

# **An introduction to Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real Gooch's *Fancied Events or, The Sorrows of Ellen* (1799)**

Elizabeth Gooch's *Fancied Events or, The Sorrows of Ellen* (1799) is particularly interesting due to the fact that it is extremely heterogeneous, exploring a variety of dominant influences as seen in the context of eighteenth century literature. Traces of techniques invented by Richardson, Burney and even Radcliffe are evident throughout. However, unlike these mainstream authors, Gooch's text can also be explored in relation to the 'scandalous memoirist' form whilst investigating the relationship between her own memoir, *Appeal to the public, on the conduct of Mrs. Gooch, wife of William Gooch, (1788)* and the one figured in her text. In order to understand more about the novel in relation to its context, it is necessary to provide a short summary of the plot and investigate into specific themes, including sensibility, the memoir form and travel.

## **Plot summary**

The first chapter is the only chapter narrated from the author's perspective and states that the following text is transcribed from a letter by a Captain S, who was a sentimental character in her previous novel, *Wanderings of the Imagination*. It is not necessary to have knowledge of this previous text in order to understand the plot of *Fancied Events* as, after two letters from this character to the author, the narrative takes the form of a memoir as Captain S transcribes a narrative given to him by a girl named Ellen. The only important factor in *The Wanderings of the Imagination* in relation to this study, is the character's sensibility evident through the statement that 'his heart was the receptacle of the finest feelings of humanity.'<sup>1</sup> However, for those readers who have not read this text, Gooch firmly establishes his sensibility and receptivity to emotion through his letters. Whilst travelling in Scotland Captain S encounters an intriguing girl named Ellen who provides Captain S with a 'faithful narrative of her eventful life.'<sup>2</sup> Following this, the narrative takes the form of a memoir as the reader reads an account of Ellen's life, written by herself.

Ellen's life begins innocently as she is nurtured by a peasant family in a cottage in the country. Her background is shrouded in mystery and all she knows of her family is that her mother is a disgrace and her father had settled on her an annuity of £20. Ellen entertains the idea that she is from an illustrious family and that she was born to fill a nobler station. The arrival of a young officer confirms this idea in Ellen's mind as he tells her not to form any matrimonial engagements. She therefore rejects a young suitor named Donald Malcolm, who she was actually in love with and who was one of the two brothers of her good friend Peggy. However, eventually she is deceived into running away to Edinburgh with the elder brother, Douglas Malcolm, who is the least trustworthy of the two. She believes him to want marriage although

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<sup>1</sup>Gooch, Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real *The Wanderings of the imagination* (B.Crosby: London, 1796) p. 23

<sup>2</sup> Gooch, Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real *Fancied Events or The Sorrows of Ellen* (Georges Cawthorn: London, 1799) Volume 1, pp 26- 27

he never mentions this and she has no suspicion of his intentions. Whilst in Edinburgh appearing to be Douglas's mistress but without realising this fact, she meets with the young officer who she had seen in the country. She eventually becomes aware of Douglas's causing him to disappear, leaving Captain Boaden, the young officer before mentioned, to care for her.

For a while Ellen's life is tranquil although she is curious as to this man's interest in her welfare. After some time, Captain Boaden has to leave and places her in a lodging with a kind lady named Miss Montgomery. Eventually, this lady marries a domineering, horrific man named Mr Shark who demands payment for all Ellen's debts, charging for her entire time spent with the now, Mrs Shark. Mr Shark tries to marry her off to a wealthy gentleman named Lands but Ellen rejects the proposal and is consequently sent to prison as she is unable to pay her debts. Eventually she is saved by 'a man of sentiment' who discharges her from prison and she later decides to sail to Bordeaux with some acquaintances. Following her time on the boat, Ellen accompanies a former acquaintance to Paris where she becomes involved in high society and consequently, gambling.

