

The Parisian; or, Genuine Anecdotes of Distinguished and Noble Characters
By Mary Charlton¹

Discussion of the Physical book and Charlton's career:

The physical copy of Mary Charlton's novel at the Chawton House Library is a copy of the first and only edition of *The Parisian; or, Genuine Anecdotes of Distinguished and Noble Characters* (1794). It comprises two volumes of 231 and 216 pages respectively, both in pocket size duodecimo form. The covers are marbled in pattern and are quite worn and faded² but the paper is thick and of good quality. In its original form the novel was anonymous but was later attributed to Mary Charlton³. *The Parisian* was Charlton's first novel and she went on to write many more with success. Her most famous work was *Rosella; or, Modern Occurrences* (1799) which was a satire on novel reading and she was also noted for her translations⁴. The copy of *The Parisian* at Chawton bears the imprint of the Minerva Press and Charlton remained with William Lane throughout her career becoming one of his bestsellers⁵.

Inside the front cover of both volumes of the novel at Chawton is a crest⁶ with the name 'J^r Henry Hay Makdougall. Bar^t of Makerstoun' underneath it and on the opposite page is a label that reads 'from the library John Charles Hardy' who was a twentieth century collector. Sir Henry Hay Makdougall, the Baronet of Makerstoun, Scotland, appears on internet search engines and interestingly another book from 1797 appears to bear his crest; *Munster Abbey, a Romance: Interspersed with Reflections on Virtue and*

¹ Mary Charlton, *The Parisian; or, Genuine Anecdotes of Distinguished and Noble Characters* (London: Minerva Press, 1794). Subsequent references are to this edition and are given in parenthesis.

² See appendix 2

³ Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press 1790-1820* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939) p. 166

⁴ M. O. Grenby, 'Charlton, Mary (fl. 1794–1824)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 < <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45840?docPos=2> > last updated 2004 [accessed 6th Jan 2009] (paragraph 1&2 of 2)

⁵ M. O. Grenby. 'Charlton, Mary', paragraph 1 of 2.

⁶ See appendix 2

Morality by Sir Samuel Egerton Leigh appears to hold the same bookplate as *The Parisian*. The tale is also strikingly similar: ‘Despite the title holding out the prospect of fashionable tale of terror, Leigh’s novel is essentially sentimental and domestic in content’⁷. Although based on a very small sample, this, coupled with the titles on the Minerva Press catalogue, may indicate the growing trend of Gothic Romance and domestic fiction that was popular during the 1780’s and 90’s.

Plot Synopsis:

The story begins by introducing us to the beautiful Laure, Childhood companion of Adeline, the daughter of a French aristocrat the Comte D’Ogimond, Laure is of unknown parentage but was taken in and educated by the Comte and his confidant Madame De Germeil. The story is published at the height of the French Revolution and its characters and plots are extremely relevant to the contemporary political climate. Laure, Adeline and Madame De Germeil are forced to leave France and spend time amongst London’s high society until they receive news that the Comte is in trouble. A friend from France, the Marquis De Saint Ouïn, finds Laure and proves that the Comte is a villain by showing her a letter from the Comte directing De Saint Ouïn to murder a man who was shortly to reveal the Comte to the National Guard. De Saint Ouïn and Laure are kept apart by Madame De Germeil but maintain communications through a loyal friend, Fitzpier.

De Saint Ouïn returns to France and shortly after the women are also summoned back by the Comte. However, they are taken prisoner on route at the local magistrate’s abbey. Here Laure is recognised and established as the grand-daughter of Madame De

⁷ ViaLibri, ‘LEIGH (Sir Samuel Egerton)’, Hinck & Wall, Inc. / viaLibri, 2008 < <http://www.vialibri.net> > last updated 2008 [accessed 5th Jan 2009] (paragraph 1 of 1)

Brience whose daughter is the estranged wife of the Comte D'Ogimond. Together, Laure and Madame De Brience flee France and after a perilous crossing and rescue by Fitzpier, De Saint Ouin joins them in England. We then discover that the Comte had intended to secure the estates of the Duke De Brience by marrying Laure. However, safe in England, Laure and De Saint Ouin marry and live happily with Madame De Brience.

