

**What The Bookseller Did: a case of eighteenth-century plagiarism**  
by *Maggie Kulik*

This is not a review. It is more like a mystery. Not so much a who-done-it as a what-was-done. These are the facts: in the year 1723 A. Bettesworth at the Red Lion in Pater-Noster Row published *The Life of Charlotta Du Pont, an English Lady* by Penelope Aubin. In 1770, forty-seven years later and thirty-nine years after Aubin's death, J. Roson, a publisher residing in St. Martin's Le Grand Street in London, published a novel by an anonymous author entitled *The Inhuman Stepmother; or the History of Miss Harriot Montague*. In 2000, a volunteer typist for Chawton House Library's Novels-On-Line project discovered that the latter is a nearly word-for-word transcription of the former. One can postulate two explanations: *The Inhuman Stepmother* was an unattributed draft by Aubin herself, or a galling case of plagiarism. Which?

From its initial printing, *Charlotta Du Pont* was ascribed explicitly to 'Mrs. Aubin', and both its dedication, 'to my much honoured friend Mrs. Rowe', and its preface, addressed to the 'Gentlemen and Ladys', are signed by a 'devoted humble Servant, Penelope Aubin'. In the preface Aubin refers specifically to the 'kind reception you have already given the trifles I have published', and to a promise she had previously made to her readers to 'continue writing if you dealt favourably with me. My booksellers say, my novels sell tolerably well'. Is it logical that an author (or her heirs) trading on an established reputation in one instance would forego it for anonymity in a *later* one, when nothing untoward had tarnished that reputation?

Perhaps, then, a bookseller, discovering an untitled, unsigned draft and enjoying the story, decided to name it and publish it, unaware that *The Life of Charlotta Du Pont* even existed: an innocent mistake.

A comparative reading of both texts gives the lie to this theory.

*The History of Miss Harriot Montague*, appearing without attribution, dedication, or prefatory material of any kind, is virtually indistinguishable from *The Life of Charlotta Du Pont*. But what discrepancies do exist, ranging from the curious to the mundane, clearly show a conscious mind at work to manipulate Aubin's prose:

- *Charlotta Du Pont*, written during the reign of George I, sets its action some 40 years earlier, 'towards the end of King Charles the Second's reign, when a long continuance of peace, and his merciful government, had made our nation the most rich and happy country in the world'.

*Harriot Montague* likewise moves its action back 40-odd years, but from its publication date of 1770 and so – rather more flatly – to 'the reign of our late sovereign George the 1st'.

- Charlotta is five when her mother simply 'fell sick of a fever and dy'd'.

When Harriot is three, an apparently more histrionic Madam Le Montague 'fell sick of a fever and died, after lingering under that terrible disorder eight months: she

was well respected by all her neighbours, which made her greatly lamented, especially by the poor, to them she was very kind’.

- Monsieur Du Pont’s wicked new wife, Dorinda, having secretly disposed of Charlotta by trepanning her aboard a ship bound for the Americas, assumes her husband will soon die of his heartache and so ‘flatter’d her self that she should soon be a widow, and return to her dear London’.

A more lascivious Madame Montague, having disposed of Harriot and ‘being highly pleased that she had acted her part so well in having got rid of the obstacle that gave her so much disgust, and that her husband took the loss of his Harriot so much at heart, flattered herself that she should soon be a widow, and return to her dear London, and enjoy the company of her dear Du Pre without molestation’.

- Charlotta’s true love, Belanger, has done all in his power to assist his trepanned mistress and at long last feels he has won her heart: ‘But, alas, Fate had otherwise determin’d; their faith and virtue was to meet with greater trials yet, and the time was far off before they should be happy. A pirate-ship came up with them in forty five degrees of latitude’.

