

Publishing History

Eliza Parson's novel *An Old Friend with a New Face* was published for T. N. Longman in 1797. Longman publishing was founded by Thomas Longman, born in 1699 in Bristol, the son of Ezekiel Longman, who was a gentleman from Bristol.ⁱ The family at this time was in the business of soap making and there were three generations of Longman soap makers before being succeeded by seven generations of publishers. Thomas's father died when he was young, aged nine, and he was sent by guardians in 1716 to London where he was apprenticed to a Lombard Street Bookseller, John Osborn, at the sign of the Oxford Arms. Here he learned his trade. Longman took his mentor's son, also called John Osborn, into partnership with him but he was to die young in 1733, before his father, leaving no children behind him. Thomas later married Osborn's eldest daughter, Mary on 27th January 1731 in St Pauls Cathedral, but their marriage produced no children and heirs to the business. He purchased the stock and goods of William Taylor, who was an established publisher, with inheritance money from a relative in Bristol amounting to £2282 9s 6d.ⁱⁱ The purchase included Taylor's two shops in Paternoster-row, which were known as the Black Swan and the Ship.ⁱⁱⁱ The sign of the ship was a long established logo at the premises^{iv} and had been running since 1640.^v Thomas Longman (the first) was one of the better established publishers of his period and had his, 'Main business in religious and school books.'^{vi} Thomas also:

paid particular attention to science titles, beginning with an edition of the works of the chemist Robert Boyle, prepared by Peter Shaw, his doctor, who helped Mary through a serious illness in 1735.His best remembered enterprise, however, is that of being one of a later consortium which produced Samuel

Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language in 1755.^{vii}

In 1754 Thomas went into partnership with his nephew, also Thomas, and the business became T. and T. Longman. Thomas Longman, the elder, died in 1755 and his nephew became the sole owner of the business^{viii} according to one source, which conflicts with the Oxford DNB stating that his wife became the senior partner at his death, alongside his nephew. He was succeeded in turn by Thomas Norton Longman (1771-1842), who guided the company through the romantic period, when Longman publishing was very strong, publishing the works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey and Scott.^{ix} He had interests in the theatre and married Elizabeth Harris, 'the sister of a proprietor and manager of Covent Garden.'^x Longman's is widely acknowledged as, 'the biggest firm of the romantic period'.^{xi} It was a prestigious firm in this period with a sound financial backing:

Longman, who maintained a huge business in wholesale bookselling as well as in publishing new and older titles, was a proud family business whose money had been made by fathers and grandfathers.^{xii}

Many of Parson's other works were printed by William Lane of the Minerva Press. It seems that until *An Old Friend with a New Face* in 1797 Parsons published entirely with Minerva, with at least ten books attributed to them before this title.^{xiii} The move from Minerva to Longman probably comes as she became a better known writer, with wider acclaim, which would have attracted the Longmans. Minerva would have been a typical publisher for a writer of Parsons' type. Her popular gothic style was exactly the kind of books they sold, for Minerva, 'became a common term to describe a particular type of

light society romance or thriller, much condemned in conduct literature.^{xiv} Minerva made books available to a larger range of people with circulating libraries and was probably the largest and best known. Their books represented what we would call today popular culture while Longmans would have been more representative of higher culture works. Minerva Press was, however, responsible for publishing a large amount of the total works produced in the period, about a third of all published in London.^{xv} Parson's first novel, in 1790, *The History of Miss Meredith* was published by Minerva Press and had a large amount of support despite her being previously unpublished. This had one of the largest lists of subscribers of the 1790's with some notable figures subscribing.^{xvi} Her large novel output and consequently varying quality were to meet her economic demands but would have also met the demands of the period for gothic or horror novels which Minerva Press was trying to supply. Parsons had at least one further novel published by Longman in 1798, *Anecdotes of Two Well-Known Families*, this change of publisher suggests a move up in the literary world of status.

Longman bought the copyright of *An Old Friend with a New Face* from Parsons for a payment of £60 and twenty copies of her novel.^{xvii} There were 750 copies printed by Woodfall in June 1797.^{xviii} There is no record of a second edition of this text but this was not unusual during this period. In the 1780's and 1790's 58-59% of novels published did not run to a second edition.^{xix} The price paid reflects Parson's popular status and the fact that Longman published this title adds to an assumption that this was considered of some literary worth. This was not her biggest selling or most popular novel however. Parsons was most famous as the author of *The Castle of Wolfenbach* in 1793, one of the

‘Northanger novels’.^{xx} This novel reflects the popularity during this period for all things German and this novel was published at an early stage of this phase: ‘ Eliza Parsons joins in relatively early with her *Castle of Wolfenbach; a German story* published by William Lane in 1793.^{xxi} *The Castle of Wolfenbach* had further editions published also by William Lane at the Minerva Press during 1794, 1824, 1839 and 1854.^{xxii} Clearly this novel was much more popular than Parsons’ *An Old Friend with a New Face* and a more closely aligned with Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*. Despite any criticism for large output and erratic quality Parsons seems clearly to have been popular in her time fulfilling the demands made by society.

ⁱ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longman>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/72356/16989?docpos=2>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longman>

^{iv} Robin Myers, Michael Harns and Giles Mandel Brode, ed. *The London Book Trade* (London: The British Library and Oak Knoll Press, 2003) pp. 102

^v <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/72356/16989?docpos=2>

^{vi} William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 159

^{vii} <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/72356/16989?docpos=2>

^{viii} <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longman>

^{ix} <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longman>

^x <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/72356/16989?docpos=2>

^{xi} William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 417

^{xii} William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 169

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xiv William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 244

xv William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 237-244

xvi James Raven 'Introduction' in Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schowering, ed. *The English Novel 1770-1799 Vol I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 55

xvii James Raven 'Introduction' in Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schowering, ed. *The English Novel 1770-1799 vol I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 53

xviii Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schowering, ed. *The English Novel 1770-1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 724

xix Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schowering, ed. *The English Novel 1770-1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 35

xx www.litgothic.com/Authors/parsons.html

xxi Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schowering, ed. *The English Novel 1770-1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 62

xxii Peter Garside, James Raven and Rainer Schowering, ed. *The English Novel 1770-1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 592

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