Publishing History:

Mary Charlton's *The Parisian* bears the imprint 'London: Printed for William Lane, at the Minerva Press, Leadenhall-street' a common badge for novels of this period. William Lane, 'one of the most astute and enterprising publishers of the eighteenth century'⁸, established himself as a bookseller around 1770 and occupied his famous premises at No. 33 Leadenhall Street by 1775⁹. In 1794 the successful Minerva circulating library was 'said to have been established upwards of twenty years'¹⁰ and during the 1780's 'affairs in Leadenhall Street were increasingly prosperous' when it is probable that 'he had set up his own press'¹¹. The Minerva Press held a certain reputation for manufacturing 'cheap fiction' in the form of novels, Romances and adventures and was especially known for its quantity of Gothic tales, all of which were directed at the female reading public.

Watt attributes the success of Richardson, Fielding and Defoe in the mid-eighteenth century, to their new genre's lack of canon and so disregard for contemporary

⁸ Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press*, p. 5

⁹ Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press*, p. 6

¹⁰ Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press*, p. 6

¹¹ Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press*, p. 9

traditional literary standards¹². However, not long after these triumphs in the literary marketplace, novels became common and tinged by the ‘sameness of mass production’¹³. Lane was accused of ‘trying to suit the shallow pocket with his wares’¹⁴ and critical reviews approached novels with ‘abuse and distaste’¹⁵. However, the novel continued to sell and was increasingly popular with the rising middle class and the expanding reading public of middle class women with more leisure time¹⁶.

Mary Charlton’s first, anonymously published novel, *The Parisian* was relatively unsuccessful with the critical reviewers of the time but was generally acknowledged to be above the normal run of Minerva Press novels. In the *Monthly Review*, William Enfield declares that there is ‘little...to entitle it to any high degree of commendation’ and the *Critical Review* comments that ‘the *genuine* anecdotes upon which this novel is founded, are certain *fictions* respecting a part of the family of the late wretched Duke of Orleans, a man who surely required not the blackening of imagination’¹⁷. However, they were not totally averse to the novel, allowing that it was ‘not ill told’ and was a ‘lively exhibition of some of the frivolities of high life’ that ‘held up to proper ridicule’ the ‘modern manners of certain fashionable inhabitants of St. George’s and St. James’s parishes’¹⁸.

The aspects of the novel condemned by the *Critical Review*, its somewhat Gothic ‘blackening’ of the Duc D’Orleans’ story, may have been what made it popular with Lane’s reading public; for no amount of critical reviews could stop the popularity of

¹² Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957) pp. 56-58

¹³ J. M. S Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1932) p. 4

¹⁴ Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 12

¹⁵ Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 18

¹⁶ Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 44

¹⁷ Peter Garside, James Raven & Rainer Schöwerling, *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographic Survey of Prose Fiction. Volume 1: 1770-1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 609

¹⁸ Garside & Raven, *The English Novel: A Bibliographic Survey*, p. 609

Gothic Romances¹⁹ in the 1790's with the middle class female reading public. Mary Charlton and *The Parisian* were obviously very popular with the target audience as they appear on the Minerva Prospectus of 1798 (four years after the publishing of *The Parisian*) under 'works of particular and favourite authors'²⁰. Charlton's novel is popular, perhaps, because of its mixture of Gothic and Romance elements coupled with satirical mocking of excessive flattery and high manners. 1794, when *The Parisian* was published, also saw the success of Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*²¹. Gothic was the increasingly popular mode and *The Parisian* is advertised in *The Mystic Cottager of Chamouny* alongside works such as *Castle Zittaw, A German Tale, Madeline; or, the Castle of Montgomery* and *The Weird Sisters*²². These titles, including Charlton's, conjure classic images of the Gothic, as does Charlton's dark and villainous Comte who steals Laure away from her childhood nurse with a plot to marry her and secure her dead father's estate. However, this element of Charlton's work is regulated by a scathing satire of the improbability of the supernatural element of the Gothic. When Laure and her companions are attending the party of Sir Edward Lockyer and the band do not turn up to play:

The calm...was soon disturbed by the entrance of a servant, who whispered to the expecting Sir Edward, with many marks of fear and horror, that while John and Joe were listening in the Park for the sound of wheels, they had seen a figure, all in white, carrying a white coffin round the clump of elms (p. 32 vol. 2)

This news is overheard by a lady whose husband, an officer, is missing and thought dead in the Bay of Bengal and she interprets this as her husband's ghost visiting to let her

