

An Introduction to Ann Gomersall's *The Citizen* (1790)

1 **Author Bibliography**

There is very little existing information on Ann Gomersall, due to the fact that:

In May 1790 the first Poor Rate Assessment Book for 16 years [...] was compiled [...] The correspondence in the Temple Newsam estate papers (the obvious source for alleged letters between the authoress and her patron) has a long gap, 1777-93. The Leeds Vestry Committee Minute and Order Book fails after 1770.¹

However, although little is known about her life, Gomersall's work gained much critical praise during its time, and more recently her novels have been described as 'superior to those of most other female writers of the period'.² Born on 24th January 1750, Gomersall appears to have come from the English urban middle-classes, probably somewhere in the southwest since many people who resided there subscribed to her first novel, *Eleonora* (1789). Although there is little information concerning her parentage, Ann credited her education to her mother, whose 'hand alone did dress the soil'.³ She was also a devout Anglican Christian.⁴

Ann Gomersall acquired her surname when, in 1781, she entered into a long and happy marriage with Leeds merchant, William Gomersall. There is no clue as to what her maiden had been, nor whether the couple had any children. They settled in the

¹ Footnote 10, in James Raven, 'Defending Trade in the Provinces: The Gentleman Merchant and Mrs Gomersall of Leeds', in *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 112-137, p. 114

² Janet Todd, *A Dictionary of British and American Women Writers, 1660-1800* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 137

³ Virginia Blain, Patricia Clements, Isobel Grundy, *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Batsford, 1990), p. 438.

⁴ Information in Author Bibliography gathered from:
Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, eds. Ann Gomersall entry: Overview screen within *Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Online, 2006). <<http://orlando.cambridge.org/>>. 29 December 2008.

industrial town of Leeds in Yorkshire, which enjoyed a lively intellectual and cultural life; ‘Joseph Priestley had been incumbent at the Mill Hill Chapel between 1763 and 1777’, ‘Dr Hey’s medical dissertations had won national recognition’,⁵ the painter Benjamin Wilson had come from there, and Tate Wilkinson had opened Leeds’ first theatre in 1771. The first bookseller had been established in 1700, along with two newspapers in 1700 and 1718.⁶

In January 1789, however, ‘her husband’s business fell victim to “the late very extensive Commercial Calamities”’, and he was never again able to support her.⁷ The couple moved from Leeds to Exeter, where Ann’s family may have originated. It was in 1789 that she began writing, in a desperate attempt to earn some money and revive her husband’s business. She wrote three didactic works: *Eleonora* (1789), *The Citizen* (1790) and *The Disappointed Heir* (1796).

However, on 14th August 1814 her husband died, leaving Ann without support. In 1818, she moved from Exeter to Newport in the Isle of Wight, where she spent the rest of her life. For eight years after her husband’s death, Ann lived by manual work and with the help of friends. Eventually, however, ““affliction, infirmity, and age” rendered her destitute’ so that in 1818 she applied to the Royal Literary Fund for financial aid.⁸

In 1820 Ann suffered from a stroke, which caused her partial blindness. She published a poem called *Creation* in 1824; however, another severe stroke followed in 1828, and on 17th June 1835 she died aged 80 at Newport in the Isle of Wight. She is buried, under the name of ‘Anna’, with her husband at Newport.

⁵ Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, p. 113

⁶ Brown, Clements, and Grundy, eds. Ann Gomersall entry: <<http://orlando.cambridge.org/>>. 29 December 2008.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Ann Gomersall's novels are remarkable due to their 'unusually bourgeois tendency'; she 'extend[ed] the novel's range out of the gentry into the mercantile class', and 'differentiat[ed] between various types of businessmen, more and less admirable, and various different attitudes to social class'.⁹ Ultimately, Gomersall's works enforce the idea that 'the merchant is a pattern of social rectitude and value to the community'.¹⁰ Her unusual approach to social class demonstrates how both the gentry and merchant classes were intertwined, whereas other novelists, such as Charlotte Smith, portrayed strong contrasts between them. Her work was particularly praised in *Town and Country Magazine*, but was, however, also quickly forgotten. However, the issue of social class has 'brought her back onto critical radar screens' in recent years; James Raven's *Judging New Wealth* dedicates a whole chapter to her, and observes her as 'a proselytiser on behalf of the industrial class'.¹¹

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. See '3.6 Gomersall's Defence of the Leeds Trade Merchant and the Values of Commence' in 'Critical Essay'.

¹¹ Ibid. On Raven's *Judging New Wealth*.

