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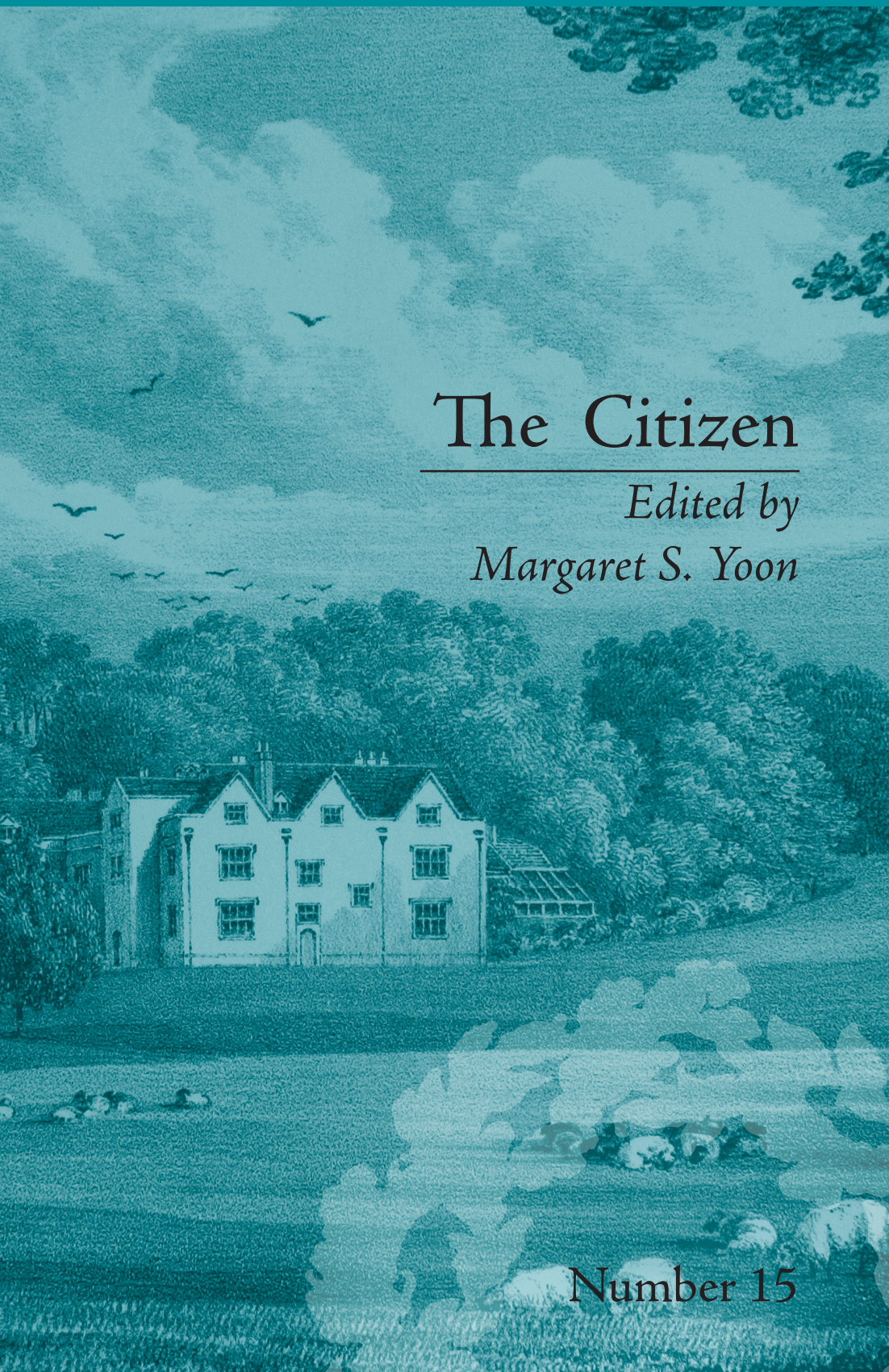

The Citizen

Edited by

Margaret S. Yoon

Number 15

THE CITIZEN

Chawton House Library Series: Women's Novels

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Ann Gomersall, *The Citizen*