Harriot was likewise wooed by her love, Leander, but again the ‘time was far off before they should be happy’. Before the inevitable arrival of the pirate ship, however, ‘Harriot being now a little used to her new way of life, began to recover a little her drooping spirits, by being continually entertained with the company of Leander, for whom by this time she had no small esteem; they were continually together except when decency required them to be asunder. One evening as they were both walking the quarter deck with the captain, treating with him about her ransom, the weather being excessive clear, not a cloud to be seen, a man at the mast-head cried out a sail, which was bearing down to them with full speed, and in half an hour’s time they could perceive that she was a ship of force, which they feared, as it certainly was, a pirate. She came up with them in forty-five degrees of latitude’ and of course Harriot’s fate was no different from Charlotta’s. What accounts for this burst of originality in *Harriot Montague*? Did the plagiarist at last taste of Inspiration – or simply of that earlier Aubin draft?

- When taken by the pirate captain, Charlotta urges Belanger to say he is her brother lest their love ‘cause the villain to destroy you to possess me, who being left in his hands when you are gone, shall be forc’d to what my soul abhors more than death’. Who cannot construe what the virtuous Charlotta means by that?

Harriot also worries she ‘shall be forced to what my soul abhors more than death’, but then brings herself up short: ‘What, do I say forced? no I never will be, for here is a friend which I will always carry about me (pulling out a dagger) that will defend me from the brutality of a villain that would do such an act of abhorrence. My dear Leander, I will die before I will yield up my virtue’. This is high drama. Regrettably it is also out of character. As we later learn, a more prosaic Charlotta relies on a ‘bodkin from her hair’ to defend her maidenhead.

- Charlotta and Belanger fail to fool the pirate captain regarding the true nature of their relationship. The captain declares he is ‘too well acquainted with the reason

for her coldness towards him, and since fair means would not do, he would try other methods. At these words he call'd for some of the crew, who seizing on Belanger, put him in irons, and carry'd him down into the hold'.

The counterpart Leander, apparently inspired by his feisty Harriot, tries a more aggressive tack: 'At these words, Leander started up and seized him by the throat, cried villain it is out of thy power, for thou cannot nor shall not whilst I live; but though Leander was a great deal stronger than the pirate, it was a very imprudent thing, for he was soon overpowered, after having lain three dead at his feet they seized him, put him in irons', and so on. Why the pirates would not immediately avenge in kind the death of three of their mates remains a mystery.

- Finally, toward the end of the novel, Charlotta's long-lost (and long-winded) uncle regales his family with a tale of reunion between himself and his first love: 'I was, said he, sitting by a Fountain in my Garden, when a Servant came and told me, that there were two Ladys and two Gentlemen in a Coach said they must speak with me. They are utter Strangers, said he, Sir, and I deny'd them entrance as you have order'd me, saying you were busy and would not see Company; but they will not be refus'd, and one of the Ladys said she would see you tho you were dying. At these words I rose and flew to the Gate, where my Angelina was standing without; but no words can express the transport I was in at the sight of her. I catch'd her up in my Arms, and ran into a Parlor with her; there setting her down, I sometimes gaz'd upon her, and then kiss'd her, saying and doing I knew not what, nor did I remember my Kinswoman and Monsieur de Abrifeaux were present, tho they stood by me, or Monsieur Morine the Surgeon, who all laugh'd: but at last Angelina reminded me of our Friends, and I welcom'd them in few words; nay I was so distracted to know Angelina's Adventures, that I hindered her from sleeping by my impertinent Questions half the Night.'

Harriot's uncle spins the tale this way: 'I was, said he, sitting by a fountain in my garden, when a servant came and told me, that there were two ladies and two gentlemen, who expressed their most eager desire of seeing me immediately: but, says he, upon my telling them, as you, sir, had ordered me, that you were engaged and could not be seen, one of the ladies swooned away; and, when she recovered, said she must see you though you were dying. As soon as I heard these last words, I hastened to see them, but figure to yourselves my great surprize when the first object I beheld, was my dear Clementina! I gazed on her with delight, and embraced her with the most ardent affection; while she, on her part, was utterly disabled from smothering the real sentiments of her heart. To compleat the scene, we were for some time lost in each other's embraces, in dumb but expressive raptures, to the no small diversion of the company, who all laughed: but at last Clementina reminded me of our friends, and I welcomed them in few words; nay I was so distracted to know Clementina's adventures, that I hindered her from sleeping by my impertinent questions half the night.'

