

'An Introduction to *Constantia; or the distressed friend*'

Although the popularity of Novels rivalled the 'Masquerades, Operas, [and] New Plays' as forms of entertainment in eighteenth-century England,¹ they were often 'left to gather dust, summarily disposed of, or returned after a brief reading to the fashionable circulating libraries' and have since been largely neglected.² However, by exploring the different aspects of the literary marketplace, as Darnton's circuit of communication attempts to do,³ I intend to place one book from the collection at Chawton House Library, *Constantia; or the distressed friend*, in the context of the 1770s.⁴ It received a warm critical reception, and demands attention, especially because of its unusual ending which wrong-foots the reader and shifts their perspective.

The last letter of the book is its most distinctive characteristic, with the author keeping the twists in the narrative a secret till the last few pages. Simon Standish, who has appeared sporadically in the narrative as a talented but struggling writer, addresses his employer the omnipresent Rev. Mr _____ asking if he can use the adventures in his friends' letters for the plot of a novel which his bookseller appears to like. The device implies that the previous letters are authentic and not yet edited or constructed to form a narrative. We are therefore presented with a clever embellishment of the truth claim usually found in preliminary material which although it 'could no longer delude [...] still pleased the public'.⁵ Furthering the truth claim is the character's detailing and condensing of events in their letters to the Rev. Mr _____ which resembles a reporting style, lending itself to Lennard Davis' belief that the rise of the novel corresponds with the rise of

¹Mary Davys, *The Reform'd Coquet* (1724) in *Popular Fiction by Women 1660-1730: An Anthology* ed. by Paula M. Backscheider and John J. Richetti (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 251-322, p. 253

²James 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. by Robert J. Griffin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 141-166, p. 142.

³Robert Darnton, 'History of reading', from *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* ed. by Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity, 2001)

⁴Anon., *Constantia; or the distressed friend* (London: W. Johnston, 1770). All subsequent references will be shortened to *Constantia* and page numbers will be given in the text.

⁵J.M.S Tompkins, *The popular novel in England, 1770-1800* (London: Methuen, 1932), p. 333.

journalism, and also reflects a more realistic letter writing experience.⁶ We also discover in the last chapter that the anonymous Rev. Mr _____ is the protagonist Constantia's long-lost Grandfather because Simon Standish attaches an allegorical musical for the Rev. Mr _____ 'GrandDaughter and Friend's' wedding, which subtly reveals the link. (p. 262 [My italics]) These two shifts change our original outlook on the text as the elusive figure of Constantia's grandfather has in fact been present throughout, and the reader is left perplexed as to whether Standish is the editor, a pseudo-name, or a fictional character in the text. The last chapter is an innovative device which would call for discussion at the time and asks for another reading of the text which would provide another interpretation.

AUTHORSHIP

As Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* illustrates, 'surmises about the literary writer were part of the stir that the book caused',⁷ and eighty-five years after *Constantia's* publication *Notes and Queries* asks: 'can you inform me who are the authors of the following anonymous novels? – 1. Constantia or the distressed friend'.⁸ In 1770, eight in ten novels were published anonymously and *Constantia* was one of them, with no name on the title page or a later attribution.⁹ We therefore have no choice but to read without an author, as Barthes instructs us to in *The Death of the Author*.¹⁰ However, whilst Barthes seeks to disassociate social, religious and political context from informing the work to allow 'unlimited interpretive play',¹¹ I believe a lot can still be gained from the text, especially when considered alongside others of the period. I therefore will take Wayne C. Booth's work on the 'implied author' which, he argues, is created by the reader who builds up a picture on

⁶ Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (Philadelphia: PENN, 1983)

⁷ John Mullan, *Anonymity: a secret history of English literature* (London: Faber, 2007), p. 10.

⁸ *Notes and Queries*, Volume 12 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1855), p. 45.

⁹ James Raven, 'Historical Introduction: The Novel Comes of Age' in *The English novel, 1770-1829 : a bibliographical survey of prose fiction published in the British Isles*, ed. by Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 41.

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of an Author' in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* ed. by Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. 1466 -1470.

¹¹ Paul Goring, Jeremy Hawthorn, Domhnall Michell, *Studying Literature: The Essential Companion* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006), p. 208.

the basis of the text.¹² By looking at the content we can make assumptions and speculate about the author such as the background, social status and level of education.