Eventually, Ellen travels to Switzerland with a lady to whom she becomes attached and after some tragic circumstances she finds herself alone without a penny and unable to pay for her lodgings. However, after Ellen encounters a near state of desperation due to illness, an old acquaintance appears and helps her acquire somewhere to stay and she eventually ends up living with a family who treats her poorly. At this time the memoir stops and the letters resume as Captain S states that after reading the memoir, he entreated Ellen to put herself under his protection. One day Captain S's son, Frederick, returns and it becomes apparent that his son and Ellen's benefactor are the same man. Thus, Ellen discovers that she was the illegitimate daughter of a lady named Isabella and that Frederick is her half brother and Captain S, her mother's former husband. She eventually ends up marrying a man of sentiment, named the Comte du Mesnil who she met during her time in France and the narrative ends with a happy conclusion for all virtuous characters.

## Sensibility

A review by the *New London Review* (1799) remarked on the sensibility in the text,

The plaintive and affectionate sensibility of the author of the *Wanderings of the Imagination* appears to infinite advantage in the novel before us; nor should we forget, though her mind is often clouded with horrid and painful prospects, we are frequently charmed with lively and enchanting descriptions of scenes and situations in which the author seems to have tasted the cup of sweetness and content.<sup>3</sup>

The writer of the review therefore views sensibility as a positive trait whilst the sentence stating 'though her mind is often clouded with horrid and painful prospects' conveys the idea that anything other than sensibility is considered negative. The review reflects a period in which sensibility was considered to be a beneficial trait for

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<sup>3</sup> Raven, James *The English Novel 1770-1829, A Bibliographical Survey* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2000)

society. Gary Kelly asserts that Sentimental tales were one of ‘the commonest varieties of fiction in the last few decades of the eighteenth century’<sup>4</sup> and ‘were being widely read as providing models for inward cultivation and gentility of soul, if not of breeding.’<sup>5</sup> J.M.S Tompkins also asserts that the word ‘sensibility’ had come to enshrine ‘the idea of progress of the human race.’ She states that it was a modern quality, not found among the ancients and was a product of modern conditions.<sup>6</sup> The most overt example of sensibility within Gooch’s text is at the beginning of the novel through Captain S’s letters. He describes his search for solitude in order to devote himself to his ‘pocket-companion,’ the *Sonnets of Petrarch* to his *Laura*; poems which are infused with an introspective sensibility. The reader is also given a clear insight into Captain S’s sensibility through his opposing attitude to the waterman while on his boat. The waterman is eager to kill a bird simply for pure pleasure which deeply contrasts with Captain S’s feelings. He asks,

Is it possible that the strongest part of the creation can enjoy a miserable triumph over the weakest? Can man boast his superiority of reason, yet, at the same time, find a pleasure in acts of inexcusable barbarity, that no reason can justify?<sup>7</sup>

His attitude towards killing the bird and his enjoyment of being in solitude evident through his wish to hire a boat ‘to enjoy solitude and reflection’ shows Captain S to be a character of sentiment for the ensuing narrative.

However, it must be noted that during the late eighteenth century, especially in the period in which Gooch was writing in the final few years of the century, warnings of excessive sensibility became noticeable. Janet Todd asserts that during the 1760’s and 1770’s many poems extolled sensibility but in the 1790’s book titles such as ‘Excessive Sensibility’ became common.<sup>8</sup> J.M.S Tompkins re-iterates this point as she states that sensibility, during the greater part of the nineteenth century, ‘was accompanied by manifestations of folly that discredited its very name, which was laughed at, (and) neglected.’<sup>9</sup> Thus, the last few years of the eighteenth century witnessed the rise of scepticism surrounding sentimentalism and by the later 1790’s, the *Anti-Jacobin* went so far as to make sensibility synonymous with un-Christian sexual license in women.<sup>10</sup>

It is evident through Gooch’s text that there is a slight awareness of this increasing scepticism as excess of it is occasionally questioned. Captain Boaden says to Ellen,

I perceive, Ellen, with deep concern, the ingenuous sensibility of your nature; but to live in the world, we must endeavour to study it; and a mind like yours must be in some measure perverted, before it can receive the lesson of worldly prudence... Yet, reflect, my dear Ellen... that the human

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<sup>4</sup> Kelly, Gary *English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830* (Longman: London, 1989) p. 42

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 44

<sup>6</sup> Tompkins, J.M.S *The popular novel in England 1770-1800* (Methuen: London, 1969) p. 92

