il capestro.  
Incomincia la gran puzza  
Del satirico a Torino,  
Mentre arrotavi ed aguzza  
Il coltello di Pasquino  
Contro il Bartoli, che certo  
E pur forza che l'ammiri:  
Nel veder che del suo merto  
Il Procuste ed il Busiri  
Senza causi si l’annoi:  
Anzi credeIo ubbriaco,  
Se 'l conosci men che i buoi  
Lume avessero di Caco;  
Ma quantunque abbia anche troppo  
Tratte botte a quel bersaglio  
Col coltello e con lo schioppo;  
Non fè colpo, e non fè taglio.  
Perche il primo Presidente,  
Lette quelle rime sporche,  
Fe’ partirlo incontinenti  
Per la porta delle forche.

Cursed still more their rules;  
Rules all come down to one:  
Let’s imitate Great Baretti,  
That if servant, if in the priesthood;  
Although this could be a portent  
To see a scoundrel so become  
Literary genius in a split second.

It’s a well-know fact,  
That poets are born, not made;  
And that if truth be told,  
He wrote while still in diapers.

For composing libels  
Those Muses gave him the force  
Already for Franco and Trivelli  
They had procured the slipknot.

So began the great stench  
Of the Satirist of Turin,  
While he made pointy and sharp  
The knife of Pasquin.

Against Bartoli, who surely  
And who had to admire him:  
Saw in him the merits of  
Procustus and Busiri.

Without reason Baretti tormented him:  
Indeed thought him drunk,  
Though he understood him less  
Than did the oxen of Caco.

Even though in that fracas  
He hit the bull’s-eye too often  
With his knives and firearms;  
He made no wound, left no gash.

Because the first President,  
Read those dirty rhymes,  
Made him leave post-haste  
Through the doors to the gallows.

---

453 [Two writers of Pasquinades: the first was hanged, and they cut the other’s head off.] Niccolò Franco (1515-1570) was arrested in 1568; Enrico Trivelli was beheaded in 1737 for writings against the Pope.

454 [So that you will have a taste of the beautiful poetry of Giuseppe Baretti, we will copy here, with all imaginable accuracy, one of the libels that he wrote against Bartoli, which you will find in the unpleasant rhymes of that Giuseppe Baretti… I won’t say anything about the style of this sonnet, but have you observed the trip Baretti, called the ox in Italy, makes in a whale form Paraguay that is in America to the Islands of Moluche that are in Asia and from there right to Madagascar in Africa? The word camello, according to the Greek derivation, one should write with only one l; some write it with two; and then when an ox writes the word, he is even able to use three.]

455 [Two famous tyrants and assassins] in Greek mythology.


457 [All these things are actual facts.]
In quel succido destino,  
Riffuggitosi a Milano,  
Trovò appin il poverino  
Da poter far il ruffiano.

Una celebre puttana,  
Per sentir qualche facezia,  
Nella barca Padovana  
Lo meno’ Fino a Venezia.

Quivi tosto ei fe’ un libello  
All’Abate Biagio Schiavo;  
E ogni Veneto bordello  
Gli die il titolo di bravo.

Il Cornelio poi tradusse  
Ed Ovidio degli amori;  
E anche questi che’ei produsse  
Son libelli a que’scrittori.

L’uno e l’altro e pero raro  
Perché niun mai non li lesse;  
Ma si dice che ’l libraro  
Qualche cose pur gli desse,

Affinch’egli se n’andasse  
Sopra un asino a Bologna,  
Ove dico che portasse  
L’invenzione della rogna.

Per la strada della Marca;  
Quando i cigni ebber scoperto  
Che passava il lor Monarca,  
Gl’intuonarono un concerto.

Ma talor dicea fra se:  
Sono dotto, eppur non so  
Cosa mai sarà di me:  
Cosa diavolo farò.

Da Torino son bandito,  
A Milano andar non posso:  
A Venezia fui schernito:  
E’ un imbroglio molto grosso.

E per me quant’era meglio  
Di servire i Sanguinetti,  
Che tradire il gran Corneglio,  
E far satire e sonetti!

---

458 [When the Venetians speak of some scoundrel, like Giuseppe Baretti, El xè onorà co ’fà la barca de Padova--He prides himself on taking the boat to Padua.]
459 Giuseppe Baretti, Primo Ciclamento (1750).
460 [And so it happened to these delightful translations the same thing that happens to all the works of Giuseppe Baretti, in Italy as well as in England, after a week no one speaks of them again.]
Della fame scheletrita
Vide allor l’orride zanne,
Che turavano l’entrata
Alle sue bramose canne.

E da questo ha derivato
Quel guardar tarpato e bieco,
Per ragion ch’ogni affamato
Dal dolor diventa cieco.

In quel punto il traditore,
Con più voti al Ciel rubelli,
Canto salmi nel suo core
Al maggior de’ farfarelli;

E sì’ disse a lui il tristo:
Se tu viene ora in mio aiuto,
Fo le fiche a Gesù Cristo,
Chiamo il Ciel baron fottuto.

Dalla Massima Cloaca
Le bestemmie vomitate
Penetrar la Terra opaca;
E le genti fotterrate
Nell’orror del golfo arsiccio,
Al sentire gl’infami accenti
Provar doppio il raccapriccio,
E i tartari tormenti.

Sfognò intanto Draghignazzo;
Né per mare, né per terra,
Ma infiltratolo nel cazzo,
Volò seco in Inghilterra
Della Borsa a dirimpetto
Si ritrova un gran caffè,
Dove quasi un mezzo ghetto
Si può dir che sempre c’è.

D’un scelino, oppur d’un soldo
Col pensier di far acquisto,
Quivi corse il manigoldo
A sparlare di Gesu’ Cristo

A maledico spedato
Fu rispinto dagli Ebrei,
Qual cagnaccio rinegato
Come appunto fu ‘l Mazzei.

Di vipereo veleno

---

461 [Dante affirms that hunger leads to blindness in his famous canto of Count Ugolino.] *Inferno*, XXXIII.
462 [Devil mentioned by Dante.] *Inferno*, XXI.
463 [This too is an authentic fact.]
Pregno allor la mente rea
Dove suol mercarsi 'l fieno,
Per saziar la fame ebra,
Degli aranci alla bottega
Venne; e questo ognun lo fa:
Onde qui' ciascun si prega
Di dir sol la verità.

V'ha in quel luogo una padrona
Cortesissima e vezzosa,
Soprattutto tanto buona
Per la gente bisognosa,
Si abbondante di pietà,
Che veder parmi a puntino
Quella bella Carità
Che scolpita è dal Bernino.

V'e' Guglielmo poi il figlio,
E Dicchi capricciosetto,
Che han le lagrime sul ciglio
Nel mirar un poveretto.

Italiani sventurati,
Senza pan, senza mestiero
Se non siete più che ingrati,
Dite che s'io dico il vero.

Se non fosse quel caffè,
Farian molti poverini
Più digiuni per mia fé,
Che in Italia i Cappuccini.

Qui 'l Baretti fu attento,
Confortato fu 'l tapino
Con minestra, con bollito,
A talvolta anche col vino.

La pietanza mi ricordo
Che rubava ancor ai gatti
E col sozzo grifo ingordo
Ripuliva tutti i piatti.

Giunta questa sua increanza
Ai suoi detti aspri e villani,
Alla folle tracotanza,
Ai costumi suoi ruffiani,

A quel tetro ed infernale
Suo visaccio di Priapo,
Venne in odio universale

---

464 [The Hostess of the coffee house called Orange’s is named Mrs. Winfield: This coffee-house is in the street where they have the hay market.
465 [These statements are also obviously true to hundreds and hundreds of Italians that still inhabit London.]
Anche più del mal del capo.

Ogni poco aveva risse
Or con Tizio, or con Sempronio;
Contro tutti scrisse e disse,
E fè cose del demonio:

E però si diede il caso,
Per la legge ch’è severa,
Ch’ei fu preso sol pel naso,
Per lui pena assai leggiera.

Una volta mancò poco
Che un corriere, o sia un lacchè
L’arrostisse sopra il foco
Del cammino del caffè.

Per voler far il Pasquino
In presenza alla Mingotti,
Riceve da un ballerino
Un diluvio di cazzotti.

Oh sentite: quest’è bella:
Il bistorto Tedeschini
Gran maestro di cappella,
Alto come i burattini,

Il Baretti lo trattò
Bestialmente molto spesso,
E perfin gli rinfacciò
I difetti di se stesso.

Ben lo punse tal offesa,
Ma siccome egli ha tre gobbe,
Non trovandosi in difesa,
Fu paziente più di Giobbe.

Finalmente fu poi stanco,
E afferrata una bacchetta,
Spiccò un salto sopra un banco,
E sfogò la sua vendetta.

Qui’ di ciò si sa menzione,
Perché veggansi gli effetti
Della gran venerazione
Che si ha in Londra del Baretti.

Non ostante il vitupero
Che avea fin sopra capelli,
Rivolgeva ogni pensiero
Sempre a scrivere libelli.
Il Giardini sonatore,

_Homo natus in Judea_

Io supпоngo per buon core,
L’aiutò più che potea;

Esso dunque fè le spese
Per coprirlo affatto affatto
La camicia sol non prese
Che non v’era assuefatto.

La natura sconoscente
Non so come allor nascose;
E al Giardini ei fe’ un presente
Di più satire famose.

Prima gratta per un’ora
Gli orecchioni suoi mideschi;
Poi in stampa ei manda fuora
Un libello del Vaneschi.

Ma per altro intorno a questo
Il Baretti libellista
Non è tanto disonesto,
Come sembra a prima vista.

V’è ‘l Cervetti che n’avvisa
Ch’ei voleva far riparo
Al Vaneschi in questa guisa:
Che gli desse ancor danaro.

Il Vaneschi si contenti
Darmi un _sbruffo_ di zecchini,
E fo mille giuramenti
Per rovina di Giardini.

Il Giardini tuttavia
Del teatro il fe’ Poeta:
E su quella Poesia
La mia critica sta cheta.

La ragion sembra evidente:
Perché il povero Giuseppe
Accozzare solamente
Una scena mai non seppe.

**Giardini the musician**

_Homo natus in Judea_

I suppose being kind of heart,
Helped him as much as he could;

He therefore got his return
For covering Baretti so well:
Baretti left him the shirt on his back
Because it was not quite his style.

Baretti’s ungrateful nature
I don’t know how it was hidden;
And he gave to Giardini the gift
Of some more famous satires.

First he scratches for an hour
His big, flapping Midas ears;
Then in print he sends out
A libel against Vaneschi.

But regarding this matter
Baretti the libellist
Is not as dishonest,
As he seems at first.

He gave Cervetti filled us in:
Baretti wanted to even a score
To Vaneschi in this guise:
He asked him for a payout.

Vaneschi will be delighted
To give me handful of _zecchini,_
And I’ll swear a thousand times
To lead Giardini to his ruin.

And yet, and yet Giardini
Made him Poet of the Theater:
And when it comes to that Poetry
I would prefer to remain in silence.

The reason is pretty obvious:
Because impoverished Giuseppe
Did not know how to construct
A single, solitary inchoate scene.

---

468 [Giuseppe Baretti without the assistance of Giardini never would have amounted to anything in London; and perhaps he would be having a tough time of it now, if Giardini did not generously give him room and board: and everyone knows that those friends that pulled Baretti off the gallows he had only because of Signor Giardini.]

469 [Vaneschi was at that time impresario in London of the Italian Theatre.]

470 [Signor Cervetti is an honest and very admirable Music Professor, who has publicly affirmed that Giuseppe Baretti, during that same period in which he was the beneficiary of Giardini, offered underhandedly to swear against him, as long as Vaneschi would pay him.]

471 [It is very curious that Giuseppe Baretti always tried in every possible way to lacerate the fame of Dr. Goldoni, whose celebrated comedies have merited the applause of all of Italy; whereas Baretti never was able to write a single scene; and the impresarios of London were forced to chase him out because the]
A man salva egli trastulla
L’altrui fama teatrale;
Poiché s’ei non fa mai nulla,
Certamente non fa male.

Fè però tanto guadagno
Da cavarsi ogni sua foia;
Quindi allor recossi al Bagno,
A lavar l’immonde cuoia.

Lindo e liscio si rese;
Ed appunto fu in quel di’,
Che di femina Francese
Giuseppino s’incazzì.

Era questa una ragazza
Pettoruta e naticuta,
Bella come la Ciutazza,
E gentil come la Nuta.

Se non venne l’Anticristo
Nella copia scellerata
Che sì fe’ di questo tristo
E di quella sciagurata:

Lascio a ognuno quella fe’,
Che dal Ciel prescritta fu;
Ma per altro in quanto a me,
Giurerei che non vien più.

Ma scemavano i quattrini:
Giuseppin cosa pensò?
Rubò un libro al Fontanini,
E ‘l suo nome v’appiccò.

E di ciò par che l’Altieri
Con ragion più sì quereli;
Che ‘l Baretti i masnadieri
Imitando più crudeli,

Che nell’orrida lor zuffa
A lavar l’immonde cuoia;
Poiché s’ei non fa mai nulla,
Certamente non fa male.

Fè però tanto guadagno
Da cavarsi ogni sua foia;
Quindi allor recossi al Bagno,
A lavar l’immonde cuoia.

Lindo e liscio si rese;
Ed appunto fu in quel di’,
Che di femina Francese
Giuseppino s’incazzì.

Era questa una ragazza
Pettoruta e naticuta,
Bella come la Ciutazza,
E gentil come la Nuta.

Se non venne l’Anticristo
Nella copia scellerata
Che sì fe’ di questo tristo
E di quella sciagurata:

Lascio a ognuno quella fe’,
Che dal Ciel prescritta fu;
Ma per altro in quanto a me,
Giurerei che non vien più.

Ma scemavano i quattrini:
Giuseppin cosa pensò?
Rubò un libro al Fontanini,
E ‘l suo nome v’appiccò.

E di ciò par che l’Altieri
Con ragion più sì quereli;
Che ‘l Baretti i masnadieri
Imitando più crudeli,

Che nell’orrida lor zuffa
A lavar l’immonde cuoia;
Poiché s’ei non fa mai nulla,
Certamente non fa male.

Fè però tanto guadagno
Da cavarsi ogni sua foia;
Quindi allor recossi al Bagno,
A lavar l’immonde cuoia.

Lindo e liscio si rese;
Ed appunto fu in quel di’,
Che di femina Francese
Giuseppino s’incazzì.

Era questa una ragazza
Pettoruta e naticuta,
Bella come la Ciutazza,
E gentil come la Nuta.

Se non venne l’Anticristo
Nella copia scellerata
Che sì fe’ di questo tristo
E di quella sciagurata:

Lascio a ognuno quella fe’,
Che dal Ciel prescritta fu;
Ma per altro in quanto a me,
Giurerei che non vien più.

Ma scemavano i quattrini:
Giuseppin cosa pensò?
Rubò un libro al Fontanini,
E ‘l suo nome v’appiccò.

E di ciò par che l’Altieri
Con ragion più sì quereli;
Che ‘l Baretti i masnadieri
Imitando più crudeli,

Che nell’orrida lor zuffa
A lavar l’immonde cuoia;
Poiché s’ei non fa mai nulla,
Certamente non fa male.
Vita involano e danaro;  
Le fatiche esso gli ciuffa,  
E lo tratta da somaro.  

Pur dicendogli sicario,  
Veggo ben che ho mille torti:  
Perché v’è questo divario  
Ch’egli scanna i vivi e i morti.  

All’ Altieri quand’ha scagliata  
Una botta micidiale,  
Tira poi una stoccata  
Al Palermo suo rivale.  

Di spropositi una torna  
In quel lessico depose;  
Ma vi fece una riforma  
Delle voci scandalose;  

E così fra gente dotta  
Acquistossi il nobil grido  
Di spropositi una torma  
In quel lessico depose;  

Ma la gola e la lussuria,  
E di Sodoma i bordelli,  
Alla borsa fanno ingiuria  
Dell’autore dei libelli;  

E da Londra la miseria  
Intimar gli vuol l’esiglio;  
Questa cosa si fa serìa  
E i pensier chiama a consiglio,  

Cosa fo in questo paese?  
Io da tutti son mal visto,  
Di penuria e malfrancese  
Solamente ho fatt’ acquisto.  

Senza indugio qui s’affretti  
Malacoda o Farfarello  
Per vettura del Baretti—  
Parte, e prima fa un libello  

Contro l’Isola d’Albione,  

---

377 [Doctor Vicentino Povoleri, Professor of Languages in the city of London, a man who is the perfect master of both the English and Italian languages, took the trouble to note in Baretti’s dictionary twenty-two thousand seven hundred seventy seven stupid mistakes and he will probably be issued in print.]

475 [Names of devils in Dante] Inferno, XXI.

476 [In the first book of those travels that Baretti wrote in Italian, and for which he was banned from Milan by the order of His Excellency Signor Conte Firmian (who you need to know is perhaps the most magnanimous Maecenas that presently is found in Italy) he made the following comment in praise of England and the English: London is a cesspool of fools, and a arsenal of rascals. The English are such morons that many of them are unable to believe that in Italy there exists the noble creatures called cows.]
Che frattanto i giorni cupi
Rasserena con ragione,
Come quando scacciò i lupi.

Per favor Ser Edovardo
Il viaggio gli pagò;
E per questo, d’infingardo
Ne’ suoi scritti l’onoro.

In Lisbona ei giunge adesso,
Malacoda ve lo guida;
Ed ha subito un congresso
Con il padre Malagrida.

Busembau e Tamburini
Studiò in quella conferenza,
De’ Teologi assassini
Scrutinò la quintessenza.

Verso Italia s’incammina,
E ripien d’un estro insano,
La diabolica dottrina
Va per spargere a Milano

Mille lodi ognor si dieno
Al Firmian Gran Cancelliere,
Che col bando pose il freno
All’iniquo suo pensiere.

A Venezia ei volge il passo
Per stampar con libertà;
Un romor da satanasso
Qui senz’altro egli farà.

Impugnata una gran frusta
L’empie zanne egli digrigna,
L’età’ nostra e la vetusta
Non han belva si maligna.

Le minacce e sferze sue
Arricciar fero ogni chioma,
Come appunto fè quel bue
Quando disse Cave Roma!

Carl Joseph Count Firmian was the patron of many, including Beccaria and Mozart, but disappointed Baretti.

478 [By means of the protection of Signor Giardini, an English nobleman, called Signor Edward, gave Giuseppe Baretti two-hundred pound sterling in payment for accompanying him on his voyages; and they had not yet gone ten miles, when Baretti wanted right away to let the whole world know, in those letters he published in Italy, how Signor Edward was a poltroon, now a fool, and finally a nut-case. That black ingratitude was thrown back in his face by some Italian authors.]

479 [It is highly probable that Giuseppe Baretti is really a vile spirit of the iniquity, Malagrida, since all know that in Milan he defended the Jesuits against the King of Portugal.]

480 Michelangelo Tamburini (1648-1730), was an Italian Jesuit.
I Poeti e gli Oratori,
Il Boccaccio, il Bembo, il Dante,
Tutti gli ottimi scrittori
Frusta il livido pedante.

Ogni ciglio si contorse
A quell’atto temerario;
Ma nessuno non s’accorse
Che ‘l pedante era un plagiario;
Che la Frusta letteraria
Era un furto d’Inghilterra:
Stava attento a quella guerra.

No, Pasquino mai non taglia
Con coltel tanto assassino;
Ed i colpi egli non scaglia,
Che scagliò quest’aguzzino.

His criticisms don’t bother us
As much as his calumnies;
To show the errors of others
His evidence is as follows:

That Plato and Theophrastus,
Quintilian and Cicero
Were all working mules
Because the South,

Baretti assures us,
Is frozen, and not warm
He uncovered the imposture
Of the faulty Thermometer,

That heat alters in various ways,
He pretends to know;
But in the Frusta letteraria
The Barometer proves him wrong.

In que’st stupid fogliacci,
Frugoni, the Abat Chiari
Are snails, abysmal scribblers,
Tutti schiuma di somari.

Il Goldoni è un babbuasso,
Il Voltaire ed il Rossò
Son balordi come 'l Tasso:
Ma 'l perché io non lo so.

Mai non ebbevi Tiranno
Ne' sì ingiusto ne sì atroce
Gallo, ed Italo, e Britanno,
Contro tutti egli è feroce.

Benché molte fanfaluche
Dai Britannì Magazzini,
Come son le rime eunuche,
Nella frusta vi strascini.

Pur gl'Inghesi ancor ferì:
Il famoso Bolinbrocche,
Swift e Pope e Shaftsbury
Chiama autor di filastrocche.

Hume al diavolo si butti,
Milton, Thompson e Smolletto,
Vuol non abbiano fra tutti
Una dramma d'intelletto.

E 'l Baretti molte volte
Se gl'Inglese chiama idioti
Chiama poi lor leggi stolte:
Chi l'intende, ben la noti.

Alfin
Bue e Cachistarco
Fu in Italia proclamato:
E di molta infamia carco
Fu da Veneti cacciato.

Molte cose ladre e sporche
Scrisse contro il loro editto;
Voglia il Cielo che le forche
Gli perdonin quel delitto.

485[Eunuch poetry [la poesia eunuca]: the trade in words [il barattar le parole]; feminine sonnets [i sonetti smascolinati], and other similar expressions, that one finds in the Frusta, Baretti had literally translated from the English language....He then also copied from magazines (that thus are called the newspapers in England) all that written about Lady Wortley Montague, and about Voltaire, and all the French authors, and especially that description of the Island of the of inhabitants of, that in in the last sheet of the Frusta.] In the Frusta Letteraria No. 4, Baretti mocks Zappi for stimulating the "gusto della poesia eunuca": "Oh cari que' suoi smascolinati sonnetti, pargoletti, peccinini, mollemente femminini, tutti pieni d'amorini." [O those dear emasculated little sonnets, teeny-weeny, mushy and feminine, all full of itsy-bitsy loves.

486[See the Frusta Letteraria: p. 89, 108, 145, 153, 171.]

487[In the letters already mentioned, for which Baretti was chased out of Milan, he speaks of the laws of England in the following respectful manner: My Englishmen would do better to not make such a fuss about your laws, which are unjust and corrupt like in all other countries." In proof of this he gives the instance of the daughter of the hostess of Salisbury, who lamented with him of being persecuted by a servant of the Duke of Bedford.]
Replicarle qui non lece:
Ma ingiurava come i Parti;
Onde il diavolo lo fece
Ritornare in queste parti.

Il Baretti galantuomo
Ora d’essere pretese;
Quindi scrisse più d’un tomo
In onor del suo paese.

Di sue lodi sul Piemonte,
Ecco come sciogli il sacco:
A Torino non v’è un Conte,
Che sol legga l’almanacco.

Tutti i nobili Italiani
Sono goffi e malandrini;
A Venezia sono cani,
Ed a Genova tapini.

Riuscire in Poesia
A Torin nessun s’aspetti:
La ragion credo che sia,
Perché nacquevi ’l Baretti.

Fa di Roma anche il saputo,
E di Napoli ha narrato
Cose ch’ivi egli ha veduto
Senza mai esservi stato.

Nel vedergli far eunuco
Per modestia il dizionario,
L’adoravo, come il ciuco
Dell’ ebraico santuario.

Ma fui dolce in quest’articolo,
Che ’l fellon non crede un pelo;
Onde messo or ha in ridicolo
E la Chiesa ed il Vangelo.*

---

488 [It is well known that the Parti ran away.]
489 [In the book entitled An Account of Italy, he expressly says that it is not possible that anyone from Piedmont would every succeed in Poetry: and that the Italian nobility, especially those from the Piedmont, are a bunch of cursed dimwits: it is something that he had already said in the two cited letters from Milan, where one read that the Torinesi walked tall like ostriches, full of brutality and pride founded on nothing: and moreover he needs to use some of the following expressions: which are no less dirty than he is: That they go serenely forth in the ignorance without being the least bit nauseated by the stench that comes out of them; and the reason for which we are to suppose that would be is because the Piemontesi never suspected the of being hot, and never wished to measure the degrees of cold and heat with the help of a barometer, like the erudite Giuseppe Baretti uses.]
490 [He confesses himself to having been neither to Rome nor to Naples, although he has the presumption to inform the English on the customs of the Romans and the Neapolitans.]
491 [In his travels in Spain, which have for the title Baretti’s Journey from London, etc. he has translated six pages from a legend of the saints in order to put the Catholic religion up to ridicule. Now those who know he was a hypocrite in Italy, see that it is said of him that he blows both cold and hot.]
E sebben loda in un luogo
La Cattolica famosa
Strage, il fece sol per sfogo
Della penna sanguinosa,
Che nel barbaro sol gode;
E con tali sentimenti
Loderebbe ancor Erode,
Perch'èuccise gl'innocenti.

Per dar esca ai pensier felli,
Per nutrire il mal talento,
Sta facendo al Machiavelli
Un feroce suo comento
Sopra delle coltellate,
Che si danno
bellamente
Alla genti disarmate
In difesa solamente.

CACHISTARTO ahi! Se non falla
Quel ch'è chiaro più del giorno,
Tu mi sembri una farfalla
Ai patiboli d'intorno.
Non ti scoppia ancor il core?
Ecco il MORGAN! Guarda, guarda
Quello scheletro d'orrore
Che la mente mi sgagliarda.
Ei t'addita la sua piaga,
Che di sangue ha fatto un laco:
Va', satollati, ed appaga
In quel sangue il cor briaco.

