

The Fruitless Repentance; or the History of Miss Kitty Le Fever. In Two Volumes

The long eighteenth century gave rise to many changes and developments, from American Independence and the French Revolution, to the discovery of gravity and the invention of the modern umbrella. Alongside the cultural, political and social development of this time came the rise of the much-disputed novel form. This work explores a novel published at the heart of this era, in 1769, and seeks to uncover who might have written it, which company published it, and tentatively to suggest its place within the genre of the novel.

Plot Summary: Kitty Le Fever goes to care for her mother when her father dies. In so doing she loses the patronage of her jealous surrogate mother and guardian, Lady Catherine. Impoverished, she and her mother take lodgings in the home of Mrs Leeson, where she encounters Lord Clerage. Struck by Kitty's beauty and piety, Clerage declares his pursuit of her to Sir George Hendon. Kitty and Polly Winter, meanwhile, discuss the curate, Mr Leicester, who is Kitty's fiancé. Clerage, suspecting that Kitty's heart is taken, uses blackmail to access Kitty's correspondence. Driven by jealousy, he contacts Johnson, an acquaintance, and plots to have Leicester kidnapped until Kitty forgets him. Clerage then goes to Lady Catherine, who promises £7,000 if Kitty marries him rather than Leicester, but Kitty turns down this proposal in favour of the penniless Mr Leicester. Clerage promises Leicester patronage in exchange for surrendering Kitty; when Leicester refuses, Clerage has Johnson kidnap Leicester, and they put him in an asylum. Kitty guesses at Clerage's involvement and promises marriage if he will release Leicester. Clerage wavers between returning Leicester and marrying Kitty. Eventually, swayed by Hendon, he releases Leicester, granting him both his patronage and Kitty. Two years later, Clerage goes disguised to the town where Kitty and Leicester are living, and stays with Polly and her husband Mr Freeman. Clerage subtly pursues Kitty and she grows fond of him as a friend. Clerage, trying to discover a flaw in Kitty, realises that Leicester's time in the asylum has damaged him, causing him to bully Kitty. Leicester dies of consumption, which Kitty also catches. Clerage proposes to Kitty but she is repelled by his revealed identity and insists upon a year of mourning. A year passes and Kitty, near death, asks Clerage to make her three children his heirs; a marriage contract is drawn up and signed. They marry, and hours afterwards she dies.

***The Fruitless Repentance at Chawton House*¹**

The copy of *The Fruitless Repentance* found at Chawton House does not appear to have been expensively produced. Evidence for this can be seen in the quality of the paper, which carries the ‘laid marks’ of paper made using fabric rags, which are pressed together or stamped, and then cut and dried; presumably the smoother paper developed in 1757 by James Whatman the Elder was too expensive for a low-end print run such as this.² The closeness of the printing to the margins is also an indication of not wanting to waste paper, and the stark simplicity of the title page, along with smallness of the print and the absence of printer’s ornaments or engravings anywhere in the text, are all suggestive of an inexpensive edition. *The Fruitless Repentance* was published just once, in 1769, with what is almost certainly a pirated edition printed in Dublin the following year.³

Although published by F. Newbery, primarily for sale to lending libraries, the copy seen at Chawton might have been privately owned. This is suggested by the book’s binding; whilst not the most expensive of its kind, with leather binding on the spine and a marbled cover, this copy of the novel has been cared for enough to have been bound or rebound twenty years after its publication. The evidence for this is the paper used for the inside cover, which is the reverse of a title page from another book called *Loyola*, which was published much later, in 1784. This suggests that the current binding was completed some time after *The Fruitless Repentance* was published. Another explanation for this later binding is that it might have been from a library, suggested by the numbers that are marked on the spine; they have been done by hand. If it is a library copy, then perhaps the book has been read so frequently that it had to be rebound because it had become damaged. Also on the inside cover, however, is a signature, of Mrs J. P. Fuller, which would tend to indicate a private owner as opposed to a library book, and although there is no date to the signature, the style of writing is suggestive of an eighteenth-century hand; the bleeding of the ink indicates the use of a quill pen.