¹⁹ Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 243

²⁰ Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press*, p. 309

²¹ Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 7

²² Anon., *The Mystic Cottager of Chamouny: a Novel, in two volumes* (London: Minerva Press, 1794) <<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO?dd=0&locID=unisoton&d1=0026900901&srchtp=b&c=1&SU=All&d2=193&docNum=CW3316287314&b0=the+mystic+cottager+of+chamouny&h2=1&l0=1793-1795&vrsn=1.0&b1=KE&d6=193&d3=3&ste=10&stp=Author&d4=0.33&n=10&d5=d6>> [accessed 6th Jan 2009]

know that she should allow her new lover to succeed him in her heart. The scene is built up until eventually the men go to inspect the matter;

Fitzpier could not restrain an immoderate fit of laughter, which being heard by Sir Edward and his followers, who had still kept aloof, they all ran to the place, and discovered in the object of their terror, an unhappy individual of the expected York band, stripped of his coat and waistcoat, which hung on his arm, and the white coffin a viol de Gamba, in a deal case (p. 38 vol.2).

Here the supernatural is mocked with great skill and one cannot help but think, in a century where heroic Romances have been ridiculed for their improbability²³, Charlton is clearly injecting some form of the real and everyday into her novel to support its didactic message that virtue is more important than wealth:

Madame de Brience, and her children, could no longer, it is true, live in the splendour, to which they had been accustomed; but nature had happily given them qualifications, to enjoy the most exalted felicity, in a state of comparative obscurity (p. 215-216, vol. 2).

Charlton mixes elements of the Gothic and Romance with realism and satire which reflects the development of the novel up to the 1790's that has seen Richardson's didactic moralising, Fielding's witty experimentalism and satire, and Burney's hybrid of satire and sensibility²⁴. Although not as popular as these almost canonical writers²⁵, Charlton combines a knowledge and criticism of the emerging sub-genres of the novel with sensitivity to the demands of the middle class female novel reading public.

Paratext:

The paratext of *The Parisian* consists of a dedication 'to my readers' which mocks the excess and falsity of the flattery of patrons. Before the eighteenth century and

²³ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* No. 4, 31st March 1750 <

<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/johnson.rambler.html> > [accessed 7th Jan 2009]

²⁴ Seminar notes, Fri 31st October 2008 (week 4)

²⁵ Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 4 -5

even during the early part of it, patronage by the aristocracy and court was the dominant means of earning a livelihood as an author²⁶ and in the dedications, writers would hand over their works to their patrons emphasising their virtue and greatness to ensure the success of the work²⁷. Charlton's witty and amusing dedication mocks:

Had I been impolitic enough to offer to an individual in the guise of a Dedication, that luscious food which, enigmatic quality, sickens all who do *not* swallow it, I might perhaps have begun thus:

To Her Grace the Duchess of _____

MADAM,

The eminent and conspicuous virtues which enrich your mind, and distinguish your Grace equally with the exquisite and acknowledged beauty of your lovely person,

Or thus:

To His Royal Highness, or to My Lord, or to anybody (p. ii – iii, vol. 1).

This appears to mock the tradition of highly elevated language, exclamation and high characters, however, it also shows a sensitivity to the changing audience of the later eighteenth century. In the move away from patronage, the eighteenth century literary marketplace made a commodity of the novel²⁸ and a trade of authorship.

The decline of literary patronage by the court and the nobility had tended to create a vacuum between the author and his readers; and this vacuum had been quickly filled by the middlemen of the literary marketplace, the publishers, or...booksellers²⁹.

It was booksellers such as William Lane who made the novel that 'debased kind of writing' in which booksellers 'pandered to the reading public'³⁰. Pandering to the public may have given novels their bad reputation but the literary marketplace was now such that writers depended 'not on patronage but on...the book-buying public'³¹. A famous

²⁶ Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 13

²⁷ Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage*, p. 29

²⁸ Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p.53

²⁹ Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 52

³⁰ Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 54

³¹ Robert Griffin, 'Anonymity and Authorship' from *New Literary History* 30.4, <

http://blackboard.soton.ac.uk/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_id= 2_1&url=%2fwebapps%2fblackboard

example of the awareness of an author's dependence on the public is the preface to Frances Burney's first novel *Evelina* that is dedicated 'to the authors of the Monthly and Critical Reviews'³²; this was earlier than Charlton and Burney must have been an influence upon her writing. Both show that the literary marketplace is centred on the reading public and use this wisely.