This paragraph constitutes the single largest variation between *Charlotta Du Pont*

and *Harriot Montague*. But the changes are meaningless,<sup>1</sup> i.e., nothing is altered in terms of plot, tone, characterization, or mood.

The above mark virtually all of the differences between the two novels. Beyond them, *Harriot Montague* is essentially straight transcription<sup>2</sup>, with one useful exception: names.

At first glance, the name changes from *Charlotta Du Pont* to *Harriot Montague* are ubiquitous, straightforward and insignificant. Monsieur Du Pont, Charlotta's father and the catalyst for all her woes, left his native France to settle near Bristol in order to enjoy religious freedom (as a Protestant) and the seashore (as a 'master of a vessel'). His counterpart, Monsieur Le Montague, settled in Plymouth for the same reasons. Leander is the name of the hero in *Harriot*, and of a minor scoundrel in *Charlotta*, which calls its own hero Belanger.<sup>3</sup> Angelina in *Charlotta* becomes *Harriot's* Clementina; Don Medenta, Don Carlos, and so on.

Mrs. Aubin could have rendered these changes herself, of course, but she would have had a solid grasp of her characters, both who they had been and who she wished them to become. The existence of astonishing errors in *Harriot Montague* helps build the case for some careless thievery. For example:

- In the tale-within-a-tale of Charlotta's wicked stepmother, Dorinda makes a conquest of a generous old colonel. This colonel is demoted to captain by *Harriot's* more parsimonious transcriber. So it is noteworthy that, when *Harriot's* Melinda (Dorinda's counterpart), a bit down on her luck, 'resolved to seek out the generous captain', she and a friend 'went, found the house, and were received [...] with much civility and kindness. The colonel was sent for [...]': it should be captain rather than colonel.
- *Charlotta's* Belanger and Montandre are forced to make a desperate escape from prison, the final leg of which is by sea, where they lay adrift for days without food or water. Leander and Dumaresque of course endure the same cruel fate in *Harriot*: 'Thus they continued for three days more drove by the winds and waves: in these three days hunger so prest them, that they ransacked every corner of the boat to find a morsel to eat, and devoured every bit of mouldy bisket they could find: but, alas! that was so little, it only tantalized, not satisfied their craving stomachs [...] The generous Montandre begged his kinsman [...]'. Montandre here should be Dumaresque.

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<sup>1</sup> So meaningless, in fact, that they well might have come from another Aubin draft. This would explain why only this rather incidental paragraph is improved upon.

<sup>2</sup> Even errors are sometimes transcribed, e.g. 'The selling human creatures is a crime', with the missing *of*, occurs in both texts, as does the unaccountable conversion of 'Philinda' to 'Philena'. Errors are also created by the transcription process itself, e.g. 'drinking salt so increas'd their drought, that they fear'd to repeat it' inadvertently becomes 'they fear'd to repent it'. Furthermore, there is an instance of the common error of transcription, text inadvertently left out when the eye jumps: in *Charlotta*, 'she often ask'd Isabinda if she could *tell any news of Belanger, and was much troubled that she could* hear nothing of him', is transcribed in *Harriot* as 'she often asked Leonora if she could hear nothing of him' (italics mine).

<sup>3</sup> Here is one instance where *Harriot* surpasses its antecedent: the mythological overtones are both pleasing and relevant.