The novels of Samuel Richardson, Horace Walpole and Mary Davys, despite being markedly different in style, form and time, have certain aspects of extensive paratext that they hold in common. Richardson, in *Clarissa*, has both a preface and an ‘Account of the principal

¹ For photographs, see appendix.

² <<http://www.baph.org.uk>>.

³ It has also been reprinted by Garland in 1974, and more recently by Gale ECCO, Print Editions, 1 June, 2010, although the circumstances of these reprints are unknown as I was unable to examine copies of them within the scope of this project.

Characters'.⁴ Walpole uses his preface to set up the pretence that *The Castle of Otranto* is a translation;⁵ this is followed by an equally lengthy second preface in the second edition, which justifies this pretence. Mary Davys' *The Reform'd Coquet* includes an address 'To the Ladies of Great Britain'⁶ in addition to the preface. These aspects of paratext are absent from *The Fruitless Repentance*, however, which contains no dedication or preface – pieces of paratext so common to novels from the eighteenth century. The dedications were used primarily to reach out to potential patrons, or to maintain favour with existing patrons, either by dedicating the novel to someone specific – as in the case of Frances Sheridan's *Sidney Bidulph*, where the dedication is addressed to Samuel Richardson, 'The Author of *Clarissa* and Sir Charles Grandison' – or, as Mary Davys does in *The Reformed Coquet*, to seek out a more general audience (of fellow 'Ladies' in Davys' case).⁷ According to A. S. Collins,⁸ by the latter half of the eighteenth century, the practice of patronage had largely died away, and whilst William Christie in 'State Patronage and the Romantic Writer' argues that it was still present well into the 1800s in figures such as Samuel Rogers, by the time *The Fruitless Repentance* was published in 1769, most patronage had ceased, and it tended to appear if at all in the form of subscriptions.⁹ Furthermore, Janet Todd suggests that even when patronage was at its height it had never been hugely helpful for women writers, 'except for a few learned ladies in the Bluestocking circles'.¹⁰ Given this waning of patronage, it is unsurprising that the novel lacks a dedication. Although it might seem odd to expect a dedication on an anonymous novel, as far back as 1705, when Mary Davys published *The Fugitive*, despite the novel containing both an explanatory preface and a dedication, her novel is signed simply 'by a Lady'.

The Fruitless Repentance does not have a preface or introduction either: they were often used particularly by female writers to justify their text, whether somewhat knowingly apologising for being a woman writer, as Aphra Behn does in *Oroonoko*, or earnestly excusing bad writing because of ill health and poverty, as Charlotte Smith does in 1794 in *The*

⁴ Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa* (London: S. Richardson, 1748), p. ix.

⁵ Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (London: Tho. Lowndes, 1765) 2nd edn (London, William Bathoe, 1766).

⁶ Mary Davys, *The Reform'd Coquet* (London: H. Woodfall, 1724), p. iii.

⁷ Frances Sheridan, *Sidney Bidulph* (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1761), p. iii. Davys, *The Reform'd Coquet*, p. iii.

⁸ A. S. Collins, *Authorship in the Days of Johnson: Being a study of the relationship between author, patron, publisher and public, 1726–1780* (New Jersey, US: Augustus M. Kelley 1973 [1927]).

⁹ William Christie, 'State Patronage and the Romantic Writer: Henry Taylor's Modest Proposal', in *Authorship, Commerce and the Public: Scenes of writing, 1750–1850*, ed. E. J. Clery, Caroline Franklin and Peter Garside (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan 2002), p. 225.

¹⁰ Janet Todd, *Sign of Angelica: Women writing and fiction, 1660–1800* (London: Virago, 1989), p. 219.