Dello spettro in van la noia
Fuggir pensi, ed il veleno
Dell'interno, che tuo boia
Ti piantò le forche in seno.
E l'Oracolo d'Apollo
Ti predice un tal disastro,
Che fra breve avrai al collo
Una fune, e non un nastro.

CHACHISTARCO hey! If you
don’t fail, it’s clear as daylight,
You seem to me a moth flying
To the death-march around.
Isn’t your heart bursting yet?
That horrifying skeleton
That terrifies my mind.
His finger points to the wound
From which poured a lake of blood:
Go, fill yourself, and saturate
In that blood your drunken heart.
In vain you think you can escape
From the torment of the specter,
And the poison inside, as the hangman
Has already stabbed you with the fork.
And the Oracle of Apollo
Predicts for your such a disaster,
That shortly around your neck
Will be a rope, and not a ribbon.

492 [In the voyages mentioned he has exaggerated the praise of the Siege of Saint Bartholomew, of which there is not a gentleman in Europe, that would be able to heave about without being horrified.]
493 [The notes to Machiavelli of Giuseppe Baretti, assassin, will very shortly see the light of day. What lovely notes!]
494 [MORGAN is one of the unhappy ones who Baretti butchered.]
495 [To understand this last stanza, you need to know that Baretti, after his return from Italy, put around his neck a large black ribbon, that seemed that of Saint Michael in France, to which he tied his monocle; this affectation is the reason why Giuseppe Baretti, assassin, is commonly called Cavalier of the Order of the Noose.]
The earliest accounts of the crime scene gave attention to details that would evaporate in time. The event reached the newspapers quickly, as did what appears to be a rapid attempt to render Baretti sympathetic, willing to put his life in the hands of a jury of all Englishmen. During the three coroner’s inquests, the news shifted: early reports indicated that the indictment would be for manslaughter only, though the bill was for two counts, one capital murder and one for the 1604 Statute of Stabbing. In these notices released before the trial, it is difficult to tell who was more “unfortunate,” Giuseppe Baretti or Evan Morgan.

On Friday night last, about 9 o’clock, Mr. Baretti, an Italian Gentleman, was accosted by a women, near Panton-street, in the Hay-market, and some words passing between them, a man came up, and, as it is said, abused and struck Mr. Baretti, who drew a little knife out of his pocket, and stabbed him in the breast and belly, of which wounds the unfortunate person died in the Middlesex Hospital yesterday morning. Mr. Baretti was immediately secured. The name of the poor man who was stabbed by the above Gentleman, is Morgan.

*Lloyd’s Evening Post, and British Chronicle* (Friday, October 6, 1769)

We are assured, that the unfortunate Mr. Baretti has refused to lay his claim of right to be tried by a Jury of half his own Countrymen, declaring he has so high an opinion of our excellent Constitution, and of Englishmen, that he is perfectly satisfied in throwing himself upon their candour and humanity.

*Lloyd's Evening Post* (Monday, October 16, 1769)

About nine this evening, Mr. Baretti, an Italian gentleman, well known in the literary world, was assaulted by a women of the town near the Haymarket, and in his own defence, stabbed two persons, who appeared to take her part, one of whom, named Morgan, is since dead.

*Gentleman’s Magazine* (October, 1769)

We hear that two bills have been found by the Grand Jury against the unfortunate Mr. Baretti; the one for the murder of Mr. Morgan, and the other on the statute of stabbing.

*Whitehall Evening Post* (Tuesday, October 17, 1769)
The first clipping suggests how much trials in Enlightenment London were spectacles or shows. In a letter, Baretti wrote (perhaps exaggerating) that two thousand spectators attended his trial; in another he estimated three thousand, roughly the number that would fill Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre. The trial was also quite long; most trials in the early modern period lasted a half hour or less.

One of the countless ironies in the Baretti case is that fact that one of the assailants, about six months later, was reported hanged for highway robbery. Capital punishment was much criticized—by Samuel Johnson and Cesare Beccaria, among others—in the middle of the century. But the punishment for murder would remain severe, as the third quotation reminds us. The punishment most feared was to be hanged and dissected by surgeons and medical students.

This morning came on, at the Old Bailey, the trial of Mr. Baretti, for the murder of Evan Morgan. After examining the witnesses, Mr. Baretti read a Paper in his defence, which was heard with pleasure, and looked on as a very candid and sensible account of the matter. – The trial lasted five hours, when the Jury brought in their verdict Self Defence; which was received with the general acclamations of all present.

_Lloyd's Evening Post_ (Wednesday, October 18, 1769)

One of the gang who assaulted Mr. Baretti, in the Hay-market, some months since, was executed last Wednesday se'night at Tyburn for highway robbery.

_Middlesex Journal_ (Thursday, May 24, 1770)

On Saturday a Man was tried at Hick's Hall, for assaulting another Man, and stabbing him in the Arm in such a Manner that he had totally lost the Use of it; he was found guilty, and sentenced to suffer seven Years Imprisonment in Newgate, to pay a Fine of seven Guineas, and to give Security for his good Behaviour for seven Years.

_Daily Advertiser_ (Monday, October 25, 1773)
The following account of the crime ends by deflecting the blame, at least in part, toward the police force, a relatively new development that fails to adequately protect law-abiding citizens from the “abandoned Wretches and their Bullies.” This account makes much—or, rather, makes light—of the weapon Baretti used, a knife with a blade made of silver, a soft metal. In fact, the knife was made of silver-plated steel; the silver served a practical purpose: to prevent the knife from rusting after pealing fruit. The instrument of death seems small in proportion to the “gross Terms of Reproach” and the mob of assailants. Could this report have been written by a friend? David Garrick, in A Letter to Sir John Fielding (London, 1773), raised a good question: “Is it fair, is it equitable to influence a jury with partial and unjust publications?” This crime report precedes a public trial in which Garrick played a lead role and it might have been intended to do the very thing he later criticized.

Friday Night, about Eight o’ Clock, Mr. Joseph Baretti, the Author of the Letters upon Italy, and well known in the Literary World, was attacked at the End of Panton-street, near the Hay-Market, by a Street-Walker, who rudely and indecently accosted him: he pushed her Hands from him, and she finding that he was a Foreigner, cried our French Bougre, and other gross Terms of Reproach, upon which a Man came up, one of her Company, and began to abuse and strike him; upon this more gathered about him, and continued striking and pushing him from Side to Side. He at last drew a little Silver Desert Knife, with a Silver Blade, and warned them not to use him ill; that he could no longer bear it, and would strike the first Person that came near him. They still pursuing him, he moving from them to defend himself, wounded two Men, one of whom lies dangerously ill in the Middlesex Hospital.—It is great Pity that the Gentleman, who is worthily at the Head of our Police, cannot prevent these continual Assaults in the Streets, from these abandoned Wretches and their Bullies.

*Public Advertiser* (Monday, October 9, 1769)
The following account is remarkable for the delicate handling of the moment of provocation, the inciting event that will be central to the case. When Baretti delivers his Old Bailey Speech, he confesses that he “cannot absolutely fix the time and place where I first struck.” In this version, however, a series of escalating abuses gives rise to the first non-lethal cut, made only after Baretti has given an explicit warning. Baretti is sent to the prison, or Bridewell, in Tothill-fields and held without bail. On the 12th he is released on a bail of £2000, an enormous sum of money (at least $400,000 today). Note: Baretti’s name was often printed as it is in this document.

Yesterday morning died in the Middlesex Hospital, the unfortunate man who was wounded by Mr. Joseph Barretti, on Friday night. This gentleman had been to the Turk’s head Tavern, in Gerrard-street, to meet some friends; not finding them there he left word that he would go [to] the Prince of Orange Coffee-house, and read the Newspapers and come back again soon, on his return he was accosted by a woman of the town, who used him with very indecent and provoking language; a bully belonging to her likewise much abused him, upon which he told them he must be obliged to stand upon his own defence, and took out a small knife with a silver blade; the bully struck him, and he gave him a cut with the knife, the woman immediately cried murder, which drew a great number of people together by whom he was pursued, the unfortunate man, who is since dead, laid hold of him, and Mr. Barretti in defence gave him the mortal wound, he then retreated into a tallow-chandler’s shop, and begged for protection, and was promised to it, if he would give up the knife, which he instantly complied with; the tallow-chandler then enquired into the circumstances of the affair, and informed Mr. Barretti, that he was a constable, and in consequence of his office he must be obliged to secure him: Accordingly he carried him before Sir John Fielding, who examined into the matter. Mr. Barretti sent for Sir Joshua Reynolds to bail him, but Sir John told them it was an offence of that nature, that bail could not be admitted, and Mr. Baretti was sent to Tothill-Fields Bridewell. This unhappy gentleman is extremely, and deservedly well known in the literary world for his writings, among which the following have met with great applause, and gained him a number of respectable friends. An Italian dictionary in two volumes quarto. An account of the manners and customs of Italy, two volumes octavo. And the Italian Library, octavo. Mr. Wyatt, Surgeon to the Middlesex Hospital, attended the deceased, during his illness with the utmost care and diligence. 

Independent Chronicle or Freeholder’s Evening Post (Friday, October 6, 1769)
Baretti arranged for three witnesses to testify to having been assaulted at the very spot on Haymarket Street where he encountered the prostitute on October 6th. Sir John Fielding was concerned about crime in the metropolis, but the following testimony suggests that he was not very vigilant in punishing petty theft and prostitution. In fact, drunks, whores, and riff-raff were reported on Bow Street, right near the blind magistrate’s office. Although some viewers of the trial found this testimony very convincing, others found it barely relevant, since solicitations of prostitutes were commonplace and easily enough fended off without resorting to violence.

Justice Kelynge: I once was coming from a relation of mine down Panton-street, when a woman took hold of me, and endeavoured to put her hand into my breeches. I immediately sprung away. I was going to knock her down, when two men came up to me. I called out watch! watch! very loud, but no watch came, though they were very near. A gentleman, a major, crossed the way to me, and then they all ran away. It is a common case there, I am sorry to say it, notwithstanding all the care we take. Here is another brother magistrate in court, that has been attacked in the same manner: there is seldom a woman that attacks a man, but they have two or three men behind them, ready to pick your pocket, or to knock you down.

Mr. Perrin: It is impossible to walk up the Haymarket in the evening, or night, but you will meet with women the most indecent, the most abandoned wretches, that ever I saw, and they have often men following them. I have been obliged to go out of the way on their account. I have complained of this to Sir John Fielding and to Mr. Kynaston desiring they might be removed, for they are a common nuisance. Pains have been taken to remove them. They generally are attended by men. I have sometimes been afraid of walking up and down there. They will attack you, by laying hold of your arm, and are guilty of very great indecency, not to be bore with. There was a night-cellar there, where they frequented, but that has been removed.

Major Alderton: I lodged at one time in Oxendon-street about four years. I was attacked about twelve months ago, at the corner of Panton-street, by men and women. I was attacked by women first, and because I pushed them away, I was attacked by men: they began to jostle me, but I had a pretty good stick in my hand, and they did not chuse to closely attack me. I applied to Sir John Fielding, and complained of that night-cellar. The licence then could not be taken away, because the house was of use to chairmen. It since is taken away. I have been more than once or twice attacked at that place. I have seen eight or ten there together, both men and women.
The following letter, written perhaps by a friend of Baretti who remains nameless, displays an alert and subtle mind, as well as one familiar with the French legal writer Montesquieu, whose Spirit of the Laws of 1748 appeared in an English translation by Thomas Nugent three years later. Dr. Johnson greatly admired the French jurist, and the delicate letter could be written by him, or by Burke or Murphy. The “LOVER OF ORDER” detaches himself from any personal involvement in the Baretti case, however, calling it “a late affair.” One wonders if this letter was not a carefully-timed attempt to sway public opinion in favor of the defendant. The announcement in the Saturday paper, referred to at the end of the letter, follows it.

To the PRINTER
SIR
I Think it is an observation of the great author of L’Esprit des Lois, that all enormities in a free State are suffered to increase more than in an absolute monarchy, and that they go on in the former unmolested by the laws, till by some particular circumstance, or terrible accident, the enormity is looked into, and prevented for the future. The abandoned women of the town are come to such a pitch of profligacy, that it is incumbent upon magistracy to look after them. They have a method now of attacking their prey in the streets, not by whispering and their usual assumed softness, and manner of address, but by the most indecent assault that can be imagined; they have no intention to merely prostitute themselves to the passengers, but they endeavour to deprive him of his senses, by a method too abominable to be mentioned, and then to rifle his pockets. It is well known now, that this is the common practice, and a young man lately so attacked in the Strand, died a few days after. A friend of mine, no later than the last week, was assaulted in the same infamous way. If the blow they give has not the effect, and the man has strength to strike away the assaulters and, and escapes being robbed, she immediately cries out, and brings her bullies about her, the consequence of which is very well known. I appeal to every man who walks the streets in the evening, or at night, whether something of this kind has not happened to him; and it is so grievous and crying an evil, that Justice would be deaf indeed, if she do not immediately attend to it. I have had long a desire of troubling you with my thoughts upon this abominable practice, but had laid it aside till a late affair, mentioned in your Saturday’s Paper, called upon me to say this much upon so disagreeable a subject.
A LOVER OF ORDER
The London Chronicle (Thursday, October 12, 1769)

Great numbers of the most respectable persons have visited Mr. Baretti, the Italian Gentleman, who unfortunately wounded a man in his own defence last Friday night, of which wound he is since dead. We are informed that Mr. Baretti was struck several times without the least provocation, before he drew his knife to defend himself against the increasing assaults of the fellows who surrounded him. The Coroner’s Jury is to sit this evening on the body of the abovementioned man.
The London Chronicle (Saturday, October 7, 1769)
The majority of crimes in eighteenth century London were property offences, while interpersonal violence, historians agree, was on a steep decline through the century. The first portion of this document places Baretti in the criminal context; William Elder was also acquitted, though in his case the death came from fisticuffs; he gave the man “a right and left Taylor fashion,” that is, in the style of the current boxing champ George Taylor. (OBSP, October 18, 1769) Kicks, pushes, and punches were more a common cause of death in London than stabbings, a fact that added another high obstacle for the Baretti defence. Some readers of this paper would have paused over the reference to Baretti’s “timidity of temper,” as the Italian had already earned a reputation for being touchy and prone to excess. Typically, “being addicted to quarrelling,” as the phrase of the day had it, could be very detrimental in the eighteenth-century court of law.

Yesterday 14 prisoners were tried at the Old Bailey, two of whom were capitally convicted viz. James Fife, for stealing a brown gelding, the property of William Beecraft, of Blackheath; and a chestnut gelding, the property of William Eterick, of Tunbridge; and Mary Davison, for privately stealing 34 guineas from the person of John Blois; five were cast for transportations, and six acquitted; among whom were Mr. Jos. Baretti and William Elder, both tried for willful and corrupt murder; the former was found self defence.

Mr. Baretti’s defence, which was a written one, was so pathetic in many parts as to draw tears from several of the spectators, as well as himself; the purport of it was to shew, that an unexpected, rude assault was made upon him from the women, backed by the three men, and joined by many others. He was intimidated by the suddenness of the attack, and the darkness of the night, the shops all shut, and no refuge at hand; which, together with his shortness of sight, deprived him of the power of judging of his danger, and being hard pressed, repeatedly struck, and pursued for several yards by the populace, at last he drew his knife, (an instrument which almost every foreigner carries about him, and no way of an uncommon kind) and in the violence of his agitation, or perhaps, as one of the witnesses, Dr. Samuel Johnson said, through his natural timidity of temper, did the injury, of which he was scarce sensible himself.

Middlesex Journal (Thursday, October 19, 1769)
This clipping places the crime within the context of gang, or mob, violence, a concern in eighteenth-century London. In his Old Bailey Speech and in various letters, Baretti gave the impression that he was overwhelmed by the malicious rabble and that his survival was “wonderful,” given the odds against him. Also worth noting in this account is the contradiction between Patman and Clarke concerning whether or not Baretti had been called derogatory names. Their denying that names were called (it is unlikely that the fray was silent) suggests the seriousness with which such insults were regarded at the time.

The sessions began at the Old Baily. At this sessions 11 criminals were capitally convicted, among whom are two of the desperate gang of cutters; an arrest of judgment was moved in favour of two others of this gang, which is to be determined by the 12 judges. At this sessions also Mr Baretti, attended by his bail, was brought into court, and indicted for stabbing, Evan Morgan, who died of his wound in the Middlesex Hospital. He was offered a jury of half foreigners, but refused it. The evidence against Mr Baretti, were a woman of the town, who admitted that her companion had provoked him by a very indecent outrage, and two men, who confessed that they had joined with the deceased Morgan in an act of injurious violence, and of whom the second contradicted, in some important particulars, the evidence of the first. Another witness from the hospital, repeated the account which he had received from Morgan, who seemed to think himself wounded without sufficient provocation. The court then called upon Mr Baretti for his defence, who read from a written paper his narrative of the whole transaction, the purport of which was, that an unexpected violent assault was made upon him by a woman, who struck him in the tender parts, which gave him exquisite pain: whereupon he hit her over the hand, when she called him French Bougre, woman hater, and other opprobrious names; and three men coming up, they shoved him about, and struck him. The suddenness of the attack intimidated him, it was dark, no refuge at hand, and he being near sighted, and thereby unable to judge of his danger, endeavoured to get away, but was hard pressed, repeatedly struck, and pursued several yards by the populace, who were now encreased in number; at last, he drew out his knife, (an instrument which foreigners generally carry about the) and told the assailants, that he could bear no longer their ill usage, but would defend himself, and warned them to keep off; but they repeating their insults, he, in the violence of his agitation, did the injury, of which he was scarce sensible himself. In construction of this narrative, he produced such testimony from Mr Wyat, the surgeon, who attended Morgan, and from a gentlewoman, who accidentally beheld the whole fray, that the jury, after the deliberation of a few minutes only, acquitted him of the charge.

By an abstract of the minutes of the short-hand writers, it appears, that from 1741 to 1769, 10,474 prisoners have been tried in the Old Baily.  

*Gentleman’s Magazine* (October 1769)
This report was written after the preliminary hearing in which Sir John Fielding explained to Baretti that his offence, a homicide committed with a pointed instrument, was a very serious crime under the Statute against Stabbing. The details here show how criminals were apprehended in the period. The cry of “Murder,” which was used for any disturbance, prompted a mob toward the scene. The constable, John Lambert, was armed with a nightstick only. Sir John Fielding’s “Treatise on the Constable” is included in Extracts from the Penal Laws (1762) and discusses the role of law enforcement during the period of the Baretti case.

Yesterday morning died in the Middlesex hospital, the unfortunate who was wounded by Mr. Joseph Baretti, on Friday night. This gentleman had been to the Turk's-head tavern in Gerrard-street, to meet some friends; not finding them there, he left word that he would go to the prince of Orange coffee-house, and read the news-papers and come back again soon. On his return he was accosted by a woman of the town, who abused him with very indecent and provoking language; a bully belonging to her likewise much abused him, upon which he told them he must be obliged to stand upon his own defence, and took out of his pocket a small knife with silver blade; the bully then struck him, and he gave him a cut with the knife, the woman immediately cried murder, which drew a great number of people together by whom he was pursued; the unfortunate man, who is since dead, laid hold of him, and Mr. Baretti in his defence gave him the mortal wound. He then retreated into a tallow-chandler's shop, so begged for protection, and was promised it if he would give up the knife which he instantly complied with; the tallow-chandler then enquiring into the circumstances of the affair, informed Mr. Baretti, that he was a constable, and in consequence thereof, Mr. Baretti is admitted to bail.

The Oxford Magazine (October 1769)
As an Italian living in England and often writing in English, Baretti certainly would not have taken kindly to being compared to a Frenchmen, much less a macaroni, an Englishman who returns from the Grand Tour an emasculated automaton. The London Magazine (April 1772) reported that London is so overrun by macaronis that “the bubble must soon burst.” The journalist defined the macaroni as a “fantastical biped” with no secondary sexual characteristics: “It may be supposed to act by a different impulse or instinct that that which sets other beings in motion. The body, as to its appearance, has no indication of sex or species; and if it has a tail, it is not always to be perceived.” While some of the satires were lightly amusing, others like this poem by TANTUM express utter disgust with this scum of the earth.

On MACCARONIES
MACCY’s there are of various kinds
Perhaps as many as are minds;
But, of whatever size or features,
Still they are homogeneous creatures;
Whether in purple, fur, or ermin,
Still but painted gaudy vermin;
Since ev’ry Mac’rony’s at best
Naught but a creeping earthworm drest.
How tho’ his native filth he spurns,
From whence he came, he strait returns;
Sooner or later, back he must,
And kiss his kindred in the dust,
The stink which dazzles vulgar eyes,
Once drops, the worm’s without disguise.
For after all his noise and pother
Worms are his brethren, dung his mother.
From dunghills if such creatures come,
Sure earth’s the soil, and they the scum.

TANTUM
Morning Chronicle (Friday September 17, 1773)
There is a great deal to notice in this account of the crime, one of the first published after four (some said five or six) hour-long trial. A great effort was exerted throughout the case to make Baretti the victim, as well as, to use a phrase of the time, “a man of feeling.” His speech moved some in audience to cry, we are told. Other accounts suggest that Baretti himself, dressed in mourning clothes, was weeping, and Judge Bathurst was brushing away tears. Critics of the trial later would express outrage at what was seen as an unfair solicitation of sympathy and swaying the jury with the emotion, rather than legal precedent or hard evidence. Was this a trial in which sensibility, rather than sense, ruled the day?

LONDON
This morning came on at the Old-Bailey, before Justice Bathurst, the trial of Mr. Joseph Baretti for the murder of Evan Morgan, when, after a hearing of four hours, the verdict brought in by the jury was self-defense.

It appeared by the evidence for the crown, that two girls (one of whom could not be found, and the other Ann Ward, who gave this evidence) sitting upon a step, at the top of Panton-street in the Hay-market, between nine and ten in the evening, when Mr. Baretti, occasionally passing, was addressed by one of these girls, who asked him for a glass of wine, at the same time pushing her hand towards his private parts; whereupon Mr. Baretti flew into a passion, and struck her with his hand. Upon which one of them called him Bougre. At this time three young fellows came up, and reproached Baretti, saying, He could be no man who would strike a woman, and instantly Morgan shoved Patman against Mr. Baretti, so as to throw him three or four feet off the footway. At this instant, according to the evidence of Patman, Mr. Baretti stabbed him, of which he was sensible in a few seconds, by the blood trickling down. He immediately hollowed he was stabbed, upon which Morgan and his two companions pursued Baretti, and presently coming up with him, collared him; then Morgan received the three wounds that occasioned his death.

Mr. Baretti’s defence, which was a written one, was so pathetic in many parts, as to draw tears from several of the spectators, as well as himself; the purport of which was to show, that an unexpected rude assault was made upon him from the woman, backed by the three young men, and joined by many others. He was intimidated by the suddenness of the attack, and the darkness of the night, the shops all shut, and no refuge at hand; which, together with his shortness of sight, deprived him of the power of judging of his danger, and being hard pressed, repeatedly struck, and pursued for several yards by the populace, at last he drew his knife (an instrument which almost every foreigner carries about him, and no way of an uncommon kind) and in the violence of his agitation, or, perhaps, as one of the witnesses, Dr. Samuel Johnson said, thro’ his natural timidity of temper, did the injury of which he was scarce sensible himself.

The following gentlemen spoke to his character: Mr. Beauclerk, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Dr. Johnson, Mr. Fitzherbert, Mr. Burke, Mr. Garrick, Dr. Goldsmith, Mr. Stevens and Dr. Hallifax. Mr. Baretti was dressed in a suit of black, and behaved with great propriety. Independent Chronicle (Wednesday, October 18, 1769)
Here is another account emphasizing the sentiments conveyed during the trial, as well as the unforgettable lineup of character witnesses “with whom the world is very well acquainted.” In the eighteenth century, criminals awaiting trial had to pay for their prison cells which were priced according to comfort. Mr. Akerman, the prison warden at Newgate, was not callous after witnessing the trial: he waived Baretti’s costs for the days he spent in jail. Prisons were holding areas, for the most part, as prison sentences came later in the century. In the time of the Baretti case, the standard punishments were fines, branding, the stocks, public whipping, and transportation (a recent development). Terrifying, yes, but the system was also merciful, as there were many loopholes, pardons, and reprieves.

We have been just favoured with the following account of Mr. Baretti’s trial, besides that mentioned in p. 6.

Yesterday Mr. Joseph Barretti, attended by his bail, was brought into Court, and indicted, for stabbing Evan Morgan, who died of his wounds in the Middlesex Hospital. He was offered a Jury half of foreigners, but refused it. The Counsel for the King were Mr. Key and Mr. Chetwood; and for the Prisoner Mr. Cox, Mr. Lucas, and Mr. Murphy. The evidence against Mr. Baretti were, a woman of the town, who admitted that her companion had provoked him by a very indecent outrage, and two men, who confessed they had joined the deceased Morgan in acts of outrageous violence, and of whom the second contradicted the evidence of the first. Another witness, from the hospital, repeated the account which he had received from Morgan, who seemed to think himself wounded without sufficient provocation. The Court then called upon Mr., Baretti for his defence, who read from a written paper his narrative of the whole transaction, composed and pronounced with so much force as to melt into tears a great part of his audience. In confirmation of this narrative he produced such testimony from the Surgeon who attended Morgan, and from a Gentlewoman who beheld the whole fray, and the prosecutor’s evidence lost its credit. Mr. Baretti’s character was then attested by several Gentlemen, with whose names the world is very well acquainted, and among them were Mr. Beauclerk, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Dr. Johnson, Mr. Burke, Mr. Fitzherbert, Mr. Garrick, Dr. Goldsmith, Mr. Steevens, and Dr. Halifax, &c. Mr. Justice Bathurst summed up the evidence on both sides with great judgment, and the Jury after a deliberation of a few minutes, acquitted him of the charge.