<sup>7</sup> Gooch, Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real *Fancied Events or The Sorrows of Ellen* (Georges Cawthorn: London, 1799) Volume 1, pp 15- 16

<sup>8</sup> Todd, Janet *Sensibility: An introduction* (Methuen: London, 1986)

<sup>9</sup> Tompkins, J.M.S *The popular novel in England 1770-1800* (Methuen: London, 1969) p. 93

<sup>10</sup> Todd, Janet *Sensibility: An introduction* (Methuen: London, 1986) p.138

passions, which, when properly corrected, must eventually lead to the advantage of our happiness, become, when indulgently left to their own guidance, our most dangerous enemies, effectually subduing our reason, and leaving us bankrupts, even in hope.<sup>11</sup>

It is evident that Captain Boaden is concerned with Ellen's naivety and although he praises the human passions 'when properly corrected,' he is preoccupied with these passions when they are 'indulgently left to their own guidance.' Although it is evident throughout the text that characters of sensibility are conveyed to be virtuous, sensibility in excess is a concern. Thus, there are warnings of overindulging in sensibility but a reasonable amount is most often praised, especially amongst men.

The male figures in the text are distinguished by their having sentiments or from having no sensibility at all, especially evident through the contrast between Captain S and the waterman on the boat. Janet Todd states that 'most sentimental novels with heroes insist on their instructional nature'<sup>12</sup> and this is certainly evident through Captain Boaden who is portrayed to be a man of sentiment who looks at Ellen with 'tenderness and concern'<sup>13</sup> yet instructs Ellen about the human passions. Other male characters endowed with sensibility include Don Joseph, the Portuguese who travels with Ellen on the boat to France, and who is 'the fated victim of hopeless love.'<sup>14</sup> He plays his Spanish guitar with 'such harmonious sounds as transfixed even the boisterous crew in silent admiration,'

His voice accompanied it either in the Spanish or Portuguese language, which we did not understand; but the animation of his features when he sung, and the rapturous expression which he gave to the pensive strains, sufficiently indicated their meaning.<sup>15</sup>

However, much like Werther, Don Joseph commits suicide, thus implying that he was a victim of excessive sensibility. In contrast, moderated sensibility is conveyed in a positive manner through male characters who instruct or are virtuous. The Count du Mesnil, Ellen's future husband, is always distinguished as a man of sentiment and is frequently contrasted to other male characters in French high society,

He possessed sentiment enough to render his conversation somewhat more diversified and amusing than was usually to be met with.<sup>16</sup>

After the happy reunion closing the novel, Captain Boaden's friend, the Colonel, is covered 'with tears of delight'<sup>17</sup> and at another point in the text, Ellen's friend Mrs Montgomery, is surprised at the lack of emotion displayed by her first husband's countenance after their son's funeral. Nevertheless, she states,

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<sup>11</sup> Gooch, Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real *Fancied Events or The Sorrows of Ellen* (Georges Cawthorn: London, 1799) Volume 1 pp 127- 128

<sup>12</sup> Todd, Janet *Sensibility: An introduction* (Methuen: London, 1986) p. 91

<sup>13</sup> Gooch, Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real *Fancied Events or The Sorrows of Ellen* (Georges Cawthorn: London, 1799) Volume 1 p. 128

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 242

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 243

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, Volume 2, p. 74

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 196

If, however, the tear of feminine weakness did not glisten in his eye, the pang of manly regret did not the less fester in his heart.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, Gooch is suggesting that sensibility need not be expressed through the body (as was employed by Samuel Richardson who describes virtue through the display of the sentiments amongst his heroines)<sup>19</sup> but can be equally expressed without the need to convey them through physical action. This type of feeling and these types of characters contrast deeply to domineering male figures in the text such as the tyrannical Mr. Shark, who had a heart ‘callous to every sentiment of honour and humanity.’<sup>20</sup>

Gooch’s pre-occupation with sensibility is also evident through her statement towards prospective readers of her memoirs. Lynda M Thompson points out that Gooch describes the kind of ‘unsentimental’ reader whom she did not want to read her *Life* (1792),