Banished Man.¹¹ Since *The Fruitless Repentance* was published anonymously there would be no need for a (possibly) female author to apologise for anything, however. These types of paratext were also used by writers such as Walpole, who famously established the context of *The Castle of Otranto* as a piece of translation, as we have seen. By 1769, however, the epistolary form of *The Fruitless Repentance* is not new to the marketplace, having been well established in Richardson's hugely successful novel *Clarissa*. *The Fruitless Repentance* is written very much in the style of *Clarissa*, in fact, with 'a Series of Letters, written principally in a double yet separate correspondence.'¹²

Publication – of whose novel?

The Fruitless Repentance was advertised once before it was printed, in the *London Chronicle* on 7 December 1769 (Issue 2026).¹³ The advert does no more than state the name of the novel, its price of 5 shillings, that it was 'sewed' (as opposed to bound), and that it could be purchased from F. Newbery at St Paul's churchyard 'on Tuesday next'. Another advert was printed on the day of the novel's release; this is almost identical to the first except it also contains the price of 6 shillings for a bound copy, though the type of binding is not indicated. These would appear to be standard prices for a two-volume novel from F. Newbery, as is indicated by the adverts that appear at the end of the second volume of *The Fruitless Repentance*, where works such as Dr Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* are advertised for sale at 6 shillings, bound.¹⁴

There were two F. Newberys publishing around the same time, but the one concerned with the publication of *The Fruitless Repentance* was in fact the cousin of the other, and nephew of the successful publisher John Newbery. John Newbery helped Francis set up as a publisher at the Crown in Pater Noster Row, in 1765, and when John died in 1767, Francis moved his business to No. 20 Ludgate, also known as No. 20 St Paul's Church Yard. This location was no doubt more suitable, being on a busy main road, than the Crown, 'tucked away out of sight.'¹⁵ When he died in 1780, Francis' wife Elizabeth took over the business and went on to publish over five hundred titles in all genres, from plays to children's books.¹⁶

¹¹ Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* (London: Will. Canning, 1688); Charlotte Smith, *The Banished Man* (London: 1794).

¹² Richardson, *Clarissa*, p. i.

¹³ *London Chronicle*, 2026 (December 7, 1769 – December 9, 1769).

¹⁴ *Public Advertiser*, 10955 (London, Saturday, 16 December, 1769).

¹⁵ S. Roscoe, *John Newbery and his Successors, 1740–1814: A bibliography* (Hertfordshire, UK: Five Owls Press, 1973).

¹⁶ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, no. 40 (London: OUP, 2004).

The Fruitless Repentance is attributed by both James Raven¹⁷ and the ESTC¹⁸ as a work that might have been written by Mrs Inchbald. However, the Orlando database suggests that it is in fact by Phebe Gibbes; she mentions it in an application to the charitable organisation, The Royal Literary Fund:¹⁹ ‘P[hebe] G[ibbes] issued a third novel ... [in 1769] *The Fruitless Repentance; or, The History of Miss Kitty Le Fever*. She told the Royal Literary Fund that this novel was “approved by Dr Goldsmith.”²⁰ Though no further evidence of her application to the Royal Literary Fund is given on Orlando, Dr Goldsmith’s book, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, is advertised at the end of *The Fruitless Repentance*, both of which were printed by the respected Francis Newbury. Dr Goldsmith’s book, which had been printed in 1766, was in its fourth edition by the time *The Fruitless Repentance* was published, despite moving among twelve different printers over a twenty-year period, with some printers such as J. Davys and August Mylius reaching fourth and fifth editions (the novel was also in the hands of other printers at the same time). It continued to be re-printed until 1800. With such a successful author attached to her application to the Royal Literary Fund, it seems reasonable to assume that this was a legitimate claim. Although I have been unable to examine the Royal Literary Fund archives, it would appear that Gibbes made numerous applications to them, and even ‘maintained that she had written in total “twenty-two sets” of novels’.²¹