- Charlotta befriends two Spanish aristocrats, Elvira and Gomez, and yearns to know how they came to be in the wilderness of the New World with her. Gomez recounts a tale of murder and revenge that pitted his family against Elvira's. He prevailed with the king to speak with Elvira's father on his behalf, to propose their marriage, but his Majesty, 'delaying to give a positive answer, having before obtain'd the Viceroyship, went off without it, and so oblig'd me to follow him'. Harriot's Spaniards are Ravina and Bellario, who of course suffer the same estrangement. Oddly, however, Bellario, despite his wish to marry Ravina, still implores his king 'to propose it to Elvira's father'. The name Elvira is used instead of Ravina, and a few pages later the same thing occurs: the Ravina and Bellario who withdraw at the appearance of a stranger become 'Elvira and her dear Bellario' as they come forth to make the stranger's acquaintance.
- Elvira and Gomez wish to thank Charlotta and Belanger for saving their lives, and so make 'presents of two rich jewels, part of those Elvira had on when she was cast on the barbarous shore'. Ravina and Bellario offer Harriot and Leander the same thanks, the 'two rich jewels, part of those Dumaresque had on when she was cast on the barbarous shore'. Dumaresque is Leander's kinsman. *Kins-man*.
- Charlotta next meets a kindly ship captain who is, of necessity, living with his lady love, Lucy, without benefit of marriage until he can find a clergyman to perform the offices. Harriot meets a captain and *his* love, Polly, but obviously Harriot's captain is more fickle: several pages later, he is with a Lucy himself.
- Charlotta's stepsister recounts her hapless fate at the hands of her guardian, Captain Farley, who arranges with an unscrupulous ship captain to spirit away the young woman to Jamaica. Luckily, this second captain's nephew, 'a very honest youth', takes pity on her, telling her that 'he heard his cruel uncle bargain with my cursed guardians to carry me thither [...] After this Mr. Stephen, for that was his name, studied how to oblige me [...] so that I went very safe [...]'. Harriot's stepsister suffers the same ill fortune at the hands of her guardian, Captain Du Pre. And of course, she also has her champion, but oddly 'Du Pre, for that was his name', shares the name of her nemesis. What are the odds?
- *Harriot's* 'author' scrupulously changes *Charlotta's* 'the year of the peace which King William made with France' (i.e. 1697 and so outside *Harriot's* scope) to 'the year of the peace which was made with France', which in the early eighteenth century could have been almost any. However, this level of scrutiny fades three sentences later when Harriot and Leander head to Bristol to search out Monsieur Le Montague, even though the poor man lives in Plymouth. It is of course Monsieur Du Pont who lives in Bristol, whither Charlotta and Belanger had duly set their course.
- Finally, incredibly, a compound error: The wicked stepmother Dorinda, who left the gay life of London to settle in Bristol with Monsieur Du Pont, starts the entire tale spinning by disposing of Charlotta when her own daughter, Diana, is born. Diana manages to grow into a kind and generous young woman who conveniently reappears to facilitate the story's denouement. Harriot's stepsister is also called Diana – except in one unfortunate address to Harriot: 'Are you not the daughter of

Monsieur Le Montague who lived near Bristol [again it should be Plymouth], and married a second wife from London, by whom he had a daughter named Diana? [...] I am, said she, that daughter Lucretia, and your sister by the father's side [...]'.

Without benefit of 'find and replace', many errors have been made in the transcription. While they may not close the case for plagiarism, such errors beg the question most persuasively. And, given the state of the London's publishing industry in the eighteenth century, the assumption is no great rush to judgment.

Perhaps no other era in printing history held the confusion, the reversals, the ups, the downs, the ins and outs of eighteenth-century England. A confluence of political, economic, and social circumstances created an era when writers were suddenly free to produce works in previously unfathomable numbers, when printers had ready access to the tools necessary to distribute that material, when readers increasingly had the skill and interest to read it. The roots of a modern publishing industry were about to be formed, but not without some missteps along the way.

England had had printed matter for almost two hundred years at the time of the Restoration, but the amount of material circulated was strictly limited by the Star Chamber and monopolized by the London Stationers' Company, a sort of printers' guild. In lieu of copyright, there existed a system of royal patent grants, by which the crown could endow certain authors and printers with the exclusive right to publish books and other materials. The purpose of such grants was not to protect authors' or publishers' rights, however, but rather to raise government revenue and to give governing authorities control over publication content.