Watt's work on the 'rise of the novel' argues that it rises in conjunction with the rise of an intermediate middle class and also the expansion of the reading public who were mainly females in this new, and for the first time dominant, class who had previously undiscovered leisure time thanks to the culture of manufacture developing in the towns of England³³. Charlton shows awareness of the futility of dedicating her work to one aristocratic person stating that:

Had I fallen into this strain, Lady Charlotte and her dear friend, unhappily reduced to the necessity of trying to fill an hour with looking over my petite piece, would have exclaimed – Oh heavens! Pass over that nonsense and let us get at the story! (Dedication, vol. 1 p. iii)

This targets the female upper class whilst directly appealing to the middle class readership; Charlton knows her audience well and through wit and directing modest flattery to them she displays sensitivity to the literary marketplace and understanding of where her patronage now lies. This marks the importance of the novel reading public to the form and sub-genre of novels at this time in which the now predominantly female middle class readership demands frequent influx of new novels from the bookseller for

[%2fexecute%2flauncher%3ftype%3dCourse%26id%3d_97451_1%26url%3d](#) >, last updated 1999 [accessed 5th Jan 2009] (paragraph 4 of 33)

³² Frances Burney, *Evelina; or, the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (London: W. Lowndes, 1778) <

[p. v](http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO?dd=0&locID=unisoton&d1=0022200201&srcht=b&SU=All&c=2&df=f&d2=7&docNum=CW3309427228&b0=Evelina&h2=1&vrsn=1.0&l0=1778-1780&b1=KE&d6=7&d3=7&ste=10&d4=0.33&stp=Author&n=10&d5=d6 > [last accessed 8th Jan 2009]</p></div><div data-bbox=)

³³ Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, pp. 35-59

entertainment purposes. This dedication also affixes the main purpose of the work to the pleasure and entertainment of the readers: ‘What amusement would this afford you? And where would be the satisfaction of reading the most animated panegyrick if you had not a share in it?’ (Dedication, vol. 1)

This raises two issues addressed in the mid-eighteenth century; that of the improbability of Romance obscuring the reader’s relation to the story (and so its moral message) because it did not relate to their everyday life; and the argument over whether novels should be first and foremost morally guiding or read for amusement. Dr. Johnson was important in both of these discourses and his article of 1750 in *The Rambler* talks about the popular works of the time, predominantly by Richardson and Fielding, which move away from the heroic Romance towards the Realistic. The key point is probability; Romances are rejected for their inability to ‘bring about natural events by easy means’³⁴. The realism of the day or ‘comedy of Romance’ can ‘neither bewilder its personages in deserts, nor lodge them in imaginary castles’ but ‘are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world’³⁵. Whether or not Charlton’s actual story is true to life (which is discussed later) her dedication shows a drive towards relating the novel and its message directly to the lives of her audience. The discussion over the relevance of the action in novels to the lives of the reading public was still an important one in the 1770’s. Even though aspects of Charlton’s text seem improbable to us, such as the villainy of the Comte and the rescue of De Saint Ouïn from the sea, one may perhaps argue that in the context of the French Revolution which was at its peak at this time, the text is less Romantic and more politically relevant.

³⁴ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, paragraph 2 of 16

³⁵ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, paragraph 1 & 2 of 16

The other debate of the mid-eighteenth century that *The Parisian* seems to comment on is whether the purpose of literature should be giving moral guidance or whether it should merely entertain. Johnson is clear on this subject; he states that the novel, because of its young and impressionable audience and probable relevance to their lives, should be morally didactic:

That the highest degree of reverence should be paid to youth, and that nothing indecent should be suffered to approach their eyes or ears; are precepts extorted by sense and virtue from an ancient writer, by no means eminent for chastity of thought. The same kind, tho' not the same degree of caution, is required in every thing which is laid before them, to secure them from unjust prejudices, perverse opinions, and incongruous combinations of images³⁶.

Johnson would have novelists censor their version of life for morally guiding examples.

Richardson is one of the best examples of a morally didactic writer of the mid-eighteenth century but even he, in his preface to *Pamela*, writes: 'If to *divert* and *entertain*, and at the same time to *instruct* and *improve* the minds of the YOUTH of *both sexes*'³⁷. This moral purpose is coupled with an aim to entertain, although the moral didacticism is stronger. Fielding also advocates both, but in chapter one of *The History of Tom Jones* he emphasises the need for his audience to be entertained by his works in a clever metaphor of being the master of a 'public ordinary' and selling his food:

Men who pay for what they eat, will insist on gratifying their palates, however nice and even whimsical these may prove; and if everything is not agreeable to their taste, will challenge a right to censure, to abuse, and to d—n their dinner without controul³⁸

And: 'In like manner, the excellence of the mental entertainment consists less in the subject, than in the author's skill in well dressing it up'³⁹.