Janet Todd’s *A Dictionary of British and American Women Writers, 1600–1800* was published in 1987, and since then many more books have been traced to Gibbes through the Royal Literary Fund archives; Isobel Grundy confidently attributes *Hartley House* to Gibbes, based on the RLF archives. In James Raven’s *Anonymous Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1750–1830* three more texts are attributed to Gibbes on this basis. It is also of note that Gibbes’ applications were occasionally made for books published some time before the claim was made, such as her claim on *Elfrida*; whilst it was published in 1784, she only made the claim in 1804. Unlike other authors who, according to Raven, would make ‘grandiose claims to anonymous titles ... which they probably knew to be incontestable’,²² Gibbes backs up the claims for both *Elfrida* and *The Fruitless Repentance* with traceable sources of

¹⁷ James Raven, ed., *British fiction, 1750–1770: A chronological check-list of prose fiction printed in Britain and Ireland* (Delaware, USA: University of Delaware Press, 1987).

¹⁸ English Short Title Catalogue.

¹⁹ Royal Literary Fund Location and Catalogue: Loan 96, microfilms M1077/1–145. Unfortunately, because the The Royal Literary Fund’s archives are on microfilm at the British Museum, I was not able to examine them within the scope of this project.

²⁰ <<http://orlando.cambridge.org>>.

²¹ James Raven, ‘The Anonymous Novel in Britain and Ireland, 1750–1830’, in *The Faces of Anonymity: Anonymous and pseudonymous publication from the sixteenth to the twentieth century*, ed. Robert Griffin (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 154.

²² Raven, ‘The Anonymous Novel in Britain’, in Griffin, p. 153.

authentication, such as Goldsmith's approval²³, and a note of authentication from the publisher of *Elfrida*, Joseph Johnson.²⁴

Raven quotes Gibbes as saying that 'being a domestic woman, and of withdrawing turn of Temper I never would be prevailed upon to put my name to any of my Productions'.²⁵ This said, Gibbes name does appear in *The Niece: or the History of Sukey Thornby*. The title page, which states the author as being 'Mrs. P. Gibbes, Author of *The History of Lady Louisa Stroud*', also lays claim to this earlier novel, published in 1764. It would appear to be either her first or second novel, but since both it and the *Adventures of Mr Francis Clive* appear one after the other in *Critical Review* (no. 17) in April 1764,²⁶ it is difficult to ascertain which was written first. Such circuitous acknowledgment of authorship was not uncommon, and neither was it a practical way of advertising other work by the same author. This same technique was used by Mary Davys in her novel *The Reform'd Coquet*, where she used her successful play, *The Humours of York*, to help sell her novel. *The Reform'd Coquet* has her full name on the title page and an inscription indicating that it is written by 'the author of *The Humours of York*'.

All the works so far attributed to Gibbes were printed for circulating libraries, and since *The Fruitless Repentance* was also printed for library use, this increases the likelihood that this is Gibbes' book. Whilst it is not printed by anyone she had worked with before or since, in her forty years of writing the novels currently attributed to her, she only used the same printer twice, so this is not an especially persuasive argument against *The Fruitless Repentance* being authored by Gibbes.

Novels printed for circulating libraries were coming under heavy attack from reviewers by this stage of the 1700s, and according to J. M. S. Tompkins, this was in large part due to the eighteenth century's 'rage for novelty' driving booksellers to fake new editions of books to make them seem more popular, and taking old books and re-issuing them 'with new title pages'; even 'old magazine stories were strung together and offered as a new book'²⁷ to feed the frenzy for new writing. Given the reputation of publishers for circulating

²³ Though it must be noted that though Goldsmith was alive when *The Fruitless Repentance* was published, however by the time that Gibbes made this claim in 1804, Goldsmith was long dead, having died in 1774.

²⁴ Raven, 'The Anonymous Novel in Britain', pp. 153–154.