In *Constantia*, Simon Standish is proud that his bookseller 'now asks me [him] into his parlour' to discuss his work, implying it is a closer and more personal alliance. (p.262) However, no matter how close booksellers' relations were, the author's prospects often depended on whether he 'had or had not independent means, powerful patronage, or a fair social standing.'¹³ Brewer notes that 'period writers frequented coffee houses and taverns' which gave writers the opportunity to mix and promote themselves with the likes of Samuel Johnson; however it was still a matter of good fortune.¹⁴ The author of *Constantia* is also aware that unless an author 'can make a respectable appearance, such as may entitle him to become a Dictator to a circle in the Coffee house [...] or else has Influence enough to engage others for that Purpose, his Works may lie by from *Christmas* to *Christmas*.(p. 261) Conscious of the abundance of ephemeral literature, he is therefore 'desirous of attaining an exalted Reputation in the literary World' which is an author's greatest asset in attracting readership and obtaining a higher commission for their work. (p. 261) Contrary to Samuel Johnson's dismissive remark to Boswell that 'we have done with patronage',¹⁵ the support of another was still beneficial; The Rev. Mr___ who pays Standish thirty pounds a year to pursue his career for example, also has the 'Power to greatly promote' his work, which Standish is eager to encourage. (p. 261)

Speculation on the author

Writers often commented on the struggles of their profession; Fielding as early as 1742 in *Joseph Andrews* for example, has a chapter on authorship, and depicts the literary marketplace largely through Parson's Adam's encounter with the bookseller.¹⁶ The character Simon Standish is a talented writer, who writes

¹² W.C Booth, 'Rhetoric of Fiction' in Ibid. p. 209.

¹³ A.S. Collins: *Authorship in the Days of Johnson: Being a Study of the Relation Between Author, Patron, Publisher and Public 1726-1780* (1927; Clifton, [N.J.]: A. M. Kelley, 1973), p. 28.

¹⁴ John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p.161.

¹⁵ Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England 1650-1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 220.

¹⁶ Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* ([1742] London: penguin, 1999) Book 1 Chapter 17, and Book 2 Chapter 1.

‘tragedy, comedy, epics, epistles, Novels &c. &c, and I correct the press; by the former to acquire Fame, by the latter, Bread’, and potentially could be a character based on the author himself. (p. 47) If we consider this stance it would contribute to the anonymity on the title page because he is very honest about his struggling social position, the realities of writing as a profession and the price of his work. *If* the author is Standish, it is difficult to trace him because he was unwilling to associate himself with his work, but there was a Simon Standish in the eighteenth-century literary marketplace who is named in the *Honeysuckle* as the secretary to ‘the Society of Gentlemen’ in 1734.¹⁷ If the author was one of the gentlemen of the society, it suggests another possible reason for the anonymity of the work because ‘Gentry were loathe to have their names associated with commercial publication for fear of diminishing their social status by appearing to be ‘in trade’’.¹⁸ Certainly the choice to depict wealthy and aristocratic characters, who can afford to travel abroad, gamble and spend their days as they please, could support this claim. However, this is only speculation and this reference would make the author very old and living well past the average life expectancy of the time.¹⁹ Although admittedly a weak link, Charles Corbett, a figure of the Society of Gentlemen, and bookseller of several works in the eighteenth-century, could potentially be the author of *Constantia*, especially because he was erroneously assigned the work *Onia* as late as 1756.²⁰ Perhaps he used the pseudonym Simon Standish in the preface to the *Honeysuckle* which he printed in 1734 and where Standish is named, but this would need further research. Contrary to the assumption that the author could be a London Gentleman, the Irish links of the author could be a clue. Printing his work first in Dublin,²¹ having an Irish Officer who is considered a hero as a character and referencing the success of Irish authors

¹⁷ The society of gentlemen, *The Honeysuckle; consisting of original poems, epigrams, songs* [London: Charles Corbett, 1734] (ESTC)

¹⁸ Paula R. Feldman, ‘Women Poets and Anonymity in the Romantic era’ in *Authorship, commerce, and the public: scenes of writing, 1750-1850*, ed. by E.J. Clery, Caroline Franklin, Peter Garside (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 44-51, p. 44.

¹⁹ According to Wrigley and Schofield (1981) the average life expectancy for both sexes was 36.2 between 1750-1775, an average from high infant mortality. Cited in James Z. Lee, Wang Feng, *One quarter of humanity: Malthusian mythology and Chinese realities, 1700-2000* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 173.

²⁰ Elof Azel Carlson, *The unfit: a history of a bad* (USA: CSHL Press, 2001,) p. 33. Also can see the extent of his publications at <http://estc.bl.uk> [12/12/2010]

²¹ *The English novel, 1770-1829 : a bibliographical survey of prose fiction published in the British Isles*, ed. by Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 125.

