

Publishing History: *Louisa; or, The Cottage on the Moor*

The first edition of Elizabeth Helme's novel *Louisa; or, The Cottage on the Moor* was published by George Kearsley, a bookseller and publisher operating in London.¹ The first publisher Helme went to rejected the novel, but Kearsley saw the potential in her work and agreed to make a print run of the text. In 1758 Kearsley established his initial publishing business at the Golden Lion in Ludgate Street. In 1773, Kearsley relocated to Johnson's Head, Fleet Street, and so it was here that Helme's novel was published.² At the time Kearsley was publishing, Fleet Street was the most prominent and popular place for publishers to operate. Kearsley began by publishing pamphlets from approximately 1758, and later moved on to publish a wide range of genres, from periodicals to poetry and prose.³ Kearsley was initially very successful. Trevor Ross states that Kearsley's business 'enjoyed [...] success, its output reaching as high as sixty imprints a year'.⁴ In the first edition of *Louisa* there is a section of advertisements entitled 'New Books Published by G. Kearsley'. From these pages it would appear that Kearsley published a substantial amount of travel literature, including titles such as *A Tour of Holland* and *An Abridgement of All Captain Cooks Voyages around the World*.⁵ It might have been through travel literature that Helme established contact with Kearsley. Helme translated a great deal of travel literature before her first novel and so may have known Kearsley as a result of that. Kearsley also published non-fiction, some of which was his own work,

¹ Elizabeth Helme, *Louisa; or, The Cottage on the Moor* (London: G.Kearsley, 1787).

² Henry Plomer, *A dictionary of the booksellers and printers who were at work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1726-1775* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1907) pp.143-144.

³ Plomer, p.143.

⁴ Trevor Ross, 'George Kearsley', *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47159>> [accessed March 2006] (para. 1 of 5)

⁵ Harry Peckham, *A Tour of Holland, Dutch Brabant, The Austrian Netherlands, and Part of France* (London: G. Kearsley, 1788), James Cook, *An Abridgement of All Captain Cooks Voyages around the World* (London: G. Kearsley, 1787).

such as *Kearsley's Tax Tables*, and also published two of his own literary magazines, the *Sentimental Magazine* (1773-7) and the *Young Gentleman's Magazine*. (1777)⁶

However, Kearsley's publishing career did not always run smoothly. In 1763 he was arrested with over fifty other men for helping publish an issue of John Wilke's controversial and radical periodical, *The North Briton* (1762-1763). In this particular issue, the infamous 'no. 45', Wilkes severely criticized the speech made by the King at the opening of parliament. Consequently everyone involved in the publication was arrested on a seditious libel charge. Kearsley and the others were later discharged after pressure from the public. Kearsley also faced financial difficulties. He went bankrupt at several points, largely as a result of the legal costs he incurred after the trial concerning *The North Briton*. His bankruptcy was detailed in the local newspaper, *The London Gazette*. For example, on 16th February, 1765 it mentions that a 'certificate of bankruptcy is to be granted' to him. It also details the 'surrender' of his finances again between 1784 and 1786 in later editions of the paper.⁷ So, it would seem that before the publication of *Louisa*, Kearsley was suffering the strain of financial difficulty. It might well have been the success and popularity of *Louisa* that helped to restart Kearsley's publishing career, as no further mention can be found of Kearsley's monetary problems after 1787.

Louisa proved popular with both critics and the general public and consequently the book was reprinted many times. In the year of its initial publication, 1787, the book went through five editions, two of which were published in Paris and Dublin. In 1788 there were two editions translated into French and in 1797 a further two editions were made in Spanish. In 1807 the novel was reprinted in New York by Richard Scott. What is

⁶ George Kearsley, *Kearsley's Tax Tables, 18th Edition* (London: G. Kearsley, 1787).

⁷ Victor Berch, 'The London Book Trades of the Later Eighteenth-Century' *Devon's Libraries Study Services* < http://www.devon.gov.uk/etched?_IXP_=1&_IXR=121391 > [accessed March 2006]

notable about this edition is that the title was changed to *The History of Louisa, the Lovely Orphan, or the Cottage on the Moor*. It may well have been that the publisher felt it would sell more successfully under this title. The last printing of the novel appears to be in 1840 in London by J. Cunningham. It was only in the fourth 1787 edition that Helme is credited as the author of the work. From this edition onwards the novel was also 'ornamented with frontispieces', 'neatly engraved' and also included a contents page. Julie Shaffer asserts that *Louisa* was reprinted until 1848 and as well as being translated into French and German, was also translated into Russian, showing that Helme had worldwide appeal and success.⁸

Louisa was the most successful of Helme's ten novels. James Raven describes how Kearsley had to send one edition to 'four different Printing Houses' in order to 'supply the increasing demand for this favorite production'.⁹ Helme was also writing within a popular genre. 'Sentimental novels', as they are often described, were part of an eighteenth-century literary genre which stressed passion, emotion and feeling over logic and reason. Although Helme's novels tended to work within these ideas she did also branch out into other genres. In 1801, Helme published a gothic text, *St. Margaret's Cave, or The Nun's Story*, which suggests that Helme was aware of the market she was writing for.¹⁰ Gothic texts were becoming increasingly popular, especially after the success of Helme's contemporary, Ann Radcliffe. Helme knew what genres sold and so adapted her writing style to remain in keeping with changing literary trends.

⁸ Julie Schaffer, 'I Once Was Lost But Now I'm Found: Recovering Rare Woman-Penned Novels in the Corvey Collection', *University of Wisconsin* (1993)

< http://www.uwosh.edu/faculty_staff/shaffer/PROVIDEN.html > [accessed March 2006]

⁹ James Raven, *The English Novel 1770-182: A bibliographical survey of prose fiction published in the British Isles*, ed. by James Raven, Peter Garside and Rainer Schowering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Elizabeth Helme, *St. Margaret's Cave; or, The Nun's Story. An Ancient Legend* (London: Earle and Hemet, 1801).

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Note: worked collaboratively with Alice James with regards to resources and information on George Kearsley.

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