²⁵ Gibbes to RLF, 17 October 1804 (RLF 2:74), in *The English Novel, 1770–1829: A bibliographical survey of prose fiction published in the British Isles*, Volume 1: 1770–1799, ed., James Raven, Antonia Forster and Steven Bending (London: OUP, 2000), p. 41.

²⁶ *Critical Review*, 17 (April 1764, p. 307) <<http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.co.uk>>

²⁷ J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770–1800* (London: Methuen & Co, 1962[1932]), pp. 5 – 6.

libraries, such as ‘the ... *Noble Brothers*’²⁸, who were the butt of satirical sketches in *The Memoirs of Gregory Giddy*²⁹, if a reviewer knew that *The Fruitless Repentance* had been printed for the circulating libraries it would then be unsurprising if they were somewhat prejudiced against it.³⁰ Francis Newbery did not specialise in printing for lending libraries, and according to the records of Publishers of Fiction in the Circulating Library Catalogue (1766 and 1790), Newbery only had two items printed in that twenty-four year period for these libraries: *The Vicar of Wakefield* and *The Fruitless Repentance*, thus giving him a better reputation than many other publishers.³¹ Still, according to the writer Mrs Griffith, ‘writers of standing dissociated themselves ... from the libraries’, so for Gibbes to associate her work with this devalued trade would suggest that she was either desperate for sales, or did not care about the standing of her work.³² Despite this, *Critical Review* ran a not insubstantial review of the work on 29 January 1770, which ran from page 43 to page 47: ‘[S]ome very uncommon words are introduced, and some very improbable adventures related; but [it is] ... sufficiently pleasing and pathetic to distinguish this novel from the common run of such publications’.³³ The ‘common run’ probably refers to the many published echoes of Richardson’s work, which were so widespread in other novels after his own success. It is also interesting that some of the ‘adventures’ seemed improbable even in the eighteenth century; it is only a pity that the reviewer does not specify whether the improbability lies in the abduction plot or elsewhere in the novel. Another critique, this time in *Monthly Review*, was unfavourable towards *The Fruitless Repentance*, and the whole review, including the title, is only seven lines long: the ‘name Le Fever ... led us to expect something *tender* ... and *affecting*; but alas ... When we had laboured through these 2 Vol[umes] we thought [not] of Le Fever ... and nothing but the Fruitless Repentance remained’.³⁴

Placed in the context of Phebe Gibbes as the possible author, it is interesting that both these papers reviewed her work favourably and unfavourably at different times, but they rarely agreed on any particular piece. The *Critical Review*, for example, is particularly damning of the *Adventures of Mr. Francis Clive*, accusing Gibbes of ‘hackneyship’; yet the review of the *History of Lady Louisa Stroud* concludes that it must be ‘the product of

²⁸ Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770–1800*, pp. 8

²⁹ Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770–1800*, pp. 8

³⁰ Publishers of Fiction in the Circulating Library Catalogue of Thomas Lowndes (1766).

³¹ Publishers of Fiction in the Circulating Library Catalogue of Michael Heavisides (Darlington, 1790) <<http://al.odu.edu>>.

³² Tompkins, pp. 3, 7.

³³ Review of *Fruitless Repentance* in the *Critical Review*, 29 (January 1770, pp. 43–47).

³⁴ Review of *Fruitless Repentance* in the *Monthly Review*, 42 (January 1770, p. 72).

[several] different pens' for some of it is 'sprightly' whilst other parts are 'flat, and uninteresting'.³⁵ The one text that Gibbes put her name to, *The Niece*, curiously obtained two contrasting reviews in the same edition of the *Critical Review* (no. 64) in December 1787.³⁶

Phebe Gibbes: A subversive writer?

