

## Publishing History

Elizabeth Bonhote's *The Fashionable Friend* was published anonymously by T. Becket and P. A. Dehondt in London, in 1773. They also published her first work, *The Rambles of Mr. Frankly*, in 1772. Thomas Becket was the former apprentice of Andrew Millar and moved to the Strand to establish his new firm with Dutch partner, Peter Abraham Dehondt. Whilst by the 1770s the contribution of publishing from country towns had increased, London continued to dominate the publishing trade due to such firms as T. Becket and P. A. Dehondt, who published a broad range of fashionable literature. (A list of novels they published can be found advertised at the end of *The Fashionable Friend*, volume 2.) They were one of the leading London novel publishers between 1770-1799, publishing seventeen novels during the 1770s, compared to the relatively recently established William Lane, who published only three. (Lane's Minerva Press went on to dominate the publishing of new novel titles in London during the 1790s, publishing two hundred and seventeen novels including much of Bonhote's later work.)<sup>1</sup>

The firm succeeded James Dodsley as Laurence Sterne's publishers and issued the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> volumes of *Tristram Shandy* at the end of 1761. They also published Sterne's further volumes of *Sermons* in 1767, with a subscription list including Voltaire, Diderot and Hume and brought him £300 in addition to copyright money.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that Bonhote's work, *The Rambles of Mr. Frankly* was inspired by that of Sterne's and wonder if it is anything more than a coincidence that they had the same publishers.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schowering, eds., *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles Vol. 1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.71.

<sup>2</sup> F. A. Mumby and Ian Norrie, *Publishing and Bookselling* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), p.166.

T. Becket and P. A. Dehondt's partnership of 13 years had its share of triumphs and disasters. It produced around 477 publications and was said to have an annual profit of £6000 when Dehondt left the country in 1766.<sup>3</sup> It is possible that the incorporation of the Becket shop from 1772 into the corner of the Adam brothers' new Adelphi, in the Strand played a factor in the end of the partnership. On leaving the partnership, Dehondt was paid, 'what he regarded as a paltry recompense of £1,300'<sup>4</sup> but he did speak of grievance over Becket's bankruptcy in 1778. Dehondt was responsible for the importing and exporting side of the business but firmly stated that he was in no way liable for the firm's debts, having had nothing to do with the firm for some years prior to the bankruptcy. Becket managed to re-establish himself by 1783 but Dehondt still maintained he was treated badly during the bankruptcy proceedings.

It is unclear but it would not be unreasonable to suggest that Becket's financial trouble could have stemmed from his lost Court case against Donaldson. In 1774, Becket was involved in a legal battle against Edinburgh bookseller Donaldson who had republished James Thomas's work *The Seasons* the copyright of which had been bought by Becket. Becket secured an injunction against Donaldson, leading Donaldson to appeal to the House of Lords; eleven judges were asked to give their interpretation of the Copyright Act and it was by a majority of one that they decided perpetual rights were ruled out. Donaldson won the case by 22 votes to 11, thus changing copyright forever and allowing the production of cheap reprints.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schowering, eds., *The English Novel 1770-1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles Vol. 1* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Marjorie Plant, *The English Book Trade* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1994), p.210.

It is quite possible that the firm's financial and business trouble led Elizabeth Bonhote to change publishers to William Lane's Minerva Press, who published many of her following works, including *Hortensia* (1777), *Olivia* (1787), *Darney Vale* (1789), *Ellen Woodley* (1790) and *Bungay Castle* (1796). It appears the Minerva Press did not publish her educational work, *The Parental Monitor*, or the book of verse, *Feeling*. One could speculate that this was because the Minerva Press primarily produced novels, neither of which these works were.

On comparing a first edition of Bonhote's anonymously published *The Fashionable Friend* (1773) with an edition of her novel, *Ellen Woodley* (1790), it is clear she had become much more successful at this point. She is not only credited as the author of the novel but more money has also been invested in the binding of the work, most likely a reflection of the expected profit that the work of a known author of her stature would create.

Word length: 700

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Other Resources:

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