Edited by

Margaret S. Yoon

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> There is no Place in the Town which I so much love to frequent as the *Royal Exchange*. It gives me a secret Satisfaction, and, in some measure gratifies my Vanity, as I am an *Englishman*, to see so rich an Assembly of Country-men and Foreigners consulting together upon the private Business of Mankind, and making this Metropolis a kind of *Emporium* for the whole Earth .... Nature seems to have taken a particular Care to disseminate her Blessings among the different Regions of the World, with an Eye to this mutual Intercourse and Traffick among Mankind, that the Natives of several Parts of the Globe might have a kind of Dependance upon one another, and be united together by their common Interest. (p. 268–9)
>
> ~Joseph Addison, *Spectator*, 69 (19 May 1729)

Introduction: Commerce, Community and the Circulation of Benevolence[1]

In September 1829, Thomas Binney, the minister of Newport on the Isle of Wight, wrote to Earl Spencer on behalf of Ann Gomersall (1750–1835).[2] Binney had successfully solicited his aid in recommending Gomersall's case to the Literary Fund Committee twice before: due to Lord Spencer's 'prompt and benevolent interest in her favor', Binney acknowledges, Mrs Gomersall 'has at both times received £10 from the Literary Fund'.[3] Soliciting Spencer's aid yet again, Binney wrote: 'It might be thought, indeed, that to have succeeded twice ought really, to content us – but alas! as life and poverty equally continue, the same necessity remains for something to be done – and I am sure I shall find the same, unchanged benevolence in your Lordship, and, I hope, the same beneficent disposition in the committee of the Institution to which I have referred'. Binney's plea was partially successful. The Committee voted to grant Gomersall £5, half the amount they had previously granted to her. Yet Gomersall's circumstances – evoked so poignantly in Binney's phrase that 'life and poverty equally continue' – were dire. Aged seventy-nine in 1829, she was partially paralysed due to a stroke and was barely subsisting, aided by the grants from the Literary Fund.[4] Her plight, similar to that of many female writers during this period, helps inform our picture of women's experiences during the effort to professionalize writing as legitimate labour in the early part of the nineteenth century.[5]

What was notable about Ann Gomersall's initial petition to the Literary Fund Committee was its silence about her three published novels as proof that she was an author and therefore eligible for a grant from the Fund. In her initial application, Gomersall cited only her 1824 poem, *Creation*, which was her last published work.[6] The omission of any reference to her novels – all of which fit

the sentimental mode – points, perhaps, to the public debate surrounding sensibility and the sentimental novel that took place in a series of essays published in the 1780s, a debate that continued throughout the 1790s.[7] One of the central issues of the debate was the power of sentimental literature to stir the emotions of its readers. By 1796, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his periodical the *Watchman*, had sardonically observed 'The fine lady ... sips a beverage sweetened with human blood, even while she is weeping over the refined sorrow of [Goethe's] Werter or of [Richardson's] Clementina. Sensibility is not Benevolence'.[8] Coleridge's comments point to the dubious nature of sentimental literature to raise sympathetic responses to fictional characters and situations, which might cause a reader to feel morally elevated. One of the questions that persisted was centred on how real such feelings of moral elevation and virtue were if they did not stir the readers into benevolent action.

Gomersall had, in fact, achieved minor acclaim with her three novels: *Eleonora: A Novel, In a Series of Letters* (1789), *The Citizen: A Novel* (1790) and *The Disappointed Heir: or, Memoirs of the Ormond Family: A Novel* (1796). The *Monthly Review* noted of *Eleonora*: 'These volumes are rendered interesting by a great variety of natural incidents, and are enlivened by an easy and often humourous delineation of characters'.[9] The reviews of *The Citizen* confirmed Gomersall's reputation: 'The favourable idea which we formed of this female writer, from her Eleonora ... is confirmed by this second attempt ... [S]he represents the manners of middle life with great exactness, and has a happy facility in sketching familiar conversations. Her *citizen*, the hero of the piece, is an excellent character, and well supported'.[10] The *Critical Review* finds the novel's humorous quality to be most interesting, and the character of the citizen, though too obviously borrowed from the 'English Merchant', is well drawn and supported.[11] Gomersall's contemporary reviewers gave due notice to the distinctive character of the 'citizen'. James Raven has observed that Gomersall's novels are unusual in that they 'were a defence of the merchant and the values of commerce' and 'that she explicitly differentiates between types of businessmen and their respective social and moral worth'. Raven is particularly struck by her distinction between the established merchant and 'the upstart merchant-manufacturer and petty trader'.[12] Gomersall's distinction between these types can be traced to the underlying philosophies and cultural issues prevalent in the late eighteenth century, particularly in the anxieties related to Britain's tremendous military and mercantile successes and the subsequent gain in wealth and power.[13] Gomersall must be granted a place in literary history for her novels, particularly *The Citizen*, because the plot of this epistolary work reveals a rich convergence of eighteenth-century debates about sensibility, commerce and masculinity in a period when Britain had emerged as a formidable international power.