We are told that Mr. Garrick spoke with great feeling at the above trial, on account of the unhappy situation of Mr. Baretti, and much affected the auditors in general.

When Mr. Baretti offered Mr. Akerman his fees, the latter generously refused taking any thing, and much pityed his unhappy situation. Mr. Baretti is much indisposed through the agitation this unfortunate affair has occasioned.

London Chronicle (Thursday, October 19, 1769)
The presence of David Garrick, the most admired actor of the day, gave credibility to what Baretti said in his own defense, but also prompted some writers to suggest his testimony was just another stunning performance. Baretti had written letters of introduction for Garrick several years earlier, when he took a short trip to Italy to see sights and gather Italian books; when he returned, Baretti reprimanded him for foolishly buying the wrong editions and penny-pinching. In the final line of this piece, Samuel Johnson’s comment on Baretti’s myopia is twisted to an absurdity. The author of this document is unknown, but it could very well have been William Kenrick (1725?-1779), a talented hack writer, who in the years after the trial would regularly publish rude mockeries targeting David Garrick and Dr. Johnson. (ODNB, “William Kenrick”)

Unlike Baretti, Johnson was more stoic when hack writers were, in his words, “pelting [him] with pamphlets.”

The following particulars relative to the trial of Mr. Baretti are come to hand since our last from a correspondent: he informs us, that at the trial of Mr. Baretti last Friday, the modern Roscius was so great an actor that he over-topt his part; for being called to the character of the prisoner, he enlarged much on his tenderness and humanity, saying, that Mrs. G_____ having some uncommon disorder (while they were on their tour in Italy) which baffled the skill of the most eminent physicians, Mr. B. had cured her without the least expectation of reward; and, that as he acknowledged himself under the greatest obligation to Mr. B_____, the court could not but to consider him an impartial evidence. Mr. Murphy (who was counsel for the prisoner) then desired that as Mr. G______ was a travelled gentleman, to look at the knife, and tell the court whether it was like those usually worn in Italy, and whether he made use of such a one when abroad? To which he replied, O yes, Sir, or else we could not have eat; that his indeed had not a silver case, but, simpering said that Mrs. G_____’s had a gold one, and that she still carefully preserved it; upon which it was observed by a person in court, that there was no doubt of that, as it was composed of a metal they had both a particular affection for.

When Dr. Johnson was asked, whether Mr. Baretti was short sighted, he replied, Mr. Baretti does not see me, nor do I see Mr. Baretti; and that, though we are often in company, if at any distance; we never see each other.

*Independent Chronicle* (Friday, October 20, 1769)
In this wonderful comment on the trial, a writer objects to how much entertainment it gave, and how little attention was paid to the death, or the life, of Evan Morgan. The final lines humanize the victim, noting that he too was a professional entertainer, while his brother was a respectable schoolteacher. Thomas Finch’s Grotto Gardens, where Morgan sang, was established in 1760 as a humble alternative to Vauxhall Gardens. It was located on the west side of Southwark Bridge Road at the corner of Great Suffolk Street, Henry Shelly informs us in Inns and Taverns of Old London (1909).

As the trial of Mr. Baretti on Friday last at the Old Bailey, one of the sheriffs, as an instance of his gallantry, no doubt, had introduced into court some agreeable young ladies, and placed them in a snug corner, who could not fail being much amused and edified by the various gross allusions that arose from the subject; which, however, coolly they may issue from the mouth of a lawyer, have a very different effect upon the youth of either sex.

Perhaps no company of gentleman every made a more respectable appearance, than those in favour of Mr. B_______i; every one of them demeaned himself with the gravity and attention which the subject required; unless, indeed, Mr. G_______k may be reckoned an exception, who did not seem to be sufficiently aware of the difference between a Court of Justice and the Court of Drury. It was cruel in him to make a man smile who was before a judge, in a matter that so nearly concerned his life and reputation.

One may venture to say, that unless every witness has the revisal of his own deposition, poor Gurney will never be able to tell what a certain member said in favour of Baretti; it was every whit as pointed, contracted and epigrammatical, as the writings of Junius.

Evan Morgan, who died in the Middlesex hospital of the wound he received from Mr. Baretti, was lately a singer at the Grotto-gardens, and his brother keeps a school near West Smithfield.

Independent Chronicle (Monday, October 23, 1769)
An impartial judge and jury are considered cornerstones of our legal system. It comes as somewhat of a shock, therefore, to read this account of the active role Judge Henry Bathurst played in the proceedings. Jurors were not selected from “peers” on jury duty for “one case or one week,” but were chosen from gentry and often served for many years. Foreign defendants could opt for a jury comprised of “half-foreigners,” a right they usually exercised, and an interpreter was provided. Baretti made much of the fact he would not assert any such privileges, and during the trial only the English language was spoken. A letter to his brother indicates, however, that translations of the trial documents were circulating in Italy soon after the trial. The second document, also on the subject of juries, calls attention to Baretti’s insistence on preserving his “honour.”

The quotation and the tone suggest, perhaps, that the author is being droll or ironic.

Mr. Baretti, in the reading his defence on Friday, drew tears from every person present, but more especially from the Bench, where the Chief Judge gave the strongest testimony of the goodness of his heart, by the visible impression so pathetic a narrative made on it. Mr. Baretti himself was violently agitated at the time when he made a recital of his being obliged, in his own defence, to give the blow which unhappily proved mortal, and was the misfortunate occasion of his then situation.

In one part of the above Gentleman’s defence, he, with great emotion, asked, “if it was probable that a man, who had now seen fifty years, and had always led a studious and sedentary life, should, at this time, throw aside his pen to brandish a knife to the annoyance or destruction of his fellow-creatures.”

When the Jury, who withdrew for a short time, came in, and found Mr. Baretti not guilty of the murder laid to his charge, and declared it to be in his own defence, while every hand and mouth was applauding their decision, Mr. Baretti, in a burst of passion accompanied with tears, raised by sentiments of gratitude and joy, cried out, “My Lords and Gentlemen, I can only thank you;” which redoubled the acclamations of the Court.

_Lloyd’s Evening Post_ (Monday, October 23, 1769)

When Mr. Baretti was arraigned at the Bar, he was informed that he had a right, as a Foreigner, to have a Jury consisting of half of Foreigners. To this he replied, He would be tried by a “Jury all Ingleeshman;” he was then informed that he might challenge any of the Jury then sworn; he answered, he would not. When he came to make his defence, he begged that he might be indulged so far as to read it, and being allowed to do so—He began with assigning the reason for his insisting on a Jury consisting entirely of Englishmen; to this effect: If the Jury had been one half Foreigners, and the other half English, my being acquitted would give suspicion, that my Countrymen had biased the English part of the Jury; my acquittal would, therefore, have robbed me of the exultation of tried, of approved innocence. I am not so fond of life, as of honour. I had rather lose the former, than the latter. And as life would not be desirable, nor indeed supportable without honour, I was willing that my honour should be liable to no suspicions, and therefore have chosen to be tried by a Jury consisting of all Englishmen.

_Lloyd’s Evening Post_ (Wednesday, October 25, 1769)
Baretti’s witnesses were adamant that the knife he was carrying was not a lethal weapon. Topham Beauclerk testified to seeing such knives for sale “in Toy shops.” The knife was presented as a dining utensil, with more similarities to a piece of jewelry than a stiletto. Garrick lost his, he said in court, but his wife carried a gold one. Experts on knife history tell us that the distinction between a table knife and a weapon was anything but clear in Italy. Laws were passed prohibiting carrying daggers, but work knives were on occasion used in murders: defendants claimed the deadly point was a result of repeated sharpening. In short, Italians would have been less inclined to accept the facile distinction regarding Baretti’s dessert knife.

At the sessions held in the Old Bailey in October 12, 1743, fifteen year old William Chetwynd was indicted for the murder of his schoolmate Thomas Rickets. Rickets ate a piece of Chetwynd cake that he had cut for himself, they quarreled, and Rickets ended up with cake knife in his guts. Although Rickets forgave his penitent friend on his deathbed, Chetwynd was convicted of manslaughter and burnt on the hand.

To the PRINTER
I cannot but admire the two very sensible letters in your paper on Mr. Baretti’s Trial and Speech, the one of the 6th instant, the other of this day, and give me leave to add my observations on the evidence given to the Grand Jury, being one of them, that it was the opinion of every gentleman present, from the evidence then given (being upwards of twenty in number) that he deserved to be hanged: your sensible Old Bailey Solicitor, is desirous to be informed of what length this infamous lady’s knife was of; be is known, it was of the length of about four inches and 1-half in the blade, besides handle, as fine, sharp, and pointed as it could possibly be; the steel blade was included in a blade of silver, sharp enough for cutting and pareing fruit, and was drawn by means of a spring at the blade end of the halt, by the thumb nail; the whole inclosed in a shagreen case for wearing in the pocket.

Nov. 13. One of the Grand Jury

Gazetteer (Wednesday, November 15, 1769)
This account tells the story from October 6th through the 20th, with details about the preliminary inquests, during which the prosecution was silenced and bullied. In this unsettling document, it appears that as much effort was spent in making it impossible for Richard Morgan, the brother of the deceased, to construct an effective case as was spent constructing Baretti’s defence. If what is documented on these pages, in fact, occurred, the Baretti trial was indeed a miscarriage of justice. This letter, beautifully composed, appeared in The Independent Chronicle (Friday, October, 27, 1769) as well, but was never reprinted, nor have I located any references to it in subsequent literature.

*A gentleman well known in the literary world and author of many ingenious performances.

SIR,  
By inserting the following Anecdotes relative to the affair of Mr. Barretti*, you will much oblige,  
A Lover of Virtue and Justice  
On Monday the 9th of October, Richard, the brother of the deceased Edward Morgan, served Thomas Patman, and John Clarke, with processes to give evidence before the Coroner, concerning the death of said Evan; and they then related to the brother as follows. That on Friday the 6th, Thomas Patman, a peruke-maker in Westminster, called to see Clarke, a glass-cutter near the Seven Dials, who was his acquaintance, and drank tea with him; that after tea the said Clarke went to see Patman part of the way home, and as they passed the end of Suffolk-street, they accidently met the deceased Morgan, who was a slight acquaintance of Patman’s, but who had never seen Clarke before. Patman asked him to go and drink a pint of beer, and accordingly they went into the Sun alehouse in Suffolk-street; this was about seven o’clock in the evening, they drank three pints of beer, till it was near nine; and Patman knowing the deceased could sing, asked him for a song. The deceased told him he would gladly oblige him, but did not chuse to sing in a public room, and added, if they would go with him to a house that he knew near Golden-square, they might have a room to themselves, and he would give them a song. They agreed; and going up the Hay-market, they observed a man strike a woman a severe blow on the head till she staggered and screamed. The deceased told the man, who afterwards proved to be Barretti, that it was not acting like a gentleman to strike a woman; and the deceased, being on the outside, pushed Clarke, who of course went against Patman, and he being foremost was pushed against Mr. Barretti, who instantly pulled out a knife, and therewith stabbed Patman in the left breast. The knife was so sharp pointed that he did not feel it penetrate his body, till he found the blood gush out, and Mr. Barretti running off. He then cried, “I am stabbed.” The deceased made after him, upon which Barretti turned about, and gave Morgan three wounds, one on the left-side of the belly, another on the left breast, and the third near the left armpit; each of which wounds was adjudged by the surgeon of the hospital to be mortal. The deceased was then led into Oxendon-street, to a surgeon, who after examining the wounds, turned him into the street, where he sat on the stones, bleeding a considerable time, with a man holding up his head; but afterwards upon the remonstrances of Mr. Clegg, a master-taylor, by assistance, he was conveyed to the Middlesex hospital.
Saturday, October 7. About one in the afternoon an acquaintance of Evan Morgan, who had been to see him at the hospital, brought his brother Richard Morgan, a schoolmaster in Quakers-buildings near Smithfield, an account of his situation. At six the brother, in the company with his brother-in-law, went to see him; but were refused admittance by the door-keeper. Who told the brother-in-law upon his application at the door, he had positive order than no person whomsoever should see him till nine o’clock the Monday following; although it was not supposed he should live so long, his wounds having been adjudged, by the surgeon, to be mortal.

On Sunday, October 8, the brother-in-law called to enquire after him, and found that he died about one o’clock that morning.

Tuesday, October 10. The brother attended the coroner’s inquest, which sat in the afternoon. Before three the room was crowded with a great number of well-dressed gentlemen (besides the jury) whose conversation proved them to be warm friends to Mr. Barretti. They took no small pains with the jury before they were sworn; they extolled the meekness and peaceableness of Mr., Barretti, and depreciated the character of the deceased. Three council were employed for the defendant, and two for the prosecution. The examination of the evidence for the crown, who were no more than four, lasted till near eleven o’clock, when one of the defendant’s council moved for an adjournment to the next day, alleging that they had a long defence to make, and many evidences to examine, to disprove the facts which had been alleged on the part of the prosecution.

Wednesday, October 11, about four in the afternoon, Mr. Coroner, and his jury met agreeable on the adjournment. The Coroner then spoke, “Last night,” said he, “we went through the evidence for the crown, and now, gentlemen, is the time for you to make your defence.” They then proceeded, but called no evidence, saying, they would reserve them for a more proper opportunity, and refused to give in their names, alleging they might be tampered with. Three gentlemen then pleaded for Mr. Barretti, without mentioning a word about any blow upon the tender parts, and told the jury that they could make no more of it than self-defense, or manslaughter at most: in which opinion Mr. Coroner agreed, and said it would be no more; but the council for the prosecution begged leave to reply. The Coroner said, they might speak upon pleas of manslaughter, or self-defense, but not a word upon MURDER. The prosecution council, however, attempting to speak, was silenced by a general laughter of the bystanders, whilst the jury in vain called for silence several times.

Then several gentlemen were called to Mr. Barretti’s character, and, what was remarkable, the same oath was tendered to those gentleman as was to the evidence for the prosecution; that is the evidence you shall give on behalf of our Sovereign Lord the King, touching the death of Evan Morgan, shall be the truth, &c. Yet nothing was asked but touching the character of Mr. Barretti. One of the gentleman (Mr. G______) being asked if Mr. Barretti, was a peaceable man, upon his oath, replied, he never knew an Italian who was otherwise.

Sunday, Oct. 15. The brother, in company with two acquaintances, went in the afternoon to the hospital, with a view of enquiring what declaration the deceased might have made, either to the nurse who attended him, or to any of the patients in the same ward with him: but were told the nurse was ill, and after several times soliciting entrance, they were peremptorily refused.
Monday, Oct. 16. The brother went to the hospital in order to see Patman, to forward him to Hick’s-hall, and to give evidence upon the bill of indictment; and was told that the surgeon had given order not to let him out upon any account, without the said surgeon’s leave. The brother then told them, “that he thought they could not refuse to let him go upon such an occasion; and that he would forfeit his recognizance;” but was answered, that no law could oblige him to go: and if the surgeon had known, he should not have gone to the justice’s. They advised the brother to go to the surgeon, and ask his leave: he took a direction, went to the surgeon’s house, but was told he was not at home; and was ordered to call in the afternoon: he called in the afternoon; and was told, the surgeon was gone out of town, and would not return until the next day. This prevented the bill from being preferred that day: therefore witnesses were obliged to attend the next, which occasioned an additional expence.

The brother took out a subpoena to serve Patman. Served him with it in the hospital, and enquired if the deceased had made any declarations respecting the manner of his death. The persons applied to denied their having heard any thing, until a little boy, who happened to be present, affirmed, though many attempts were made to silence him, that the deceased declared he had been stabbed by a gentleman whom he had not offended; and that the deceased said the same in the hearing of some of the persons then by, who before had denied hearing any such thing; but who were then obliged to confess the truth. And upon further enquiry, it appeared that not only some of the servants of the hospital, but several of the patients had heard the like words and that he had almost all day long begged they would send for his brother, crying, Oh! My poor brother, oh! That I could but see my brother!

Friday Oct. 20, the trial came on: about the beginning of it Richard Morgan, being on the outside of Justice-hall, was informed of two very material witnesses in favour of the prosecution: he applied several times, as brother of the deceased, at all the doors, and told the keeper that he had particular business with the council; but was absolutely refused admission: so that he could not get a billet conveyed to the council, until after two hours application. A person in coloured clothes observing his distress, told him his mourning betrayed him to be the brother; and calling him aside, took the billet, which was then immediately received from the stranger at the door-hatch; but whether it reached its intended destination is uncertain, as he never heard from the council during the whole trial*. As money is customarily given for admittance into a court of justice, he made several offers, and not contemptible ones, which were, to the astonishment of the bystanders, rejected, by which means he had not the satisfaction of hearing the trial, or the prisoner’s defence; but had since found that he has been honourably acquitted.

*The brother was not prosecutor on the trial, but the constable who took Mr. Barretti into custody, who a few days before the trial was seen by the brother drinking tea with Mr. Barretti’s attorney.

Town and Country Magazine (October, 1769)

We shall now, to show our impartiality upon this, as upon every other occasion, lay before our readers all that has transpired concerning the trial.

[St. James Evening Post, Saturday, October 21, 1769]
Another Account illustrates the Matter still farther.
[Independent Chronicle, Friday, October 20, 1769]
Below is one of several advertisements for the Sessions-papers that included the “remarkable Trial” of Joseph Baretti. The trials were recorded by short-hand writers, whose manuscripts became the basis for the published accounts, condensed as the editors saw fit. In an age before mechanical recording tools, these papers were the best available trial transcript. For this reason, we will never know precisely what was said of Baretti’s character, as the note-taker probably jotted down the commonplaces, such as being “peaceable,” “humane,” or “not addicted to quarrelling.” Everything that was printed was likely said, though much could have been said and not printed. Many of Baretti’s works sold well, but none was read as much as this publication, one that it is clear from this advertisement many people were eager to buy.

This Day is published
Part the First, Price Six-pence.

Containing many very remarkable Trials, among which is that of Mr. JOSEPH BARETTI, for the Murder of Evan Morgan, and the Speech he delivered at the Bar in Support of his Character (Some of the most eminent Gentlemen of Literature in the Kingdom appeared in his Behalf.)

The Proceedings at the Old Bailey before the Right Hon. SAMUEL TURNER, Esq.; Lord Mayor of the City of London. Amongst others are the following remarkable Trials, viz. Richard Bransby, Andrew Hendrick Longreen, George Crowder, William Clark, John Simonds for stealing Goods in a Dwelling House, William Troy for a Highway Robbery; John Doyle and John Valline for cutting and destroying Silk in Looms; James Fife for Horsestealing; Mary Davidson for stealing 35 Guineas privately from John Blois; John Maycock for a Highway Robbery; Peter Perrin and James Fissey for cutting and destroying Silk in Looms. (These were all capitally convicted) John Bagnell, Peter Graham, John Wood, and Shepherd Strutton for a Burglary.

N. B. The whole Trial of Joseph Baretti will appear in this first Part.

Sold by S. Bladon, No. 28 Pater-noster Row.

Public Advertiser (Wednesday, November 1, 1769)

An Italian newspaper report printed soon after the verdict:

(Londra 31, Ottobre)
Il Sig. Giuseppe Baretti Torinese, Segretario per le corrispondenze straniere in questa Accademia delle Belle Arti, e già famoso Autore in Italia della Frusta Letteraria, ha corso, i giorni passati, un grave pericolo. Egli il giorno sette di questo mese, essendo la note avanzata, s’incamminava verso casa, quando da una Donna di Mondo gli fu fatto uno schiaffo, che a lui dispiacque. Egli le diede una spinta, e lascio andare così al bujo uno schiaffo, col quale colpì una Donna compagna della predetta; e questa datasi a gridare fece accorrere alcuni della plebe, i quali maltrattarono il Baretti con parole, e con fatti. Veggendo questi il caso disperato, mise mano ad un trinciante, che egli aveva in tasca, e meno più colpi addosso agli aggressori, alcuni de’ quali rimasero feriti, ed uno mortalmente. Liberatosi cosi il Sig. Baretti, andò a rifugiarsi in una Bottega, di dove fu condotto prigione. Esaminate le Donne, e i feriti, uno de’ quali era già morto, la causa
divenne molto seria. Ma avendo alcuni Signori amici del Baretti dato cauzione per esso, fu egli lasciato in libertà: e trattasi in seguito la causa, fu a pieni voti giudicato innocente, e che l’omicidio era stato commesso per necessaria difesa.

*La Gazzetta di Milano* (Ottobre, 1769)
News of the crime and trial was circulating in Italy in subsequent months, probably in manuscripts and letters. Baretti’s brother Filippo must have inquired about the details of the case he heard in circulation in Italy that differed with what his brother reported in letters late in 1769. Baretti’s letters in return show his displeasure in learning from Filippo of inaccurate reports of the trial. He is also unhappy to hear of translations of the Old Bailey Speech.

To Mr. BARETTI:
Sir,
You have owned to Mr. Davies, bookseller, in Russel-street, that you are the author of two Italian libels published some time ago, in which you attempted, without the least provocation, to stab my character in the dark. The literary punishment you have undergone on account of that dirty transaction, ought, in my opinion, to have abated the doggedness of your heart, and cured your imprudence; for, you well know, Mr. Baretti, that you could never make any reply to the Italian pamphlet which gibbeted you up all over Italy, and made you a laughing-stock to the heart-felt satisfaction of our countrymen, whose love and esteem you have captivated to such a degree, that the deepest groans were fetched from Naples down to Turin when they got intelligence that you escaped—caetera desunt. Yet—ecce iterum Crispinus: Now, because you can no more libel me with your pen, you struggle to libel me with your tongue—O fy! Mr. Baretti! Altho’ you are old enough to be my father, let me however give you a bit of admonition to better your future conduct—Be careful to not expose yourself any further in this country; I am told that you have already lost all your friends, and I pity you. It would be very easy for me to dissect your abilities in English, as I have already done in Italian; but I forgive you from the bottom of my heart all your backbitings, and clandestine defamations—and I am determined to follow Voltaire’s advice, who being asked why he did not take any notice of the gross, snappish aspersions thrown upon him in your accounts, and journey, answered: “shall I make use of Hercules’ arrows to kill—what?—an insect. Nay, I am not so cruel-hearted as not to feel for your situation.--I really think you are continually raving; for, the distraction of your mind must at least be equal to that of Lady Macb--.
Enter Mr. Baretti walking in his sleep, with the torch of Alecto in his heart.
“Yet there’s the smell of blood—Not all the perfumes of Arabia will sweeten the stink of my reputation. Oh! Oh! Oh! (Exit) O poor Mr. Baretti! 
Your most obedient humble servant, CHARLES FRANCIS BADINI
The Morning Chronicle of (Wednesday, December 1, 1773)
This document includes three of the erotic poems from Badini’s La Priapeja [The Priapiad]. The satirist published them around the same time as Il vero carattere, a fertile period in his long career. A devout pagan, Badini had an ironic, wicked sense of humor evident in both works, as well as a taste for blasphemy.

The question arises, who was the audience for this collection of lascivious Italian verse? And can we take seriously the testimony of Badini when he attacks Baretti on grounds of immorality?

II

Correte cazzi e incotalar le potte,  Run cocks and fill up the pussies
E voi o potte a smidollar i cazzi:  And cunts go to make limp the cocks:
Cieli che veggo! Alla lussuria rotte  My Heavens! To luxury devout
Puttane e puttanier, ninfe e ragazzi,  Sluts and whore-fuckers, nympha and boys,
Anime intese a fottiture ghiotte,  Souls intent on quite delectable screws,
Ed a lussuriosissimi sollazzi,  And on the most luxurious release,
Che quando in essi il mio pensier si ferma,  That when I stop to think on them,
Mi fan dal cazzo sdrucciolar lo sperma.  They make my cock drip with sperm.

V

Sien d’incenso i coglion sempre ripieni  The balls would always be filled with incense
A profumar l’altra della potta:  To perfume the others of the pussy:
Purpuree labbra, alabastrini seni  Purple lips and breasts of alabaster
Divotamente baci ognun che fotta;  Devoutly kiss everyone who screws;
Di bianca mano toccamenti osceni  From a white hand touches obscene
Spreneur daranno all’amorosa lotta,  Spur us to the amorous match,
Onde in quel somma arcidivin sollazzo  From which most arch-divine joy
S’imparadisi eternamente il cazzo.  Puts the cock in eternal paradise.

VI

Fuor della potta è ogni pensier perduto,  Outside of the pussy every thought is wasted,
Dura il goder tanto ch ‘l fotter dura;  The pleasure lasts just as long as the fuck;
E chi fotter non può, tutt’è fottuto,  And who is not able to fuck—is totally fucked,
Quindi in potta guizzare ciascun procura,  Thus, everything in pussy tries to wriggle
Fotte l’augello, l’angu, il pesce, e ‘l brutto,  The bird, snake, fish and beast all fuck
In somma fotte tutta la natura,  In short, all of nature is given to fucking
E fu lo scaricar d’un gran Cotale,  And it was the release of a giant Member
Che cagionò il diluvio universale.  That the caused the universal flood.
This parody of an entertainment news report, possibly by Badini, shows how the satirist used the famous trial to stigmatize Baretti and ridicule anyone associated with him. Richard Yates was an impresario at the King’s Theatre. Even the meek Oliver Goldsmith, when he was “horridly abused” in a newspaper, “thrashed the editor.” He was little concerned about being sued for libel, he wrote to James Boswell, as “the press is so scandalously abusive that I believe he will scarcely get damages.” James Boswell, Boswell for the Defence, 1769-1774 (New York, 1959), 154.

