

**ENGL 3041: Adventures in the Literary Marketplace**  
**Assignment 1.2: Publishing History**

*Anna: or Memoirs of A Welch Heiress*<sup>1</sup>, described as a rewriting of Cinderella by Margaret Mason<sup>2</sup>, ran to four editions in England in the lifetime of its author, Anna Maria Bennett<sup>3</sup>, of which all were published by The Minerva Press.<sup>4</sup> The first edition in 1785 (p. 136)<sup>5</sup>, the second in 1786<sup>6</sup> and the fourth in 1796<sup>7</sup> all consisted of four volumes, an unusually high number amongst Minerva's catalogue at the time, for as Dorothy Blakey notes, most Minerva novels were issued in two volumes up to 1795.<sup>8</sup> All three editions were published in duodecimo size, as was customary for Minerva novels.<sup>9</sup> The third edition is not traceable, judging by the lack of mention of it in the above sources.

Minerva's owner was William Lane, a poulterer turned soldier<sup>10</sup>. The company, identified by its logo of the goddess Minerva, and a rare example of a business in the era using an emblem<sup>11</sup>, published its first novel in 1783, and Lane spearheaded this operation until his retirement some time between 1803 and

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Maria Bennett, *Anna: or Memoirs of A Welch Heiress* (London: The Minerva Press, 1785; 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1786). This novel will hereafter be referred to as *Anna*.

<sup>2</sup> *Dictionary of British Women Writers*, ed. by Janet Todd (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> There are differing accounts as to whether the author's first name was Anna or Agnes, but she will always be referred to as the former here for the purpose of consistency.

<sup>4</sup> Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press 1790-1820* (Oxford University Press, 1939). Any subsequent references to Blakey are taken from this book, and all factual information in this piece is taken from this book unless otherwise stated. Also mentioned in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO?locID=unisoton>>, which will subsequently be referred to as *ECCO*, and on <<http://www.copac.ac.uk>>.

<sup>5</sup> Blakey, p. 136.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 138.

<sup>7</sup> Listed on *ECCO* and *COPAC*, but not in Blakey.

<sup>8</sup> p. 272.

<sup>9</sup> Blakey, p. 81.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 136-137.

1808.<sup>12</sup> Minerva continued producing novels until 1820, when Anthony King Newman, Lane's apprentice and successor, dropped the name.<sup>13</sup> However, despite publishing by far the highest number of new titles in the 1780s, with eighty, and the 1790s, with 217, of any London publisher<sup>14</sup>, under Lane Minerva was about much more than publishing novels. After all, in 1788 he became the proprietor of *The Star and Evening Advertiser*<sup>15</sup>, and in 1791 the company introduced a printing service for the public.<sup>16</sup> But Lane is most famous for his championing of circulating libraries.

Lane had owned the Minerva Library in London since 1770<sup>17</sup>, and although he did not found the first circulating library in the capital, 'he was largely instrumental in the spread of the movement to the provinces', as Blakey notes.<sup>18</sup> He persuaded shops, not just booksellers, to set aside some shelf space for a lending library<sup>19</sup>, items from which could be had at a few days' notice.<sup>20</sup> Judging by the libraries' variable subscription rates, from one pound one shilling for four books in the town and eight in the country to three pounds three shillings for eighteen books in the town and twenty-four in the country in 1798, and individual

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<sup>12</sup> Blakey, pp. 22-23.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles, volume I: 1770-1799*, ed. by Peter Garside et al (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 93.

<sup>15</sup> Blakey, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>17</sup> Alison Adburgham, *Women In Print: Writing Women and Women's Magazines from the Restoration to the Accession of Victoria* (Chatham: W & J Mackay, 1972), p. 113. And subsequent references to Adburgham are taken from this book.

<sup>18</sup> p. 119.

<sup>19</sup> Adburgham, p. 167.

<sup>20</sup> Clery, p. 136.

fees per book for non-subscribers<sup>21</sup>, Lane was offering access to fiction across different social strata.

Two particularly interesting developments to *Anna* through its different Minerva editions are noticeable. Firstly, by the fourth edition the title page declares that the novel is 'By Mrs. Bennett', whereas previously Bennett had retained her anonymity. In fact, in 1785, the year of *Anna*'s first edition, Minerva published thirteen novels, all of which were by anonymous writers, with Bennett one of only two authors to later publicly claim theirs.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps Bennett's initial decision to remain anonymous stems from the contemporary belief, as suggested by Paula R. Feldman, that 'poetry was a legitimate and highly respected literary form, while the novel, a more recent genre, was not'.<sup>23</sup> Then, once commercial success arrived for Bennett, perhaps there was less shame in her name being revealed.

Secondly, the title page to the second edition of *Anna* contains the note 'corrected by the author'. As the *Dictionary of British Women Writers* states, this refers to grammatical corrections as a result of reviewers' criticisms of Bennett who, in her defence, had no access to formal education, for her poor standards in this field.<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to note Bennett's 'address to the reviewers' at the beginning of *Juvenile Indiscretions* (1786), which apologizes for any grammatical

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<sup>21</sup> Blakey, all p. 314.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>23</sup> 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 et al (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), pp. 44-53 (p. 47).

<sup>24</sup> p. 57.

errors in the following novel, and intriguingly describes these mistakes as 'female'.<sup>25</sup>

*Anna* was undoubtedly a popular novel, with its first run selling out on its opening day of sale.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, *ECCO* has a fourth edition published in 1796 by Luke White, and *COPAC* lists an 1804 edition published by Brett Smith, both in Dublin and in two-volume format. This, coupled with the inclusion on *COPAC* of two known translations into French, the first in 1788 by Buisson and the second in 1797 by Maradan, and both translated as *Anna, ou l'héritière galloise*, indicates the novel's broader appeal beyond the confines of England. However, two other Bennett novels scaled similar heights of success; firstly, *Vicissitudes Abroad* (1806) sold out on its first day of production too, even though its price of 36 shillings was well above normal going rates for Minerva novels<sup>27</sup>; and secondly, *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English* describes *The Beggar Girl and her Benefactors* (1797) as Bennett's most popular book. Her works generally seemed to be considered profitable products by Minerva's proprietor William Lane, with the first editions of *Anna* and *Vicissitudes Abroad* the most expensive Minerva novels of their respective years of release, costing three shillings and six shillings per volume respectively.<sup>28</sup> In fact, as the *Dictionary of British Women Writers* states, Bennett 'was the most commercially successful of all the authors associated with The Minerva Press'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *ECCO*.

<sup>26</sup> *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*, ed. by Virginia Blain et al. (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1990), p. 82. Any subsequent references to this book are taken from this page.

<sup>27</sup> *Dictionary of British Women Writers*, p. 56.

<sup>28</sup> Blakey, p. 273.

<sup>29</sup> p. 56.

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