2 **Publishing History**

Ann Gomersall's realistic and didactic epistolary novel, *The Citizen*, was published by subscription in 1790, under her name 'Mrs Gomersall of Leeds, author of *Eleonora*'.¹² Interestingly, Gomersall made her gender very clear in declaring herself 'Mrs Gomersall'. During the 1770s, 10% of novels were published by men, whilst just 6% were published by women (the majority were published anonymously; in fact, 'over 80% of titles published in the 1770s and 1780s were published anonymously').¹³ In the 1780s, the percentage of novels published by named women increased to 10%; but by the 1790s, just '17% of novels [...] were published with named male writers [whilst] more than a fifth (21%) gave named female writers'.¹⁴ Not only is it explicit that female authorship was on the increase, but writers were also no longer ashamed to disclose their names, for anonymous authorship was decreasing. Unlike *Eleonora* (1789), which Gomersall published anonymously, *The Citizen* was 'published with admitted authorship'.¹⁵

Only one edition of *The Citizen* appears to exist, and a copy is located at Chawton House Library. This is hardly surprising, and should not be used to judge its popularity at the time, for the majority of titles were never reprinted; '58-59% of the total novel titles first published in the 1770s and 1780s did not achieve a second

¹² *The Citizen, A Novel, In Two Volumes, by Mrs. Gomersall, of Leeds, author of Eleonora. ...* Vol. 1. London, 1790. 2 vols. Based on information from *English Short Title Catalogue. Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group. <<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>> Subsequent references are taken from the title page, inscription and the text and will be given in the text. See 'Appendix' for title page and inscription.

¹³ Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schowering, *The English Novel, 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Vol. 1, p. 45, p. 41

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 45-6

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 41

edition',¹⁶ and by the 1790s republication rates had not changed. Of the 74 titles published in 1790, the year *The Citizen* was published, 14 were reprinted only once, 6 were reprinted more than once, and 54 were not reprinted at all.

The Citizen was published in two volumes, and the copy at Chawton is bound together in one duodecimo book of contemporary tree calf gilt, and accompanied by an inscription, subscription list, and advertisement for *Eleonora*.¹⁷ It was sold at 6s per volume and was 'influenced by George Lillo's bourgeois tragedy *The London Merchant*' (1731), which also dealt with the vindication of the merchant class.¹⁸ Mr Bertills, the citizen of the title, is supposedly based on 'the self-made merchant, Matthew Rhodes, one of the most prominent of Leeds merchants in the 1780s'.¹⁹ Mr Bertills's daughter is even given the name 'Rhoda'.

2.1 The Publisher and Bookseller

The Citizen was printed for Scatcherd and Whitaker, successors to Mr Edward Johnson of Ave-Maria-Lane, Ludgate Street, who traded as successful booksellers in London between 1781-1795. James Scatcherd was a native of Yorkshire who served his apprenticeship to a bookseller in York; thus perhaps it was his Yorkshire background which encouraged his alliance with Gomersall. Scatcherd also published the *European Magazine* from 1784-6, and traded alone between 1794-1803 before trading as Scatcherd and Letterman/ Litterman between 1804-1826. Whitaker continued as a publisher at Ave-Maria-Lane until 1881.²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 35

¹⁷ For all information concerning the physical book, see 'Bibliographical Description' in 'Appendix'.

¹⁸ Brown, Clements, and Grundy, eds. Ann Gomersall entry: <<http://orlando.cambridge.org/>>. 29 December 2008.

¹⁹ Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, p. 116-7

²⁰ Information on publishers gathered from:

The British Book Trade Index <<http://www.bbti.bham.ac.uk>> 28 November 2008.

It is difficult to gather concrete information about eighteenth-century publisher-booksellers such as Scatcherd and Whitaker, because ‘most of those responsible for the financing and marketing of novels have left little trace’, being just small operators.²¹ Any remaining book records seem to only hold information about the leading publishers and booksellers, such as the Robinsons, the Nobles, William Lane and Thomas Hookham. Interestingly, however, Thomas Hookham in fact published Gomersall’s *The Disappointed Heir* (1796) under Hookham and Carpenter, 14 Old Bond Street (1791-1800). It is strange that Hookham, one of the most successful booksellers, had a part in the publication of Gomersall’s least successful novel.