It is unusual for a work to be printed in Dublin first because it goes against the standard practice of beginning in London, then once successful, other editions or pirate editions would later appear in Ireland.

such as Oliver Goldsmith are all possible allusions.²² It also seems that the writer is from the provinces based on his vague descriptions of London and the nonchalant reference to a 'London' publisher in his last letter. (p. 262) However, this is all speculation and despite my best efforts, the author stills remains an elusive figure.

Whilst the author's personal background remains a mystery, his educational background is clearer with intertextual allusions ranging from Rousseau and Shakespeare, to Otway, and John Gay. The epigraph on the title page is from Lucian who, as Fielding writes in the preface to *Amelia*, was 'a very excellent writer indeed' and suggests an author who is educated in the classics, especially with later references to Francis' translation of Horace.²³ (p. 262) Furthermore, in *Constantia* he displays a broad repertoire of writing styles including a musical allegory, an eastern tale, odes, and beginnings to comic operas giving the work variety and texture as well as demonstrating he is an author with a broad knowledge and love of literature.

Publishing History

Simon Standish, the alleged compiler of the text, excitedly remarks that having the London bookseller's 'very Name at the bottom of the Title page will ensure its success'. (262) The imprint is 'W. Johnston, Numb. 16. Ludgate-street' who was regarded as 'one of the leading shareholders in the trade' and began by purchasing stock and copyright from John Clarke in 1748.²⁴ By having a London imprint, Standish's reference to Johnston in the last letter of the narrative is a clever piece of whimsical flattery of both Johnston's influence and his own work.

²² The author refers to the 'Chinese Habit' by the Irish author Oliver Goldsmith on page 5. In the NDOB he is noted as 'one of 'the most distinguished literati of the day'. He wrote a series of humorous letters supposedly written by a Chinese traveller about his visit to London in the papers which were printed together in 1762. He went on to *The Vicar of Wakefield* in 1766 which had more twenty editions in the eighteenth century.

²³ Henry Fielding, *Amelia* in The Wesleyan Edition of the Works of Henry Fielding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 325.

²⁴ Ian Maxted: *The London Booktrades 1775-1800, a preliminary check list of members* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1977), p. 123.

Whilst the traditional ‘wholesale trade continued to be concentrated in the area around Stationers Hall’ which is where Ludgate Street and W. Johnston were located,²⁵ the opulence of new booksellers caused the trade to expand along the Strand towards the West-End. However, despite increased competition, the eighteenth century is said to be ‘an age of convivial hospitality’ in the literary world and both *Constantia*’s publishing history and the fictionalised account in the last chapter seem to support this claim.²⁶ Standish is encouraged that his bookseller has promised to ‘recommend the Work to a friend of his in *London*’ which could suggest the first publisher, Dillon Chamberlaine in Dublin had a working relationship with his London ‘friend’, Johnston. (p. 262) Raven remarks that by the 1760s Dublin booksellers, (including Dillon Chamberlaine) had strong links with London booksellers and were dependent on good relationships to keep up with the London trends, especially important with production pirated editions.²⁷ However, unfortunately Pollard notes ‘little is known’ of Chamberlaine’s working relationships and without any specific evidence about *Constantia* we can only speculate.²⁸ Nonetheless, even if the relationship is fictional, the letter still illustrates that the eighteenth-century was ‘the age of co-operation in the trade’.²⁹ At the very least, we do know that Johnston, ‘the great copy-owning bookseller of Ludgate Street’,³⁰ was partnered with George Robinson to 1763/4 and often collaborated with the likes of J. Rivington and J. Dodsley,³¹ illustrating the need for close relationships in the eighteenth-century book trade for the ‘conger’ system to work.³²

The author of *Constantia* clearly had faith in his own ability as he ‘took the financial burden’ himself and paid for an edition to be printed in Dublin,³³ suggesting wealth and aspirations to commercial success. The

²⁵ Terry Belanger: ‘Publishers and writers in eighteenth century England’ in *Books and their readers in eighteenth-century England: new essays* ed. by I. Rivers (London, New York: Continuum, 2003), pp. 5-25, p. 20.

²⁶ A.S Collins, p. 51.

²⁷ James Raven, *The business of books: booksellers and the English book trade, 1450-1850* (New Haven, Conn; London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 233.

²⁸ M. Pollard, *A dictionary of members of the Dublin book trade, 1550-1800* (London: Bibliographical Society, 2000), p. 98.