I am well aware that the language of the heart frequently subjects us to ridicule where we intend it to produce far other emotions; for among the many readers into whose hands every publication finds its way, how numerous is the class, that, destitute of sentiment themselves, cannot comprehend its reasoning, much less appreciate its merits... Let those, then, on whose callous minds sensibility has ceased to make its impressions, save themselves the trouble of reading a book recording the misfortunes and the errors of the last Villa Real!<sup>21</sup>

The response generated would have pleased Gooch. A contemporary critic stated,

That she who has so frequently bestowed relief should, by the ingratitude, the selfishness, and the insensibility of others, be reduced to seek relief herself, is one of those instances of depravity in human nature which gives the most painful reflections to a feeling mind...<sup>22</sup>

It is clear both through Gooch’s own words and the review, that the readers of her memoir need ‘a feeling mind’ to sympathise with her situation. Her feelings towards sensibility are overt and this passage helps re-affirm the idea that Gooch was a promoter of conveying sensibility. However, her pen was obviously influenced by the fact that she was writing in a decade where portraying characters of sensibility was becoming increasingly scrutinized.

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<sup>18</sup> Gooch, Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real *Fancied Events or The Sorrows of Ellen* (Georges Cawthorn: London, 1799) Volume 1, p. 137

<sup>19</sup> Mullan, John *Sentiment and sociability: The language of feeling in the eighteenth century* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1988) p. 61

<sup>20</sup> Gooch, Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real *Fancied Events or The Sorrows of Ellen* (Georges Cawthorn: London, 1799) Volume 1, p. 168

<sup>21</sup> Thompson, Lynda.M *The Scandalous Memoirists, Constantia Phillips, Laetitia Pilkington and the shame of ‘publick fame’* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2000) p. 9

<sup>22</sup> *The general Magazine and Impartial Review*, 1788. p. 93

## Scandalous memoirists

It is particularly interesting to relate *Fancied Events* to the tradition of scandalous memoirists due to the fact that Gooch published a memoir of her own life. Caroline Breashears states,

The scandalous memoirs ... are the narratives of experience from which men are excluded... their content is a uniquely female situation-the Fall from chastity that transformed 'character' and all other experience.... Each text vindicates the apologist from blame, while, in contradiction, it attempts to escape the moral and social system that requires that very explanation.<sup>23</sup>

*Fancied Events*, although fictitious, is modelled on the form of the memoir and at times is similar to events in Gooch's own life, evident when Ellen is sent to prison for being in debt and travels to France. Scandalous memoirists were constantly accused of writing fiction or 'romance,' and even worse, 'of making themselves the heroines of their own romances.'<sup>24</sup> The line between fact and fiction became increasingly obscured as these memoirists were blamed for 'making it up.' Gooch would have witnessed these criticisms on the publication of her own memoir but been able to avoid this type of blame and indulge into a certain element of authorial license as Ellen's memoir is set up as fiction. However, Gooch still maintained a realistic perspective as many experiences detailed in the text were experienced by the author, thus, making it more appealing for readers. Referring to this mix of fact and fiction, Lynda Thompson states,

The eighteenth century was a melting point for the interplay and divergence between fiction and 'true story.' The memoirs of Constantia Phillips, Laetitia Pilkington...and others highlight both the cross-dressing and the rivalry between the genres of the novel and the memoir. Both media staked their claim to authenticity: they were 'true to life.'<sup>25</sup>

Thompson continues to note the themes explored in a variety of women's memoirs (including Gooch's) and notes that they 'describe loveless marriages, husband's violence, their own subsequent love affairs and their spouses' recourse to marriage laws which were highly prejudicial to women.'<sup>26</sup> These themes are also prevalent in Ellen's experience and in relation to the former Miss. Montgomery and Mr. Shark. The latter is able to demand money off Ellen due to his new position as husband and the formerly prominent character Mrs. Shark suddenly becomes a far more minor character in the narrative. Mr. Shark is also figured as a violent tyrant much like a

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<sup>23</sup> Breashears, Caroline, 'Scandalous Categories: classifying the memoirs of unconventional women,' In: *Philological Quarterly* [http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary\\_0286-12174874\\_ITM](http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-12174874_ITM) (April, 2007)

<sup>24</sup> Thompson, Lynda.M *The Scandalous Memoirists, Constantia Phillips, Laetitia Pilkington and the shame of 'publick fame'* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2000) p. 123