³⁶ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, paragraph 7 of 16

³⁷ Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (London: C. Rivington & J. Osborn, 1740) p. i

³⁸ Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones* (1749) ed. by R. P. C. Matter (Penguin, 1966) p. 51

³⁹ Fielding, *Tom Jones*, p. 52

This places entertainment of the reader on his or her own terms, as central to the novel. William B. Warner has argued that Watt's 'Rise of the novel' model is a 'narrative' that is based on assumptions; one of which is that the novel was characterized by Realism⁴⁰. Warner argues that the realism of the new type of novel of Richardson and Fielding is linked to an emphasis on didacticism by Watt and that attempts to elevate the novel obscure the early centrality of pleasure in genre⁴¹. Warner gives the examples of Behn, Manly and Haywood for this centrality of pleasure⁴². However, it is evident in Richardson and Fielding that entertainment was a key aspect of the novel and it is equally clear in Charlton's dedication that by the 1790's pleasure had become central to novels⁴³. Watt's theory on the rise of the novel, the middle class and the reading public suggests that the 'altered...centre of gravity of the reading public' towards the middle class meant that literature was directed less at the educated and professional and more at those 'who desired an easier form of literary entertainment, even if it had little prestige among the literati'⁴⁴. Charlton's Minerva Press audience would certainly have been this newly central middle class reading public and in her work we see the centrality of entertainment through literature. Although Warner would argue that we are viewing Charlton from inside the 'rise of the novel' 'narrative' and not outside of it, as he does⁴⁵.

Satire and Sensibility, Romance and Realism:

⁴⁰ William B. Warner, 'The Rise of the Novel in the eye of literary history', in *Licensing Entertainment* (Berkeley: University of California, 1998) pp. 1-44, p. 1 & 2

⁴¹ Warner, 'The Rise of the Novel in the eye of literary history', p. 4

⁴² Warner, 'The Rise of the Novel in the eye of literary history', p. 4

⁴³ Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 72

⁴⁴ Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 48

⁴⁵ Warner, 'The Rise of the Novel in the eye of literary history', p. 3

Mary Charlton's *The Parisian* is very difficult to place in any one of the sub-genres of the eighteenth century novel so it is necessary to look at the features of each alongside an analysis of the text. Sensibility was one of the prime features of fiction writing between the 1740's and the 1770's with authors such as Lawrence Sterne and Henry Mackenzie as its examples⁴⁶. Sensibility emphasised 'the faculty of feeling, the capacity for extremely refined emotion and a quickness to display compassion for suffering'⁴⁷. Tears were the currency of sensibility and crying was 'to give convincing testimony of one's sensibility'⁴⁸. The pathos of sensibility was meant to evoke moral feeling in the reader who was 'forced to respond to the emotion conveyed'⁴⁹. The characteristics of novels of sensibility are 'terms such as 'benevolence', 'virtue', 'esteem', 'delicacy' and 'transport'', it is full of hyperbole and apostrophe, and 'exclamation marks, brackets, italics and capitals pepper and disturb the flow of sentences'⁵⁰. Its subject is quite often filial relations or obedience⁵¹. Janet Todd also remarks on how sentimental fiction is 'reactive and unstable' and therefore does not move 'logically to its destination' but 'meanders'⁵². There are elements within *The Parisian* to suggest that it is a novel of sensibility: its plot is a continual meandering journey; its subject matter is the familial situation of Laure.

Madame de Germeil remained with the young ladies in a state of perturbation and anxiety that would have excited interest in a mind far more unfeeling than that of Laure; who forgetting all the coldness and dislike with which she had lately been treated, shared her grief, and consoled her with inimitable delicacy and tenderness (p. 80, vol. 2).