Nevertheless, although Scatcherd and Whitaker were less renowned than these publishers, Raven still recovers evidence of their past publications, including: Anon., *The Adventures of an Actor* (1782), Anon., *Edwin and Anna, A Northumbrian Tale* (1785), Anon., *Letters Between an Illustrious Personage and a Lady of Honour at B-* (1785), Anon., *Rajah Kisna, An Indian Tale* (1786), Anon., *The Penitent Prostitute; Or, the History of Miss Julia Frank* (1788), Margaret Caroline Rudd, *The Belle Widows* (1789), *Frederick and Alicia; Or, the Sorrow of Love*. By the author of Lord Winworth (1791), and Mrs Mathews, *Simple Facts; Or, the history of an Orphan* (1793).²² Interestingly, most of these publications are, unlike *The Citizen*, anonymous works; however, many employ the same epistolary form as *The Citizen*. They also received mixed reviews, very much like Gomersall’s works; whilst *Letters Between an Illustrious Personage and a Lady of Honour* was described as a ‘frivolous, but

Exeter Working Papers in British Book Trade History; 0 The London book trades 1775-1800: a preliminary checklist of members. Names S <<http://bookhistory.blogspot.com/2007/01/london-1775-1800-s.html>>

F. Jefferies, Obituary, in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* (Jan 1828), p.89-90. Original from the University of Michigan. Digitised Aug 9, 2005.

²¹ Garside, Raven, and Schowerling, *The English Novel, 1770-1829*, p. 74

²² Information gathered from Garside, Raven, and Schowerling, *The English Novel 1770-1829*.

innocent production’,²³ Rudd’s novel was described as ‘the climax of uninteresting nonsense’.²⁴

The Citizen was also sold by ‘one of the most knowledgeable booksellers in the north of England’, John Binns of Leeds.²⁵ The son of a highly successful bookseller of Halifax, Binns studied under Crowder and Paternoster Row before opening his bookselling premises in the 1760s. Binns became a respectable member of the community, formed many alliances with other booksellers in Leeds, York and Halifax, and took up partnership in the Leeds Commercial Bank. By 1789, the year he accepted subscriptions for Gomersall’s work, Binns had 7486 titles for sale.²⁶

2.2 Ann Gomersall’s Other Published Works

Gomersall’s first epistolary novel was *Eleonora*, published in two volumes in June 1789 under the attribution ‘by a female inhabitant of Leeds in Yorkshire’.²⁷ Authors often chose to conceal their names ‘for reasons ranging from genuine modesty to fear of public ridicule and the wrath of their families’.²⁸ In Gomersall’s case, she was ‘fear[ful] of calling up a blush into [her patron’s] cheek for having condescended to ornament with [her] name a work which must drop all claim to merit’.²⁹ Nevertheless, the fact that her patron, Viscountess Irwin, also subscribed to *The Citizen*, which Gomersall in fact published with her name, is proof enough that *Eleonora* was a success.

²³ *The Monthly Review* (73:73, July 1785), in Garside, Raven, and Schowering, *The English Novel 1770-1829*, p. 347

²⁴ *The Critical Review* (68:495, December 1789), in Garside, Raven, and Schowering, *The English Novel 1770-1829*, p. 485

²⁵ Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, p. 114

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Title page, in *Eleonora, A Novel, in a Series of Letters ; written by a female inhabitant of Leeds in Yorkshire. ...* Vol. 1. London, [1789]. 2 vols. Based on information from *English Short Title Catalogue. Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group. <<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>>

²⁸ Garside, Raven, and Schowering, *The English Novel, 1770-1829*, p. 41

²⁹ Inscription page, in *Eleonora*, p. v <<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>>

Eleonora was published in London and ‘printed for the Authoress, by the Literary Society at the Logographic Press, and sold by J. Walter [...] and W. Richardson’.³⁰ *Eleonora* Sheldon narrates her life story through retrospective letters, describing how she was orphaned as a child, grows up to work as a governess in Leeds, and how she eventually finds happiness in marriage and children. Both the *Critical* and *Monthly Review* praised *Eleonora* for its simple plot, moral lessons, and Yorkshire humour:

The story is not perplexed by an artificial plot unravelled with skill; but an artless tale, told in an easy pleasing style, enlivened by the occasional introduction of humorous personages and laughable events, and rendered instructive by the excellent morality which pervades every page.³¹

Eleonora was commended for its accurate representation of class and gender relations, particularly between the working class and their employers. *The Feminist Companion* declares that ‘dialect is well used, and Leeds unfavourably compared with Bristol: its labouring men are “scarce humanised” drunkards, and nine in ten brides are pregnant’.³²

The Disappointed Heir: Or, Memoirs of the Ormond Family, was Gomersall’s third novel, published in two volumes in November 1796 under her own name, ‘A. Gomersall, Author of *Eleonora*, *Citizen*’.³³ It was published in Exeter by J. M’Kenzie and Son, W. Richardson, and Hookham and Carpenter of Bond-Street, London.³⁴ The story covers two generations of fighting in America and the West Indies, and its protagonist, Westby, is another heroic merchant, also supposedly based on a real

³⁰ Title page, in *Eleonora* <<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>>

³¹ *The Critical Review* (68:163, August 1789), in Garside, Raven, and Scherling, *The English Novel 1770-1829*, p. 473. See also *The Monthly Review* (William Enfield, 80:552, June 1789).