When eighteenth-century moral philosophers such as David Hume turned to economic questions, they focused on the public benefit to be gained from private enterprise. In his essay 'Of Commerce', Hume declared that:

> The greatness of a state, and the happiness of its subjects, how independent soever they may be supposed in some respects, are commonly allowed to be inseparable with regard to commerce; and as private men receive greater security, in the possession of their trade and riches, from the power of the public, so the public becomes powerful in proportion to the opulence and extensive commerce of private men.[14]

In this essay and in 'Of the Refinement in the Arts', Hume particularly emphasized the importance of the circulation of both goods and responsibilities throughout all levels of society so that men and women 'must feel an increase of humanity, from the very habit of conversing together ... Thus *industry, knowledge* and *humanity*, are linked together by an indissoluble chain, and are found, from experience as well as reason, to be peculiar to the more polished, and, what are commonly denominated, the more luxurious ages'.[15] Hume's emphasis on industry, knowledge and humanity can be translated to commerce, education and community in Gomersall's novel, issues of central importance to *The Citizen*.

The Citizen thus addresses the problem of how to move its readers from sympathetic feeling to benevolent action by using the merchant as a role model. In the tradition of novels such as Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of the World* (1773) and Clara Reeve's *The Two Mentors* (1783), *The Citizen* focuses on the hero, rather than the heroine, and on the role of the mentor in guiding the hero. Gomersall's novel is distinct in that she raises the merchant to the role of moral guide, and in particular, she associates the industrious activity of the merchant with a Christian practice of benevolence. With *The Citizen*, Gomersall engages in the same social and political debates that were central to Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1765–70), a novel in which the younger son of an earl is raised in rural obscurity and becomes a moral and prominent man of business. Echoes of *The Fool of Quality* appear in Gomersall's work, especially in the way 'the major debates and concepts of eighteenth-century political discourse' were marshalled 'under two opposing banners': 'under the banner of manners and of sentiment, the properties of feeling, politeness and taste are aligned with industry and commerce; opposing these are the forces of worldliness and corruption associated with aristocratic landed wealth, fashion and city society'.[16] The conflict between these two forces emerges in the choice that faces the young characters in *The Citizen*, particularly Charles Montgomery.

Following the events of a typical courtship novel, *The Citizen* follows the romantic plot of three couples through their correspondence. Their letters, however, are concerned not only with romance but also with making the right choice of learning to reject the frivolous ambitions of 'making a great figure in life, with

respect to *dress, house, furniture, equipage, and a suitable number of servants*' to an understanding of the role a 'benevolent mind' has in 'the pleasing satisfaction of performing the necessary duties of humanity'.[17] The practices of the London merchant and 'citizen' of the title, Mr Philip Bertills, become the model that educates and guides the activity of the country gentleman, Charles Montgomery, in managing his land and wealth. Rather than emphasizing the importance of personal gain – the popular misconception of merchants' ambitions – Mr Bertills mentors Charles in the importance of properly and benevolently circulating resources to aid those who are needy within the community. The novel particularly emphasizes the importance of making the right moral choice between industry and commerce and fashion and pleasure, through Charles's search for identity and purpose in life after his father dies, when he discovers that he is illegitimate and has no legal claim to his father's wealth or estates. Through the story of how a young man must redefine himself as he enters adulthood, *The Citizen* promotes an idea of the proper education of gentlemen, and in raising the merchant to the role of moral guide and mentor, the novel not only defends and validates the commercial activities of merchants, but also powerfully joins that commercial activity with a communal humanity.[18] Indeed, in partnering Charles's work as a benevolent landowner with Mr Bertills's mercantile practices, the novel more than hints that Charles has discovered a 'profession', a topic of growing concern during this period. In fact, one of the most famous inhabitants of Leeds during the period in which Gomersall lived in that city and wrote her first two novels was Joseph Priestley, who wrote *An Essay on a Course of Liberal Education* (1765), pinpointing some of the crucial defects of a gentleman's education.[19]

Directed to the dissenting Warrington Academy, Priestley's essay addresses a concern for educating those gentlemen who will be 'engaging in those higher spheres of active life', which

> comprehended all those stations in which a man's conduct will considerably affect the liberty and the property of his countrymen, and the riches, the strength, and the security of his country; the first and most important ranks of which are filled by gentlemen of large property.[20]