OPERATIONAL INTELLIGENCE EXTRAORDINARY

The most melancholy accident happened a few days ago to DICK YATES, Esq. alias Richard Yates, a Comedian. Dick sitting at dinner with his bosom friend the notorious Signor Baretti, and wanting to PEEL the golden pippin, or the apple of discord, which Signor Baretti had just thrown upon the table, was so unlucky as to mistake the knife of that celebrated Signor for his own. Signor Baretti’s knife was then CAUSALLY besmeared with a certain red liquor, commonly called BLOOD; SO THAT POOR Dick, who is often apt to be absent in mind, inadvertently swallowed both the apple and the ruddy drops. This we are afraid will very likely prove the most fatal of all Dick’s blunders, for he is ever since grown ferocious as much as ACHILLES, nay it has worked him into such a fit of madness, that there is no more dealing with Dick.

Public Ledger (Monday, December 20, 1773)
As Italy has been for many ages the school of the fine arts, and consequently much visited by all those who were desirous either to improve their taste, or gratify their curiosity, it is very surprising, that the accounts we have of the face of the country, and the disposition of its inhabitants, should be so very different, and even contradictory. On these, and many other points, I expected full information from Mr. Baretti’s late publication, and am sorry to say, that I am greatly disappointed. The author seems more disposed to abuse and cavil with Mr. Sharp, than to give the reader that satisfaction which he might naturally expect from a native; and his too warm zeal for the honour of his country has hurried him into several very palpable contradictions, some of which I beg leave to point out to him thro’ the channel of your magazine.

Vol. 1. p. 46. and in several other places, he treats Mr. Sharp very roughly, for intimating that assassinations are very frequent at Venice, and p. 54. asserts, that the common people in the different states of Italy are in general humble, courteous, and of a friendly disposition; yet p. 61. he says, their feelings are so quick, that even a disrespectful word, or glance, will make them fall upon one another with their knives, p. 63, 63, 73, they sometimes give a stab to a rival and even a mistress, and are of a very touchy temper. That the masters of coffee-houses will sometimes attack those very gentlemen whose livery they have formerly wore. P. 69. The Italians are of a furious disposition, and not easily brought to justice. Vol. II p. 51. The friars are very malevolent and disingenuous in their controversies. Vol. 2. P. 154. The people of Brescia are of a very quarrelsome disposition, and till very lately many of them made assassination their profession.

Mr. Baretti has a very intrepid pen, which builds the boldest assertions on the slightest foundations; for having in the beginning of his work specified three or four words, the meaning of which he says Mr. Sharp did not understand, he begins his tenth chapter, p. 247, with saying, “I think it already proved, to the reader’s satisfaction, that Mr. Sharp does not understand a word of Italian.” By the same method of reasoning it might be easily proved the Mr. Baretti does not understand a word of English.

I shall beg leave to make but one observation more, which is, that in whatever light Mr. Sharp’s profession may be looked upon in Italy, yet as he is in this country allowed to be a gentleman, it is certainly very impudent in Mr. Baretti to treat him so frequently on English ground with such illiberal language, which, however he informs us is not to be met with in Italy, except amongst the canail. That Mr. Sharp might make some mistakes on this subject is very probable and pardonable, but that Mr. Baretti should attempt to impose upon the public a heap of contradictions for a true account of his native country is unpardonable, and, if he cannot clear up the above articles, and several others, I think he ought to beg Mr. Sharp’s pardon, and that of the public.

The London Magazine or Gentleman’s Monthly Intelligencer (April 1768)
The Sharp-Baretti debate on homicides in Italy is discussed at great length in this review from the Gentleman’s Magazine. Sharp wrote his second book in the third person, dispassionately addressing Baretti’s claims about his prejudices by referring to respected eye-witnesses to homicides in Italy, such as Abbé Richard, Sir James Gray, and Sir William Hamilton.

Mr. Baretti accuses Mr. Sharp of having called the Neapolitans a nation diabolical in their Nature.

Mr. Sharp answers, that what he said was confined expressly to the lower people, and that as to the Neapolitan mob, all disinterested writers have described them as a ferocious and brutal class of men; that he appears to have been willing to commend this mob, as far as he could commend them with truth, he observes, that they are totally exempt from the vice of drinking spirituous liquors.

Does this look like the involuntary escape of truth, in a casual remission of malice? Mr. Baretti has severely censured Mr. Sharp, for the account he has given of the frequent murders in Italy, which he ascribes to the practice of drawing out knives in sudden quarrels, and stabbing instantly, and so the encouragement given to this practice by impunity, arising from the protection of the church, the difficulty of seizing offenders, the forms of law which suffer an offender, when seized, to escape, and consequently the few examples of capital punishment.

Mr. Sharp abides by his assertion, that murders are frequent in Italy: and he proves they must be so, by bringing proofs of the practice of stabbing, and the impunity of offenders, from Baretti’s own book.

Baretti says, that the Italians have such quick feelings, that even a disrespectful word or glance from an equal, will suddenly kindle a good number of them, and make them fall on one another with their knives; and, that the people, from a mistaken principle of humanity, and still more mistaken point of honour, will not give the least assistance to the officers of justice, in the execution of their duty; and that you might sooner bring an Italian to suffer martyrdom, than force him to stop any man pursued by them. Mr. Baretti, indeed, denies that the church is a sanctuary for murderers throughout Italy, but Mr. Sharp insists that it is so in Naples, Rome, and Florence, where he resided, and supposes the fact to be so notorious that Mr. Baretti will not deny it.

Mr. Sharp, as a further justification of himself in this particular, quotes the following passages from a description of Italy, published by the Abbé Richard, since the date of his letters, a book that is in very high esteem: this author, speaking of the frequent assassinations at Rome, where, however, they are not supposed to be so frequent as at Naples, says, “the people here are quick and impetuous in their passions, people of the lowest order poignard one another with the most determined resolution; they have, to appearance, no other way of fighting; they are more afraid of a punch in the stomach than a dagger. In this sort of quarrel they begin with reviling each other in the most opprobrious manner; when they are provoked to the highest degree, he who is in the who is in the greatest passion, draws out his knife, and the other does the same; which of the two strikes first is usually the conqueror, and if he is not wounded, retires as tranquilly, with his nose in his cloak, as if he had just withdrawn from an act of devotion; the
bystanders carry him that is wounded to an hospital, and all is over; unless by chance no church is near, and the officers of justice happen to be upon the spot to seize him. He continues: These bloody scenes are very common at Rome; at least there were twenty of them from December 1761, to May 1762. Passing by the square of the rotunda, I saw two peasants quarrelling, and in an instant one of them was murdered, without causing any extraordinary commotion amongst the numerous populace who were present. In the unwholesome season of July and August, the government takes no notice of these assassinations, imputing them to the effects of a violent fermentation in the blood."

I could, says Mr. Sharp, if necessary, bring proofs from the mouth of the present ingenious and polite Cardinal Albani, that executions are rare, and murder numerous beyond all credibility of proportion; so prevalent is the maxim in Italy, ‘we have lost already one subject by murder, therefore we must not lose another by execution.’ But I believe, says he, I have already said enough to establish the truth of all I suggested in my letters on this head.

Mr. Baretti will not believe, that Mr. Murray, the resident at Venice, told Mr. Sharp these things; which Mr. Sharp declares he did tell him, nor does he even believe he made him frequent visits.

To this Mr. Sharp replies, that Mr. Baretti has certainly been ill instructed, for that he lived in the greatest intimacy with Mr. Murray so long as five and thirty years ago. He adds, that since the publication of his letters, Sir James Gray, late envoy at Naples, confirmed the story of the murderer mentioned by Mr. Sharp, and doubted by Baretti; and that Mr. Hamilton told the story of five or six murderers whom he gave up, after having taken sanctuary in his palace, and who were afterwards suffered to escape publicly, which is a full justification of Mr. Sharp’s having mentioned it in his Letters

*Gentleman’s Magazine* (July, 1768)
These three pieces from newspapers reveal sarcastic and ironic humor generated by Baretti’s trial. There was something unbelievable or ridiculous in the reports that “alarmed for his safety, [Baretti] took out a pocket French dessert knife.” At least some people thought so. The final passage, taken from a longer poem, reveals how much the knife became associated with the name Baretti. Knife fights were not unusual in the eighteenth century Italy. Homicide records in the State Archives (Perugia) include files with drawings of the murder weapon; after some trials in Italy, the bloody knife was wrapped in paper and sealed with the case file. One such wrapped knife on display at the Museo Criminologico (Rome) is wrapped has the word “avvelenato,” poison-tipped, written in block letters on the thick paper.

A correspondent desires to know what has become of Mr. Baretti’s knife? Whether it is deposited among the pistols, and other deadly weapons and instruments of highwaymen and robbers, lest his timidity should prompt him to use it as he has done; or if he yet preserves it for the gentler purpose of paring fruit?

Middlesex Journal (Tuesday, November 28, 1769)

To the GAZETTEER
A Card to Signor JOSEPH BAR—HATE—YE.
I Find in your English and Italian Dictionary a very accurate definition of the word coltello, a knife: but coltello, I apprehend, is but a common knife. I should be very glad to know how the Italians call such knives as they make use of to carve their victuals. If there is such a thing in Italy, why did you not mention it in your Dictionary?

ERASMUS
Gazetteer (Friday, September 20, 1776)

In town some fear we like possess,
Of footpads, sharers, who profess
A pilfering, idle life;
But when our apprehensions dread
The man who thirsts for blood to shed,
With a Baretti’s knife.

Middlesex Journal (Saturday, October 27, 1770)
Images of brutality in Italy in the 1700s are so frequent that it is no surprise that, after first denying the prevalence of assassinations in his dispute with Dr. Sharp, Baretti admits that murders do occur under certain set circumstances. The first anecdote has all the usual features of these crimes, though a pistol is used (a weapon considered less reliable). In the third piece, the author finds himself in Bologna, where he views an impressive collection of sculptures, before witnessing a gruesome scene. In the context of these reports, the incident on Haymarket Street takes on a whole new meaning. The fourth passage highlights the fact that, in Italy, boxing was an unknown sport and knife-fights were somewhat expected, especially in cities in the south and on the coast.

But this comedy ended most tragically; for as the head dancer was retiring out of the amphitheatre he was shot dead at the door by a villain, with whom he had had some trifling dispute the day before, concerning a mistake he had made in a dance; the delinquent was soon taken and conveyed to prison, he did not seem to be under the least concern, but rather rejoiced at what he had done; to such a height do the Italians, tho’ in many respects a worthy sober sort of people, carry their revenge; and the misfortune is, that they seldom or ever give their antagonist a fair change for his life; it is sufficient if they only think themselves injured, and so for any affront, whether real or imaginary, they either villainously assassinate him themselves, or basely procure it to be done by others.

Sacheverell Stevens, *Miscellaneous remarks made on the spot, in a late seven years tour through France, Italy, Germany and Holland* (London, 1758), 362-363.

If the body of a man, who has been murdered, is seen in the street or the road, the passengers walk by it, without concern; it is at length removed by order of the magistrate, and no further notice is taken of the matter. If two men are seen fighting with knives or other deadly weapons, it excites little attention. No less than fourteen persons were found murdered in Rome at one time, a few years ago, and five of them were in the same square, called in French, *La place d’Espagne*. The privileges and immunities vested in churches, greatly contributes to this enormity. I have been told, says this Author by an ecclesiastic of great rank and authority, (un prelat de la consulte), that there were very frequently, during the course of one year, no less than two thousand murders committed in the ecclesiastical state, where capital punishments are, notwithstanding, very rare. *Monthly Review* (Appendix, 1769)

One morning we happened to be present at the infliction of a punishment that was quite new to us. I believe they call it *La corda*; it is as follows. A large pulley is fixed to an iron crane, about 40 feet high, which projects from the side of a house. Over the pulley is a rope, to which the culprit’s wrists (being previously tied together behind him) are fastened. He is then drawn up slowly to a certain height, when the rope being suddenly loosened, he drops within a few feet of the ground. This torture is repeated a second and a third time, the last fall being made higher than that preceding it; but the second never fails of producing the desire effect, that is, of dislocating the shoulder bones. On enquiry into the offence of the criminal whom we saw, I was told that he had undergone this
punishment three times in seven months, for giving the *coltellata*, or stab, with a knife to three different persons, the last of whom was his mother. Had he robbed the church he would have been burnt alive.


In walking the streets, I have often been robbed of my handkerchief, the Neapolitan pickpocket being a greater adept than Mr. Barrington. Some years since the boatswain of an English frigate had lost so many, that he determined to sew one to his pocket for the purpose of detecting the thief. Having done so he came on shore, and had not walked a hundred yards before he felt a pull; turning around on the instant, he struck the culprit with his fist in the stomach, and laid him breathless on the pavement. Many people immediate assembled, and turning the wretch about, were astonished not to perceive any marks of blood; for they supposed it impossible that one man could deprive another of his senses, without he had in their own common way stabbed him in the heart.


I am afraid to tell you how many are killed and wounded annually in this kingdom by the *coltellata*, or cut of the knife; lest you should suppose I romanced, but I assure you I have it from the most respectable authority, that there are not less than 16,000. The Neapolitan, you will observe, never strikes with his fist, as an Englishman would, but always with his long knife, and when he has done the deed, no man ever thinks of arresting him. A few years since an assassin, grown grey in murder, was by some unaccountable accident taken up. He not only acknowledged the crimes laid to his charge, but mentioned several others unknown. A monk who was present happened to say, that probably too he had never confessed himself, or observed the discipline of the church. This reflection was too cutting, he lost all patience, and addressing himself to the priest with extreme anger and indignation, exclaimed, Come padre, mi sospettate dunque di non essere Cristiano? How father (said he) and can you suspect me then to be no Christian?

Joshua L. Wilkinson and Joshua Lucock, *The Wanderer; or Anecdotes and Incidents, the Result and Occurrences of a Ramble on Foot, through France, Germany and Italy, in 1791 and 1793* (London, 1798), ii. 439-440.
It will be necessary to remark to those unacquainted with the buildings of Naples, that many families inhabit the same house, and that even the bed-chambers generally open in a sort of gallery, which people pass in common unnoticed. This was here the case; and about one o’clock in the morning of the Tuesday, a noise was heard at the bed-chamber of the servant, with a loud whisper, which bid him open the door. After a natural question “who is it?” The voice replied, “tis I, I am come to pay you the forty ducats I borrowed of you—open the door.”—The door was opened—the MONSTER rushed in, and stabbed him ten different places with his bayonet. The screams of the Servant, and his cry of “Murder! Murder!” in English, alarmed the inhabitants of the whole house.--They come to the room from whence the sound proceeded, and find the poor Englishman weltering in the gore which had flowed from his mangled body. His stomach, and lungs were particularly perforated, and extravasated wind, and blood issued at the same time from his wounds. (ii, 46-47)

A surgeon instantly attended—on viewing the miserable object, he lifted up a despairing eye and exclaimed “Gesu maria è morto!” The poor creature had a sufficient knowledge of Italian to understand from the expression of the surgeon, that he was beyond the possibility of recovery, and had still existence enough to know and name the murderer…The officers of justice repair to the soldier’s habitation;--they fly to his bed-chamber, which they bust open;--they go towards his bed, and there they only see a French woman, who lived with this horrid miscreant. Satisfied by her assurances and their own eyes, that he was not in the house; they were returning: but, one of them having just discerned a bloody pair of breeches on the floor, they renew their search, and find under the bed a trap-door, and the trembling wretch concealed under it. They immediately take him into custody, and commit him to prison. (ii, 48-49)

With fruitless hope of recovering the poor Englishman, he was conveyed to the hospital; and for the purpose of convicting the assassin, it was necessary to establish a proof, which should be irrefragable. The tribunal of NAPLES is extremely cautious in admitting the internal evidence of facts, and particularly so, in judging of (what is termed in England) collateral evidence. Their criminal laws suppose, that predetermination frequently results from indignant feelings; and that other violent men, like the Judge in the melancholy case of Calas, may connect probable circumstances with ease, and may reconcile even discordant circumstances without much difficulty. This is the natural effect of premature judgment, from which few men are perfectly exempt...It will be now useless to observe that this wretch was a proper object for all the rigour of an avenging death; and yet, as his punishment, he was only banished for life to one of the neighbouring Islands of Sicily.

We see from this deplorable and fatal lenity, that the Government of Naples does not sufficiently deter its inhabitants from the perpetration of murders by the vengeance of penal justice. (ii, 51-52)

A Comparative Sketch of England and Italy, with Disquisitions on National Advantages (London, 1793)
Baretti first stabbed Patman in the back, but he did not realize he was seriously injured till much later. As odd as this seems to us today, it appears to have been not uncommon in early knife killings in the early modern periods, as the weapon was so sharp pointed that it created a tiny wound. The Italian Renaissance stiletto did not usually have a cutting edge, but was very lethal, especially when the guts or an organ were struck or the tip was poisoned. In the Museo Criminologico in Rome a dagger from a trial is wrapped in paper and marked “avvelenato,” poisoned. Giancarlo Baronti, a distinguished scholar in Perugia, uncovered legal transcription in the State Archives in Perugia that give shocking evidence of unpremeditated murders. These passages, unlike the English accounts of similar crimes, were not intended for publication. The scribe was writing as fast as possible and paying little attention to grammar, though he tried to include relevant facts, like names, locations, times, and the type of knife used.

Gli dissi ladro baron fottuto ed esso Ercolano mi rispose che io ero un ladro baron fottuto e così cominciassimo a fare a pugni assieme, io li favo a lui e lui li dava a me, e poi doppo il detto Ercolano scappo fuori dalla bettola con le mani in saccoccia, e così io gli corsi alla vita, e con un cortello che portavo ad uno di macellaro gli diedi una cortellata. [He called me crook and fucking jerk-off and that Ercolono responded that I was the crook and fucking jerk-off and so we began to punch each other, I was doing it to him and he was giving it to me, and then after the said Ercolano ran out of the tavern with his hands in his pockets, and thus he ran, and with a knife and one a butcher would use he gave the stabbing.]

Tribunale di prima istanza di Perugia, secolo XVIII, busta anno 1716, fascicolo: Città Porta S. Angelo. Ferita con qualche pericolo, 16 septembris 1716.

In occasione che sabbato si stava tra noi discorrendo passò vicino a me Giovanni Todeschino che portando nelle mani una Ringa se l’andava mangiando e senza che io gli facessi cosa alcuna mi diede una spinta col gomito del suo braccio che mi colpi sotto la zinna sinistra, onde io gli dissi che quella non era maniera di procedere con chi non gli dava fasticio, ma esso allora postesi le mani in saccoccia e cavato fuori un cortello che mi parve serratore con molla, quello mi diede un colpo. [On the occasion that was Saturday we were talking then passed by me Giovanni Todeschino that had in his hands a herring and was going along eating and without me annoying him at all he gave me a push with his elbow that struck me under my left breast, to which I responded that that was not a way to act with someone that wasn’t bothering him, but he then put his hand in his pockets and pulled out a knife that seemed jagged with a spring, and he gave me a stab.]

Whether for the effects of stricter weapon laws or for other reasons, Florence was one of the safer cities during the Grand Tour. Archival documents of crimes in a period before criminology and police are incomplete and often non-existent; this is more of a problem in the south, though evidence suggests that the southern cities were, as Samuel Sharp asserted, particularly dangerous.

A very long and interesting trial transcript in manuscript survives in the State Archives (Florence). It relates the murder of Orazio Bucalossi by Vincenzo Bonifazi near the Duomo on October 25, 1788. The victim [was killed with a stabbing] “fu amazzato con una stilettata”: [his heart was greatly offended and therefore the immediate cause of death was the wound described] “il cuore nel nostro caso è stato gravemente offeso, dunque la cagione immediata della morte è stata la descritta ferita.” The victim’s wife, who was at the scene, testified that no one was able to determine the true cause of the stabbing: “E chi è mai potuto saper la vera causa la quale il Buonafissi ...a dare la stilettata al mio marito.” Character evidence, so important in the Baretti trial, was brought forth. When asked, “Di che carattere fosse Orazio Bucalossi,” his wife responded, [my husband was of a docile nature, not given to quarrels], “mio marito era un carattere docile, niente perbato ai litigi.” The killer is described as ruthless man without fear of God: “un uomo scellerato, e senza timore di Dio

Gli atti processuali contro Vincenzo Bonifazi per omicidio. Segue un atto di comparizione nel quale prosegue il racconto del caposquadra del quartiere di S. Giovanni, Antonio Galli e del caposquadra del quartiere di S. Maria Novella, Giuseppe Botti i quali affermano che, trovandosi la sera del 16 ottobre1788 nella bettola di Angelo Campolini in via dell’Alloro, un certo vetturino romano, Vincenzo Bonifazi con sua moglie, Jacopo N. cocchiere del Fidi nella Vigna Nuova e Andrea Fioravanti parrucchiere, abitanti nel chiasso degli Altovita, cominciarono ad altercare fra di loro e usciti dalla bettola alle ore dieci e un quarto , continuavano a litigare, ma nel frattempo era intervenuto un certo Orazio Bucalossi, detto Pinocchio, vetturino del Fensi, che era uscito da bere dall’osteria di Romeo Fallani, pure in via dell’Alloro, per sedare la rissa. Quando fu passato l’albergo dell’Aquila, precisamente sotto l’abitazione del dott. Tramontani, il Bonifazi gli menò una coltellata nel bassoventre talm ente penetrante che dopo poco Bucalossi morì miseramente e fu trasportato nella stanza mortuaria della chiesa di S. Lorenze dalla compagnia di carità di detta chiesa. Dopo aver commesso l’assassinio, il Bonifazi se no torno’ nell’albergo della Fiamma, dove si trovava alloggiato già da due mesi con la moglie, raccontando agli osti Francesco e Giovan-Battista Somigli di aver ucciso il suddetto Bucalossi e se ne fuggì, dicendo di andarsene fuor di Stato e partì; alla volta di Bologna. Anche la moglie ha raccontato ai famigli che fu il Bonifazi ad uccidere il Bucalossi. Il coltello fu ritrovato, instrinse di sangue e si credette che fosse il coltello usato dal Bonifazi e fu consegnato alla presenza dei testimoni Giuseppe Boni e Pietro Sqrti, posto in un pezzo di carte bianca e legato in croce c on del refe e sigillato con cera Rossa di Spagna, esprimente il sigillo di una testa umana

Filza 2447 Straordinario dell’anno 1787 all’anno 1790, Supremo Tribunale di Giustizia
[The court papers against Vincenzo Bonifazi for homicide.  
The narrative of the constable of the quarter of San Giovanni, Antonio Galli and of the constable of the quarter of Santa Maria Novella, Giuseppe Botti who, finding themselves the evening of October 16, 1788 in the tavern of Angelo Campolini in Via dell’Alloro, a certain Roman coachman, Vincenzo Bonifazi with his wife, Jacopo N. coachman of the Fidi in the Vigna Nuova e Andrea Fioravanti barber, who live in the Chiasso degli Altovita, began to argue between them, and they left the tavern at 10:15, but in the meantime a certain Orazio Bucalossi, called “Pinocchio,” coachman of Fensi, who had came out of the inn of Romeo Fallani, also in Via dell’Alloro, where he had been drinking, to settle down the quarrel. When he went past the Hotel of Aquila, precisely under the house of Dr. Tramontani, Bonifazi gave him a stab in the lower abdomen so very, very deep that after Bucalossi died miserably and was transported in the mortuary room of the Church San Lorenzo by the a charitable guild of the said church. After having committed the assassination, Bonifazi returned to the Hotel of Fiamma, where he had been living for two months with his wife, and told the story to the hosts Francesco e Giovan-Battista Somigli of having murdered the said Bucalossi and he ran off, saying that he would get outside of the State and flee to Bologna Also his wife told the relatives that it was Bonifazi who murdered Bucalossi. The knife was recovered, still bloodstained, and it was believed to be the weapon Bonifazi used and it was consigned in the presence of witnesses Giuseppe Boni and Pietro Sqarti, put in a piece of white paper and tied with a cross with ribbon and sealed with red Spanish wax, and on the seal was printed a human head.]
English papers did not report very much from Italy during the eighteenth century, but news of horrid stabbings abroad did find its way onto newsprint. While some historians would attribute such reports as these to xenophobia or the persistence of prejudicial images of Italians dating from the Renaissance, Italian scholars have recently shown that such reports were not make-believe: throughout Italy, but especially in the south, the use of knives to resolve what we would consider petty disputes persisted through the nineteenth century. As is the case in these two examples, the slayer frequently escaped into the protection of a church or into a different region of Italy; the community sometimes sympathized with the criminal, rather than the government, and often gave protection to the outlaws. These reports are complete.

We learn from Pisa, that a Father there hath had the Barbarity to kill with a Stiletto his own Son, aged 20 Years, because he opposed the Sale of some Effects belonging to the family. The proper Officers are in Pursuit of him.