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 172

male Radcliffean oppressor who makes Mrs. Shark tremble ‘under the rod of tyrannic despotism.’<sup>27</sup> Thompson asserts,

For by the act of marriage a woman completely lost her financial independence under English common law, a system which was harsher to the married woman than that of any other European country. As Peter Earle makes clear, ‘a wife was treated in law as a *feme covert*, a minor almost totally under the legal subjection of her husband, an upper servant rather than an equal.’<sup>28</sup>

The idea that English law in relation to marriage is a harsher system is extremely prevalent in Gooch’s fiction. When Ellen goes to France she becomes submerged into French high society and quickly learns the Parisian manners. She is extremely surprised at the married Comtesse’s actions towards the Chevalier de Choiseul after seeing them repeatedly act in a manner with each other, which, according to Ellen, seemed as if they were courting. Generally, the women seem to have more power and influence over the men compared to the female characters in England. It is clear that as soon as Mrs Montgomery marries the loathsome Mr Shark, she becomes a minor and this loss of power is also conveyed through the vocabulary chosen. Ellen says,

Thus was the widowed hand of the respected Montgomery devoted to a wretch who was incapable of knowing its value. Fain would I have usurped the prerogative of friendship, and rescued her, by my persuasion, from the misery that awaited her...<sup>29</sup>

The chosen vocabulary is significant as the words evoke the theme of power and worth. Mr Shark is a wretch who will never know the ‘value’ of Mrs Montgomery and Ellen says she would have ‘usurped’ the prerogative of friendship. This is noteworthy when considering marriage as loss of power for the woman and how marriage can be seen as a transfer of property. This can be related closely to how Radcliffe portrays power relations and marriage in her texts. Gary Kelly states that Radcliffean heroines are ‘entirely private and domestic beings or they are means of transferring property and power from one man to another.’<sup>30</sup> Similarly, Richardson’s Pamela asks, ‘And pray...how came I to be his Property?’<sup>31</sup> At this time, Gooch seems to be echoing themes already conveyed by her predecessors and contemporaries, in order to convey the plight of women.

Throughout Ellen’s memoir there is a constant theme of justification which is also evident in Gooch’s own autobiography. Ellen blames her mistakes on her naivety due to the fact that she was raised in the country, similarly to Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778). In Gooch’s own memoirs she admits to ‘frailty’<sup>32</sup> and

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<sup>27</sup> Gooch, Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real *Fancied Events or The Sorrows of Ellen* (Georges Cawthorn: London, 1799) Volume 1, p. 171

<sup>28</sup> Thompson, Lynda.M *The Scandalous Memoirists, Constantia Phillips, Laetitia Pilkington and the shame of ‘publick fame’* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2000) p. 172

<sup>29</sup> Gooch, Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real *Fancied Events or The Sorrows of Ellen* (Georges Cawthorn: London, 1799) Volume 1 p. 162

<sup>30</sup> Kelly, Gary *English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830* (Longman: London, 1989) p. 53

<sup>31</sup> Doody, Margaret Anne *The Cambridge companion to the eighteenth-century novel* ed by Richetti, John J (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996)

<sup>32</sup> ‘To be ‘frail’ means, in its general sense, to be “weak, subject to infirmities; wanting in power, easily overcome,” but in the eighteenth century it was commonly used as a description of sexual failing:

blames this on her husband's cruelty, her loss of all protection and lack of funds. The disadvantages stated refer specifically to the fact that Gooch was educated to remain in a state of childhood, to be innocent and to lead sheltered lives.<sup>33</sup> Both memoir's contain a strong strain of justification and the idea that leading a sheltered life is damaging is echoed by Ellen, as the temptations of the town are even more powerful when one has had no experience.