³² Blain, Clements, and Grundy, *The Feminist Companion*, p. 438

³³ Title page, in *The Disappointed Heir: Or, Memoirs of the Ormond Family. A Novel. In Two Volumes. By A. Gomersall. ... Vol. 1. Exeter, 1796. 2 vols.* Based on information from *English Short Title Catalogue. Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group. <<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>>

³⁴ Title page, in *The Disappointed Heir* <<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>>

individual. However, *The Disappointed Heir* received negative reviews, and was described as a work ‘rank[ed] with those novels which one neither laments to have read nor to have missed reading’.³⁵

Gomersall’s last work was *Creation*, a poem of eighty-nine pages written in couplets, and published by subscription in 1824 at Newport in the Isle of Wight. Although all five hundred copies were sold, Raven calls it an ‘appalling poem’, which only achieved publication due to ‘the generosity of [her] friends’.³⁶ A pious preface suggests that ‘she began writing [it] in her bereavement, to fill up leisure and solitude: [...] “My lyre neglected, out of tune the chords, / Long has my harp upon the willows hung”’.³⁷

³⁵ *The Monthly Review* (new series, 22:220, February 1797), in Garside, Raven, and Schowering, *The English Novel 1770-1829*, p. 674

³⁶ Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, p. 115

³⁷ Brown, Clements, and Grundy, eds. Ann Gomersall entry: <<http://orlando.cambridge.org/>>. 29 December 2008.

3 Critical Essay

3.1 Plot Synopsis

The Citizen is a realistic epistolary novel, and presents us with a complex system of intertwining characters of various social classes, who help narrate the story.

Alongside other digressive plotlines, *The Citizen* tells the story of Charles Montgomery, who, as a member of the gentry, incurs the disapproval and concern of his father, Frederick Montgomery, and his friends, Edward Melworth and Augustus Fitzmaurice, in forming an 'ill-placed passion' (v1, p.32) for Fanny Elwood; the poor, uneducated daughter of an ex- 'working manufacturer', whose relations Frederick believes are 'unfit [...] for polite circles' (v1, p.65). They criticise Fanny's general deportment and manners, and believe her only interested in Charles's money and inheritance. However, Charles thinks that it is her 'deficiency in richness' (v1, p.62) which is his father's real reason for disliking Fanny. However, following the death of Frederick Montgomery, Fanny abandons Charles when he is proved not to be the legal inheritor of his father's fortunes. He is in fact an illegitimate son, and instead Mr Bertills, the citizen of the title, a rich London trade merchant and his father's childhood friend, is the legal heir. Charles believes himself 'forlorn, destitute [...] my only inheritance scorn, contempt and poverty' (v1, p.122), and sees joining the army as his only option. His anti-trade prejudice leads him to believe that Mr Bertills won't help him, due to his 'love of money' and his 'imbibed opinions and sentiments despicably narrow and contracted' (v1, p.127). However, Charles's judgement of the citizen is proved incorrect. Rather than abandoning Charles, Mr Bertills generously makes him apprentice to and inheritor of his business, and happily marries him to his

daughter, Rhoda. Meanwhile, Fanny turns to liquor, prostitution and eventually dies ‘in a state of insensibility and intoxication too horrid to be described’ (v2, p.210).

3.2 Critical Response

When first published, Gomersall was ‘acclaimed as a penetrating critic of contemporary society’, although ‘public acquaintance with her work vanished during the nineteenth century’.³⁸ *The Citizen* received positive reviews mainly for its humour rather than its plot. The *Critical Review* declared, ‘this novel [...] is more interesting from the humorous scenes with which it is interspersed, than from any artful plot of dextrous development’.³⁹ It is interesting that these humorous digressions, which often satirise the behaviour of members of the gentry, gave readers and critics more pleasure than the main story; for instance, Lady Gertrude Carruther’s ‘consummate quackery’ (v1, p.187), and the Duke of ---’s ‘tiresome tongue’ (v2, p.41) provide readers with much amusement. The *Monthly Review* also praised Gomersall for her realistic portrayal of middle-class society, declaring:

Though she does not appear to possess any particular degree of refinement, either in sentiment or language, she represents the manners of middle class life with great exactness, and has a happy facility in sketching familiar conversations. Her *citizen*, the hero of the piece, is an excellent character, and well supported.⁴⁰

In contrast, however, Raven suggests that critics might have disliked Gomersall’s ‘too accurate representation’ of the manufacturing classes, with their ‘coarse and ungrammatical dialect’.⁴¹ Other contemporary criticism, such as *The Feminist*