Here, Priestley identifies a chief fault in the traditional education programmes of the universities: they were designed for training the clergy and hence only subjects such as rhetoric, logic and 'School-Divinity' are taught.[21] In order to redress the faults of this narrow view of education, Priestley recommends instruction in subjects such as civil history, particularly civil policy: the theory of laws, government, manufacture, commerce, naval force, etc. – topics that can serve to benefit any gentleman in his *active* roles. What Priestley emphasizes, however, is a focus for gentlemen who have no financial need to embark on a professional career. Priestley, in fact, recognizes the need and desirability for men of substance to be educated properly so that they can responsibly fulfil their roles as landowners and men of influence.

Hence, Priestley's concern is to equip gentlemen and those in the professions to understand and manage the fast-paced, modern world of the late eighteenth century, in which the realm of gentlemanly concerns has expanded beyond the confines of a country estate or a single nation. Aware of the responsibilities as well as benefits of Britain's massive increase in wealth and power, Priestley urges that an educational programme be developed that will help maintain Britain's status against competitor nations:

> so thoroughly awakened are all the states of Europe to a sense of their true interests, that we are convinced, the same supine inattention with which affairs were formerly conducted is no longer safe; and that, without superior degrees of wisdom and vigour in political measures, every thing we have hitherto gained will infallibly be lost, and be quickly transferred to our more intelligent and vigilant neighbours.[22]

In this new international world, Priestley recognizes the need for what he calls 'more lights and superior industry': a 'different and a better furniture of mind' is necessary not only for ministers of state but for anyone who has 'influence in schemes of public and national advantage'.[23] In this growing, global economy in which Britain is the dominant power, the role of a landed country gentlemen now carries more responsibilities, and the ripple effects from one estate can develop into a mighty national wave.

The novel opens at a crucial point in which Charles has fallen into the snare of an immoral, social-climbing beauty from Leeds, Fanny Elwood, the daughter of a wool-stapler. She desires Charles for his wealth and the estates he will inherit from his father, a fact recognized by Charles's father and friends, who see Fanny in her true colours. Much of Volume I centres on the circulation of letters urging Charles to recognize Fanny's moral faults. Charles, however, although well educated and guided by an excellent father, is governed by impetuous passions. As his friend, Sir Edward Melworth cautions, 'take care what you are about; you are on the brink of a dangerous precipice; another step may plunge you into irretrievable misery! Do not suffer your rashness to be the destruction of all your prospects of felicity'.[24] Even in the face of incontrovertible evidence that Fanny has been the mistress of Major Herbert, with whom she has had a child, Charles persists in his devotion to Fanny, ignoring all the dictates of reason and remaining enthralled by his passions. In the end, he is saved only by his father's death, when knowledge of his illegitimate birth emerges. Unable to inherit, he loses his estates, his income and his beloved simultaneously, for Fanny transfers her attention to another man, Mr Wilkins. Thus the death of his father throws Charles into a crisis of identity in which he must 'devise some expedient for the means of sustaining my existence'.[25] Having been educated as a gentleman and knowing no other path, Charles is in a quandary about his future:

> At present, I know not what course to take: trade I am wholly a stranger to, nor do I think I could ever bring my mind to submit to all the servile situations which the trader must necessarily be thrown into very frequently. The army seems to me the only resource I have left. How little did my late honored parent imagine that his darling son would ever be reduced to the necessity of living by his industry! yet it *must* be by the exertion of that, in some way or other, by which alone I *can* live. I can never support the idea of submitting to be a dependent upon the bounty of another.[26]

Charles, an educated gentleman with no practical skills or abilities that will enable him to live by his own means, presents here the two options typically open to the younger sons of landed gentry: trade or the army (and increasingly, the navy).[27] Charles is, in fact, in precisely the position that Priestley had identified in his essay.