⁴⁶ Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1986) p. 4 & 8

⁴⁷ Janet Todd, *Sensibility*, p. 7

⁴⁸ Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 96

⁴⁹ Janet Todd, *Sensibility*, p. 6

⁵⁰ Janet Todd, *Sensibility*, p. 5

⁵¹ Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 84 - 85

⁵² Janet Todd, *Sensibility*, p. 6

This section displays a language of sensibility. Laure frequently breaks down in tears throughout the novel and the sections of dialogue between her and De Saint Ouin are full of exclamation marks, capitals and italics (p. 105-109, vol. 1). All of this would suggest that *The Parisian* is a novel of sensibility, however, as Todd states, the cult of sensibility is dying out and being ridiculed during the 1780's and 90's⁵³.

There are scenes within *The Parisian* itself that appear to mock sensibility. When stopped and taken prisoner on the road just outside Paris, Laure, Madame de Germeil and Mademoiselle D'Ogimond are taken to the local magistrate's house where Laure is recognised. The 'gouvernante' of the Abbey, Madelon, shows an excess of emotion that makes excess sentiment comical in contrast to Laure: 'Laure's emotions, which had been hardly supportable, were now relieved by tears; and Madelon conjecturing the cause, blubbered an accompaniment' (p. 111, vol. 2). The difference in language between 'tears' and 'blubbered' is striking and the scene becomes even funnier when they find out that the letter from Madame de Brience actually carries good news:

Letting slip the lower part of her apron, which was gathered up in her hand, cabbages, carrots, sorrel, garlic, and sage, were scattered about the room in great profusion...but heedless of the confusion, Madelon threw her arms round his [the Abbé's] neck in a most indecorous transport, and fixing the onions just under his nose, he struggled hard to disengage himself...yet scarcely perceiving the effect of her unlimited ecstasy, she quitted the Abbé, with his torn cassock, and his eyes overflowing with water (pp. 113-114, vol. 2)

In this way, and in the dedication, Charlton appears to mock excessive sensibility.

Todd also notes that romances and Gothic novels have elements of sensibility in them but use them to their own ends⁵⁴.

So perhaps *The Parisian* is a Gothic or Romantic novel? As I have shown, the novels mocks the supernatural of the Gothic in the scene with the ghostly band member

⁵³ Janet Todd, *Sensibility*, p. 7

⁵⁴ Janet Todd, *Sensibility*, p. 9

and the Abbey home of the magistrate, as shown above, is the site of comedy rather than any Gothic supernatural. It may be more convincingly described as a Romance with its sometimes elevated language and aristocratic, even royal, characters. However, the central character, Laure, has a more normal and everyday name⁵⁵. The definition of Romance is based on improbability but at the height of the French Revolution, when *The Parisian* is written these journeys across the sea and scandals of murder with the aristocracy forced to leave the country, would not have been the improbable fantasy of Romance fiction⁵⁶. As even the *Critical Review* states, the basis for the Comte's character was 'a man who surely required not the blackening of imagination'⁵⁷. The falsity of praising, in highly elevated language, the virtues of the nobility is emphasised in the dedication and the majority of the first volume is spent in mocking the manners of fashionable society. Lady Carbreon is ridiculed for her vanity and Lady Lockyer for her addiction to gaming. In this aspect *The Parisian* cannot be called a novel of manners for it mocks the very society who should be emulated in a Romance⁵⁸.

Indeed, *The Parisian* does not fit as a Romance or a Gothic novel and although it holds elements of sensibility, it is questionable whether, in the 1790's, we are meant to take them seriously. This difficulty in categorizing the work probably arises from the fact that the categories applied are modern critical labels for the novel. It is clear that Charlton was aware of the trends in the literary marketplace otherwise she would not be able to mock them with such skill but these labels are modern ones. It is more true to say that *The Parisian* is a hybrid of sub-genres, as we see them. The novel includes elements of

⁵⁵ Emma Clery, Lecture Notes, Week 11 (Monday 5th January 2009)

⁵⁶ David Cody, 'French Revolution', on *The Victorian Web* <
<http://www.victorianweb.org/history/hist7.html>> last updated 10th August 2007 [accessed 8th Jan 2009]

⁵⁷ Garside & Raven, *The English Novel: A Bibliographic Survey*, p. 609

⁵⁸ Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, paragraph 2 of 16

Romance whilst mocking the truly improbable parts of it; its title and plots suggest those of Gothic novels yet it mocks the excess and implausibility of the supernatural; and it advocates sensible virtue but turns excess sentiment into comedy. This novel shows an awareness of most forms of the common novel in the 1790's and it rises above them to create its own form that could be described as a type of realism and satire. Realism was defined by its probability in everyday life and Charlton rejects the improbable from the proliferation of forms she uses to create the moral message that genuine virtue is rewarded, not with wealth and high society, but with happiness and restored family ties. This probable moral message produces a realism of the 1790's in which novels are published in their hundreds, good alongside bad⁵⁹, and Charlton rises above her Minerva contemporaries⁶⁰ by navigating these with wit and satire.