³⁸ Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, p. 112

³⁹ *The Critical Review* (new series, 2:355, July 1791), in Garside, Raven, and Schowerling, *The English Novel 1770-1829*, p. 505

⁴⁰ *The Monthly Review* (William Enfield, new series, 3:223, October 1790), in Garside, Raven, and Schowerling, *The English Novel 1770-1829*, p. 505

⁴¹ Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, p. 116

Companion, has also assessed *The Citizen* for its effective and ‘complex use of letters, to contrast bourgeois and genteel attitudes’.⁴²

3.3 Subscriptions, Incriptions and Writing for Money

Gomersall published all her novels by subscription. Her advertisement in the *Leeds Mercury* declared her noble but unrealistic hope that the money made from subscriptions would revive her husband’s business after his financial crash in 1789.⁴³ Such subscription schemes ‘supported many of the novels published in this period, often acting as a broader form of the vanity press’ as they frequently boasted renowned and respectable names.⁴⁴ Overall, subscribers to *The Citizen* were not aristocratic; many names were not even identified, often concealed by their initials. However, there were some substantial and respectable subscribers, including Viscountess Irwin, and the aristocratic writer Lady Hawke who wrote her own novel, *Julia de Gramont*, in 1788. Subscribers were mainly female and from around London, Portsmouth, Newport and the southwest, although there were also some male subscribers from Jamaica. There is no obvious explanation as to why both *Eleonora* and *The Citizen* attracted subscribers from Jamaica (*The Disappointed Heir* was even set in the West Indies, although the very few surviving copies have no subscribers lists). Perhaps the movement for the abolition of the slave trade in 1787 encouraged new connections and trading opportunities between England and the West Indies, perhaps Ann had relations over there to support her, or perhaps she was assisted by the trade connections of her husband.

⁴² Blain, Clements, and Grundy, *The Feminist Companion*, p. 438.

⁴³ Brown, Clements, and Grundy, eds. Ann Gomersall entry: <<http://orlando.cambridge.org/>>. 29 December 2008.

⁴⁴ Garside, Raven, and Schowerling, *The English Novel 1770-1829*, p. 54

Additionally, 'a particular attraction for novelists seeking subscribers was association with an illustrious dedicatee'.⁴⁵ During the 1790s, 'more than a third (38%) of all novels carried some sort of specific attribution'⁴⁶ to a renowned patron, whose name would help promote the publication and attract further subscribers. Gomersall followed this pattern, dedicating both *Eleonora* and *The Citizen* to 'the right honorable Viscountess Irwin' of Temple Newsam, Yorkshire, 'as a mark of that esteem due to distinguished merit'.⁴⁷ *The Citizen*'s inscription page also incorporates an ornate illustration of a coat of arms, a dragon and a crown, reflecting her patron's elevated status. In *Eleonora*'s dedication, Gomersall admires the Viscountess for her 'many excellences', declaring, 'it will afford me unspeakable pleasure to think I am patronised by a Lady whose rank and fortune, though great, are inferior to her virtues'.⁴⁸

Interestingly, however, Viscountess Irwin (commonly known as Frances Ingram) was in fact the illegitimate daughter of a rich merchant called Samuel Shepherd, who left his fortune between his five daughters. Considering that *The Citizen* often refers to illegitimacy, (such as Fanny's illegitimate baby, and Charles's own illegitimacy), it initially seems strange that Gomersall would inscribe this novel to one who has also suffered similar humiliating circumstances. In fact, however, Frances's father happily accepted her as his daughter; she still received a good education, had friends in the most respectable families and the political elite, owned land in both Yorkshire and Sussex, and 'was worth approximately £60,000 [...] all arguments which would have swept away lingering doubts caused by her parentage'.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 55-6

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 41

⁴⁷ Inscription page, in *The Citizen* <<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>> (see 'Appendix')

⁴⁸ Inscription page, in *Eleonora*, p. vi <<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>>

⁴⁹ Information on Viscountess Irwin gathered from:

Thus perhaps Gomersall inscribed her novel to Viscountess Irwin as a mark of Frances's own success and acceptance in society despite her illegitimacy, just like Charles's eventual success in *The Citizen*. Readers can identify with Charles and draw parallels between him and the Viscountess, furthering support for and admiration of her case.