When Ellen travels to France and becomes involved in French high society, she becomes involved in gambling and rapidly loses all her winnings. J.M.S Tompkins states that plots with moral lessons in eighteenth century literature always contain the same lesson; how an artificial form of life is dangerous to virtue. She says that 'the plot that carries this lesson usually traces the degeneration of some country-bred girl or youth, exposed to the temptations of the town...'<sup>34</sup> Gary Kelly states that there is a 'repeated narrative figure' where 'the unsocialized self is led into conduct that appears immoral at worst, morally ambiguous at best; and the resulting embarrassment drives the insouciant self back on itself, for reflection, self-examination, and self-reconstruction...'<sup>35</sup> Tompkins also refers specifically to gaming and says that this 'is one of the women's subjects.'<sup>36</sup> Combining Kelly's idea that a 'resulting embarrassment drives the insouciant self back on itself' and Tompkin's observance on gaming, *Fancied Events* is a perfect example. Ellen is described as having 'no very agreeable sensations'<sup>37</sup> and reflections 'of the most distressing nature'<sup>38</sup> after losing all her money through gambling. She continues,

I felt myself perfectly degraded, when I considered that I had foolishly squandered away what should pay my just debts...It is impossible to describe what I felt; and yet I encouraged, as it were, those feelings, trusting that they would prove salutary to my future conduct, and, from their poignancy, act as an antidote against all propensity to gaming in future...'<sup>39</sup>

Thus, it is evident that, similar to so many eighteenth century novels, the heroine learns from her mistakes and a moral is conveyed. However it differs from the norm through the fact that it takes the form of a memoir and is therefore more reflective and introspective.

Referring to the epistolary and memoir forms, Ian Watt states that these forms provide a contact with the consciousness of the character enabling the reader to participate fully in the life of a fictional character. He states that Richardson employed these techniques in order to convey sentiment with more force.<sup>40</sup> The epistolary and

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"morally weak; unable to resist temptation; habitually falling into transgression." Thompson, Lynda.M *The Scandalous Memoirists, Constantia Phillips, Laetitia Pilkington and the shame of 'publick fame'* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2000) p. 171

<sup>33</sup> Thompson, Lynda.M *The Scandalous Memoirists, Constantia Phillips, Laetitia Pilkington and the shame of 'publick fame'* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2000) p. 185

<sup>34</sup> Tompkins, J.M.S *The popular novel in England 1770-1800* (Methuen: London, 1969) p. 80

<sup>35</sup> Kelly, Gary *English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830* (Longman: London, 1989) p. 45

<sup>36</sup> Tompkins, J.M.S *The popular novel in England 1770-1800* (Methuen: London, 1969) p. 79

<sup>37</sup> Gooch, Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real *Fancied Events or The Sorrows of Ellen* (Georges Cawthorn: London, 1799) Volume 2, p. 87

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 91- 92

<sup>40</sup> Watt, Ian *The rise of the novel, Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Chatto & Windus: London, 1957) p. 217

memoir form is also evident in Fanny Burney's *Evelina* who takes her inspiration for this 'intimate, immediate, and confessional' form from Richardson.<sup>41</sup> It is also more reflective. Referring to the fact that she went to Scotland as Douglas's mistress, Ellen states,

So true it is, that to an ardent imagination fancy will supply the place of reality, and the whispers of flattery be attended to, while the voice of reason is disregarded.<sup>42</sup>

This is not the naive voice of the present but of a woman with experience who has lived and learned from her mistakes. It is only through the memoir forms that the reader is able to gain such an insight into the protagonist's subjectivity, which, in this case, is tinged with moralistic undertones.

## Travel

In 1797 the Critical Review pronounced, 'This may be called the age of peregrination; for we have reason to believe, that the desire of seeing foreign countries never before so diffusively operated.'<sup>43</sup> Travel is one of the most dominant themes in the text. Ellen is Scottish and is constantly on the move within Scotland before sailing to Bordeaux in France, then Paris and following this she ventures to Switzerland. The narrative is also interrupted by an epistolary section as Ellen receives a letter from Captain Boaden who describes India in great detail.