Like the manuscript, books at this early date retained an air of the sacred, the prerogative of the clergy or the plaything of the aristocracy – 'furniture for the rich', the poet Robert Southey later described them. Limited demand, due to widespread illiteracy, and primitive manufacturing techniques made books so scarce and expensive that they were necessarily luxury items, found only in the magnificent libraries of great country houses, with the owner's private bindings ostentatiously on display.<sup>4</sup>

It was the oral arts, particularly the theatre, that formed the preserve of the common man. But with the abolition of the Star Chamber in 1641 and the closing of the theatres in 1642, the locus of popular discourse and entertainment shifted radically. Pushed aside by journalism, the stage ceased to be the center of news, the source of public information, and the focus of debate. The great pamphlet wars of the Interregnum raged, and the printed word became king:

In the average seventeenth-century town there were no printed posters, theatre bills or programs, handbills, labels, tickets, printed forms, marriage certificates, indentures, or receipts.... By the end of the [eighteenth] century there were words for sale in every village in the nation, and

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<sup>4</sup> Such snobbery gave rise to jokes like the one about the ignorant nouveau riche collector who gave standing orders to his bookseller to send him anything by Milton, Pope, and Shakespeare 'and anything new those fellows may produce'. (Pool, p. 9)

virtually every branch of a modern print culture was flourishing.  
(McIntosh, p. 5)

The ad hoc print shops that sprang up to accommodate this explosion were by and large small, storefront enterprises that operated with little capital, much like the other shops and stores of the period. They had their own hand presses in the back of the shop and often sold stationery or had a circulating library as a sideline (Pool, p. 57), thus hopelessly blurring any distinction between printer, publisher, and bookseller, and establishing overlapping spheres among the three that would conflict long into the Victorian era.

One Richard Atkyns in 1664 estimated ‘There are at least 600 booksellers that keep shops in and about London and two or three thousand free of the company of stationers ...’. But Atkyns presciently sensed a danger, noting that ‘the licensed books of the kingdome cannot imploy one third part of them. What shall the rest do?’.

What they did, at least the poorer and more reckless among them, was undertake unlicensed, surreptitious, and piratical printing, which became of great significance both to the literary output and to the state of the texts:

Chapbooks, broadsheets, ballads and penny dreadfuls were the staple printed literature of the working classes until well into the Victorian age. If their authors ever nursed conventional literary aspirations, they were soon buried under a shroud of anonymity and the indifference of middle-class critics.... The whole concept of authorship, implying intellectual property, copyright and contractual obligations, was still irrelevant to street literature. (Cross, p. 126)

By mid-century the free market that had so energized the printed word became flooded with reprocessed classics and plagiarized pages. Without the protection of personal property rights, freedom devolved into anarchy, with the inevitable result: the publishing industry grew simultaneously static and chaotic.

Upon his ascension to the throne in 1660, Charles II sought immediately to reimpose the status quo of his father’s reign. He reopened the theaters, once the seat of so much popular discourse, but the world had passed irrevocably into a print culture in the twenty years since their closure. The booksellers viewed plays as simply more grist for their mill. Two years later Charles imposed the Licensing Act of 1662 in response to a request by the Stationers’ Company for control of the industry. But rather than attacking the problem at its source – the lack of a viable copyright law – the Licensing Act levied a host of draconian measures: it restricted printing to four authorized locations – London, Oxford, Cambridge, and York – and lowered the number of legal presses in London from 60 to 20. It also bestowed untold powers in odd places. One Roger L’Estrange, given sole right of printing news in London, promptly enacted severe penalties against renegade colleagues: John Twyn, a London printer, was hanged, drawn, and quartered for ‘seditious publishing’ in the first year of L’Estrange’s appointment.

Fortunately, these strictures did not last long, but for reasons entirely unrelated to drawing, quartering, or even licensing. The plague and the great fire of 1665-66 – which resulted in the deaths of many involved in the printing, publishing, and bookselling industries, and destroyed great numbers of books, including those preserved in St. Paul's Churchyard, the original quarter of London's publishing trade – created a void that paradoxically helped the trade to recapture some of its lost strength. The city's printing venues rapidly increased and expanded, and the Act of 1662 never regained its original muscle. With the crowning of William III in 1689, L'Estrange was deprived of his exclusive license and sent to prison, and a new flood of newspapers and pamphlets appeared. When the Licensing Act was not renewed in 1695, artificially imposed limits on the location and number of presses vanished, and the publishing industry burgeoned.