As yet, not a lot appears to be known about Phebe Gibbes. She was born around 1740 and died some time after her last application to the Royal Literary Fund in 1806. Although she was married, she outlived her husband and her son, and was possibly only survived by two daughters. Over the forty years she was publishing, Gibbes only signed her name to her work once, although anonymity in eighteenth-century texts was not especially unusual, with eighty per cent of all novels published between 1770 and 1789 being printed anonymously³⁷. The reasons for disguising authorship ranged from modesty to fear of ridicule or reprisal. According to the Orlando database, Gibbes used a number of pseudonyms, both female (Mrs Lucius Phillips) and male (Sir Phillip Gibbes). One of Gibbes' letters to the Royal Literary Fund, sent in 1804, suggests that Gibbes' anonymity was voluntary; however, a later letter to the RLF implies that her anonymity was imposed upon her. She said that 'my Relatives, to my unspeakable misfortune, are so Pious as to Condemn every species of Literature, except [that which is] devotional'.³⁸ Sadly, though Gibbes believed that 'posterity would vindicate her name ... [the Royal Literary Fund] thought her an unrealistic visionary, who needed disappointment for the good of her soul'.³⁹

Robert Griffin confirms the notion that anonymity in the eighteenth century was encouraged along gender lines. Throughout much of history, women were 'commanded ... to be "chaste, obedient, and silent", [and] women who violated the ... silence risked ... castigation by a society dominated by males'.⁴⁰ Female writers of this period could seek to break the enforced silence, without being punished for doing so, by signing their texts as written 'by a lady'. These women writers made a 'public declaration of [their] possession of intellectual and artistic property', a state of affairs that would not exist under English law

³⁵ *Critical Review*, 17, pp. 306–307.

³⁶ *Critical Review*, 64 (December, 1787) – one appears on page 480, the other on page 481.

³⁷ James Raven, Antonia Foster and Stephen Bending, eds, *The English Novel, 1770–1829: A bibliographical survey of prose fiction published in the British Isles Vol.1: 1770–1799* (London, UK: OUP, 2000), p. 41.

³⁸ Orlando database – Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, 1790–1918.<<http://orlando.cambridge.org>>.

³⁹ Orlando database – Archives of the Royal Literary Fund, 1790–1918.<<http://orlando.cambridge.org>>.

⁴⁰ Robert Griffin, ed., *The Faces of Anonymity: Anonymous and pseudonymous publication from the sixteenth to the twentieth century* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

until the Married Women's Property Act of 1881.⁴¹ *The Fruitless Repentance* is not one such text, but Gibbes's *Elfrida* from 1784 is, as is her most political book, *The American Fugitive*.⁴²

In terms of the lack of acknowledged authorship, then, *The Fruitless Repentance* does not present a challenge to established male narratives. Unlike her later works, such as *The Niece*, where Gibbes experiments by combining the genres of novel and play to form what she terms 'A Dramatic Novel', here she is using the now well-established epistolary form, and marks it with many of the tropes essential to a sentimental novel. For R. F. Brissenden, a sentimental hero is distinguished by a 'highly developed awareness [and] ... belief in the sanctity and authority of their private judgments',⁴³ and it is an extension of this that creates the passive power through which Kitty's character subverts certain expectations of the genre.

As we have seen above, many works at this time sought to emulate the style and success of Richardson's novels, and indeed there are a number of similarities between *Pamela*⁴⁴ and *The Fruitless Repentance* in terms of both form and genre – and they both involve female characters of high morality and virtue. It is interesting to note, however, that whilst in Richardson's novel Pamela is vulnerable to the power of Mr B, in *The Fruitless Repentance* Kitty is partially protected from the malevolent actions of Lord Clerage, as she is under the protection of her mother and Clerage's relation, Mrs Leeson, whose good opinion he seems keen to maintain. Mr Leicester, on the other hand, is poor, unconnected and has left his family in the country; with no one to notice his disappearance but Kitty, he is as easily abducted and held as Pamela was. This 'feminisation' of Leicester perhaps throws into question other portrayals of femininity in the novel.