The importance of travel is clearly stated at the outset of the novel. The author states,

I am fated to be the sport of Fortune, the perquisite of chance. At one moment, fatigued, exhausted, and dispirited by my journey, I look forward towards its close as the harbour of eternal rest... Thus, tossed to and fro, I wander promiscuously I know not whither; veering, without compass or rudder, as the winds direct me; little dreading the storms of life that I am in future doomed to encounter...<sup>44</sup>

Life is thus figured as a journey and sets the tone for the ensuing narrative, preparing the reader for Ellen's adventures. The letters begin 'from the borders of the Lake Geneva'<sup>45</sup> but unlike Radcliffe who excels at her landscape description Captain S does not attempt to describe the scenery as 'language is too feeble to admit of relation.'<sup>46</sup> The important factor concerning Ellen's travels within Europe is the disparity between town and country rather than *where* she travels as the narration does

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<sup>41</sup> Kelly, Gary *English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830* (Longman: London, 1989) p. 46

<sup>42</sup> Gooch, Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real *Fancied Events or The Sorrows of Ellen* (Georges Cawthorn: London, 1799) Volume 1, p. 88

<sup>43</sup> 'cit.' Elizabeth Bohls *A Companion to The Eighteenth Century English Novel and Culture* ed. by Paula R. Backscheider (Blackwell Publishing: Oxford, 2005) p. 97

<sup>44</sup> Gooch, Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real *Fancied Events or The Sorrows of Ellen* (Georges Cawthorn: London, 1799) Volume 1, p. 2-3

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5

not attempt description or indulge in any political references, despite the fact that she goes to France during the revolutionary period. Much like Burney's *Evelina*, contemporary politics are not apparent in Gooch's text as both authors were more concerned with keeping their texts closer to home and conveying the town as the cause of vice and the country as representative of innocence. Ellen grows up in the country and it is the move to Edinburgh, and later, Paris, that causes her to suddenly be figured as a guilty figure. Similarly, Jenny Duncan, Ellen's friend's mother, is said to have gone to London and 'observed the allurements of vice.'<sup>47</sup> Alongside these dominant themes on travel, Captain S's letter to Evelina conveys the reader away from Europe and describes India. He begins,

Of the general manners and customs of the natives, I have not yet seen anything to prejudice me in their favour, but much to disgust me. Many of their customs are indeed shocking, and such as no length of residence could possibly reconcile to an European mind, possessing the least spark of European delicacy...<sup>48</sup>

The narrative continues to provide a view of the scenery of Bengal, whilst occasionally hinting towards a colonizers view of the supremacy of the colonizer over the colonized. This idea is borrowed from Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* where European exploration and colonialism, along with the representation of Non-European people and cultures is fundamental.<sup>49</sup> The fear and desire evoked by the prospect of contact with an 'as yet immaterial Other'<sup>50</sup> in *Robinson Crusoe* is also evident in Gooch's text evident through Captain S's exclamation over the disgust he feels towards the natives. Crusoe is able to construct his identity through distinction from the Other and slowly begins to lose rationality as 'he loses his confidence in a world governed by the Great Clockmaker.'<sup>51</sup> However, Captain S avoids narrating any incidences between him and the 'Other' and instead chooses to focus on the scenery, thus, leaving the image of the colonizer unthreatened.

## Conclusion

*Fancied Events* is a hybrid text which fuses diverse elements together from a variety of different influences. It does not restrict itself by belonging to a particular genre but encompasses a range of themes. This hybrid quality is evident in Gooch's portrayal of sensibility as she does not wholly advocate sentiment or fully reject it but maintains a middle ground in its favour whilst demonstrating the excesses also. The memoir form and its relationship between fact and fiction is also interesting. Whereas questions over truth and reality abounded in the scandalous memoirists' publications, this text encompasses both fact and fiction also as it is clear that Gooch borrows many elements from her own life and incorporates it into her fictional narrative. These realist elements, alongside elements of travel, make for a very interesting read, both

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<sup>47</sup> Gooch, Elizabeth Sarah Villa-Real *Fancied Events or The Sorrows of Ellen* (Georges Cawthorn: London, 1799) Volume 1, p. 61

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, volume 2, p. 3

<sup>49</sup> Bohls, Elizabeth *A Companion to The Eighteenth Century English Novel and Culture* ed by Paula R. Backscheider (Blackwell Publishing Oxford, 2005) p. 102

<sup>50</sup> *ibid*

<sup>51</sup> *ibid*

from the perspective of a contemporary reader in their ability to explore a scandalous life alongside travel narrative, and for a modern reader seeking to analyse the text in relation to its context.

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