²⁹ A.S Collins, p. 15.

³⁰ Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote, *The London book trade: topographies of print in the metropolis from the sixteenth century* (London: British Library, 2003), p. 100.

³¹ ESTC, <http://estc.bl.uk> [accessed 12/12/2010]

³² The conger system was where publishers shared the risk of publication and agreed to take so many copies for sale

³³ J. Raven, ‘Historical Introduction: The Novel Comes of Age’, p. 90.

fictionalised debate on price reflects the reality of low copyright payments with Simon Standish expecting ‘a rise from Six Guineas’ that he received for his last novel, yet his bookseller ‘could not afford to give more than five Guineas for it.’ (p. 262, p.260) Authors had to negotiate the best they could especially when the uncertainty of copyright in the ‘seventies which kept prices down because ‘unsuccessful publications will lose money anyway and successful ones will be pirated.’³⁴ Standish’s payment seems fair when ‘the usual payment for a library novel seems to have been between five and ten guineas’ at the time.³⁵ Of course there were exceptions such as the £800 that Millar paid Fielding for his sentimental novel *Amelia* in 1751, which Samuel Johnston remarked ‘raised the price of literature’.³⁶ It was a brave bookseller who offered a substantial sum for copyright and, in contrast to the size of the first edition of *Amelia*, editions were usually printed at ‘no more than 500 at a time’; moreover, in 1770 fifty two per cent of novels like *Constantia* were not reprinted.³⁷ Such statistics show the transient life span of a novel which was fuelled by the abandonment of “intensive reading’ in favour of ‘extensive reading”, increasing the demand for fiction which could be devoured and quickly replaced.³⁸

Constantia was advertised in *The Public Advertiser*, *The New Daily Advertiser* and *The Scots Magazine*.³⁹ The adverts were no more than five lines and contained the title, the price bound, and the name and address of the printer; however the coverage is large, especially since the Public advertiser alone had ‘an average daily circulation of 3400’ in 1769-71.⁴⁰ Furthermore, in 1788 the allegorical play which Simon Standish includes in his letter to the Rev. Mr ____ is printed as an anonymous play in *Egertons Theatrical Remembrance* and later

³⁴ Belanger, p. 21.

³⁵ Tompkins, p.9.

³⁶ Tom Keymer, Jon Mee *The Cambridge companion to English literature from 1740 to 1830*, (Cambridge university press, 2004), p. 15.

³⁷ J. Raven, ‘Historical Introduction: The Novel Comes of Age’, p. 35.

³⁸ William St. Clair, *The reading in nation in the romantic period* (Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2004), p. 11.

³⁹ *Public Advertiser* on Saturday May 5, 1770, the *New Daily Advertiser* on Monday May 7, *The Scots Magazine* in Jul 1770. British Newspapers 1600-1900, www.bl.uk

⁴⁰ Richard D. Altick, *The English common reader: a social history of the mass reading public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p.48.

Constantia also featured in the catalogues of books by *The Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1770 and *The London* in 1773.

still, in 1824 *Constantia* appeared in the *Bibliotheca Britannica* by Robert Watt.⁴¹ The literary value of this anonymous novel, which only had one edition, is evident with Kessinger Publishing bringing out an edition in 2009 showing its ability to evoke continuing interest.⁴²

Plot synopsis

Printed in one volume, *Constantia* is a meta-narrative epistolary novel which is crammed full of action and is told through the correspondence of Sophia Easeby, her brother Charles, and their neighbours the Trevors. The novel begins with a letter from Charles to Sophia describing his discovery of a stranger asleep in a field who he takes into his house to recover. Meanwhile, in London, through Sir Thomas Trevor, Sophia meets Constantia who came to England with her friend Bella Lacey, whose correspondence from her lover Sir Thomas had been intercepted. Constantia becomes suspicious of their lodger Ned Green and inquires about alternative accommodation but when she returns, Bella has gone. Constantia is distraught and upon hearing news from Bella she goes immediately with Sir Thomas following; however, it is Green's hoax and Sir Thomas is wounded in a fight which later causes him to become melancholy. At this point, Henry Trevor rescues a distressed woman and explains his recent neglect of social life is a result of his shame at gambling away his estate.