It is at this point, at the end of Volume I, that *The Citizen* makes a dramatic turn. The novel's focus shifts away from the courtship plot to the 'apprenticeship' of Charles Montgomery to the merchant, Mr Bertills, as he mentors Charles into a new understanding of the responsibilities of a gentleman of substance. Charles's passions – his ability to feel deeply – characterizes him as a 'man of feeling'. Part of his apprenticeship to Mr Bertills involves governing his impetuous passions – the kind of self-love against which Alexander Pope had written about in his *Essay on Man* earlier in the century – with a rational and sensible humanity. In actively pairing the issues of benevolence and manly action, *The Citizen* tackles one of the paradoxes inherent in the 'man of feeling': that such a virtuous man's feelings often were too overwhelming to result in effective and *manly* action. Henry Mackenzie's Harley from *The Man of Feeling* (1771) famously embodies this paradox, raising questions about what constitutes proper manliness.[28] Charles's passions allow him to shed tears of genuine sympathy, but his training in learning how to act with compassionate humanity (along with his social status and wealth) enables him to render effective aid, rather than merely weeping in helpless sympathy. As a man of substance *and* a man of feeling, Charles embodies the sentimental hero first envisioned by Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), with the crucial difference that the moral guide of the sentimental hero is not a vicar or a tutor, but a merchant.

Mr Bertills begins his mentorship by having Charles witness several acts of benevolence, in which deeply Christian ideas of trust and faith emerge and are coupled with the prevailing moral philosophy of the period. Mr Bertills personally introduces Charles to those in need, urging him to visit the sorrowful, which parallels Adam Smith's statements about what motivates virtuous duty in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). In a powerful statement about the human condition, Smith speculates on the responses of 'a man of humanity' to the knowledge that the 'great empire of China ... was suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake'.[29] Smith imagines that such a person would 'express strongly his sor-

row for the misfortune of that unhappy people', but after some 'fine philosophy' on the nature of disasters, he would return to his daily business and cares, 'provided he never saw them'.[30] Although he continues to make a larger point about reason and duty, Smith recognizes here the deep influence of calamities that are witnessed first-hand. In a similar way, Mr Bertills urges Charles to practice a personal kind of benevolence. The emphasis on the personal is reinforced by the epistolary form, in which the stories of those in need are recounted as a personal testimony, or a witnessing, of how sympathy inspires benevolent action as Charles recounts his experiences to his friends. After only a few days spent with Mr Bertills and witnessing his transactions with others, Charles exclaims, 'What a man is Mr. Bertills! how noble, how generous, how exalted is his conduct! In the amiable qualities of the heart *no one* ever surpassed him, and *few* ever equalled him. Every day displays to my view some excellency in his character unseen before'.[31]

This deeply personal touch was an important aspect not only of the communities of sympathy and benevolence promoted by Hume and Smith, but also of the competitive mercantile world of the City of London. Early in their correspondence, Mr Bertills tells Charles, 'remember I have assured you of my friendship; let that satisfy you till we meet; and do not forget that the *word* of a British merchant is as sacred as his *oath*; *I* dare not violate *mine*'.[32] London merchants relied heavily on personal meetings and much of their success in business was based on the strength of their reputation, or their 'public face'.[33] In essence, their business rested on their word. To these philosophical and commercial meanings can be added Christian significance to the merchant's 'word', which emerges in Mr Bertills's first actions regarding the estates he has inherited from his friend.

Mr Bertills chides those who are worried for not trusting that he would act as he should. In the cases of Mrs Ellis, the old butler and the tenant farmers, Mr Bertills gently rebukes all of them for worrying about the future now that he has inherited. As the intimate friend of Mr Montgomery, Mr Bertills has known all of them for many years. Hence, Mr Bertills chides them for not trusting in their knowledge of Mr Bertills and for not trusting in their faith in God that their futures are secure even though Mr Montgomery has died intestate. Mr Bertills reminds all who are concerned that they should 'contentedly leave that affair in the hands of providence' and that all they must do is 'to endeavour to perform [their] duty to God and man'.[34] For Mr Bertills, to worry about the future is to lack faith not only in God, but also in those Christian individuals who have the responsibility of ownership.

In the case of Mr Clements, Mr Bertills extends this Christian philosophy of trust and faith to business dealings. He chides Mr Clements for not explaining about his inability to repay the loan, and also for not trusting in the knowledge that not only could he ask for an extension to repay the loan, but also that he could apply for an additional loan to help him through a difficult period. In

Mr Clements's situation can be seen a microcosm of the larger society, for Mr Clements puts himself in financial peril by promising to help others who are in desperate trouble as well. If Mr Bertills had demanded the immediate repayment of his loan, Mr Clements would have been ruined and along with him all those who were indebted to him. Hence a chain of devastation would have been wrought by the lack of understanding shown to one person.

