

Publishing History of Elizabeth Hervey and William Lane of the Minerva Press.

Elizabeth Hervey's *Melissa and Marcia* was published by William Lane of the Minerva Press, Leadenhall Street, London in 1788. It was her first novel, yet none of her subsequent five novels were published by Lane, suggesting that contemporary reception of this printing press as being 'so closely identified with cheap fiction, that the name Minerva meant little more than a convenient epithet of contempt'¹ was accurate and it was used as a means of gaining a footing in the literary market.²

Hervey wrote for financial reasons and she is listed in the appendix of *Living by the Pen* as having received money for *Melissa and Marcia*.³ The exact amount is not specified but it is unlikely to be much as 'Lane did not pay his authors very much, and he himself waxed exceedingly rich on the proceeds of their labours.'⁴ Lane's main publishing interest was 'in the fertile field of romantic novels'⁵ and his reason for opening the Minerva Press in about 1770 was because it would be 'a most useful outlet for the light novels that were the principle productions of his press.'⁶ Opinions of Lane range from him being a hardworking businessman to someone who exuded 'brash dominance' and who produced low quality 'pot-boilers.'⁷ Lane wanted to be seen as a publisher whose business was accessible to everyone and this can be seen in 'one still anonymous Lane novel, a character describes at length her efforts to have her own novel published. She is rejected by all the booksellers until she enters Leadenhall Street and meets Lane, "liberal in his ideas, equally polite in his manner,

¹ Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press 1790-1820* (Oxford University Press, 1939) p. 1.

² This is implied by texts on the Minerva Press, including Blakey and Adburgh. One can imagine Hervey consulting other publishers who might pay her more as it has already been made clear she was writing to support herself and her two sons financially.

³ Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen* (Routledge, London and New York, 1992) p. 60.

⁴ Blakey, p. 170.

⁵ Alison Adburgham, *Women in Print; Writing Women and Women's magazines from the Revolution to the Accession of Victoria* (George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London, 1972) p. 159.

⁶ *ibid*, p. 113.

⁷ *ibid*, p. 76.

who, not only with spirit receives those kind of light airy readings, but, in a manner that does honour to his publications, introduces them to the whole.”⁸

Although ridiculed and satirised in cartoons for his poultry background, any sort of notoriety, positive or not, leads to an increase in public awareness of your company.⁹

Indeed it has been said that ‘Lane took over from Nobles in shameless self-advertisement,’¹⁰ and this, coupled with the accessibility of the novels, may have contributed to the dominance Lane had in the 1790s in which he published one third of all new novel titles in London.¹¹ He was devoted to his Minerva Press and had good intentions for his business. He often promised authors work of the highest standard, but unfortunately time constraints did not allow for perfectionism.¹²

Melissa and Marcia was translated into French, but does not appear to have been published in German.¹³ Raven’s bibliography provides evidence that there was at least one further edition of the novel in 1796¹⁴ and the British Fiction website confirms that there were at least two editions of Hervey’s last novel *Amabel*, proving Hervey’s popularity at the time.¹⁵

⁸ Adburgham, p. 91.

⁹ ‘Lane was the son of a London poulterer and a member of the Poulterers’ Company in his early years.’ James Raven *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey* Vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 78. ‘Cartoons and satirical odes lampooned Lane as the “chicken-butcher” and “scribbling poulterer”’ Raven p. 80.

¹⁰ *ibid* p. 102.

¹¹ *ibid* p. 79.

¹² “In advertising for manuscripts Lane also promised his authors that his pressmen would execute the work to the very highest standards. Unfortunately [...] attempts at faster publishing are evident.” Raven, p. 82.

¹³ *ibid* p. 65.

¹⁴ The entry is listed as ‘1788: 58. *Melissa and Marcia; or the Sisters: A Novel*. In Two volumes. London: Printed for W. Lane, Leadenhall-Street, 1788. Further edn: London, 1796, ESTC n064744. French trans. London and Paris, 1788 (*Melise et Marrcia ou les deux soeurs*) (BGR).’ Raven p. 441.

¹⁵ <http://www.british-fiction.cf.ac.uk/TitleDetails.asp?title=1814A034&browse=y> [accessed 25 02 06].

Melissa and Marcia was less successful than Hervey's other novels, notably *Louisa* and *The History of Ned Evans*. This is indicated by the absence of her first novel in many bibliographies, despite the more popular *Louisa* clearly stating on the title page that it was by the author of *Melissa and Marcia*. The popularity of *The History of Ned Evans* can be seen in it being recorded in an entry under the publisher, John Rice in the *Dictionary of members of the Dublin Book Trade 1550-1800*¹⁶ thus proving it was worthy of mention.

Blakey states that 'in the minor fiction of the eighteenth century, anonymity was the rule' and indeed William Lane published many novels under 'by the author of...'¹⁷ which helped an author consolidate their reputation without revealing their name.¹⁷ This in turn led to many novels being erroneously attributed to other authors, for example *The History of Ned Evans* was initially attributed to Jane West as the title page gave no clue to the author and was so different to the title pages of Hervey's other novels.¹⁸

Two of Hervey's later novels are listed as being published in Dublin and indeed William Porter, the publisher of *The Church of Saint Siffrid* in 1798 is listed in the *Dictionary of members of the Dublin Book Trade 1550-1800* as being 'a bookseller of 72 Grafton Street 1796-1822.' There is no mention of him being a bookseller in England, supporting the idea that Elizabeth Hervey must have moved to Dublin and

¹⁶ M. Pollard, *Dictionary of members of the Dublin Book Trade 1550-1800* (London Bibliographical Society, 2000) p. 492.

¹⁷ Blakey, p. 48.

¹⁸ Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schowering, eds. *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey, vol.1* (OUP, 2000) p. 678.

published there. Her novel is not listed as an example of his well-known novels, which implies it was not very successful.¹⁹

¹⁹ Pollard, p. 462 .

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<http://www.jimandellen.org/montolieu/bibliography.html> Followed through a Google link to 'Elizabeth Hervey,' leading me to this website on Isabelle de Montolieu which lists *Amabel* in the bibliography. Repeats much of the information of Summers and Turner [accessed 25 02 06]

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