Another strand to the narrative is Constantia's history which is told in irregular letters to Sophia. It begins with Count Lacey (Bella's grandfather) taking care of a wounded Irish officer who later marries one of the Count's daughters; however, because they are Protestant they are sentenced to being burnt at the stake in England. Miraculously, the wife gives birth to the orphan Constantia in the flames and the Count adopts her. The ending is tied up quickly with everyone being reunited and the identities of Henry's distressed lady and Charles' stranger are revealed as Constantia and Bella. Constantia hears from her grandfather, who we later

⁴¹ John Egerton, *Egerton's Theatrical remembrancer: containing a complete list of all the dramatic performances in the English language* [1788]

Robert Watt, *Bibliotheca Britannica*, Volume 3 [1824]

⁴² Anon., *Constantia, or the distressed friend* [1770] (USA: Kessinger Publishing, 2009)

realise is Rev. Mr _____, a character who offers advice to the characters, and the writer Standish inquires about using the adventures for a novel.

Reception

Irrespective of how much copyright was bought for, a work could not survive in the literary marketplace alone but was dependent on the booksellers, the voice of the readership and reception from the critics. Whilst not on Darnton's communications circuit, reviewing became an essential component of the eighteenth-century literary marketplace and the reviewing journal was something 'which no one, conversant in the literary world, ought, in justice to themselves, to be without'.⁴³ Reviews were popular reading material, and their following consistently grew; for example in 1768, two years before *Constantia*, *The Monthly* had a circulation of 3000.⁴⁴ Whether or not readers agreed with the critics is impossible to determine, but a ruthless review certainly had the potential to damage the success of a work. Whilst the Noble brothers accuse *The London* 'of damning every novel they publish', the reviews of *Constantia* were, on the whole, complimentary.⁴⁵ As Tompkins notes it was possible for 'little jets of warm approval to rise up in the desert of scorn',⁴⁶ and Noorthouck comments that his enthusiastic review of *Constantia* in *The Monthly* was 'no small compliment' in the mass of dismissive reviews of other works at the time.⁴⁷ By the 1770s, the 'new species' of writing of the mid-century had become worn with the deluge of imitations, and reviewers became irritated with how formulaic literature had become.⁴⁸ The majority of novels in the late eighteenth-century had a transient existence and often ended up in libraries which were 'crucial in boosting the consumption of books as ephemeral entertainment', and they were frequently considered to have little

⁴³ Advert in the *General Advertiser* October 1749 for the *Monthly Review*, cited in *Index to book reviews in England, 1749-1774* ed. by Antonia Forster (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, c1990), p. 9.

⁴⁴ Antonia Forster, 'Review journals and the reading public' in *Books and their readers in eighteenth-century England: new essays*, ed. by I. Rivers (London, New York: Continuum, 2003), pp. 171-190, p. 178.

⁴⁵ J. Raven, 'Historical Introduction: The Novel Comes of Age', p. 101.

⁴⁶ Tompkins, p. 17.

⁴⁷ Article 19. *Constantia; or, the Distressed Friend*, *Monthly Review*, 43 (1770: Aug), p. 152 British periodicals, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.co.uk>. All subsequent references from the *Monthly* are from this page. Oxford ODNB: Noorthouck worked for the Griffiths at the monthly until October 1793 when 'the weakness of my [his] eyes' caused him to resign. (Noorthouck to R. Griffiths, Bodl. Oxf. MS Add. C.89).

⁴⁸ Samuel Richardson quoted in John Richetti, *The English Novel in History 1700-1780* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 98.

literary value.⁴⁹ However, Noorthouck comments that *Constantia* ‘merits some distinction from the common performances of the kind of which the press is so prolific’ and highlights the text as an original work of value amongst the congested marketplace of indistinct imitations which increased ‘the mere Drug of books’;⁵⁰ a trend Goldsmith calls the ‘fatal revolution’ of literature.⁵¹

Noorthouck further praises the brevity of *Constantia* because although it ‘is comprised in one volume, it is full of business; and [...] might with ease be spun into four.’ Reviewers were growing tired of novels being drawn out to a second volume for more profit and conscious of the hack writer who knew that ‘the booksellers pay mechanically at any rate of so much per sheet...A flowing style is half the battle’.⁵²

Therefore, by containing *Constantia*’s hectic story in one volume the author’s credibility is increased because unlike the hack, he is not primarily motivated by filling the pages. *The Critical* also notes the fast pace, especially the beginning, which leaves him feeling ‘so perplexed’, but continues that the ‘winding up of it however, is clear and commendable’.⁵³ Promisingly, he hopes that the author of *Constantia* (who he assumes is male) will, ‘in *his* next novel, if *he* is encouraged to proceed, tell *his* tale with less perplexity, and make *his* good things, appear in a more graceful light.’ ([my italics], CR, p. 365) Encouragingly, the reviewer sees an author on the cusp of his literary career.