_Daily Advertiser_ (Monday, June 16, 1777)

At Scaddiglia, about 30 miles from the city of Rome, the Governor of the place has been murdered with circumstances of horrid barbarity. A wretch who had been brought before the said Governor for some trifling offense, desired to see the warrant on which he had been thus charged before him, which, in justice, could not, it must be confessed, be denied him. At first, however, the Governor refused him; but at length, while handing it over to him, the culprit drew a stiletto from his bosom, and stabbed him several times in the throat. In the confusion, the villain effected his escape, and has as yet baffled every pursuit.

_World_ (Monday, July 21, 1788)
Garrick had enemies who criticized his performances and accused him of self-promotion and greed. The following letter may have been penned by one of his hostile reviewers, like William Kenrick (the initials suggest as much), who Garrick sued for libel in the years after the trial. His accusation here is nothing short of bribing an official of the court, the constable John Lambert.

To DAVID GARRICK, Esq.

SIR,

You are public accused of having declared upon your oath, before the Coroner’s inquest that sat on the body of Evan Morgan, who was killed on the 6th of October last by Joseph Baretti, that you never knew an Italian who was otherwise than a peaceable and quiet man: that you was several times at the constable’s house, who was admitted prosecutor against Baretti; and, in particular, both you and the prisoner’s attorney, were there the night before the trial at the Old Bailey: that you have presented the prosecutor with a silver ticket, which will admit the bearer gratis at any time into the play-house; and that the constable has such a ticket at this time in his possession, and has had it ever since the trial.

You that have acquired a Peer’s fortune, and more than a Peer’s reputation in your province, will not, I dare say, hesitate to follow the noble example of a Peer, and an Alderman, by making a public defence to a public charge, and clear yourself of the imputation of having used indirect means to prevent justice, and screen the peaceable Italian, who stabbed an innocent Englishman.

Your silence will be deemed guilt; and it is hoped, if you give any answers, they will not be evasive ones, but simple replied to the following questions:

1st. Did you, or did you not, make such an oath as is above described? And if you did, do you believe there is a man of credit in Great Britain, that is so well acquainted with Italy as you are, that would do the same?

2d. Was you not, the night before Baretti’s trial, at Lambert’s, the Tallow-Chandler, in Panton-street, the 19th of October last? And if you were, what induced you to pay that visit?

3d. Did you give, or cause to be given, to the said Lambert, or his wife, or any other person of his family, a ticket, of any kind or sort whatever, that will admit him, or any other friend whom he chuses to give it to, into the play-house in Drury-lane, without paying? And has he not, to your certain knowledge been admitted, in the course of the last season, into the playhouse by virtue of the said ticket, without paying? If he is possessed of such a ticket, what signal service has he done you to deserve such a present.

I am, Sir,

Your humble servant, and well-wisher,

D. K.

Middlesex Journal (Thursday, November 8, 1770)
This follow-up letter to D-30 is rhetorically very shrewd. It purports to be written by a second writer (and may be), and implies the author or the first letter must have been one of Garrick’s friends, concerned about false rumors of his obstructing justice. It seems very unlikely that Samuel Sharp wrote this letter, but the author is clearly familiar with the controversy and Sharp’s rebuttal.

To the Printer of the MIDDLESEX JOURNAL.

SIR,

In your paper of the 10th of November last, I read some Queries addressed to David Garrick, Esq. I am inclined to think that they were written by a friend of his who could not be convinced of their authenticity, so gave Mr. Garrick the opportunity of clearing himself. But has he answered those Queries? No, and I am persuaded he never will. I was at the Coroner’s Inquest, and heard him examined and I do assure you the charge is true; and I was not a little surprized [sic] at the time to think a man of his public character could, upon his oath, make such an assertion, before upwards of an hundred people, and in direct contradiction to what his learned friend the Italian wrote and published some time before, viz. Vol. I, page 61, in BARETTI’s Letters on Italy, he says, “their feelings are so quick, that even a disrespectful word or glance will make them fall upon one another with KNIVES;”—page 61, 63, 73, “they sometimes give a stab to a rival, and even to a mistress, and are of a very touch temper; that the masters of coffee-houses will sometimes attack those very gentleman whose livery they have formerly worn;”—page 69, “the Italians are of a very furious disposition, and not easily brought to justice;”—vol. II, page 154; “the people of Brescia are of a very quarrelsome disposition, and still very lately many of them made assassination their profession.” Such the learned Baretti tells us his countrymen are: such I believe he had convinced every honest man he is; notwithstanding the great Garrick upon his oath declared, “he never knew an Italian that was otherwise than a peaceable and quiet man.”

SILURIST

Middlesex Journal (Tuesday, January 22, 1771)
Although during the trial every effort was made to persuade the jury that Baretti’s knife was not a concealed weapon, many observers remained skeptical, insisting that the weapon indicated malice. This letter is written by a very thoughtful follower of the case, perhaps a lawyer, well familiar with the rule of evidence, the theory of provocation, and the problem of overly sympathetic juries. He calls attention to the “circumstances of the crime,” not overlooking Patman’s severe injury and how Morgan’s wounds speak of “excessive defense,” in today’s legal parlance. “An unfortunate woman, not long ago, in a fit of jealousy, and with more provocation than Mr. Baretti had for stabbing Patman,” NESTOR writes, “did an act in Chancery lane, for which, without any regard to her feelings, she was executed. The unidentified author is referring to the trial of “Elizabeth Richardson, otherwise Forrister” at the Old Bailey on December 7, 1768, Available online, the circumstances of the case merit comparison to those in Baretti.

To the Printer of the Whitehall Evening Post
SIR,
I am not an advocate for the behavior of prostitutes and their bullies; I condemn it; and I am sorry to remark, that many outrages committed by them is owing to the want of a regular administration, and due exertion of magistratic power: some weeks we shall hear of mock constables and reformers, exercising the most wanton acts of assumed authority: the next, we are insulted and abused, and cannot rouse either constable or watchman to our assistance and their duty. The case of Mr. Baretti is not unworthy of attention of the public: it has been fully stated, I make no doubt, in the Sessions-Paper. If any part of the evidence has been suppressed, it will be remembered by those who heard the trial: but presuming that account to be right, it must be observed, that Baretti stabb’d Patman without any provocation, other than what every man, who walks from Charing-cross to the Exchange, must unavoidable meet with. If an Englishman had been jostled willfully, he would only have remonstrated with the insulter, or have passed on without noticing it all.
Mr. Baretti has been a great many years in England; and being too a man of letters, he must be so well acquainted with the customs of the people, and their temper and disposition, that no apology can be found for his carrying such a weapon about him: that foreigners usually do so is not a reason in England; it rather indicates the dark designs of a man of that country, who is suspicious of his fellow-creatures.
When he wounded Patman, Baretti fled, and pursuit was made, with propriety I say, after the offender; and perhaps some blows were given him, and justly too: what violence was used, in attempting to take him, to induce the stabbing of Morgan in three different parts, I do not know, but a Jury of greater mercy and humanity than Mr. Baretti, conceived more favorably of the transaction than perhaps some others would have done. It may be well that Mr. Baretti lives; and it might have been well had Mr. Morgan lived. If Mr. Baretti has such tender feelings, he will, I hope, have the remainder of his life seasoned with proper sensations.
It is somewhat extraordinary, that so much regard should be paid to the tender feelings and the delicate sensations of a foreigner, who can entertain such ideas as must be necessary to carry such a weapon: an Englishman, of whose feelings we seldom hear any
thing said at the Old Bailey, or in the News-papers, even some of the third regiment, would have shudder’s at the thoughts of such an assassination. His Worship, or the Major, could not have conceived a thought of stabbing a man who only jostled them. The activity of Mr. Baretti’s benevolence is no excuse for his stabbing Patman; the instance of that active benevolence is confined to the limb of a lady, and tends not at all towards exculpating; unless in this way, that because he contributed something to one, he cannot, in the nature of things, be supposed capable of taking away anything from another. The being a man of Letters is greatly against him. The foreigner who shot Mathews the Surgeon was also one of the Literati.—Timidity, or short-sightedness, now so commonly affected, does not warrant the using or carrying such weapons in England. I will not contradict the gentleman who said he could not have got victuals without the assistance of such a weapon: some persons by means of such could not perhaps have got any; but if the gentleman had not aped the foreigner when he was abroad, he might have seen a knife brought to table with a blade of Birmingham (a town not far from Stratford upon Avon) though a pretty dagger in gold is certainly preferable. It would be matter of astonishment if the justice of the law should be complimented away. Comparisons are sometimes said to be odious; but an unfortunate woman, not long ago, in a fit of jealousy, and with more provocation than Mr. Baretti had for stabbing Patman, did an act in Chancery lane, for which, without any regard to her feelings, she was executed. Let those transaction be had in remembrance by all those abandoned wretches who Infest the streets; and let not Mr. Baretti’s escape make foreigner more daring; but let it be in the contemplation of every one of them, that he who hereafter, in England, carries about him, concealed, such an instrument of death, may be ______.
NESTOR, jun.

*Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer* (Thursday, November 2, 1769)
One of the principle witnesses, the begging prostitute who appears to have started it all, vanished from the scene. Throughout early accounts such as this one, writers taking sides on whether Baretti’s reaction was that of a “reasonable man” (a term that comes later in legal history and it not used), or excessive given the provocation. Legal scholars refer to this as “proportionality.” Andrew Ashworth, Professor of Law at Oxford, frames the issue succinctly: “It would be difficult to claim an intrinsic proportion between A’s kicking B and B’s killing A; but it is perhaps intelligible to say that there is greater proportion if A’s initial act was either to inflict a stab wound or to commit adultery than if it was merely to make an insulting gesture.” Andrew Ashworth, “The Doctrine of Provocation,” 296-297. Ashworth’s use of the word “perhaps” shows that the subject continues to be a slippery one. In this version, it is worth noting, Baretti is not trying to escape death but a murderer trying to escape capture.

It appeared by the evidence of Elizabeth Ward, that on the 6th of October last, between nine and ten in the evening, she heard a woman (whom she had never seen before) ask the prisoner to give her a glass of wine, and at the same time saw her take hold of him with her hand, in an indecent manner, on which he went on a little, but directly turned back, and hit the evidence, who was standing by the other woman, a violent blow on the face with his double fist! She then screamed out, and three young men, whom she was not acquainted with, came up, and asked him “how he could strike a woman!” and by once or twice shoving against him, pushed him off the pavement. Baretti then drew a knife, and ran up Panton street, the young men following him, crying “Murder! He has a knife out!” and the witness believed it was then the deceased was stabbed.

Royal Magazine (November, 1769)
In this letter, signed by a CROWN LAWYER, the Baretti case is presented as a miscarriage of justice, but not for any personal hostility toward Baretti in the manner of C. F. Badini. The author of these “Judicial Remarks” discusses the “illegals” of the case with precision and expertise. He disapproves of the weight given to character evidences, noting “character, in doubtful cases, or where there is evidence of the charge against the prisoner is circumstantial only, is certainly a very proper defence.” The Latin passage comes from Horace Epistulae 1.16.40-41: *Vir bonus est quis? Qui consulta patrum, qui leges iuraque servat.* [Who is the good man? He is the one who takes care with the advice of the senate, who serves the law and justice.] This letter was also printed in Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser (Monday, November 6, 1769). Lord Ferrers, mentioned toward the end, was found guilty of murder April 18, 1760 and executed. This was the last time a peer of the realm would be hanged as a common criminal.

Judicial Remarks on the Trial of JOSEPH BARETTI, for the supposed wilful [sic] murder of EVAN MORGAN, by stabbing him three several times in the body with a knife.

THE extraordinary pomp of Council, and the uncommon parade of character, illegally introduced in this prosecution, on the Coroner’s Inquest, leaves us no room to doubt, that an acquittal, and not the honour of the prisoner, as was ridiculously given out, was the chief object in view, as the sole motives of the great deligence [sic] of Council and friends on that enquiry. These arbitrary proceedings had their merited, though, perhaps, not their desired success, for the prisoner was charged, by twelve Englishmen, with manslaughter, notwithstanding the above unjustified attempts, to persuade the Jury to be of a contrary opinion.

The Grand Jury, uninfluenced by Council, and unprejudiced by character, charged the prisoner with willful murder; an alarming instance this of the dangerous tendency in admitting illegalities in proceedings instituted by the law, for the sake of investigating truth, in order to the acquittal or condemnation of an assassin.

The prisoner being informed, that the integrity and abilities of a Judge would superintend his Jury of life and death, was persuaded to endeavour to make that Jury believe, that though he had been so unsuccessful in his management of the first Jury, and his having no opportunity of influencing the second, that he relied much more upon the candor and impartiality of the last, than the former two, intimated that he voluntarily and generously waved the privilege allowed a foreigner by the law of England, of having six of his own countrymen on his Jury, on his trial for life and death. But may we not presume to surmise, without impeachment of Italian Honour, that the true reason of rejecting this English privilege was, that he, on consideration, thought that both his life and honour would be much safer in the hands of stranger, than in those of his own countrymen, even in a case of assassination, attended with the untoward circumstances, of having given not only one—not only two, but not less than three stabs.

The Council for the prisoner owe the opportunity of confounding the King’s witnesses, and of attempting to make them prevaricate and contradict themselves on the trial, from their being admitted on the Coroner’s Inquest, which ought not (as before observed) to have been allowed. But notwithstanding all the legal sophistry, used, in order to
invalidate the testimony of the evidence [sic] for the Crown, it is in proof upon the trial, and incontestably so too, that the prisoner stabbed the deceased three several, upon his collaring him, after he had wounded Patman. I do insist, that it was not necessary that the deceased should know, at the time that he collared the prisoner, that the prisoner had wounded Patman; for this very law came in question, on a special verdict for murder.

The case was briefly thus:
A street walker being arrested by two men, a stranger rescued her, and in the scuffle, killed one of the persons who arrested her. It appeared that the woman had not been guilty of any crime, at the time of the arrest, for which she was liable to be arrested, that neither of the persons who arrested her had an authority so to do, and therefore held not murder, by Holt C.J. and six other Judges, against the opinion of the other five Judges, though the stranger was ignorant of all these circumstances at the time of the rescue.

Lord Holt, concluded his argument with this memorable declaration, viz. “I am as much for reformation as any one, but in a legal manner; for
________________--vir bonus est quis?
Quel consulta partum, qui leges juraque servat.
The name of the case alluded to, is that of the Queen v. Tolsey; it is reported in 2 Lord Raym. 1296. 11 Mod. 242. Cas. Temp. Holt. 485. pl. 6.

I consider the prisoner’s speech, as I dare say, he did himself, as his dying speech, and as such, dismiss it, without any further comment.

The confession that the civil power in Westminster is not sufficient to keep the prostitutes in order, seems to indicate, that authority is not so conspicuous in the dark part of the town alluded to, as manhood; otherwise the indecent insults complained of would not happen so often to these vigorous gentlemen.

Character, in doubtful cases, or where there is evidence of the charge against the prisoner is circumstantial only, is certainly a very proper defence; as for instance, suppose Barretti had been taken with a bloody knife in his hand, and the wounded party near him, in a crowd, in the street, without positive proof of his having given the wound, evidence tending to shew, that he was a person incapable, from his life and conversation, of committing so cruel and bloody an act, would most justly acquit him of the charge, in the opinion of an English jury. But was this Barretti’s case? Was he not, on the contrary, fully charged with the wounding one man, and the stabbing another three times, after he had wounded the first man?
And what does this evidence of character, given by some of the first literati in the kingdom, prove in our case? Why, that Mr. Barretti was a man of learning, and that it was usual to carry about one, in Italy, such instruments as that wherewith he stabbed the deceased.

Indeed in antient times of ignorance and superstition, the learned, and learned only, were totally exempt from capital punishment; but in more enlightened ages, learning hath been very justly thought to condemn, rather than to acquit the culprit.

I remember, on Lord Ferrers’s trial for murder, his friends attempted to vindicate his Lordship, as being a fool and a madman; Barretti’s friends, on the same charge, urged his being a scholar and man of parts, in justification of his criminal conduct.
I cannot help smiling, when I consider how ridiculous an answer is given to a man, charged with stabbing an *Englishman* in *London*, viz, that it is the custom in *Italy* to carry such sort of knives about one, for the purpose of eating fruit with them. However, Mr. *Barretti* had the good fortune, I will not say the *honour*, of being acquitted; the verdict justifying the killing by allowing it to be self-defence in point of law. “To excuse homicide by the plea of self-defence, it must appear that the slayer had no other possible means of escaping from his assailants.” Whether the legal circumstances requisite to make the killing in our case amount only to self defence, must be collected from the evidence, which being so generally read at this time, I decline stating, but refer to the Sessions-paper.

A CROWN LAWYER

*Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer* (Saturday, November 4, 1769)
This position piece, signed with the initial “D” by an unknown correspondent, conveys genuine outrage at what is seen as an abuse of the free press, called “the public prints.” The author sustains that due process was observed in the Baretti case, and that abusing a man declared innocent is not only mean-spirited, but descends to “downright licentiousness.” This letter raises the issue faced today of whether trials should be shown on television. Furthermore, this letter asserts that there is xenophobia behind the attacks on Baretti.

In his thirty-five years in London, Baretti never complained of encountering prejudice for being Italian, although such prejudices did exist. Italian identity privileged Baretti in the literary networks of Johnson’s London.

To the PRINTER
As the Gazetteer has admitted some several animadversions (not to say untruths, asserted by correspondents) on the case of Mr. Barretti, your known candour will not refuse a reflection or two in his favour. The crime Mr. Barretti stood suspected of, was no less than that of willful murder. The coroner’s jury sat two days, entered minutely into the nature of the fact, and acquitted him of the murder, by finding him guilty only of manslaughter. A verdict, which though less favourable than was the opinion, perhaps, of the coroner (who seemed to think the action to be no more than self-defence) yet was properly found, as it necessarily subjected Mr. Barretti to a more solemn trial at the Old Bailey. Here then was Mr. Barretti arraigned for his life, the matter thoroughly investigated, and the prisoner heard in his own defence. And what was the result? Was the verdict murder, or even manslaughter? It was an honourable acquittal; honourable because directly coinciding with the opinion of a full and most respectable court. And after the accused party had passed the unspeakable anxiety of awaiting two judicial determinations; after throwing himself, with confidence, on the justice of English juries; after saving his life, and, as he trusted, his honour too, by a full acquittal; shall be again and again arraigned, and even condemned, by scribbling malevolence, in the public prints? Shall character cleared of the most foul imputation, and natural disposition, attested to be humane, peaceable, and even timid, be wantonly blackened, in order to prejudice the public mind against the learned person, because he is a foreigner; or because he was adjudged to be innocent? Forbid it, candor! Forbid it, justice! When we see the public prints made the instruments of compassion of mercy (which, in a signal instance, the Gazetteer has very lately been) detraction itself must confess the utility of these publications; but when, by being open to all parties, they happen to become the vehicles of willfully unjust accusation, the liberty of the press sinks, unavoidably, into downright licentiousness.

D.
Gazetteer (Tuesday, November 14, 1769)
In this Letter, John Lambert, the constable who arrested Baretti, defends himself against accusations of accepting bribes and using his position for personal gain, rather than public interest. Ten years after the trial, Lambert still has to deal with the Baretti case, as we see toward the end. The writer—or the printer—left a blank for three quite derogatory names. A greatest insult to honour in early modern England was referred to as “calling the lie,” accusing someone of being a liar. This was felt to be considerably more disparaging than being called a bastard, ugly, or effeminate.

It is, among other things, alleged, by an anonymous miscreant (who impudently subscribes himself “Veritas”) in the Gazetteer of Thursday last, that the records of the parish of St. Martin’s in the Fields are much augmented by the prosecution against the inhabitants at my instance. Sir, I do acknowledge, and with an honest pride I acknowledge, that when I was an inhabitant, and in office in that parish, that I so far adhered to the faithful discharge of my duty as to use every legal method in my power to remove or suppress the numerous pest houses in Hedge-lane, which remain at this day a lamentable instance of the depravity of human nature; that lane being a principal receptacle of abandoned profligates, highwaymen, housebreakers, and desperate invaders of every denomination. Against the keepers of those houses, indeed, I did commence prosecutions, but not from revengeful, lucrative, or sordid motive but as against wretches who are the bane of society, whose enormities had long and justly incurred the execration of the whole neighbourhood, who were considered as the abettors of felony, the protectors of felons, the seducers of indigent, innocence, and encouragers of confirmed guild. Had I followed the prudent dictates of interest, I might have turned a connivance at such scenes of infamy to a good account, and procured many private customers, instead of public enemies. Such a shameful prostitution of my trust would have secured to me the approbation of every scoundrel in the parish.

But will the immaculate Veritas stand forth and accuse me of a single litigious, vexatious prosecution, or of the most distant attempt, to unduly, or from personal motives, exercise any undue power annexed to my office; if he does, let him avow both the act and himself. At the same time, I will give him full permission to speak in plain English, and not drive him into the miserable shifts of ambiguous kinds, loose conjectures, and vague innuendos, to describe my conduct. For a moment let him change the scene, act the man, and proclaim his charges in the face of day; and not with a base stiletto hand conceal the dagger until the friendly hour of midnight appears to secrete the murderer. As I have condescended to notice the security of an anonymous reptile, I think it a duty I owe to myself and the public, to answer, not only every charge, but the bare insinuation of a charge again me. I am therefore constrained, however painful to recollect the circumstance of Mr. Barretti, some years ago; I would have gladly spared myself so disagreeable a relation, but the conduct of the gentleman himself, or his injudicious champion, “Veritas,” has rendered a recital of the facts indispensable. I lived, at the time of the fatal accident, in the very street where it was committed, and was at the time, a constable. As such I was called upon by an enraged populace or take him into custody; my duty forbid a refusal. I therefore secured Mr. Barretti, and he was, by Sir John Fielding, committed to Totillfields Bridewell, and of course I was called upon at his trial,
to give such evidence, as by those means came within my knowledge. To reason, therefore, upon the propriety of my conduct would be to insult common sense. I shall therefore answer this charge by asking a reasonable question: What should I have deserved, had I acted otherwise? In order to prove me capable of the crime “Veritas” has had the temerity to exhibit, he insinuates, that I received my education in Leicester Goal, and thinks himself justified in advancing this round assertion, because a relation of mine, whose name was Lambert, was the keeper of that prison. Though this circumstance, in itself, is very immaterial, yet I cannot consent to suffer such an idea to go into the world, because it will go upon the bare authority of a c----d, a l--r, and a s-------l.

*Gazetteer* (Tuesday, August 8, 1780)
Like the Letter to the Town and Country Magazine above (D-17), this piece is written on behalf of Richard Morgan and exposes his insurmountable difficulties in trying to assemble a case for the prosecution. Why was this letter published seven months after the verdict?

To the Printers of the Middlesex Journal

Sir,

I have observed your paper to be very impartial, and ready in admitting the just complaints of the injured: if, therefore, you will be so candid as to insert the following Anecdotes, it may, perhaps, induce those who preside in a Court of Justice, not to suffer the door-keeper to shut out the only friend, and thereby deprive him of doing justice to a murdered relation.

I was at the Rose Coffee-house in the Old Bailey on the 20th of October last, in company with the brother of Evan Morgan, Counsellor Keys, and the witnesses whom he had collected at a considerable expence,* in order to give evidence against Baretti, for the supposed murder of the said Evan. A gentleman came into the room, and asked if Mr. Morgan was there and the brother told him his name was Morgan. The gentleman, whose name is Higginson, said, that he came to inform him of two very material witnesses in favour of the prosecution: they are, said he, the mistress of the Hole in the Wall in Panton-street, and a mathematical instrument-maker, that works next door to Mr. Foote’s Theatre in the Haymarket: the landlady related to me as follows—when she heard the cry of murder in the street, she went out at the door, and there she saw Baretti giving the deceased two stabs, without his molesting or interrupting him in any manner whatsoever; two stabs, she said, she saw him give, but how many more she could not tell; and that the other witness was present at the same time. The landlady further told me that the Constable, (who was made prosecutor on the trial, instead of the brother) was at her house the night before, soliciting witnesses for the prisoner, and in company with a soldier, whom she heard advance gross falsities; particularly, his saying the deceased had struck the prisoner; for which she reprimanded the soldier; upon which the Constable told her, in a very a haughty tone, “Madam, any body that knows any thing in favour of the prisoner has a right to declare it.”—That is true, reply’d the landlady, provided they tell truth; but what I heard him advance is false, can disprove it, and will if called upon. In consequence of the above information, the brother took coach and went in quest of the witnesses; he called at the Mathematical Instrument-maker’s, and was informed he was gone to the Old Bailey; he went from thence to the Hole in the Wall; the landlady refused going with him, alledging, that her husband was gone to the trial, and that she had nobody to take care of her house, otherwise she should have no objection. Finding he could not prevail upon her to go, he returned with all expedition in order to get a subpoena; but how great was his surprize when he came to the Old Bailey to find the door-keeper refuse him admittance, notwithstanding he applied as brother to the deceased; told him he wanted to speak to Counsellor Keys, and had occasion for subpoenas to serve upon two very material witnesses, one being at that time in Court; and offered him money several times, but to no purpose. I believe he was so foolish at one time as to beg for God’s sake to let him in: this produced a hearty laugh from the
bystanders, who told him if he could not find a better argument, he might wait long enough before he got admission. A gentleman advised him to write a note to the Counsel, which he did, and presented it at the door-hatch, but could not prevail upon any one of them to take it in. The first he offered it to told him, he must go to the next door; the person who kept that, gave him the same advice, and so did the rest, till after two hours application, a person in coloured cloaths observing his distress, told him his mourning betrayed him to be the brother, and calling him aside, took the billet, which was then immediately received from the stranger without the least objection; but by this time the prisoner was making his defence.