For many female authors like Gomersall, writing was their only means of making money. Yet, 'as a career, novel-writing was almost never self-supporting';⁵⁰ there were 'extraordinary differences in the financial awards,'⁵¹ and ultimately for many 'an assumed income from novel-writing was an unrealisable dream'.⁵² Indeed, subscriptions to Gomersall's novels did not bring her the profits she needed; *Eleonora*'s 219 subscribers earned her just £66, whilst *The Citizen*'s 246 subscribers earned her £73.16s, neither of which were enough to revive her husband's business, or even to cover printing costs.⁵³ In 1818, Gomersall eventually applied to the Royal Literary Fund for financial aid, established in 1790 'to dispense modest grants to authors fallen on hard times'.⁵⁴ They paid her £12 in 1818, and over the years made her thirteen further payments of around £10 each.⁵⁵ However, like many others, Gomersall eventually 'died utterly destitute'.⁵⁶

E. H. Chalus, 'Ingram, Frances, Viscountess Irwin (1734?–1807)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, Sept 2004); online edition, Jan 2008
<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/68378>> Accessed 29 Dec 2008.

⁵⁰ Robert John Griffin, *The Faces of Anonymity: Anonymous and Pseudonymous Publication from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 152

⁵¹ Garside, Raven, and Schowerling, *The English Novel 1770-1829*, p. 54, p. 50

⁵² Griffin, p. 153

⁵³ Information on subscription profits gathered from:

Brown, Clements, and Grundy, eds. Ann Gomersall entry: <<http://orlando.cambridge.org/>>. 29 December 2008.

⁵⁴ Garside, Raven, and Schowerling, *The English Novel 1770-1829*, p. 54

⁵⁵ Information on RLF grants gathered from:

Brown, Clements, and Grundy, eds. Ann Gomersall entry: <<http://orlando.cambridge.org/>>. 29 December 2008.

⁵⁶ Garside, Raven, and Schowerling, *The English Novel 1770-1829*, p. 50

3.4 Form and Style

The Citizen, published in 1790, came at a time of revival for novel production after the preceding novel drought in the late 1770s. This novel drought had perhaps been due to the American War of Independence, or the Copyright Act of 1774, which had ended perpetual copyright. However, it was brought to an end ‘by a strong rally from the late 1780s’, perhaps encouraged by a ‘new generation of novelists, [...] more translations into English of French and German novels, [...] new emphasis on the female novelist and reader, [...] the increased number and activities of circulating libraries, [...] and the] marketing panache of a new generation of booksellers’.⁵⁷ The publication of Frances Burney’s *Evelina* in 1778 is also believed to have encouraged the revival of the novel in the 1780s.

However, although *The Citizen* came at a time of revival for the novel form as a whole, for the epistolary form in particular, it came at a point of deterioration. The epistolary novel had formerly ‘enjoyed a distinguished history from the early models of Richardson’, and between 1770 and 1790, 30% of all novels were published in epistolary form, mounting to an average of 40% for the 1770s and 1780s.⁵⁸ Even as late as 1790, the year *The Citizen* was published, 27 of the 74 published novels (36.5%) were in epistolary form. However, the turning-point came ‘in 1791, when only 15 [...] of the 74 novels published that year were in letters’.⁵⁹ By the end of the eighteenth century, the epistolary form had lost its popularity, ‘swamped [...] by the diversity and directions of the new historical and Gothic narratives that were not well-suited to relation by imaginary letters’.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 26-7

⁵⁸ Information gathered from Garside, Raven, and Schowerling, *The English Novel 1770-1829*, p.31

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 31

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 31

It is strange that Gomersall chose to write both *Eleonora* and *The Citizen* using the epistolary form when it was so rapidly going out of fashion. Perhaps it was ‘an easy form to adopt for the inexperienced or unimaginative writer’; after all, she was only writing for money, and was perhaps not a naturally gifted writer.⁶¹ Nevertheless, by the time *The Disappointed Heir* was published in 1796, it appears that Gomersall might have realised the unpopularity of the epistolary form in choosing to write in the third-person instead. Unfortunately, however, *The Disappointed Heir* was not positively received, which might suggest a lack of natural writing talent.

3.5 Genre: *The Citizen* as a Novel of Entertainment, or of Didacticism?

The Citizen finds a good balance between its desire to entertain and its need to enforce a didactic moral lesson. As well as the main plot, *The Citizen* also relates various unrelated though entertaining storylines, such as the developing relationships between Charles and Miss Bertills, and between Augustus Fitzmaurice and Harriet Melworth. It is also interspersed with some irrelevant though humorous and often satirical accounts of marginal upper-class characters, such as the flirtatious Lady Bab Stanfield, the ridiculous Lady Gertrude Carruther, and the gossiping Duke of --- who ‘makes it a difficulty for any one else to put in a word when he is present’ (v1, p. 201). It was in fact for these comical digressions, rather than the main plot, which the *Critical Review* praised Gomersall.