When Richardson was writing *Pamela*, 'sensibility' meant specifically a 'feeling of sympathy'.⁴⁵ Walter F. Wright suggests that Edmund Burke, however, 'gave it a broader significance [including] the capacity for enjoying art', and more commonly by 1760, the term referred either to sympathy or compassion, as well as to a 'general capacity for feeling'.⁴⁶ *The Fruitless Repentance*, even in its title, appears to be attempting to evoke this strain of sympathy. For instance, by some odd perversion, the sicker Kitty becomes, the more

⁴¹ Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press 1989), p. 103.

⁴² Phebe Gibbes, *Friendship in a nunnery; or, The American fugitive* (London: J. Bew, 1778).

⁴³ R. F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the novel of sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1974), p. 24.

⁴⁴ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (London: C. Rivington and J. Osborn, 1741).

⁴⁵ Walter F. Wright, *Sensibility in English Prose Fiction, 1760–1784: A reinterpretation* (US: Russell & Russell, 1972 [1937]), p. 23.

⁴⁶ Wright, *Sensibility in English Prose Fiction*, p. 24.

beautiful she is, 'her ugly cough would frequently check our admiration', but '[n]o face was ever fairer ... no eyes brighter, softer, or more intelligent',⁴⁷ thus engaging the reader's compassion and sympathy through the aesthetics of the female sickbed.

The sentimental novel often contained a strong sense of poetic justice yet Lord Clerage, who is perhaps more similar to *Pamela's* Mr B than to Lovelace, is nonetheless punished only by his loss of Kitty, a wife we are never really convinced that he changed enough to deserve. Nevertheless, Kitty's death means that Clerage (responsible not only for Leicester's kidnapping, but also his 'madness'⁴⁸) is not rewarded by marriage to the beautiful woman he has so long pursued. Poetic justice, however, is not to belong to Kitty either. Rather than be rewarded for her self-sacrifice in offering to marry Clerage to save Leicester, she instead suffers for many years with an unstable husband who 'render[s] her the most miserable of women',⁴⁹ only to die of consumption having given over the care of her three children to Clerage, who 'once so outrageously persecuted and tormented'⁵⁰ her. The one consolation – as with Clarissa – the reward by escape into heaven, is here destabilised in the final sentence of the novel, which contains no consolation of heaven for the heroine, only the sentiment that death is 'the inevitable fate of all created beings'.⁵¹

In this, *The Fruitless Repentance* resembles Frances Sheridan's novel *Sidney Bidulph*, in which the narrator of the introduction reminds the reader that 'even the best disposition[s] that the human heart is capable of, are of themselves [in]sufficient to defend us against the inevitable ills ... allotted, even to the best'.⁵² *The Fruitless Repentance*, like much of the work of Sheridan and Richardson, sets itself up as yet another novel of sentiment concerned with female virtue in distress. However, as Janet Todd suggests, some novels of sentiment were used to disrupt the expectations of the reader, and to confront 'the price as well as the charms of sentimental virtue and femininity'.⁵³ Clerage's continued pursuit of Kitty even once she is married is always justified by him as a result of Kitty being 'little inferior to the angels themselves'.⁵⁴ Furthermore, Clerage's search for redemption as an 'honest man' hinges upon Kitty maintaining her 'beauty of holiness', which provides Clerage with self-justification for his voyeurism, and the challenges he sets Kitty, such as allowing the squire to

⁴⁷ *The Fruitless Repentance*, p. 186.

⁴⁸ *The Fruitless Repentance*, p. 93.

⁴⁹ *The Fruitless Repentance*, p. 93.

⁵⁰ *The Fruitless Repentance*, p. 193.

⁵¹ *The Fruitless Repentance*, p. 224.

⁵² Sheridan, *Sidney Bidulph*, (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1761) p. 15.

⁵³ Todd cites Sheridan's novel as an example here. Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angelica*, p. 162.

⁵⁴ *The Fruitless Repentance*, p. 68.

assault her. He tests her to prove her to be the perfection of ‘purity and virtue’⁵⁵ that he had initially presumed – and now needs her – to be.