Alas, so too did the reemergence of piracy. Because theft was no longer punishable by law, the less scrupulous booksellers began to hire copyists expressly for that purpose. The bookseller John Dunton wrote of them: 'These Gormandizers will eat you the very life out of a copy so soon as ever it appears; for, as the times go, *Original* and *Abridgement* are almost reckoned as necessary as Man and Wife; so that I am really afraid that a *Bookseller* and a *good conscience* will shortly grow some strange thing in the earth'. (Peters, p. 14)

Or as the sly Alexander Pope would later have it:

Next, o'er his Books his eyes began to roll,  
In pleasing memory of all he stole,  
How here he sipp'd, how there he plunder'd snug  
And suck'd all o'er, like an industrious Bug. (From *The Dunciad*, Book I, II. 127-30)

In 1703, William Congreve got wind of a plot to plagiarize his recently drafted 'Tears of Amaryllis for Amyntas', a pastoral elegy on the death of the Marquis of Blandford which he claimed was never intended for publication.<sup>5</sup> Congreve and his publisher Jacob Tonson accordingly printed the poem themselves in a desperate effort to avert the piracy. In his 'To the Reader', Congreve explains:

These Verses had been Printed soon after they were written if they had not been design'd rather privately to Condole, than publickly to Lament....  
But, by some Accident, many Copies of 'em have been dispersed, and one, I was informed, had been shewn to a Bookseller. So that it was high time for me to prevent their appearing with more Faults than their own, which might probably have met with Encrease, if not from the Malice or Ignorance, at least from the Carelessness of an under-hand Publisher.... I have particular Reason at this time to apprehend the disingenuous Proceeding of some such Person, having lately seen some Verses Printed,

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<sup>5</sup> The claim, sometimes genuine, sometimes not, to have published as a precaution against piracy was already a convention by the time Congreve published the pastoral. The threat of piracy could 'force' an unwilling gentleman of letters to release the 'true' copy the public deserved.

and Intituled *A Satyr against Love, Revised and Corrected by Mr. Congreve*; who does assure the Reader he never saw or heard of any such Verses before they were so Printed, viz. without either the Name of the Author, Bookseller or Printer, being Publish'd after the Manner of a Libel.

Clearly, the print trade stood in need of some remedy.

The Statute of Anne, passed in England in 1710, proved a milestone in the history of publishing and copyright law. Previously, the debate had raged as to whether authors had a right to their published works as actual property or mere privilege, for by common law *copyright* signified merely a stationer's sole right to publish and sell copies. It was only with the Statute of Anne that the rights of 'incorporeal property' began to be defined and established in statutory law. The Statute did revoke the author's common law 'perpetual' copyright, establishing the idea that such laws should have only limited duration (initially 14 and later 28 years), after which works could pass into public domain, and this proved a loophole through which many an unscrupulous tradesman would wriggle well into the following century. Nevertheless, for the first time in history literary property implied the right of authorship, not merely the right to print.

Again, the industry exploded. Writers, at last with a stake in the fruits of their trade, produced as never before.<sup>6</sup> By the end of 1759, Samuel Johnson could note in his *Idler* No. 85 that '[o]ne of the peculiarities which distinguish the present age is the multiplication of books'. And Oliver Goldsmith's Letter XIX in the *Public Ledger* on April 14, 1760 could claim 'were we to estimate the learning of the English by the number of their books that are every day published among them, perhaps no country, not even China itself, could equal them in this particular'.