This was not the only circumstance that facilitated the acquital of the Italian. There was likewise Thomas Williams, a shopman to a mercer in Paton-street, who was standing at his master’s door, which is not many yards from the Haymarket, together with Edward Haggerdy. They saw the whole affair from the moment the dispute first began, till Baretti was taken into custody by the Constable. Both of them several times declared that they could safely swear, that neither of the three persons, nor any other person whatsoever struck, or offered to lift up a hand against, the prisoner, from the beginning in the Haymarket to the time he was apprehended. Thomas Williams was subpoenaed, and attended at the Old Bailey, but was not examined; and Edward Haggerdy was the person who took up the deceased, when he fell down of the wound he had received.

Ann Box, nurse, who attended the deceased from the time he was taken into the Middlesex hospital till his death, was called into Court, but not a question asked her. Also several persons of credit and undoubted veracity attended, who had known the deceased a great many years, were ready to attest that he was of a meek, quiet and peaceable disposition, never addicted to quarrels, but remarkable for putting up with injuries rather than resenting them; an acquaintance who went with him from his lodgings at seven o’clock that fatal evening with an intent to buy a few mutton chops for his supper, when he unfortunately met Clarke and Patman, who prevailed upon him to go and drink a pint of a beer, and that it appeared by their conversation, that Clarke was an absolute stranger, and that Patman was only a slight acquaintance, having no other knowledge of him than his dressing his hair about two years ago.

The above witnesses not being examined, I believe may be justly attributed to the brother’s being refused admittance into the Court, as he was the only relation the deceased had within a hundred and fifty miles of this place.

Whether this be real or imaginary grievance, I shall not take upon me to determine, but humbly submit it to the consideration of those worthy and judicious magistrates who superintend that Court; from whose virtue (should it appear to be the former) I make not the least doubt but such methods will be taken as may in future prevent the door keepers refusing admission to a poor unhappy person in a similar case.

If any person doubts the truth of what is here advanced, I refer him to the brothers Richard Morgan, who lives in Quaker’s buildings, near West Smithfield, who I am certain can prove the whole to be true by incontestable evidence. I am,

A FRIEND TO TRUTH AND JUSTICE

*The prosecution was carried on at the sole expence of the brother, the constable being admitted prosecutor unknown to him by Sir John Fielding, whilst he attended the Coroner’s Inquest.

Middlesex Journal (Saturday, July 28, 1770)
Many historians have explored the opposition to capital punishment and the use of torture in the eighteenth century, giving the impression that all critics of the justice system thought it brutal and severe. Some critics, however, felt that the English courts had become far too lenient in dealing with heinous crimes. This passage, taken from a longer editorial, is typical of the outrage expressed regarding the soft justice. “On February 21, 1770, Matthew and Patrick Kennedy were sentenced to death for the being moved by the instigation of the devil, on the 24th of December, on John Bigby, of malice aforethought, did make an assault; the said Matthew, with a certain iron poker, value 6 d. which he had and held in his right hand, on the hinder part of the head of him, the said John, feloniously, wilfully, and of malice aforethought, did strike and beat, giving to him on the hinder part of his head, one mortal bruise.” (OBSP) Their sister Polly, a charismatic prostitute who has well-connected clients—was able to intercede and have a reprieve granted, even though the brothers were found guilty and sentenced to death and dissection.

The Kennedies, for murdering a poor old man in the decline of nature, cruelly butchered as being not fit to crawl ‘tween heaven and earth, reprieved by the desire of the notorious Poll Kennedy Baretti, that peaceable Italian, for murdering a youth who set a girl to kiss him, a thing so inconsistent with his nature; Roscius [i.e. David Garrick] appeared in his friend’s behalf, assured them he was a harmless, inoffensive creature, and would not have stabbed him had not the prelude been provocation; reprieved. Where was justice then? Why fallen a sacrifice to the gilded persuasions of ministerial mandates. Not that I am for condemning without hesitation, but endeavour to let my words correspond with my conscience, and let the punishment be adequate to the offence. Let us unroll the records of time, and take a peep at futurity, and see it written, that none at this period but murderers and sodomites escaped the gallows.

*The Morning Chronicle* (Wednesday, August 19, 1772)
The following is the testimony of John Wyatt, who concerned himself not only with internal bleeding, but also with trying to ascertain who did what on the night of the stabbing. Clark's contradictions (and suggestions of friendship between the deceased and a streetwalker) were very damning evidence indeed, given more weight perhaps than the timing and severity of the wounds.

John Wyatt of Newport Street, Surgeon. Last Friday about 11 at night was sent for to the Middx. Hospital to examine the wounds of the deceased, & then saw two Wounds on the left side one on the Breast the other Belly, that he attended him sevr. times & treated him properly — Put no Questions to the Deceased till about 12 on Saturday night when he was dying & answered some of the Questions consistently & some not so — asked which of the two was stabbed first, the deceased answered that he was stabbed first, dropped down before the other was stabbed I repeated the Question because the other Man had told the Witness that he had was stabbed first, to which The deceased replied No I was stabbed first & dropped down before the other was stabbed, & believes the deceased understood this Question & Answer, & that when he put & repeated the Question to him Being in doubt whether he understood the Question on its being first put answered, he repeated the Question & bid him take time to answer which he accordingly did & answered with presence of mind — was informed upon the deceased being moved on Saturday night into the warm Bath it was discovered that he had another a third Wound on the left side about 3/2 inches below the armpit. Has examined the Wounds today, & found that on, the Belly penetrated the Cavity passed thro the Cromlung Misonlaica & into one of the Small Guts, & found a considerable quantity of extravasated blood in the Abdomen — the wound on the left Breast enterd the Cavity of the Thorax into the Lungs & passed thro a small portion of the Lungs & entered the Pericardium but did not wound the Heart. — The third Wound passed into the Cavity of the Thorax & wounded a portion of the Lungs. & has no doubt that these Wounds were the Cause of the death of the deceased & were given by a pointed Instrument -- Clark told the Witness in the Hospital at the Hospital that as he went down up the Haymarket he saw the Prisoner & Lady of the Gentlemans acquaintance there abusing a woman in the Street. Asked him how the affair happened. How came these Stabs? — Clark answered that the Gent had given three. — Asked if he had done it without any provocation he answered yes — Which of ye was it that struck him? None of us struck him he said. The Gentleman up stairs (meaning the deceased) pushed me against that Gent (meaning Patman) & I pushed him against the Gentleman — Then asked Clark how the Prisoner came to use the Lady ill, & upon repeating the Question he told him that he believed she damned him for a French Bougre that he ought to have his head clove with a Patten, but I did not see any Patten added he. Thought it was of consequence his Clark's having said the Woman was the deceased's acquaintance upon which the witness took Clark into the Board Room of the Hospital & asked him again whether the woman was an Acquaintance of the deceased when he denied that she was & also denied that he had ever said so.

J. Wyatt
Adjourned for furr. Evidence to 11 Octr. at the same place.
These two quotations were published in a new journal edited by William Kenrick, known today primarily for his satirical abuse of Samuel Johnson. In fact, Kenrick was an able writer and demanding critic. The passage footnoted in the first letter follows and is part of a severe review of Johnson’s recently-published pamphlet, Taxation no Tyranny (228-230). Kenrick believed Johnson’s style was too uniform, as did a writer for the Observer: “the sententious style of Dr. Johnson whether he is treating of a paradise of pleasure, or the pastimes of a puppet-shew, swells with the same pomposity of phrase.” Kenrick noted that “this pompous pseudo-philosopher [Johnson] affects to suppose cowardice incompatible with the character of an Italian bravo.”

Captain James Cook, in his Voyages (London, 1772) defines 'run amok': "To run amock is to get drunk with opium... to sally forth from the house, kill the person or persons supposed to have injured the Amock, and any other person that attempts to impede his passage."

We wish we could honestly join in recommending it to the reader: but this our deference to the publick, and regard for our own reputation absolutely forbid. To say the truth, having heretofore treated this Author, by way of example, with just severity as a moralist, we opened his book with the best disposition of shewing him all possible favour as a writer....But though the presumption of vanity might justly excite indignation, the imbecility of dotage and the incoherence of insanity, as naturally excite commiseration. Whether Mr. Baretti be still suffered, by his fried, to go about at large, we know not; but, were we of the circle, we should certainly take some means for his safety, and our own preservation...Indeed, a strait-waistcoat and a dark chamber may appear too rigid a discipline; the patient seeming fitter to be turned over to the nursery, to be kept quiet by the rod, and clean by a slabbering bib.

Farewell, also, to the vagabond author of these Billingsgate dialogues; with those puerilities we should not have so long troubled the reader, had not his credit as a writer been, for some years past, bolstered up by men of too much eminence in the republic of letters, to require so wretched a foil, though mean of spirit enough to accept of the fulsome encomiums of so contemptible a parasite.

London Review of English and Foreign Literature (October 1775)
See Page 230 Vol. I of the London Review: in which this Italian philosopher, is adduced to illustrate an argument of his friend Dr. Johnson, against the use of juries, in the trials of criminals.

“If they are condemned unheard, it is because there is no need of a trial. The crime is manifest and notorious. All trial is the investigation of something doubtful. An Italian philosopher observes, that no man desire to hear what he has already seen.”

Does not this strike at the root of all Trial by Jury? Nay, at all formal trial whatever? Let us put a case to this pompous politician. He says that there is no need of a trial, when the crime is manifest and notorious; for that all trial is the investigation of something doubtful.—We will suppose that his Italian philosopher, after taking leave of his countrymen at the Orange Coffee-house, should, in going up the Hay-market, be beset
with women of the town and their bullies; that, from allowed timidity of disposition, and a sufficiency of self-love to urge him to self-defence, he should draw his stiletto, run a muck, like a Malayan, at the mob and give some of them several mortal stabs: We will suppose this done at an early hour in the evening and in the presence of numbers; the instrument of death being found in the philosopher’s hands, and the victim of his timidity and self-love, carried in the presence of crowds to the hospital; where he dies. Let us now ask our Author, what would become of his philosophical friend, if Englishmen did not possess the inestimable right of a trial by Jury? Would it not be sufficient, on the Italian philosopher’s own principles, that the fact was manifest and notorious, to have him condemned unheard, there being no need of a trial. Surely in such a case the culprit who might be acquitted by a jury, on a formal arraignment, as an innocent philosopher, would be tucked up without troubling judge or jury as a guilty assassin—Let not this Author, therefore, sport with privileges so sacred, merely to figure away certamine ingenii, or to appear grateful for the paltry pension he receives as the wages of prostitution.

*London Review of English and Foreign Literature* (March 1775)
After considering the whole matter, the jury acquitted Mr. Baretti of murder and manslaughter, and gave a verdict of “Self-defence.”

The case of Mr. Baretti may be deemed one of the extraordinary kind. It seems evident, from the depositions made on his trial, and from the substance of his defence, that he had been assaulted by people of abandoned character; but the question is, whether he had a right to defend himself with such a weapon as he made use of; however, we shall not presume to decide on this question, as the jury solemnly determined that he *had*, by the verdict they gave.

Mr. Baretti’s character was of the utmost service to him on this solemn occasion. His learning, his connexions, his disposition, were all of the highest importance to him; and though the alleged crime was no less than murder, we well remember that he was bailed by four gentleman of distinguished character; so that he did not lay in Newgate even a single hour.

His generous refusal to accept of the usual favour of being tried by a jury composed of an equal number of Foreigners with Englishmen, furnishes an admirable proof of his disdain of taking any advantage; nor is it a small presumptive proof of his innocence: and his declaration that his regret would endure as long as life should last, though the trial should turn out as favourably as innocence might deserve, is greatly in favour of his humanity: and even the accidental occasion of the death of a fellow-creature, without sincerely lamenting the misfortune.

The people of this country may wonder that Mr. Baretti, an Italian by birth, should make his defence in such correct English: but it is to be remembered, that he had lived long among us, had studied our language with critical attention, and wrote it with a degree of purity scarce ever equaled by a Foreigner; to whom the English language, of all others, is said to be the most difficult of acquisition.

Upon the whole, this inference should be drawn from the present case:--those who would consult their own safety should avoid giving offence to others in the streets. The casual passenger has, at least, a right to pass unmolested; and he or she that may insult him cannot deserve pity, whatever consequence may follow.

Foreign gentleman, however, should consider that the best method of escaping the fury of a mob is to take shelter in the first house they may see open: there are few people who could be so hard of heart as not to afford them protections; and we must think, for the honour of our country, that the generality would protect them against their assailants.

The number of abandoned women, who infest the streets of the metropolis every evening, are in some measure to be pitied; but, when they add insult to indecent application, they ought to be punished with the utmost severity. But what must those men think of themselves, whose seductive art have reduced women to a state so deplorable? If they
have any sensibility left, horror and remorse must seize their minds: yet, however great
their sufferings, they are not deserving of pity.—Violators of all the laws of honour, they
have no claim to our compassion!

_The Malefactor's Register; or, the Newgate and Tyburn Calendar. Vol. 4._ (London,
[1779]): 383-385.
This poem from the anonymous Remarkable Trial of the Queen of Quavers and Her Associates (London, 1777?) demonstrates familiarity with Italian artists and with learned wit. Reynolds has so “hit” the subject when he painted Baretti that the Italian brays like the ass he is. The closing image of Baretti “hanging” is, of course, an allusion to the execution he escaped some years earlier. The truly remarkable fact about this work is that it might have been written by C. F. Badini.

Let vain Italians boast of Raphael’s name,
Reynolds, you’ll spread no less the British fame:
Free in his flights, yet master of each rule,
Your pencil is the bee of every School
On Tuscan wings you reach’d the bold sublime.
Correggio taught you higher still to climb,
The melting union of the tints to hit,
The perfect light and shade,—the painter’s wit,
Maratti the correctness we admire,
And Rosa to your fancy lent his fire:
From Titian you acquired the graceful ease,
And your own taste improv’d the art to please,
But with Bassano’s too, your genius suits,
And has a special knack at painting Brutes;
For when Bear-hate-ye’s portrait I survey,
You’ve hit him so, I swear I hear him bray:
 Critics, however, whisper that Knight
Ought to appear a little more polite:
They seem to wonder how it came to pass,
That in your cabines you keep an Ass:
‘Tis hard, they say, the creature should sit where
Lords, Ladies, Dukes, and Duchesses repair.
But for my part, I think you may reply,
There is as big an Ass plac’d in the sky;
I own such object tucked up in your room,
Reflects on all the rest an odious gloom;
But ‘tis to me no wonder I declare,
To see Bear-hate-ye hanging any where. (96-97)
It would be wonderful to know who this hostile letter. The author is obviously very familiar with Baretti and his works, although he also detests the Italian as a manipulative ingrate. The second document here, from the same period in which Baretti (with Johnson’s help) composed the musical setting of Horace, uses the imagery of Baretti stabbing to refer to an ill-produced performance of an opera by Metastasio.

For the St. James Chronicle.
To Mr. BARRETTI.
SIR,
I have been at your Carmen Seculare*; I have read your Travels and your Tryal, and I am willing to allow that a Man of Genius, of whatsoever Station he be, ought to meet with Encouragement; I have read too, the severe, and in some respects, the Just Chastisements you have given Mr. Sharp for laughing at your Religion, and abusing your Countrymen; And now Sir, in my Turn, I desire to ask you, and I expect (as Admiral Keppel said to Capt. Hood) a straight and direct Answer. Did you not, when last in Italy, publish there a Number of familiar Letters in Italian, addressed to your three Brothers; in which Letters, have you not spoken in the most disrespectful Manner of the English Nation, and represented the Laws and Customs of the Country not only in an unfavourable, but in a false Light? Have you not said that the common Prostitutes of the City of London, were Children of Eleven Years of Age? Have you not said that on Sundays (the Days of such Joy and Festivity in Catholick Countries) all was gloomy Sadness? That Officers were placed at the Corners of Streets to hurry away to Jail all such Persons who were disposed to be Jovial on Sundays, and that London is the sink of Europe? Answer me these Questions, and I will then put more to you; at present I will only ask you one more: Was you not ill at Genoa some Years ago; and did not an Englishman visit you there; (for there too you passed for an Englishman) and did not you tell him your Disorder; and how you got it? Now, pray Sir, tell me how old you said a certain Girl was, you then mentioned to that English Gentleman? It is true Sir, London, like Italy, has Prostitutes from Eleven to Fifty Years of Age. But would any Stranger believe, by your Familiar Letters, that full grown, and the finest Woman in the World, unfortunately, are the common Prostitutes of London, I must tell you too, Sir, that London, that Sink of Europe as it is, is the only Sink, in which you have been so liberally maintained; and a Sink in which you enjoy an Employment many honest Englishmen are full as well qualified to hold as yourself.

April 11 A Detester of Ingratitude
*There were not less than three hundred Italians at one Night to give Plaudits to this new created Concert. Had an Englishman established the same Entertainment, it would have sunk to nothing.
St. James Chronicle or the British Evening Post (Saturday, May 8, 1779).

OPERATIONAL INTELLIGENCE
KING’S THEATRE
Last Saturday night was revived a serious opera called L’Olimpiade, written by Metastasio, and castrated by one Signior Andrei, under the direction of Mons. Le Texier. We cannot help observing that the operator has shewn very little dexterity in his performance. Instead of employing the pruning-knife of a judicious critic, he seems to have handled the bloody knife of the Carmen Seculare’s queer translator, for he has most inhumanely stabbed the vitals of the piece.

*General Advertiser* (Tuesday, June 1, 1779)
Baretti was convinced that this letter and the three following, which he called “four scraps,” were written by John Bowle, the editor of Don Quixote with whom Baretti had a nasty feud that led to his writing Tolondon, one of his final works. We know, however, that Bowle was a member of the Essex Club, a group of admirers of Samuel Johnson who assisted him in the final months of his life. Thus, it is plausible that Bowle heard directly from Johnson the confession of perjury and collusion. That said, would a friend of Johnson be so heartless as to expose this in the public papers so soon after his death? To complicate matters further, there is also some tantalizing evidence that the letter came from the pen of James Boswell. See Tolondon, 116-132, for Baretti’s response to this scrap.

Mr. URBAN,
If it is reckoned among Dr. Johnson’s foibles, that he became apologist for two culprits arraigned for atrocious offences at the bar of justice, viz. Messieurs Savage and Baretti. Perhaps his friends will not allow that these undertaking should be imputed to him as blemishes in his character, but rather considered as the mere effects of humanity. But let us consider the circumstances under which the Doctor, is supposed to have composed the short speech which Savage spoke before sentence was passed upon him. It need not be mentioned what he has offered in the Life he wrote of that unhappy man in extenuation of his guilt. Mankind will judge very differently of his case, and the Doctor has no right to pass the judgment he has done upon the event of Savage’s trial. Savage himself says, that his offence was the effect of a casual absence of reason, and a sudden impulse of passion. Dr. Johnson said, that Savage always denied his being drunk, as had been generally reported. How is this consistent with the causal absence of reason which Savage mentioned at his trial was an apology for his conduct, &c. What Dr. Johnson said, in behalf of Baretti, as it was taken down at the trial, is exactly as follows.

Dr. Johnson. I believe I began to be acquainted with Mr. Baretti about the year 53 or 54. I have been intimate with him. He is a man of literature, a very studious man, a man of great diligence. He gets his living by study. I have no reason to think he was ever disordered with liquor in his life. A man that I never knew to be otherwise than peaceable, and a man that I take to be rather timorous.
Q. Was he addicted to pick up women in the street?
Dr. J. I never knew that he was.
Q. How is he as to his eye-sight?
Dr. J. He does not see me now, nor I do not see him. I do not believe he could be capable of assaulting any body in the street, without great provocation.

Observe. The accusation was, that Baretti had murdered a man by stabbing him, and it was in evidence that he had stabbed two men, one of whom died of his wound. What says Dr. Johnson in his defence? R. Baretti, says he, is a man of letters, and a studious man, he never picks up prostitutes in the street, that I know of; he is short-sighted, and so am I; and, I believe, would not assault a man without provocation.” This puts one in mind of the Dutch printer’s defence in answer to Milton’s accusations. “You are a crafty knave, says Milton, but says the printer, I am a good arithmetician.” “You fled from your
creditors, says Milton, for debt; but, says the printer, I published tables of signs and tangents."

When his defence of Baretti was mentioned to Dr. Johnson, the Doctor replied, “I was not alone in that affair.” It was answered, “Your own conduct was no better for that circumstance, unless you would have been guided by your fellow deponents in every thing else.” But Dr. Johnson’s commiseration for unhappy criminals was remarkable. And as he had some success in his operations on Savages account, perhaps he might think that a little of his benevolence of the same kind might save Dr. Dodd; but the impunity of Savage and Baretti was not sufficiently edifying to the publick in its consequences to authorize the extending the same indulgence to the unhappy Divine.

Yours, &c. QUERIST

_Gentleman’s Magazine_ (July, 1785)
D-45

This fascinating letter uses Baretti’s bilingualism—the talent of which he was most proud—to expose him as a deceitful, Janus-faced writer. When Baretti revised letters he had written to his three brothers, in Italian, for publication in England, he omitted the letter discussed here; it gave the impression, whether or not it was accurate, that Baretti held two quite different opinions about London and Londoners, and the real Baretti was, of course, the one writing in Italian. Baretti discusses this letter in Tolondron, 133-140, attacking its author for the “stink of his words.”

Mr. URBAN,
As you have mentioned Dr. Johnson’s partiality to Mr. Baretti, give me leave to observe, that Mr. Baretti is unworthy of any partiality from Britons; for though, in his English publications, he speaks of England and Englishmen with that great regard which he, who has been so well received among us, ought, yet, when he returned to his native country, he published a number of familiar letters there, addressed to his two brother, wherein he says, “London is the sink of Europe; that the common prostitutes are children of ten years of age; and that on Sundays men are placed at the corners of the streets to hurry away to jail all kinds of disorderly people.” It is some years since I read those letters, and therefore do not remember many particulars; but, upon the whole, I do aver, that he has represented England, and London in particular, not as it really is, or then was, but as he wished it to be. It was, however, in this sink of Europe, where he stabbed a man to death, and where he was tried and acquitted of murder.—Mr. B. is an adept at a translation; and it is wished he would favour the publick with a translation of his familiar Letters, wherein he give his real opinion of England and of Englishmen.
Yours, &c. ANTI-JANUS

Gentleman’s Magazine (August 1785)
In fact, Baretti is not mentioned in Johnson’s will, although Johnson did bequeath to “Mr. Sastres, the Italian master, the sum of five pounds, to be laid out in books of piety for his own use.” It was a crowded funeral:

Eight coaches and four, containing the Literary Club, and others of the Doctor's friends, invited by the executors; viz. Dr. Burney, Mr. Malone, Mr. Steevens, the Rev. Mr. Strahan, Mr. Ryland, Mr. Hoole, Dr. Brocklesby, Mr. Cruikshanks, Mr. Nichols, Mr. Low, Mr. Paradise, General Paoli, Count Zenobia, Dr. Butter, Mr. Holder, Mr. Seward, Mr. Metcalf, Mr. Sastres, Mr. Des Moulins, the Rev. Mr. Butt, Dr. Horsley, Dr. Farmer, Dr. Wright; to whom may be added, Mr. Cooke (who was introduced by Dr. Brocklesby), and the Doctor's faithful servant, Francis Barber. Two coaches and four, containing the pall-bearers, viz. Mr. Burke, Mr. Windham, Sir Charles Bunbury, Sir Joseph Banks, Mr. Colman, and Mr. Langton. After these followed two mourning coaches and four, filled with gentlemen who, as volunteers, honoured themselves by attending this funeral. These were the Rev. Mr. Hoole, the Rev. Mr. East, Mr. Henderson, Mr. Mickle, Mr. Sharp, Mr. C. Burney, and Mr. G. Nicol.

In Tolondron 141-151, Baretti writes a rebuttal of this letter, pointing out that he was in Bath “struggling with deep snows,” on the day of the funeral. The quotation that concludes the letter is from Johnson’s A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland (London, 1775), 192.

Mr. URBAN,

In extenuation of Dr. Johnson’s foibles respecting two of the culprits, p. 497, it may be urged, that though he had been long acquainted with the second [Baretti], he did not discover the man till very late. It is well known to several of his friends, that for more than the last thirteen months of his life all intercourse betwixt them was at an end, and a renewal, though solicited, was rejected on the part of the Dr. The no-notice of him, either in his will, or at his funeral, farther corroborates this, if other proof were wanting. In a word, he seems to have consigned him over to the solitary patronage of a man, who, to use his own words, “if falsehood flatters his vanity, will not be very diligent to detect it.” Yours, &c. X. Y.

*Gentleman’s Magazine* (September 1785)
One of the loudest and most incoherent tirades against Baretti, this letter is written in three languages, English, Italian, and Latin. The mistakes in the Italian suggest that the author, or the typesetter, was not a very careful linguist. “Travaccio” should be “bravaccio,” “sealtrō” should likely be “scaltro” and there are other mistakes as well. Baretti, in critically refuting this letter, said it was written by “a ragamuffin of deep thought” named John Coglione. Baretti’s complex retort to this letter can be read in Tolondron 152-164.