Generally, critics ‘paid attention to the moral, probability and characterisation of a novel’,⁵⁴ and Tompkins quotes the last line of *The Critical*’s review: ‘his intentions as a man sufficiently apologize for his irregularities as a writer’ to exemplify that in the late eighteenth-century ‘the function of the novel was explicitly

⁴⁹ *Authorship, commerce, and the public: scenes of writing, 1750-1850*, compiled by E.J. Clery, Caroline Franklin, Peter Garside (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 14.

⁵⁰ Edward Young, ‘Conjectures on Original composition’ (1759) in *Novel definitions: an anthology of commentary on the novel 1688-1815* ed. by Cheryl Nixon (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2008), p.191.

⁵¹ Goldsmith, [1761] quoted in Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (1957; London: Penguin, 1963), p. 56.

⁵² *The Egg or the memoirs of Gregory Giddy Esq.* [1772], cited in Tompkins, p. 8.

Giddy is persuaded by his friend to try novel writing and told not to worry too much about the style or content.

⁵³ Article VI. *Constantia, or, The Distressed Friend*, *Critical Review, or, Annals of literature*, 29 (1770: May), pp. 364-366, p. 364. British periodicals, <http://britishperiodicals.chadwyck.co.uk>. All subsequent references are from this source and will be given in the text with the abbreviation ‘CR’.

⁵⁴ Tompkins, p. 330

educational and that its main business was to inculcate morality by example'.⁵⁵ (CR, p. 366) The pedagogical qualities of *Constantia* are a defining feature of its reception and allowed reviewers to gloss over its imperfections. *The Critical* comments on the usefulness of correspondence from *Constantia*'s grandfather to the youth which 'ought to be attentively perused by every young person, as it contains precepts which cannot be too much commended'; (CR, p. 365) *The Monthly* also recommends its sentiments which it describes as 'chaste and laudable'; and *The London* notes it: 'gives some lessons that deserve a serious attention from its readers'.⁵⁶ *Constantia* was not considered pure improbable frivolity for entertainment alone, but a sensible and rewarding choice of novel.

Furthermore, *The Critical* also sees *Constantia*'s history as educational to readers because it is 'pathetically related, and the perusal of it will serve to strengthen every true protestant's abhorrence of popery'. (CR, p. 364) Alongside endorsing Protestantism, the opinion that the tale is 'pathetic' and evokes sympathy seems to take priority over its improbability. Similarly, *The London Magazine* affirms the author's 'power over the passions, that in a relation of some very improbable events, he affects the heart not a little forcibly.' Improbability was usually looked upon unfavourably, but the merits of *Constantia*'s didactic purpose and sentimental value seem to overshadow its adventurous plot of mistaken identities and poetic justice. However, in contrast, Noorthouck draws attention to the improbability of the history and astutely notes that 'Simon Standish is probably indeed indebted to Fox' seeing *Constantia*'s miraculous birth as '*absurd*' due to its implausibility.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Tompkins, p. 70

⁵⁶ Article V, *Constantia; or the Distressed Friend, The London Magazine, or the Gentleman's Intelligencer est. 1732*, 39 (May 1770), p. 267. All subsequent references from *The London* are from this page.

⁵⁷ Foxe's *The Book of Martyrs*,⁵⁷ depicts the suffering of English Protestants from the first to the sixteenth-century was first published in 1563. As Noorthouck notes, *Constantia*'s birth amongst the flames of her mother's stake is also told by Foxe. A woman and her two daughters are to be burned, one heavily pregnant whose 'bely of the woman brast a sonder by vehemencie of the flame,' but still gives birth to child which 'fell into the fire'. However, despite being taken out of the fire, he is thrown back into the flames unlike *Constantia* who is saved. In the eighteenth-century the book was still popular and would have been recognisable to the readership of *Constantia* because it was printed sixteen times between 1760 and 1780 showing the enduring demand of religious works in the eighteenth-century.

John Foxe. *Acts and Monuments [...]. The Variorum Edition*. [Online]. (hriOnline, Sheffield 2004). Available from: <http://www.hrionline.shef.ac.uk/foxe> [Accessed: 22.11.2020].