Whilst writers such as Richardson and Fielding had no literary traditions of the novel to follow they were more inclined to have strong, decisive discourses of either Romance or realism, sensibility or satire, in their works⁶¹. However writers such as Burney and Charlton had traditions to navigate and discriminate between in their literature. Just as Burney's *Evelina* can be seen as a hybrid of sensibility and satire, so can Charlton's first novel be seen to combine many forms and it is perhaps most fitting to say that Charlton writes in the 'school of Burney'⁶². Both of their heroines take journeys to search for parents (fathers) in a similar way, perhaps, to how these novelists search back through their new fictional roots to define their works and discover where they belong.

⁵⁹ Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 2

⁶⁰ M. O. Grenby. 'Charlton, Mary', paragraph 1 of 2

⁶¹ Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, Chapter 1, pp. 1-34

⁶² Emma Clery, Lecture Notes, Week 10 (Monday 8th December)

Epigraph:

Although *The Parisian* is a mixture of the novels of manners, sensibility and satire, it is the latter area which Charlton excels in. The critics praised her for her ‘exhibition of some of the frivolities of high life’ and the ‘proper ridicule’ of high society⁶³. The strength of Charlton’s ability as a writer shines through in her satire and in fact the most successful work of her career, *Rosella; or, Modern Occurrences* (1799) was a witty satire on novel reading itself⁶⁴.

One of the most telling examples of Charlton’s satirical mocking of convention in *The Parisian* occurs in the epigraph.

Fictis meminerit nos non joculari fabulis

Variouly translated; ‘let it be remembered that we are amusing you with tales of fiction’⁶⁵ or ‘Let those whom folly prompts to sneer be told we sport with fable here’⁶⁶.

This is a slightly inaccurate quote taken from the Roman philosopher Phaedrus who

Claims two merits for his book: first that it gives good advice; and second, that it is very amusing, *risum movet*; and with a superfluity of solemn dullness, he admonishes the reader, that if anybody objects to beasts and trees speaking, it is to be remembered that the author is telling stories and joking⁶⁷.

⁶³ Garside & Raven, *The English Novel: A Bibliographic Survey*, p. 609

⁶⁴ Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press*, p. 61

⁶⁵ Henry T. Riley, ‘Dictionary of Latin and Greek quotations, proverbs, maxims, and mottos, classical and mediaeval, including law terms and phrases’ (1891), *Internet Archive* <
http://www.archive.org/stream/dictionaryoflati1891rileuoft/dictionaryoflati1891rileuoft_djvu.txt >
[accessed 4th Jan 2009]

⁶⁶ John Hawkesworth, *The Adventurer*, No. 37, Tuesday 13th March, 1753 <
http://books.google.com/books?id=QXdHAAAIAAJ&pg=PA227&lpg=PA227&dq=fictis+meminerit+no+n+jocari+fabulis&source=bl&ots=YgNmhBUxA&sig=5GfmdffULsD7z0E2qQcNbNHCyIM&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=3&ct=result > [accessed 6th Jan, 2009]

⁶⁷ Anon. ‘Men and Books’, in *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* ed. by Thomas Campbell, Samuel Carter Hall, Edward Bulwer Lytton, Theodore Lytton (London: Henry Colburn, 1833) <
http://books.google.com/books?id=KDMAAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA81&lpg=PA81&dq=fictis+meminerit+no+n+jocari+fabulis&source=bl&ots=EXa-Ln05m0&sig=rJgEOZw36_AwKONnq-uAMxOa2FI&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=12&ct=result#PPA85,M1 > [accessed 7th Jan, 2009]

Not only does this mock the convention of the epigraph, which was used to elevate the work by association with the classics and high education, it undermines its own title of 'genuine anecdotes of distinguished and noble characters'. It places Charlton as a promising writer of satire who can laugh at a marketplace full of novels that arose out of conduct manuals⁶⁸ yet is now fully indulgent in Gothic Romances⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, p. 71

⁶⁹ Tompkins, *The Popular Novel*, pp. 243 - 295

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