Mr. URBAN, Sept. 6
I have thought that the following words of Valerius Maximus, lib. ix. c. 2., describe pretty exactly the person of a man who has been mentioned in your two last Magazines, Truculent facies, violent spiritus, vox terribilis, ora minis, et cruentis imperiis referta. Can we hesitate a moment on whom to fix the following character? Pieno d’ignoranza, e di scelleragine, e sealtrō, e petulantē, e sfacciato, e maldicente, e adulatorē, e travaccio, e vigliacco, e dissolutō, e maţo, e fregiato in somma d’ogni abominevole dote; a man full of ignorance and wickedness, sly, petulant, impudent, a slanderer and flatterer, a bully and poltroon, dissolute, fool, and, in short, adorned with every abominable endowment. See La Frustra [sic] Letteraria di Aristarco Scanmabue [sic], p. 287.

Though your correspondent ANTI-JANUS, p. 608., has advanced nothing but what is to be confirmed from the 12th of his “Lettere familiari a suoi tre Fratelli,” [sic] to his three brothers; yet that he is unworthy of partiality from Britons is not to be too hastily credited, as some Britons, in this age of affluence, in this total exemption from taxations, have thought him deserving of a pension: and who dares to controvert the propriety of such conduct? A translator from that language, in which this deserving man boasts himself to be an adept, at the same time he arranged him of total ignorance in it, applied to him Johnson’s famous distich of

London! The needy villain’s gen’ral home,
The common-shore of Paris and of Rome.

An account of his great worth and learning may be seen in “Some Remarks on the extraordinary conduct of the Knight of the ten Stars,” &c. for which see last Monthly Review, p. 156. With some slight variations, his Letters are translated, and incorporated into his Travels,
Yours,
J. C.

Gentleman’s Magazine (October 1785)
The following three documents relate to John Bowle, an editor of Cervante’s Don Quixote. Although the novel was already translated into English, by Thomas Shelton (1612), by Charles Jervas (1742) and by the Scottish novelist Tobias Smollett (1755), no edition contained the extensive annotation and critical apparatus of John Bowle. Today Bowle is regarded in Spain as one of the greatest editors of the classic work, but Baretti had a much less favorable opinion. When he learned that Bowle was not fluent in Spanish—and when Bowle offended him in print and seemed indifferent to his advice—Baretti wrote one of his final works, Tolondron. The title of the work means “blockhead” and refers, of course, to Bowle.

Poor Bowles has reason to regret that he ever entered into a controversy with Baretti. To be called a Tolondron is the least piece of severity, which he has received from the late publication under that title. He has certainly been very roughly treated by his adversary.

However Baretti may treat Bowles’s pretensions to erudition with contempt, no person who has read his edition of Don Quixote will deny him the praise of being elaborate.

The learners of the Spanish language will find but little improvement from the controversy between Bowles and Baretti, which like most literary controversies, has degenerated into personal abuse. Instead of establishing the rules of emphasis and accent, they seem anxious to drag each others crimes and weaknesses into publick light; and every impartial spectator, begins to exclaim in the spirit of a Parliament man, To order gentlemen! To order! All this may be very true, but it is totally irrevalent [sic] to the subject of debate!

Morning Chronicle (Saturday, August 12, 1786)

MR. BOWLES

The Rev. Mr. BOWLES, who lately died at Idmiston, near Salisbury, was the object of BARETTI’S literary rancor, on account of that gentleman’s having published an edition of Don Quixote.

Mr. BOWLES, was possessed of deep and various learning. His taste for the celebrated novel of CERVANTES, induced him to study the Spanish language, in which he made a great progress, and obtained a more comprehensive knowledge than most persons not of Spanish origin.

His zeal for the celebration of Don Quixotte [sic] was so ardent, that he gave the world a very elegant edition of that admirable work, which provoked the furious Italian, who published a book under the title of Tolondron (fool or dunce) in which he endeavoured to detect the ignorance and expose the mistakes of Mr. BOWLES.
Tolondron was, however, written with so much asperity, and with so offensive a violation of good manners, that the work never effected its intended purpose, but excited indignation at first, and soon sunk into contempt and obscurity.

The private character of Mr. BOWLES was so mild and benevolent that the publication of Tolondron was considered as an attack upon virtue itself, and therefore the number of Mr. BOWLES’S friends considerably increased.

His death was widely regretted by the poor, to whom he was a firm friend. 
*Morning Post* (Wednesday, November 5, 1788)

**TOLONDRON**

Malevolence never assumes so disgusting a form as when, under the mask of doing justice to the memory of the dead, it attempts to traduce the living. In a panegyric on the learning and benevolence of the late Rev. Mr. Bowles, of Tolmiston [sic], which appeared in a morning paper a few days ago, and was on Friday reprinted in another, it is said that his elegant edition of Don Quixote so provoked the *furious Italian*, that he published a book under the title of Tolondron, written with so much asperity and so offensive a violation of good manners, that it excited indignation, and was considered as an attack upon virtue itself. To couple the antecedent and consequent, without any regard to the intermediate terms, is not a fair representation of the truth. Tolondron was not written by the Italian in consequence of provocation received from the elegant edition of Don Quixote, but in vindication of his own character from certain very inelegant epithets bestowed upon him by the Editor, in conversation, in writing, and in print, on account of some marginal notes which he had the ill luck to write, with a pencil, in a copy of the Don Quixote. The rough drollery of Tolondron, and the ponderous annotations of the elegant edition, now moulder in quiet oblivion, perhaps on the same shelf; and the friends of Mr. Bowles, if they wish to erect a monument to his memory, will not forward the work by disturbing their repose.

*Gazetteer* (Monday, November 10, 1788)
In the following anonymous letter to the editor, Mr. Baldwin, the author is appalled by Baretti’s behavior, altogether more corrupt than Mrs. Thrale’s poor choice in marrying an “Italian singing man.” In a moment strangely reminiscent of October 6th, Baretti is reprimanded for not acting like a gentleman, for being rough and rude.

To the printer of the St. J. CHRONICLE

SIR,

Having just opened one of the monthly publications for June 1788, I found therein an Extract, the only Part I have seen of Baretti’s Remarks on the Correspondence between Mrs. Piozzi and Dr. Johnson; and though I cannot esteem Madame Piozzi for her Conduct in marrying an Italian Singing Man, I cannot avoid admiring her as a Woman of great Genius, and an excellent Writer. As to Mr. Baretti, I know him not, otherwise than now and then having read some of the Productions of his Pen, which led me to consider him as a Man of some Sense, Literature, and Learning; but I will venture to pronounce, in the Face of the Publick, to whom I now appeal, that what he has written, as far as I have read in that Magazine, is the simplest, rudest, and most ungentlemanly Production I ever read: and proves, beyond a Doubt, that it came from the Pen of an Italian, who is angry out of his Wits, if he ever possessed any. His Language is scurrilous to her and indecent and rude even to his Readers: And I will venture to pronounce also it is such as no Man, who possess the most distant Idea of Propriety, could have made use of to a Gentlewoman of any Condition, much less to a Woman who all Men of Sense must agree possess Talents sufficient to demand much Admiration. Is Mr. Baretti serious, when he insinuates that Dr. Johnson wished to possess one of those Salisbury Hands he so foolishly exposes. Did Dr. Johnson think of making his Court to Mrs. Thrale, by troubling her with such repeated Accounts of his personal Disorders? That Insinuation is Folly in the Extreme. Is Mr. B.’s own Person so perfect and captivating that he must hold out the Imperfections of Mrs. Thrale? She may have a bad Hand for aught I now, but she used her Pen with it in a Manner that Mr. Baretti would be happy to imitate. Will Mr. Baretti give me Leave to ask him a Question or two relative to the double Use he make of his Pen, for though I know what fine flattering Things he has said of England and of Englishmen, when writing for their Information and Emolument; I know also in what Manner he speaks of Englishmen and England, when he wrote his familiar Letters to his Brothers in Italian, when in Italy!! Pray, Mr. Baretti, is London “the Sink of Europe?” Is not Paris more like a Sink? “Are the common Prostitutes of London Girls of ten or eleven Years of Age? Or are they not (the more is the Pity) the finest Women in Europe? Was the Condition he was found in at Genoa some Years since the Consequence of an Italian Girl’s Favour of ten Years of Age or of a London Prostitute so young? “Are Peace-Officers stationed at the Corner of all the Streets in London to hurry those to Gaol on a Sunday who are found to be the least disorderly?”

In short, I have many more Queries to put to this favoured Italian, when he has answered these; and so, Mr. Baldwin, till then, I am his and your Humble Servant,

A QUERIST.

St. James Chronicle (Tuesday, November 25, 1788)
The following is a marvelous showpiece of biting satire, perhaps not in very good taste:

Baretti had not been dead a week. The author could be Badini, who admired and quotes Alexander Pope frequently; the lines that conclude the letter are from Book XVII of Pope’s translation of Homer’s Iliad. It is dangerous to attribute such letters to single correspondents, however, as they might very well have been composed by two or more like-minded individuals.

BARETTI

Let not the death of Baretti pass unnoticed by the World.

Baretti was a wit and a scholar—acknowledged such by Nations not his own:--35 years he lived in a foreign country, in whose language he was such a master, that he would wield it in attack on its inhabitants, sometimes better than they could in their defence.—Often pleasing, yet never praising any one, in book or conversation!—Long supported by the private bounty of his friends he delighted rather to insult than flatter: he at length obtained competence from a publick which he detested!—and died in the refusal of that aid he deemed useless, leaving no debts, but THOSE OF KINDNESS, undischarged! Expressing no regret of the past, no fear of the future!

His spirit was indeed not only independent, but haughty. His prejudices were strong. He was prone to misconceive himself the subject of slight and injury. His anger, though unprovoked, was cruel. His resentments, quite unauthorised, were excessive,—his hostilities, when once begun, had the barbarous infamy, of never ending—His aversions were irreclaimably savage. A death bed could not tame them!

The Hornet in Homer, is made to illustrate the flighty mischief of Menelaus. What did for him, may also do for Baretti too—

So is the vengeful HORNET—Soul all o’er,
Repuls’d in vain—and thirsty still for gore!
BOLD SON OF AIR AND HEAT—On angry wings
Untam’d—untir’d—he turns! Attacks! And stings!

Whitehall Evening Post (Saturday May 9, 1789)
This memorial article was pieced together from at least three submissions. The first part is a (D-50), the second (D-48) and the third from a “valuable friend.” This third section displays an effort to galvanize Baretti’s legacy following his death, softening “those accounts which have represented him as a man of a brutal and ferocious temper,” as the author of the Morning Post wrote. Early biographers in Italy as well struggled to represent Baretti without bias and to emphasize “the better qualities.”

Joseph Baretti, esq.--Mrs. Piozzi has reason to rejoice in the death of Mr. B. for he had a very long memory, and malice enough to relate all he knew. That he was a wit and scholar, is acknowledged by nations not his own. Thirty-five years he lived in a foreign country, in whose language he was such a mater, that he would wield it in attack on its inhabitants, sometimes better than they could in their defence. Often pleasing, yet never praising anyone in book or conversation! Long supported by the private bounty of friends, he delighted rather to insult than flatter. He at length obtained a competence from a publick which he detested; and died in the refusal of that aid he deemed useless. An old correspondent has sent the following strictures on this extraordinary character: “Now Mr. Baretti is gone, it cannot be amiss to repeat, what I have often asserted before, viz. That he met with a better reception in this kingdom than he merited, either for his abilities or his gratitude! And therefore, whatever you may say in your Obituary of his merits, let me give the following specimen of his love and gratitude to a kingdom who fed him, caressed him, and who favoured him when he exercised one of his own country practices in the public streets. I know, when he was writing to Englishmen, or in the English language, the flattering manner in which he expressed himself; but, Mr. Urban, I have seen what he wrote and printed at home (Italy) relative to this country, in three or four familiar letters, as he styles them, to his brothers; and there, it is most reasonable to suppose, he delivered his real sentiments. In these letters he calls London the sink of Europe; he says, the common prostitutes are children of eleven years of age, and that officers of justice are placed at the corners of all the streets on Sundays, to hurry away to prison all persons who are partaking of those rational diversions, which are allowable in all Catholic countries. Yet, when he lay in the most deplorable condition in an inn in Genoa, and there passed on his own country as an Englishman, Mr. Horne Tooke can tell a tale, and will, I dare say, if he be asked, which would shew that the charge he has made against English children would have come nearer the truth had he said Italian children of eleven years of age.—The attack too he made upon Mr. Sharpe, an ingenious and an honest man, to whom this kingdom is obliged, was mean and spiteful, nor did it do your friend Dr. Johnson any credit in assisting him in it. I neither know nor care for Madam Piozzi; but yet I think Baretti’s attack upon her is in many parts false, and in all malicious, and that he has seldom written but with the stiletto in one hand, and the pen in the other. As I did not personally know the foreigner; I leave you, Mr. Urban, who perhaps did, to point out his virtues, for virtues he certainly must have possessed, or he could not have met with so many friends and protectors in a strange country.”—Thus far had we actually printed, when we received from a valuable friend the following particulars, which we gladly annex to our account, thought the conclusion of it has not yet come to hand. “So much asperity of language has been employed to exhibit Mr.
Baretti in an odious light to the public, that it is but justice to a foreigner, who lived among us six and thirty years of his life, to produce some testimonies of his better qualities; and shew that, though his severity had created him enemies, his talents, conversation, and integrity, had conciliated the regard of many valuable friends and acquaintance. The writer of this account was acquainted with him for the last seventeen years of his life, and such particulars as he collected, either from conversation with him, or from others concerning him, he thinks it a duty to lay before the publick, through a channel that presents better hopes of duration than a daily paper. Joseph Baretti was a native of Piedmont, with little patrimony, except his education. To his education he was indebted for his knowledge of the Latin language; to his own industry, for the acquisition of French, English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Greek he was not acquainted with, and was never ashamed to confess and lament it; nor is it improbable, but that the facility he naturally experienced in acquiring modern languages, added disgust to the difficulty of making a proficiency in Greek. In the languages he did possess, his knowledge was not merely superficial and colloquial, but accurate and critical to a great degree; and though his countrymen have sometimes denied him the credit of possessing the Tuscan purity in his Italian writings, he failed possibly in those little niceties of the dialect, which not but a native speaker can discover; and certainly it is that he had labored so earnestly to attain that excellence, as totally to neglect the Piedmontese, and became incapable of conversing in it with fluency and propriety. It is no small testimony of his industry or abilities, that he was a publisher in the Italian, French, and the English languages. Of his proficiency in English, we are the best judges; and if we say that he failed in the manner, rather than the language and phrase of our best writers, we must still leave him the merit of being able to amuse, delight, and instruct—a merit none will deny him who have read his “Travels in Spain,” or his “Remarks upon Mr. S. Sharpe’s Letter from Italy.” His “Travels in Spain” is the work by which his friends would wish him to be remembered; and as he received 500l. for this work from the bookseller it might have been a lesson to teach him, that where profit was most attainable, it was most creditable likewise, and ought to have deferred him from commencing that style of invective by which he was ever a loser. Large supplies, however, like this, were not the produce of every day. We ought not to be surprised, therefore, if we find Barretti engaged in the humbler offices which almost every man must submit to who has no profession but his pen. It was want that compelled him to be a corrector of the press for Spanish and Italian works, to frame dialogues for instruction in those languages, or compile dictionaries in the service of booksellers, in order to find the means of a regular support. The latter labours of his life, which claim the title of originality, were “A Letter to M. de Voltaire,” in French, treating very freely his structures upon Shakespeare. His “Tolondron,” in English a severe invective against Mr. Bowle, the translator of “Don Quixote;” and some remarks in Italian upon the conduct of the Bishop of Pistoia, who is supposed to be instigated by the present Duke of Tuscany to prepare the minds of his subjects for throwing off the spiritual tyranny of Rome. Of the first of these works little need be said to recommend it to Englishmen, when they are told it is in defence of Shakespeare, the god of their idolatry. But it is in reality a sensible work, combating the volatile and impetuous Frenchmen on his own ground, and proving, to a demonstration, that, though ignorant of English and Italian, he had, with out scruple, written in the one language, and criticized the authors of the other. The “Tolondron” contains a series of the grossest abuse upon
Mr. Bowle, which nothing could justify, unless Mr. Bowle was the author of the publications in the Gentleman’s Magazine, imputing the crime of murder to a man assaulted by pickpockets in the streets of London. Baretti certainly thought Mr. Bowle the author of those charges, and took therefore this severe, though perhaps unwarrantable, mode of retaliation. It is not even food of its kind, but must appear far more reprehensible to those who are not aware of the provocation. The publication in Italian relating to the Bishop of Pistoia, the writer of this account never saw, and can therefore pass no judgment upon it.

Having said this of his writings, it may be necessary to add something of his fortunes. He had himself been heard to say, that he was induced to come to England first, about six and thirty years ago, by an Irish nobleman (Lord Charlemont, it is supposed), to whom he had the opportunity of shewing some civilities in Italy. What were the prospects held out to him are not so evident; but certain it is, form his first setting foot on English ground (tho’ he has been reproached with not loving the English nation) his attachments to the country and people was fixed, and incapable of diminution. It was after this first arrival that he returned to Italy, and commend the publication of “Frusta letteraria,” which brought him a considerable profit, but raised such a flame in Venice, as to make his stay in that country at least disagreeable, if not dangerous. With the profits of this work, and with unabated love to England, he returned to this country, and had the address or good fortunate to introduce himself to the acquaintance of Dr. Johnson, Mr. Burke, Mr. Garrick, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and most of those who were distinguished for their talents or professional abilities in the metropolis. How he supported himself before he was a master of the English language is uncertain; but his spirit and moderation were such, that he was under pecuniary obligations to very few of his acquaintance, that he sought the assistance of no one by servility, and, when he received it, was in that absolute distress which his friends could not fail to discover, and which they were ever more ready to afford than he to accept. It was not distress that compelled him to take refuge in the hospitality of Mr. Thrale (as has been suggested): he had lately received 500l. for his “Spanish Travels,” but was induced by Dr. Johnson (contrary to his own determination of never becoming a teacher of languages) to undertake the instruction of Mr. Thrale’s daughters in Italian. He was either nine or eleven years almost entirely in that family, though he still rented a lodging in town, during which period he expended his own 500l. and received nothing in return for his instruction but the participation of a good table, and 150l. by way of presents.—Instead of his letters to Mrs. Piozzi in the European Magazine, had he told this plain unvarnished tale, he would have convicted that lady of avarice and ingratitude, without incurring the danger of a reply, or exposing his memory to be insulted by her advocates.

Gentleman’s Magazine (May, 1789)
This document is the continuation of the “Anecdotes and Character of the late Mr. Baretti” (D-50), sent to the printers after the first part. The author opens by objecting to the fact that his piece was attached to a “bitter invective.” Despite the author’s desire to be impartial, the magazine editor created yet another Baretti controversy, this time over his legacy. Clearly, this sketch is not intended to gloss over Baretti’s faults, as man and writer, such as impatience. The final line prompts us to wonder why Baretti’s “numerous correspondents” would be happy to hear that Baretti’s papers were “burnt without inspection.”

Mr. Urban June 25.
When I determined to give you an account of Mr. Baretti, I meant not to enter into altercation with any of his calumniators, but to give you a plain narrative of what the publick might wish to know concerning him, and with such a degree of impartiality, that though the account might appear visibly to come from the hand of a friend, it should not be subject to the charge of falsehood or concealment. The nature of your publication induced you to subjoin this narrative to a bitter invective against him, which gives it the air of an answer or counterpart; no such object was in view at the time, and no notice of that invective shall be taken at present, but to remark that the author of it who accuses Baretti of writing with a pen in one hand, and a stiletto in the other, is himself guilty of the charge, while he is imputing it to another. Yours, &c. &c.

* * *

The person of BARETTI was athletic, his countenance by no means attractive, his manners apparently rough, but not unsocial, his eye when he was inclined to please or be pleased, when he was conversing with young people, and especially young women, cheerful and engaging: he was fond of conversing with them, and his conversation almost constantly turned upon subject of instruction: he had the art of drawing them into correspondence, and wished by this means to give them the power of expression and facility of language; while he himself conveyed to them lessons on the conduct of life; and the best answer that can be given to all those accounts which have represented him as a man of brutal and ferocious temper, is the attachment which many of his young friends set while he was living, and preserve to his memory now he is no more. He was not impatient of contradiction, unless where contempt was implied; but alive in every feeling where he thought himself traduced, or his conduct impeached. His Tolondon, and letters to Mrs. Piozzi bespeak his temper; and as invective always finds its way to notice, more readily than any other subject, it is not to be wondered at, if these have left more impression on the public, than his other works. But let it be remembered, that in both instances he was attacked.

Mr. Bowle treated him (or was believed to treat him) as a murderer; Mrs. Piozzi, as a man of an unfeeling and ungrateful heart; he suffered by his irritability on these and other occasions. His letter to Voltaire produced him nothing but a few copies to give to his friends; his Tolondon never sold, his letters in the European Magazine he gave to the printer. In every other intercourse with the world he was social, easy, and conversible;
his talents were neither great nor splendid; but his knowledge of mankind was extensive, and his acquaintance with books in all modern languages which are valuable, except the German, was universal: his conduct in every family, where he became an inmate, was correct and irreproachable; neither prying, not inquisitive, nor intermeddling, but affable to the interiors, and conciliatory between the principals: in others which he visited only, he was neither intrusive nor unwelcome; every ready to accept an invitation when it was cordial, and never seeking it where it was cold and affected.

His love of the English nation was sincere and unbounded; he might have lived in want at home, probably as much as he experienced in England, but if his conversation may be depended on, he preferred his humble pension here, to double the amount in his own country; his assistance to every Englishman who wished to visit Italy, his readiness to give or procure recommendations was constant, and many have received civilities and attentions from his family, who were unconscious that requests for that purpose had been transmitted. His friendship with Dr. Johnson was unbroken for five and twenty years, the coolness which arose just before the Doctor’s death, he had stated with great simplicity in his Tolondonron. It is an additional proof of his impatience under slight or contempt, but his reference of the abilities and worth of his friend was unimpaired to the last moment of his life; they had been friends in distress; and one evening, when they had agreed to go to the tavern, a foreigner in the streets, by a specious tale of distress, emptied the Doctor’s purse of the last half guinea it contained; they took their supper, however, as they had agreed, but when the reckoning came, what was the Doctor’s surprize upon his recollecting that his purse was totally exhausted! Baretti had fortunately enough to answer the demand, and has often declared that it was impossible for him not to reverence a man who could give away all that he was worth, without recollecting his own distress. In point of morals he was irreproachable; with regards to faith, he was rather without religion than irreligious. The fact was, possibly, that he had been disgusted with the religious of Italy before he left it, and was too old when he came to England to take an attachment to the purer doctrines of the Protestant church; but his skepticism was never offensive to those who had settled principles, never held out or defended in company, never proposed to mislead or corrupt the minds of young people. He ridiculed the libertine publications of Voltaire, and the reveries of Rousseau; he detested the French *pour les femmes de chambre*, and though too much a philosopher (in his own opinion) to subscribe to any church, he was a friend to church establishments.

If this was the least favourable part of his character, the best was his integrity, which was, in every period of his distress, constant and unimpeachable. He had once trespassed upon Mr. Cadell’s liberality to the amount of 70l. with little hope of discharging the obligation; fortune relieved him, by bringing him an Eastern present from a young lady, who had been one of those he took a pleasure to instruct; she was just married to Mr. Middleton in Bengal, and transmitted him, among other treasures, a diamond of some value; the use he made of it, was to lodge it in Mr. Cadell’s hands, till it could be sold, and the debt discharged. His regularity in every claim was conspicuous: his wants he never made known but in the last extremity: and his last illness, if it was caused by vexation, would doubtless have been prevented by the intervention of many friends who were ready to supply him, if his own scruples, strengthened by the hopes of receiving his
due from day to day, had not induced him to conceal his immediate distress till it was too late to assist him.

Such was the character of Joseph Baretti, as it appeared to the writer of these anecdotes. Those who never lived with him, may perhaps draw contrary inferences from his disputes with Mr. Bowle and Mrs. Piozzi; but if any of those who knew his course of life, should think more has been said of him than he deserves, the press is open to their remarks.” A panegyrist might think himself called upon to reply to them; but the writer of this account knowing what he has said is the truth, cannot object to other truths being laid before the public. It may be some satisfaction to his numerous correspondents to be informed that every letter in his possession was burnt without inspection.

*Gentleman’s Magazine* (June, 1789)
The Lettere familiari were published in Milan in 1762, not long after Baretti returned from his first period in London. Baretti was trying to impress the Italians with his national pride and the downside of London, when he wrote the letter mentioned, translated below (D-57). Notice the language of the duel or challenge, though the author hastens to point out that he does not want to fight. Whoever the author of this letter is, there can be no doubt that he was wrote similar letters to the St. James Chronicle, in May 1779 (signed A Detester of Ingratitude) and late November 1788 (signed A QUERIST). Pottle points out that Boswell used the signature QUERIST on other occasions. (The Literary Career of James Boswell, (229-230). But why would Boswell claim to never have spoken a word to Baretti in his life? John Horne Tooke (1736-1812) was a politician and philologist. See (D-44) and (D-49).