Discussion of the text

With no dedication, preface, marginalia or any illustrations to draw information from paratextual analysis is limited, and so focusing on the text itself is my main source of information. However, the lack of justification or apology in introductory material suggests that towards the end of eighteenth-century the novel genre was an accepted form of fiction, and it was enough to simply have 'A novel' on the title page. The novel represented a large body of fiction, especially in the epistolary form which was also widely used and no longer considered 'a new species of writing' as it was in the 1740s with the success of Richardson's *Pamela*; in fact in 1770, thirty five per cent of all English novels printed that year used letter correspondence as a framework.⁵⁸ However, in contrast to Richardson's epistolary work and meticulous detailing of daily experiences, *Constantia* follows Fielding's fast paced, episodic plot with layers of narrative intertwined throughout, as in *Joseph Andrews*. *Constantia* seems to weave strands from the work of Fielding and Richardson, as well as elements of sensation and romance such as abductions; a 'happy ending' and clear-cut characterisation to create a work that would both stand out and still be fashionable. Moreover, it was shielded from criticism by its exemplary didactic purpose and its depiction of sensibility which were so important in the 'seventies.

Sensibility

Ioan Williams's belief that eighteenth-century 'criticism of prose fiction in England falls into two sections, dividing at the year 1740', excludes the cultural and literary trend of sensibility, an important branch of fiction.⁵⁹ In the mid eighteenth-century, sensibility was considered an achievement of modern civilisation and 'was to most authors susceptibility to the gentler affections, pity, sympathy, and the other humanitarian feelings'.⁶⁰ It aimed to produce 'pathetic' effects in order to teach morality and so literature's function

Devorah Greenberg, 'Eighteenth-century 'Foxe': History, Historiography, and Historical Consciousness' in John Foxe. *Acts and Monuments [...]. The Variorum Edition*. [Online]. (hriOnline, Sheffield 2004). Available from: <http://www.hrionline.shef.ac.uk/foxe> [Accessed: 22.11.2020].

⁵⁸ Raven, 'Historical Introduction: The Novel Comes of Age', p. 32.

⁵⁹ Ioan Williams, *Novel and Romance 1700-1800* (London: Routledge, 1970), p.1.

⁶⁰ Walter Francis Wright, *Sensibility in English Prose Fiction 1760-1814: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Russel and Russel, 1972), p. 45.

evolved: 'Please and instruct became *indulge* and *improve*' and works of sensibility, such as *Constantia* show that pleasure and instruction are not mutually exclusive in fiction.⁶¹

Harvey defines four types of masculinity between 1650–1800 starting with the household patriarch, the libertine, the polite gentleman, and the man of taciturnity.⁶² The behaviour of the male characters in *Constantia* identifies them as polite gentleman, a stage which includes the short lived phenomenon of sensibility. The narrator observes 'there could not possibly be found two Heroes better adapted to be the subject of a modern Novel' as Charles and Sir Thomas as they embody the characteristics of sensibility.(p. 5) Therefore, the excessively sentimental hero Harley, in Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* [1771], provides a useful point of comparison to *Constantia*.⁶³ Mackenzie's episodic text 'displays certain incidents which would portray the hero [Harley] in a variety of emotional experiences' as he strives to help others and is grieved by their situations and tales.⁶⁴ The eighteenth century was considered 'the age of humanity, benevolence, or[and] charity'⁶⁵ and Charles, like Harley, continually demonstrates his good-will as he provides hospitality for a stranger and is sympathetic for his friends' unfortunate situations. Additionally, Harley is melancholy when he believes Miss Walton is to be engaged, and it is generally considered that he dies from his excessive emotions; likewise, Sir Thomas is inconsolable and falls ill from his futile attempts to rescue his beloved Bella. However, because he recovers with the support of Charles, *Constantia* can be considered to champion the emotions rather than illustrating their dangers because it concludes by rewarding the virtuous, sentimental characters and punishing deceitful ones.

Social analysis

Maurine Harkin's reads *The Man of Feeling* as a self-conscious discourse on the 'role of fiction in producing community and setting social standards', which were rapidly disintegrating towards the end of the

⁶¹ Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 120.

⁶² Karen Harvey, "The History of Masculinity, circa 1650-1800", *Journal of British Studies*, 44: 2 (April 2005)

⁶³ Henry Mackenzie *The man of feeling* ([1771] New York: Norton, 1958), pp.296-311.

⁶⁴ K. Slagle, 'Introduction' in *Ibid.* p, vii.

⁶⁵ Van Sant, p. 16.

eighteenth century.⁶⁶ With the rise of consumerism and the stirrings of the industrial revolution corrupting the morals of society, Harley is a resisting figure who attempts to restore good-will within the community. Looking at *Constantia* as social analysis, Charles and Sir Thomas can be seen as exemplary figures of sentimentalism with their expression of emotions and charitable acts. In contrast, Ned Green could be seen as the product of modernity with his deceit and manipulation which are motivated by his need for money. His ability to climb the social ladder by 'sponging' off others perhaps illustrates the concern of the rising middle class and shows that society was no longer clearly divided by wealth and class. Henry Trevor can also be seen as affected by the lures of modernity with his gambling abroad almost costing him his estate and reputation.