This frenzy of activity, of course, resulted in overheated competition. One enterprising London bookseller, John Bell, began in 1775 to print one of Shakespeare's plays every week. When this well had run dry, he advertised that his now institutionalized *British Theatre* would begin with Aaron Hill's *Zara* and would continue to print one play weekly until one hundred issues had appeared. In subsequent advertisements he warned customers to be careful to ask for *Bell's British Theatre* 'least a false copy should be obtruded on the purchaser', for, he said, 'several other booksellers, envious of the success of this work, are meanly attempting to [...] foist their own futile productions, when this is particularly wanted'. (Korshin, p. 96)

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<sup>6</sup> Then as now, owning the fruits of their labours was not synonymous with the printing and marketing of them. Despite steps to 'dignify professional authorship', principally by demanding a 'worthy wage' to sharpen the distinction between the gentleman amateur and the workaday writer and to clarify the line between the Grub Street hack and the literary genius (Gettmann, p. 5, 6), still to a large extent 'the professional writer was the employee of the bookseller' (Aldis, p. 6) or at least, as we hear from James Boswell, beholden to him:

Wednesday 13 April. Who is now come to town but the Great Donaldson [Boswell's publisher in Edinburgh]? I breakfasted with him this morning, and then we went to Flexney's, where he took a parcel of the Letters, and then to the booksellers in Paternoster Row, whom he engaged to befriend us. In these matters the favour of the trade (as the booksellers call themselves) is a prodigious point [...] (Quoted in Pottle, p. 240)

In 1777 Bell announced the first of a proposed one hundred little volumes of *The Poets of Great Britain*, ‘comprising all the British Poets from Chaucer to Churchill’, and again it was not long before he felt compelled to issue another warning, this time calling attention to ‘a large body of London booksellers’, who, refusing to fill provincial booksellers’ orders for the work, were ‘attempting an edition of their own on a similar scale’. That rival edition, *The English Poets*, was advertised prominently in local papers as already ‘in the press’, and promised ‘a preface [...] by Samuel Johnson, L.L.D.’. This of course turned out to be the eminent *Lives of the English Poets* (Korshin, p. 97).

Something of the same desperate effort to differentiate one’s product attaches to the large advertisements frequently printed in various local papers in the closing years of the century by one John Wheble, who made persistent attempts to persuade readers that they should purchase *his* publication, the *Lady’s Magazine, or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex*, rather than a work of precisely the same title published by Robinson and Roberts (Korshin, p. 98).

In the face of such obdurate competition, coupled with an ever-expanding appetite for print, booksellers and publishers did not always hold to the high road, indulging in the gamut from honest mistakes to poor judgment to outright criminality. Undue haste led to untold *errata*, as printing plodded from an art form to a trade. Lust for the sensational caused exploitation, culminating most notoriously (albeit much later) in one English publisher’s issuance of Victor’s Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris* under the surely compelling but misleading title *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*.<sup>7</sup> And increasingly dubious or absent attribution spread doubt whether a given manuscript was in fact authorized and intended for publication, or whether it was but ‘one of several’ versions purportedly submitted by some ‘well-wisher’ of a reticent author or, worse, a ‘philanthropic benefactor of the reading public’ (Alston, p. 322).

This was the state of the publishing world into which Penelope Aubin introduced *The Life of Charlotta Du Pont, an English Lady* in 1723. Whether the appearance of the nearly identical *The Inhuman Stepmother; or the History of Miss Harriot Montague* some 50 years later was error or theft, only J. Roson of St. Martin’s Le Grand Street could affirm. The flux of the eighteenth-century bookseller’s world would support either hypothesis. But combined with the earlier exegesis of the texts, it argues for an intentional but woefully clumsy deception.

*The Life of Charlotta Du Pont* (and consequently *Miss Harriot Montague*) is not a great novel. It suffers from the typical weaknesses of a poorly rendered picaresque adventure: character assessments are instantaneous and unerring, coincidences are outlandish, and the story is passed like a baton from tired characters to fresh, with the consequent tedium of too much plot and too little characterization. Still, the novel is not without its charms. A good trepanning will always thrill, a seraglio will titillate, the New World will beckon, and enduring love will enthrall. Our plagiarist obviously agreed.

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<sup>7</sup> The shift of focus from the cathedral to its pitiable inhabitant was particularly unfortunate, since it meant a shift of attention from the book’s strength to its relative weakness, from its sublime ideas to the gothic elements of its plot.

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