However, Gomersall’s principal design is to enforce a didactic lesson. In fact, with the sudden resurgence in novel output in the late 1780s, many believed that ‘the only moral corrective was a properly educative form of the novel’.⁶² Just as Frederick Montgomery attempts to educate Charles, Gomersall also attempts to educate her

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 30

⁶² James Raven, ‘Promotion and Defence’, in *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 61-82, p. 77

readers about immoral and deceptive ‘bad characters’ (v1, p.79) such as Fanny Elwood, who is ‘made up of *art*, inside and out’ (v1, p.99), and emphasises the inescapable horrific fates which fictional wrongdoers must suffer as punishment. Fanny is ‘a monster’ (v1, p.89); obsessed with money, ‘mistress and child-bearer to virtually every male character’,⁶³ she abandons Charles for the wealthy Mr Wilkins, and ‘striv[es] to seduce [Miss Matthews] into the paths of infamy and destruction’ (v2, p.80). Gomersall unmask[s] her ‘painted face’ (v1, p.99) so that both Charles and Gomersall’s readers can ‘view her in her true colours’ (v1, p.124).

Mrs Fleetwood’s letter (letter 40) functions as a plea on the part of Gomersall herself, advising her readers to ‘shun the paths of vice’, such as those taken by Fanny, otherwise ‘they will lead you to misery and everlasting destruction’ (v2, p.86). Indeed, ‘the nasty ends within the 1790 novels were related [...] to the moral worth of the recipient’;⁶⁴ thus Fanny’s death is imperative and irrefutable, and Charles foretells how ‘she will ere long [...] fall victim to infamy and disease’ (v2, p.120). Indeed, Fanny eventually ‘suffers the natural consequence of her abandoned conduct’ and dies ‘in a state of insensibility and intoxication too horrid to be described’ (v2, p.209-10).

3.6 Gomersall’s Defence of the Leeds Trade Merchant and the Values of Commence

Nevertheless, ‘this does not explain why so many of the unstable and vulgar coquettes of these novels were deliberately depicted as the daughters and sisters of trade’.⁶⁵ In fact, this may have been due to the widespread anti-trade prejudice and animosity towards the *nouveaux riches* manufacturers, petty traders, businessmen, grand merchants and nabobs during the 1780s and 1790s. This animosity was often reflected

⁶³ Ibid, p. 78-9

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 78

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 79

in literature, which acted ‘as a purveyor of modish opinion’.⁶⁶ Many novelists attacked ‘the newly-moneyed and successful businessman’ for his ‘vulgarity’, ‘sudden elevation in social station’, and his ‘mis-use or non-use of fortune’ as well as ‘the rate of its accumulation’.⁶⁷ The eighteenth-century businessman was ‘guilty of superfluous luxury and fashionable consumption’ and ‘the upstart threatening social and economic stability’.⁶⁸

In Gomersall’s *The Citizen*, Charles is guilty of this anti-trade prejudice. Having discovered he is not heir to his father’s fortunes, Charles considers it a ‘vain hope’ to suppose that Mr Bertills will help him, believing his ‘love of money’ is bound to create in him ‘imbibed opinions and sentiments despicably narrow and contracted’ (v1, p.127). However, Charles soon realises that ‘the idea that I had so very rashly formed of Mr Bertills was not only *injurious* but *unjust*’ (v2, p.20). Far from abandoning Charles, Mr Bertills ‘secur[es] [him] from the scorn of the world’ (v1, p.175) by making him inheritor of his business and allowing him to marry his daughter, Rhoda.

Through *The Citizen*, Gomersall stresses the value of commerce in the locality, and fights ‘a rearguard action against what she saw as rising anti-business prejudice’.⁶⁹ Gomersall defends the middle-class gentleman merchant, such as Mr Bertills in *The Citizen* and Mr Oswald in *Eleonora*, as the ‘repository of social rectitude, of charity to the poor, of discrimination, of the highest moral standing’.⁷⁰ Mr Bertills carries out numerous acts of charity to the poor and working-classes; ‘he founds an institution to educate poor female orphans, and rescues a young merchant

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 82

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 82

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 82

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 115

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 115-6

from imminent financial ruin'.⁷¹ Mr Bertills is also depicted as highly religious, encouraging Charles to put his faith in the Almighty, who 'has the hearts of all in his hand' (v1, p.156), and he is modest, insisting that thanks are not due to him but to 'the supreme being' (v2, p.74). Mr Bertills is not completely preoccupied by trade as Charles first thought, but in fact uses it 'as an instrument to subdue those feelings which would be too painful to support' after the death of his wife and children (v1, p.133). Trade keeps his 'body and mind in action' (v1, p.134) and 'engross[es] his fixed attention' (v1, p.133).