Mr. URBAN, Aug. 18.
The friends and defender of Baretti, p. 569, has certainly an undoubted right to give him the character he thinks his deceased friend merited; but he has not right whatever to say that I hold the dagger, and the pen, which I have put into the hands of Baretti. I have said that which I believe to be strictly true: I have seen his familiar letters to his two brothers, written in Italian, and printed, I think, at Bologna. He tells them, “that London is the sink of Europe,” yet Baretti had then seen Paris; “that the prostitutes of London are children of ten or eleven years of age, and that officers of justice are paced at the corners of all the streets on Sundays, to hurry away all disorderly people they meet to a goal.” &c. It is many years since I saw those books, but I am confident they have the name of Joseph Baretti prefixed to the title-page. His attack upon Mr. Sharp was very illiberal, his attack upon Mrs. Piozzi more so; and he ought not to have so stigmatized the capital of a kingdom which received him, fed him, and in which he found so many friends, with the appellation of being the sink of Europe. I appeal to any man who has seen Paris, whether that city is not ten times more sinking than London? And I appeal to Mr. Horne Tooke, to repeat, for he can, if he be asked, the disorder Baretti labored under at Genoa, when he lay confined to his bed under the character of a sick English gentleman, and the age of the child to whom he owed his Italian malady. —And now, Mr. Urban, I do assure you, that I never spoke a word to Baretti in my life; that I despise the lady he has so be-spattered for her latter conduct; and that I am as much a stranger to her, as I was to him: and if his defender will leave his name with you, Mr. Urban, mind is at his service. I do not mean this as a challenge to fight, but a challenge to prove what I have asserted, and that I have not “a dagger in my hand,” nor malevolence in my heart. I have said, and thought, ever since I saw Baretti’s familiar Italian letters, that man of his country, so received, so fed, and so caressed in mine, should have honoured and loved its inhabitants, for many of his betters, and natives of England, would have been grateful for the good things he met with in the sink of Europe. His attack upon our Sundays was to contrast the levity of Italian and French Sundays; and I am sure those letters contained many other gross falsehoods relative to the customs and manners of the English nation, which did not become Mr. Baretti’s pen, much less his Italian press. A foreigner, who, when writing to the English, compliments the nations, and who when writing to his countrymen bespatters them, is, in
my opinion, a despicable wretch; and I call upon his defender, to defend him from these charges, or expose me. If he does not, he will stand self-condemned.

_Gentleman's Magazine_ (August, 1789)
Of all the difficult relationships in the life of Baretti, none was more strained than that he had with Mrs. Thrale, a woman in whose country house he lived for several years. He had been hired to teach Italian to her daughter, not a position that would create great hostilities. But it certainly did, and Mrs. Thrale reports that when Baretti finally packed his bags and left, he did not even say goodbye. Baretti deserved more respect and a higher salary from the wife of a wealthy brewer. Her young daughter’s private tutor was, after all, a dictionary writer, a published poet, and a hard-nosed literary critic.

This reprinting of (D-52) has a slightly different conclusion.

Character of the late Mr. BARETTI., not by Mrs. PIOZZI.
The person of BARETTI was athletic, his countenance by no means attractive, his manners apparently rough, but not unsocial, his eye when he was inclined to please or be pleased, when he was conversing with young people, and especially young women, cheerful and engaging: he was fond of conversing with them, and his conversation almost constantly turned upon subject of instruction: he had the art of drawing them into correspondence, and wished by this means to give them the power of expression and facility of language; while he himself conveyed to them lessons on the conduct of life; and the best answer that can be given to all those accounts which have represented him as a man of brutal and ferocious temper, is the attachment which many of his young friends set while he was living, and preserve to his memory now he is no more.

He was not impatient of contradiction, unless where contempt was implied; but alive in every feeling where he thought himself traduced, or his conduct impeached.

* * *

He was charitable in the extremes: and, like Goldsmith, would divide the last shilling he possessed with a friend in distress. He also kept small money of various kinds in a pocket by itself to relieve distress. He was improvident enough to be always anticipating his income, and spent a good deal of it in post-chaise hire in travelling through the country. He was no dealer in compliment. Avoiding the practice of it himself, he would not knowingly permit it to be used towards him. He would not receive money from any one, and actually refused 6l. from his brother at a time when he was in want, though he accepted from him some wine and macaroni.

Immediately after his death his legal representatives (for no other persons could be authorized to interfere in so extraordinary a manner) either as executors or administrators, burnt every letter in his possession without inspection; an instance of Gothic precipitation which ignorance itself would blush to avow, and which, with the papers of a man of letters, may be attended with very mischievous consequences.

Morning Post (Thursday, September 3, 1789)
This letter opens by referring to (D-53) and ends by inviting anyone with information “relative to Baretti” to submit it to a hotel. No separate or book-length biography of Baretti appeared, so the author is likely referring to an entry on Baretti in a biographical dictionary. The early English biographies contain little if anything not already reported in the various 1789 newspapers pieces. Italian biographers relied heavily on these English accounts, adding the occasional word-of-mouth reports from Italians living in London.

Mr. URBAN, Sept. 15.
Thought I was not the writer of that paragraph relative to Mr. Baretti, which is attacked in the strictures contained in p. 717; yet feeling, as I do, the justice of the character, I am ready to meet your last correspondent on similar grounds. This *rencontre* must be in print. As he professes to have no other design in view but to arrive at truth, he is more likely to attain the object of his wishes by such a mode of communication, than by the probable, if not certain, warmth of personal altercation. I pledge myself to him, and to the publick, fully to refute all his charges by the first of next January at farthest. My reasons for the delay are these: I am writing the Life of Baretti. Were I to anticipate the publication of the entire work, by printing only such parts as I though necessary to his vindication, it would render the remaining parts dull and uninteresting by the unavoidable repetition of certain facts. I cannot be in town earlier than December, which will unavoidable delay the publication till about the time I mention. In the mean time, any communication relative to Baretti will be thankfully received, if directed to H. S. at the bar of Ibbotson’s hotel, Vere-street; and, if inserted, gratefully acknowledged. Yours, &c. H. S.

*Gentleman’s Magazine* (September, 1789)

J. B. desires to inform the memorialist of Joseph Baretti (vol. LIX p. 470.), that the first of the Two letters (so severely remarked on in the Tolondon) which appeared in our Magazine under the signature of *Querist*, was not written by Mr. Bowle, but by a gentleman, who, after a thorough investigation of the whole business, thought himself justified in asserting, that “Baretti was guilty of murder in the streets of London.” Indeed, it is most probably, that, had the culprit been of English, instead of Italian extraction, he would not easily have escaped.

*Gentleman’s Magazine* (December, 1789)
The signature of VIGORNIENSIS was a Latinate form to designate a person from Worcester. Who was this well-read man from Worcester who here comes to Baretti’s defense? Pottle, Frederick A. The Literary Career of James Boswell, Esq. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929 (229-230) is inclined to believe J. B. is Boswell, noting that he signed other papers Querist. Boswell was at the Stratford Jubilee in 1769, dressed as a Corsican, with a red cap, we read in the quotation from a contemporary account of the Shakespeare Jubilee that follows.

Mr. URBAN  Worcester, Jan. 8
In answer to your correspondent Scrutator’s enquiry, relative to the word Tontine, I send him the following extract from the catalogue of Batemen, &c. prefixed to the Life of Louis the XIVth by Voltaire: “Emeri succeeded to the Marshal de la Mellerage, as superintendent of the finances in 1649. An Italian, named Tonti, employed by him, then invented a new loan upon life annuities, chargeable on the national revenues, and divided into shares and classes; the income of each proprietor that died to be shared among the survivors. Hence similar loans came to be named after the inventor.”

If J. B. mentioned in your Index Indicatorius as the author of the paper which so severely wounded the feelings of an unfortunate foreigner, be (as I suspect he is) the gentleman who appeared at the Stratford Jubilee with his name written in large letters upon his cap, I sincerely regret that he found reason a third time to change his opinion relative to Mr. Baretti’s guilt or innocence. He at first thought him criminal; but, upon mature consideration of the evidence, and other circumstances which did not come before the Court upon the trial, he changed that opinion, and in a very candid manner acknowledged to Mr. Baretti his error, expressing a wish that in future he might be numbered amongst his friends. The letter on this subject I have seen, and believe to be still in existence. Now, if J. B. be that person, he should give his reasons for again recanting. The initials support my conjecture, and I have mentioned the circumstance which happened at Stratford to shew the gentleman himself, whom I mean, what my suspicions are, at the same time wishing not to give him any pain by being more explicit when a hint is sufficient.

Yours, &c. VIGORNIENSIS.
Gentleman’s Magazine (Supplement to the Year 1790)

Mr. Boswell, the celebrated friend of Paoli, appeared in a Corsican Habit, with pistols in his belt, and a musket at his back, in gold letters, in the front of his Cap the words PAOLI and LIBERTY were printed.
Whitehall Evening Post (Saturday, September 9, 1769) 5, 1788).
The following passage from a letter Baretti wrote deeply offended English readers. This passage proves that Baretti was very familiar with the scene of October 6, 1769 many years before. Lettere familiari a’ suoi tre fratelli. Ed. Luigi Piccioni (Torino, 1941), 66-71.

E chi non ha né moglie né figli, e talvolta anche chi ha quella e questi, va a cadere in braccio alle meretrici, chi in Londra non hanno giorno più propizio della domenica, perché in quel santo giorno la più parte d’esse guadagna di che campare tutta la settimana, o almeno di che ubbriarcarsi [sic] anch’esse per un paio di giorni. Di qui nasce che pochi artefici e operai son in stato di attendere il lunedì alle loro faccende, essendo costretti di starsene, per la più parte di tal di nelle lor case e ne’lor letti a digerire quella tanta birra e quel tanto puncio tracannato nell’osteria, o rifare le forse infiacchite ne’ lupanari. Di qui nascono que’ frequenti suicidi che i poveri commettono, o impiccandosi, o annegandosi, o tagliando la gola, o dandosi una pistolettata nella testa, o facendosi altra simile bella burla. E di qui nascono e si propagano quelle tante infermità e quelle tante nauseose specie di povertà che offendono ad ogni passo gli occhi e i nasi di chi va per via. E di qui nasce che le prigioni si popolano ogni di, malgrado il troppo numero di sciaurati che sono mandati schiavi alle americane colonie, e malgrado le troppe carrettate di ribaldi che son condotte alle forche molte volte l’anno.

Ma giacché ho nominate le meretrici di Londra, che nella classe de’ poveri tengono a parer mio il più povero luogo, voi dovete sapere, fratelli, chi il loro numero passa i dieci mila; e centinaia d’esse ho visto io co’ miei occhi che non giungono a’ dieci, agli undici e a’ dodici anni; e non si può dire quante di queste sventurate creature stieno tutti i dodici mesi dell’anno nelle strade, prive d’abitazione, e vivendo la vita bestialmente casaccio, senza potersi cavar ben la fame una volta al mese, e piene sino agli occhi di mille mali: miseria, a considerala bene, degna d’estrema compassione. Ed è cosa fastidiosa molto andare la sera per istrada, ed essere da centinaia d’esse ora balanzosamente ed ora umilmente richiesto di pagar loro un bicchier di vino: vale a dire, di condurle in taverne e in bordello, che hanno le porte bene illuminate, perché sieno più facilmente distinte da’ pazzi peccatori. E di tali bordelli e taverne ve n’ha una ogni venti passi in tutte le strade più frequentate, e molte anco nelle strade remote.

Moltissime di quelle meretrici ho io osservate dotate d’assai bellezza, ma bellezza sepolta negli stracci e nel sudiciume e nella malinconia scritta in visibili maiuscole sulla più parte delle loro face; e dalle bocche loro troppe volte si sentono uscire le più laide parole e le espressioni più stomachevoli, e torrenti d’ingiurie e di maledizioni e di bestemmmie crudeli, massime quando un gruppo di scapestrati furfantelli mezzo ubriachi, come spesso avviene, scorre per la città col solo fine di palparle a forza, di pizzicarle, d’oltraggiarle e di sbatterle contra i muri; il tutto con indecenza somma e sfacciataggine insopportabile, e senza il minimo riguardo o timore degli uomini o di Dio. E chi va per quelle strade bisogna guardi bene alle proprie tasche, e all’orologio chi lo ha, che le meretrici e i ladroncelli sono destrissimi a furare ogni cosa; né si può dire la quantità di borsaiuoli,
maschi e femmine, che come una pestilenza infettano tutta quella gran metropoli. Ne’ saria facile enumerare le varie sorte di delitti che in Londra si commettono e che non si sente si commettano in altri paesi, massime ne’ nostri.

[And those who do not have wives or children, and sometimes even those that do, go and fall into the arms of the prostitutes, that in London don’t have a more advantageous day than Sunday, because on that holy day a large part of them earn enough to take them through the week, or at least to get themselves drunk for a couple of days. From here the craftsman and workers wait until Monday for their projects, being constricted to stay for the most part of the day in their houses stuck in bed digesting those many beers and that great quantity of punch consumed in the inn, or trying to regain their strength weakened in the whore houses. From here arise the many suicides committed by the poor, either hanging themselves, or drowning, or cutting their throats, or giving themselves a pistol shot in the head, or some other amusing joke. From here are born those diseases that nauseating types of poverty that offend the eyes and the nose of the passerby at every step. And from here are born the prisons that they fill up every day, notwithstanding the too high a number of scoundrels that are sent as slaves to the American colonies, and notwithstanding the many rebels that are sent to the gallows many times each year.

But having mentioned London prostitutes, that in my opinion are the lowest class of the poor, you must understand, brothers, that their numbers surpass ten thousand; and hundreds of them I’ve seen with my own eyes that do not pass the age of ten, eleven, or twelve years of age; and you cannot tell how many of these miserable creatures spend the entire twelve months of the year on the streets, homeless, and living a bestial life, without being able to appease their hunger once a month, and filled up to the eyes with a thousand evils: misery, considering it well, worthy of extreme compassion. It is a very annoying thing to go through the streets in the evening, and to be by hundreds of them, some boldly and some with humility, asked for a glass of wine: this means conducting them into the tavern and whorehouses that have their doorways well-lit so as to distinguish them from crazy sinner. And such whorehouses and taverns are found at every twenty steps in all the most frequented streets, and many also in those back alleys.

I’ve observed many of these prostitutes to be graced with the most beautiful faces, but beauty hidden under the rags and the sweat and in a melancholy you can see written in capital letters on most of their faces; and from their mouths too often one hears flow the most offensive words and awful expressions, a torrent of swear words and cruel curses, most often when a gang of rascals half-drunk, as happens often enough, ramble around intent only on knocking them about, or pushing them against the walls; and all this with the greatest indecency and unbearable shamelessness, and without the most minimal care or fear of man or God. And who goes through the streets must watch his pockets really well, and his pocket-watch if he has it, for the prostitutes and the crooks are very adept at robbing everything; one cannot count the number of purse-snatchers, male and female, that like a pestilence infect that huge metropolis. Nor would it be easy to enumerate the various sorts of crimes they commit in London and that they do not commit in other cities, least of all ours.]
The Baretti case can be situated in the contemporary debate on dueling that was very much in the air at the time. In the following passage from James Boswell’s Journals, Johnson discusses his stance on the issue, coming down firmly on the right to self-defense in any circumstance. The paradox in this passage is that duels—and violent reactions like Baretti’s—are a sign “artificial refinement.” As suggested in Chapter One, the murder of Evan Morgan may very well have been caused by a breech in the polished manners of eighteenth-century society.

I started the question if duelling was lawful. The brave old General at once fired at this and said that undoubtedly a man had a right to defend his honour. Goldsmith said, “I asked you first, what you would do if you was affronted?” I answered, “No doubt I would fight.” “Why then, that solves the question.” “Nay, Sir,” said Mr. Johnson, “it does not follow that what a man would do is therefore right.” I said I wanted to know if duelling was consistent with Christianity. Mr. Johnson took up the question and indeed treated it in a masterly manner; and so far as I have been able to recollect, he thoughts were these: “Sir, as men become in a high degree refined, various causes of offence arise which are considered to be of such importance that life must be staked to atone for them, though in reality they are not so. A body that has received a very fine polish may be easily hurt. Before men arrive at the artificial refinement, if one tells his neighbour he lies, his neighbour gives him a blow; but in a state of highly polished society, an affront is held to be a serious injury. It must, therefore, be resented, or rather a duel must be fought upon it; as men have agreed to banish from their society one who puts up with an affront without fighting a duel. Now, Sir, it is never unlawful to fight in self-defence. He, then, who fights a duel does not fight from passion against his antagonist but out of self-defence; to avert the stigma of the world and to prevent himself from being driven out of society. I could wish there was not that superfluity of refinement; but while such notions prevail, no doubt a man may lawfully fight a duel.

Let it be remembered that the justification is applicable only to the person who receives the affront. All mankind must condemn the aggressor.


A passage from one of the legal theorists Johnson admired that discusses an issue debated in legal circles during the period of the Baretti case. What is the distinction between self-defense and retaliation? Is revenge ever a noble or honorable sentiment?

But, though we have a right to suspend the acts of benevolence in regard to an enemy, yet we are never allowed to stifle its principle. As nothing but necessity can authorise us to have recourse to force against an unjust aggressor, so this same necessity should be the rule and measure of the harm we do him; and we ought to be always disposed to reconcilement so soon, as he has done us justice, and we have nothing farther to apprehend.

We must therefore distinguish carefully between a just defence of one's own person, and revenge. The first does but suspend, through necessity and for a while, the exercise of
benevolence, and has nothing in it opposite to sociability. But the other stifling the very
principle of benevolence,
introduces in its stead a sentiment of hatred and animosity, a sentiment vicious in itself,
contrary to the public good, and expressly condemned by the law of nature.
J. J. Burlamaqui, The Principles of Natural and Politic Law, Translated into English by
This important personal letter gives us a profound insight into the psyche of Giuseppe/Joseph Baretti. It was purchased for the Biblioteca Braidense in Milan at an auction in 2003. (Aut. Braidense XXXIII. 76)

It has never been published. Baretti wrote it on October 6, 1769, some hours or even minutes before his life would change forever. Baretti is writing to one of his oldest friends in Italy with whom he wrote poetry in the 1740s. The letter reminds us of Baretti’s good side, his charm, his unbelievable achievement (defending the Italians in a book written in English), his lively style, his obsession with the contrasts between Italy and England. The letter demonstrates a profound love of London, as well as nostalgia for his native country. This is a touching letter and one that, given what would happen before the ink completely dried, a rather emotional one.

Di Londra, li 6 ottobre 1769

Che vi posso dire, Signor Conte mio, per iscusare il mio costante silenzio di quattr’anni? Sono stato sbattuto quà e là dal caso, e sempre tanto lontano da Imola che mi pareva pur vergognar farvi pagare molto di posta per de’ nonnulla. Mi pare però di avervi scritto un tratto da Bologna, e d’avervi di colà mandati non so che fogli della Frusta. Forse la memoria mi gabba.

Orsù, io vi ringrazio del vostro rallegrarvi con meco per l’onore confertomi da questo Re. Sia benedetta quella Gazzetta che vi diede tal notizia, perché così mi ha procurata una Lettera vostra. Ora però che sapete dove sono, avete a pensare come io vi possa fare alcun piacere. Questa è Londra, la più vasta metropoli del mondo moderno. Vi sarà pure in una Londra alcuna cosa che vi potria quadrare o per bisogno, o per gusto, o per capriccio? Pensate, e comandatemi liberamente sia per voi, sia pe’ vostri Amici. Non vi dico questo in cerimonia, no.

Torniamo all’onore fattomi dal Re senza che io mi sonnassi di sollecitare alcuno per ottenerlo. Credereste che io devo alla fama acquisitami con un Libro che ho scritto in questa Lingua in difesa dell’Italia barbaramente maltrattata da un Viaggiatore Inglese? Nè sono meno superbo dell’onore procuratomi da quel Libro che del Libro stesso, poiché già me l’hanno / ristampato non solo qui, ma anche in Dublino, che, come sapete, è la Capitale dell’Irlanda. Chi me l’avessè detto quando scrivevamo entrambi in Lode del Gatto, che un di v’avrei scritto d’aver composto un Libro Inglese stimato a tal segno da questa Nazione che si ristampò due volte in un anno! Volete voi perdonarmi se ne sono un po’ superbo? E quel che è meglio, il manoscritto mi fu pagato dugencinquanta ghinee d’oro in oro, che fanno più assai di dieci mila paoli. Che differenza, direte voi, da Londra a Imola! E chi vi dicesse che ne sto ora scrivendo un altro de’ Libri, in quattro Tometti in ottavo, per cui devo avere cinquecento ghinee? Eccovi narrata una parte de’ casi miei dopo che vi lasciai. Ne volete sapere un altro poco? Non sono cinque mesi che feci una scappata di sei mesi in Ispagna, due de’ quali passai in Madridd che tanto dileto e soddisfazione che li conto pe’ più piacevoli che m’abbia passati mai. Di tanto in tanto corro anche a Parigi a vedere alcuni amici che ho colà. Ma in Italia quando vuoi tu tornare? Vi rispondo presto. In aprile o maggio prossimo. Voglio andare fino a Roma, starvi un mese, e poi tornar qui correndo; e o nell’andare o nel tornare, vi vo’ porre la
braccia intorno alla persona, e darvi una buona stretta. Vi piace così? Voi allora mi direte, oh sta qui un giorno! Io risponderò, non posso. Voi ripeterete le istanze con calore; ed io per mostrarmi generoso vi starò due. Vi piace così? Ma sarà con patto che mi riconduciate da quella Dama dove mi / faceste passare una piacevolissima sera. Che dama di garbo! Il nome suo non mi vuol ora tornare in capo, ma fatela pur certa che le vo’ appiccare un bacio sulla mano, e proprio colla pece. Se venisse in Inghilterra, sarebbe un bacio sulle labbra; ma in Imola mi contenterò della mano per conformarmi a’ costumi de’ paesi, che non vanno violati mai, e specialmente dagli Uomini che hanno già vissuti come ho vissuti io secento buoni mesi, che, se fossero trecento soli, non badarei tanto a questi scrupoli de’ costumi. Orsù, conte mio, fate di star sano e lieto, e a rivederci in aprile, o in maggio, o in giugno alla più lunga, se qualche cosa non mi rompe il pensiero. Addio a Voi, e a tutta la vostra degna Famiglia.

Il Baretti vostro.

In caso vogliate comandarmi alcuna cosa, eccovi qui l’indirizzo mio in Inglese.

Joseph Baretti, Esq.
Secretary to the Royal Academy,
London

[From London, October 6, 1769
What can I say, Signor Conte, to excuse my constant silence of four years? I was knocked about here and there by chance, and always so far away from Imola that it seemed to me a shame to make you pay a lot in postage to learn not much. I seem to recall, however, having written you a piece from Bologna, and from there having sent you some pages of the Frusta. Perhaps my memory is playing tricks. Come on, I want to that you I thank you Re. Thank goodness for that Gazette that brought you the news, because it brought to me your letter. Now that you know where I am, give a thought to how I could do something to please you. This is London, the vastest metropolis in the modern world. There must be something that you would like or need, either for taste, or on a whim? Thank about it and tell me without holding back what I can do for you, as well as for your friends. I’m not saying this to be polite, no. Let’s return to the King’s honor without my needing to dream up someone to obtain that for me. Would you believe that I owe the fame I earned for myself with a book that I wrote in this language in defense of Italy barbarously mistreated by an English traveller? Nor am I any less proud of the honor brought to me by that book as the book itself, because they have republished it not only here, but also in Dublin, that, as you know, is the capital of Ireland. Who would have said this would happen to me when we wrote “In Praise of the Cat,” that one day I would have write you about having composed an English book esteemed so highly by such in this Nation that it was republished a second time in a year! Will you forgive me if I’m a little bit proud about this? And the best part is that they gave me two hundred guineas in gold for the manuscript, that equals much more than ten thousand paoli. What a difference, you say, between London to Imola. And who would have said that I would now be writing another book, in four little volumes in octavo, for which I should get five hundred? Here is expressed a bit of my luck after you left. You want to hear a little more. Not five months ago I escaped for six months in Spain, two of which I passed in Madrid with so much delight and satisfaction that I count then the two most pleasant that I ever passed.
From time to time I also run to Paris to see some friends that I have up there. When are you going to come back to Italy? I will let you know soon. Next April or May. I want to go all the way to Rome, stay there a month, and then return here running; and either in coming or going I can put my arms around you in person, and give you a good strong hug. Do you like that? You then say to me, oh stay here a day! I am going to respond, I just can’t. You repeat the requests warmly; and I to show myself generous am going to stay there two. Do you like that? But it will be provided that you take me to that Lady with whom we passed a very pleasant evening. What a charming lady! Her name won’t come back to me now, but take this for certain I would kiss her hand, and really with pitch. If she came to England, it would be a kiss on the lips; but in Imola I would content myself with the hand and the customs of the county, that are never violated, and especially not by men who have already lived as I have six hundred good months that, if they were only three hundred, I would not worry so much with a scruples about customs. Come on, my Count, make sure you stay healthy and easy, and let’s see each other again in April, or in May, or in June at the latest, if something doesn’t break my thought. Goodbye to you and your worthy family.

You’re Baretti.

In case you want to ask anything of me, here is my English address.

Joseph Baretti
Secretary to the Royal Academy,
London]
CURRICULUM VITAE

M. F. RUSNAK

1993 – present
Bucks County Community College – Dept. of Language and Literature
Professor of English /Italian

2001 – present
Rutgers University – Dept. of Italian
Part-time Lecturer in Italian

Summer 2004/2006
Rutgers University Program in Urbino, Italy – Università di Urbino

1986 – 1992
University of Pennsylvania – Dept. of English
Instructor, Freshman English

Ph.D. (May, 2008)

ABD – English

B.A. in English, summa cum laude, (May, 1986)

Muhlenberg College – Allentown, PA, 1983 – 1984