Continuing with the awareness of social problems in eighteenth-century England, the abduction of Constantia and Bella can serve as a caution to youth and of the need for females to be socially educated. A comparable text is Frances Burney's *Evelina* which is also written in epistolary form, and like *Constantia* traces a female's journey from the safety of the home to the dangerous wiles of eighteenth-century London.⁶⁷ The female protagonists in both texts learn to negotiate sexual threat and maintain their virtue and dignity throughout, unlike their predecessors such as Richardson's moral icon Clarissa and arguably Pamela as she fails to resist Mr.B's persistent rakish advances. They both illustrate that 'the modern young women of the 1770s can actually learn to cope and survive when they make it into the world',⁶⁸ and show the progression of female characterisation in literature.

Readership

The copy of *Constantia* in Chawton House library is similar to Sir Thomas's 'Paris Edition of *Captain Whim*, neatly bound and gilt' with good paper quality, ink and reasonable margins. (p. 12) It is printed in the most

⁶⁶ Maureen Harkin, 'Mackenzie's Man of Feeling: Embalming Sensibility' *ELH*, 61:2 (Summer, 1994), pp. 317-340, p. 318.

⁶⁷ Frances Burney, *Evelina, or, The history of a young lady's entrance into the world* ([1778] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)

⁶⁸ Vivien Jones, 'Introduction' in *Ibid.* p. Xiv.

popular form of duodecimol, like the seventy-five per cent of English novels printed in 1770,⁶⁹ and was part of John Charles Hardy's private library.⁷⁰ I have not found any accounts of readership of *Constantia* on the likely databases,⁷¹ but the physical book suggests that the reader enjoyed the novel enough to include it in their personal library. Furthermore with gold lettering and markings on the spine this edition of *Constantia* suggests a wealthy reader who could afford the luxury of investing in good binding even though it had not received the seal of approval of a second edition. However, in spite of the appearance of the physical book at Chawton, I believe *Constantia* was intended for the popular audience rather than the elite, with its contemporary intertextual allusions and fashionable form and style. *Constantia* proves to be a useful resource to explore the literary marketplace in the 1770s because it incorporates certain features of the time such as innovation, sensibility and didacticism. Despite its lack of further editions, it is understandable that it was recommended in the eighteenth century and is considered a significant text to be published once again in the twenty-first.

⁶⁹ J. Raven, 'Historical Introduction: The Novel Comes of Age', p. 96.

⁷⁰ This also explains why it is bound with another novel, as the owner was at liberty to choose how to present his books.

⁷¹ Such as the Reading Experience Database <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED/> [accessed 10/12/2010]

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Bibliographical Description

<p>Author (and attribution as it appears on title page, or note of pseudonym or anonymity)</p>	<p>Anonymous</p>
<p>Title (as it appears on title page)</p>	<p>Constantia; or the distressed friend. A novel</p>
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<p>Physical description (details relating only to this specific copy, e.g. binding & decoration, binding anomalies, annotations etc.)</p>	<p>Binding: Contemporary quarter sheep gilt, red label Decoration: the embossed gold leaf pattered tooling on the spine. Marble effect on the fore edge is quite elaborate. Plain pastedown and end sheet.</p> <p>Bound with Memoirs of Harriet and Charlotte Meanwell 1756. However, not mentioned on the spine or on front page.</p> <p>The narrow margins (showing the expense of paper) means some pages which are not aligned come very close to the edge of the paper</p>
<p>Provenance (e.g. bookplates, inscriptions)</p>	<p>From the John Charles Hardy Library, with his bookplate, and an additional amoral bookplate which has the Latin phrase "Certum Pete Finem." (aim at a certain end)</p>
<p>Details of advertisements (you can summarise if there is a long list e.g. genre, price range, a few characteristic or notable titles)</p>	<p>Four line advertisement in the <i>Public Advertiser</i> (Saturday May 5, 1770) and in <i>Gazette and New Daily Advertiser</i> (Monday, May 7, 1770)</p>
<p>Paratext (title page epigraph, subscription list, dedication, preface, introduction, etc. noted or summarised)</p>	<p>Epigraph is from Lucian, genre: novel, no subscription list, dedication, preface, or introduction.</p>