Ultimately, Gomersall wants to 'differentiate between types of businessmen and their respective social and moral worth'; between the respectable great gentleman merchant, such as Mr Bertills, and the *nonveaux riches* working-manufacturers, such as Fanny Elwood's father, who she depicts as 'deceitful, uneducated, selfish, and socially destructive'.⁷² In *The Citizen*, Gomersall 'deliberately sets up the vulgar family of petty traders and wool-staples to contrast with the great merchant'.⁷³

Thus both Edward Melworth and Mr Bertills re-educate Charles and Gomersall's readers in their attitudes towards commerce. Edward asserts that 'a man's being engaged in commerce, and living in the city' does not 'make him *the less of a gentleman in his manners, contract his ideas, or harden his heart*', and instructs Charles 'to throw away directly the narrow prejudices you have yourself imbibed entirely from books' (v1, p.134-5). Mr Bertills also insists that 'the remembrance of this event [should] prove an important lesson to you thro' life' (v2, p.74-5), and instructs Charles to live a moral life, 'comforting the sick [...] liberating the captive debtor, wiping away the tears of the orphan, and making the widow's heart to sing for joy' (v2, p.203).

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 118

⁷² Ibid, p. 115---6

⁷³ Ibid, p. 126

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Appendix

1.1 Bibliographical Description

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Author (and attribution as it appears on title page, or note of pseudonym or anonymity)</p> | <p>By Mrs Gomersall of Leeds, Author of Eleonora</p> |
| <p>Title (as it appears on title page)</p> | <p>The Citizen, A Novel, In Two Volumes</p> |
| <p>Imprint (Place of publication: publisher, year of publication as they appear on title page)</p> | <p>London, Printed for Scatcherd & Whitaker, <i>Ave-Maria-Lane</i>; and sold by Binns, Leeds, and Edwards and Son, Halifax 1790</p> |
| <p>Physical description (details relating to all copies, e.g. number of vols., number of pgs, size, price – sometimes shown on title page, quality of paper and printing, illustrations, etc.)</p> | <p>2 volumes bound together in 1 book; volume 1: 217pp, volume 2: 211pp; 12mo (duodecimo), 6s per volume; paper of rough texture made from linen, not of highest worth but not bad quality, sheet of marbled paper at the front and the back of the book; epistolary form; no illustrations; ornament on inscription page to Viscountess Irwin.</p> |
| <p>Physical description (details relating only to this specific copy, e.g. binding & decoration, binding anomalies, annotations etc.)</p> | <p>Bound in contemporary tree calf gilt, brown label; gilt edge binding; boarded cover worn and tattered; the book is not finely produced, yet it is expensive; <i>C+P JB</i> scribbled on the inside cover; price <i>£1,200</i> scribbled on first page; blotches on last pages.</p> |
| <p>Provenance (e.g. bookplates, inscriptions)</p> | <p>Inscription page: ‘As a mark of that esteem due to distinguished merit, this work is most respectfully inscribed to the right honourable Viscountess Irwin, by her ladyship’s much obliged, most humble, and most obedient servant, A. Gomersall’. Accompanied by an illustration of a coat of arms, a dragon and a crown.</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>At the back of the book there is an advertisement for Eleonora, 6 shillings, by author of The Citizen, plus extracts from the Monthly Review, June 1789, and the Critical Review, August 1789.</p> |
| <p>Paratext (title page epigraph, subscription list, dedication, preface, introduction, etc. noted or summarised)</p> | <p>List of subscribers listed A-Z, p.i-x, including Lords and Ladies, and some substantial and respectable names such as Viscountess Irwin, Lady Hawke, and a number of subscribers in Jamaica, although on the</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p>whole names are not aristocratic. Many names of subscribers are not identified, or are referred to by their initials e.g. Mr. T----n. Subscribers are also mainly women, although all the Jamaican subscribers are male. Strangely, the Chawton copy of the book is a faulty cope – the subscription list is mixed up rather than being in alphabetical order; perhaps due to careless production on the part of the publishers? No preface or introduction.</p> |
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1.2 Title Page of *The Citizen*

THE
CITIZEN,
A Novel,
IN TWO VOLUMES,
BY MRS. GOMERSALL,
OF LEEDS,
Author of Eleonora.

VOLUME FIRST.

LONDON,
PRINTED FOR SCATCHERD & WHITAKER,
Ave-Maria-lane;
and sold by
Binns, Leeds, and Edwards and Son, Halifax
1790.

1.2 Inscription Page of *The Citizen*



AS
A MARK
of
that esteem due to distinguished merit,
THIS WORK
is most respectfully inscribed
to
THE RIGHT HONORABLE
VISCOUNTESS IRWIN,
by
her ladyship's much obliged,
most humble, and
most obedient servant,
A. Gomersall.