Clerage’s suspicions quelled, he is somewhat redeemed by his conversion of the local squire from a lecherous drunk into a charitable man, but only after he has encouraged the squire to take advantage of Kitty in a very *Pamela*-esque scene in the summer house, so that Clerage might step in and save her. Despite his act of ‘heroics’, he continues to seek Kitty’s affection and hand in marriage, even once he is certain she is dying. The only action of power open to Kitty as a victim is, according to Todd, to ‘entail [her] misery on those who love [her]’.⁵⁶ Kitty achieves this by postponing her marriage to Clerage until she is certain she is dying, and she then completes the action by creating power from the ultimate powerlessness of death. Indeed, like Richardson’s *Clarissa*, Kitty’s *only* power to punish her persecutor lies with her death.

The Fruitless Repentance is not ground-breaking in style or subject, nor in its use of anonymity in hiding female authorship; even so, it is novel in its subversion of some well-established tropes of sentimentality and poetic justice. So little is yet known about the extent of Gibbes’ work and life that she would prove a most fruitful figure of study, especially as she appears to have been, as James Raven suggests, ‘one of the most prolific of novelists in this period’.⁵⁷

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⁵⁵ *The Fruitless Repentance*, p. 68.

⁵⁶ Todd, *Sign of Angelica*, p. 166.

⁵⁷ The period referred to here being the 1770s to the 1780s. See James Raven, Antonia Foster and Stephen Bending, eds, *The English Novel, 1770–1829: A bibliographical survey of prose fiction published in the British Isles Vol.1: 1770–1799* (London, UK: OUP, 2000), p. 41.

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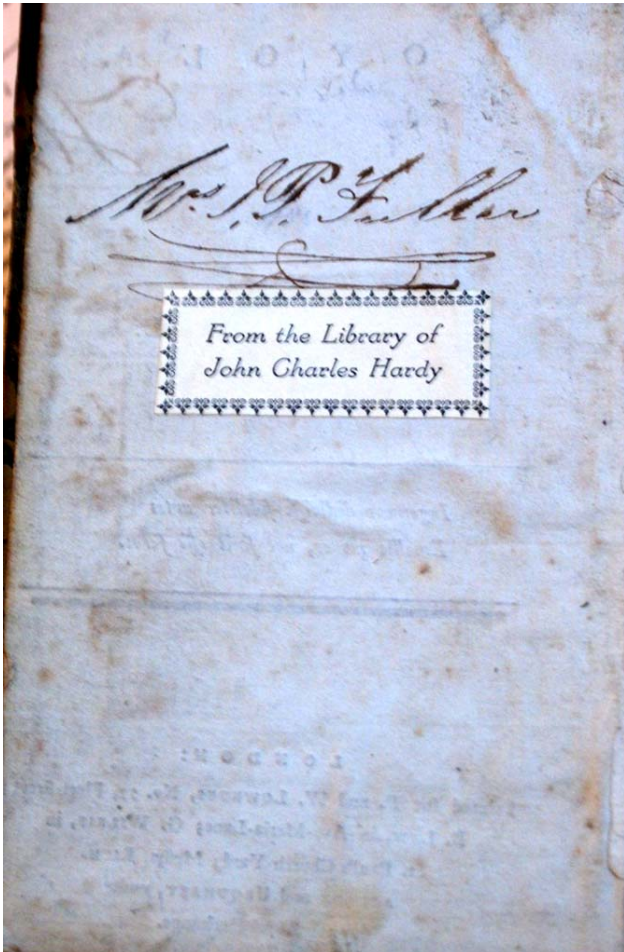
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Appendix



Leather binding, with marbled cover and markings on the spine, which read 'Le Fever 217 & 218'



Inside cover showing the re-used title page of *Loyla*, and the owner's signature, 'Mrs J. P. Fuller'