Charles, however, has already learned to trust Mr Bertills. In a rapid reversal of his earlier prejudices, Charles *does* have faith in Mr Bertills after spending just a few days with him, remarking that 'my heart is at ease, from a certainty that he has too elevated a turn of mind to entertain a thought of reducing me to indigence by taking the utmost advantage that the law allows him ... I have, therefore, dismissed all my fears, and in his hands I think myself safe'.[35] In trusting Mr Bertills, Charles passes a 'test' and learns a valuable lesson. During the interview in which Charles receives the deed for the estates, Mr Bertills explains: 'It has been the will of God to try your patience, for a short time, by divesting you apparently of every *human* support; that you might thereby be compelled to place your dependence upon him alone'.[36] As a man of feeling, Charles knows to trust in his feelings. What he subsequently learns from his apprenticeship to Mr Bertills is how to trust in God as well, and to act on those feelings with a true understanding of his responsibilities as a man of wealth. When Mr Bertills hands over the estates and inheritance that belonged to his father, he impresses on Charles the need to think of 'the *use* of what is committed to your charge: – ever bearing upon your mind that *to whom much is given of him will much be required*'.[37] In receiving his inheritance from the hands of Mr Bertills, Charles is inducted into the philosophy of Mr Bertills.

As a merchant, Mr Bertills represents a contested figure of authority within the novel, with Charles initially voicing fairly typical prejudices against the profession. Charles assumes at first that Mr Bertills 'must, of course, have imbibed opinions and sentiments despicably narrow and contracted' as a result of his occupation as a London merchant. Furthermore, he is certain that Mr Bertills must have a 'love of money' because 'notwithstanding he has only one child to inherit his wealth, he pursues business now with as much avidity as he did in the days of his youth'.[38] As a matter of historical fact, however, the distance between the landed gentry and city merchant is not as great as Charles's prejudice would imply. Many younger sons of landed families were apprenticed to merchants throughout the eighteenth century.[39] Significantly, the character in *The Citizen* who vouches for the integrity and nobility of Mr Bertills and of other merchants like him is Sir Edward Melworth, an example of the English country gentlemen whose knowledge of the world is broad and informed. He and his sister, along with their friend, the Hon. Augustus Fitzmaurice (the son of a peer), spend much of Volume II in France visiting friends. When Charles finally understands

the true worth of Mr Bertills, Sir Edward writes, 'I imagine you have now discarded all narrow prejudices against citizens and traders; and, in future, will judge of persons only by their sentiments and conduct',[40] an important lesson of the novel for its readers.

In raising the merchant to the level of hero, the moral voice of the novel, Gomersall actively engages in the social issues of her day, joining the company of other popular novelists who similarly sought to rescue the merchant from his early roots as a figure of scorn and ridicule. The merchant as a literary character gradually metamorphoses over the course of the eighteenth century from a figure of comedy and the focus of satire to a character who grows into the role of hero, and eventually becomes 'justified by a bourgeois ideal of gentlemanliness, based upon ideas of responsibility and service'.[41] The writings of Daniel Defoe and George Lillo served to praise the responsible and productive character of the merchant early in the century, and later, virtuous and admirable merchants appear in popular works such as *The Fool of Quality* and Richard Cumberland's play, *The West-Indian* (1771). Nonetheless, the stock figure of the 'cit' – ridiculed, critiqued and satirized – persisted in eighteenth-century literature.[42] The persistence of this negative portrayal may lie in what has been identified as the merchants' paradoxical place in British society: 'The wealth of the merchant may have been feared in some gentle circles as a threat to the landed order, but their riches were likely to engender conservatism and loyalty to the existing regime. If well-managed, London's merchants could be a key force for stability in a very uncertain age'.[43] The threat of social upheaval depicted in eighteenth-century fiction was not, in fact, a reflection of reality, particularly since most merchants did not actually retire to an estate in the country, but rather continued to work until they died and lived close to their warehouses, remaining confined within the City.[44]

Mr Bertills emphatically defuses any threat of social encroachment when he renounces his legal status as heir to Mr Montgomery's estates and deeds them to Charles. Contrary to Charles's expectations, Mr Bertills states that he 'considered all the property both *real* and *personal* as [Charles's] *natural and equitable right*, and myself [Mr Bertills] as a guardian to *secure* that right to you firmly'.[45] Mr Bertills recognizes that Charles has been educated as a gentleman and cannot conceive how he could be transformed or trained into another profession. He thus emphatically vetoes Charles's initial desire to enter the army, informing Charles: 'Under the idea of being a *gentleman* by profession you would condescend to the very worst slavery, and let yourself out as a *mark to be shot at for so much per diem*'.[46] Nor does he have any intention of attempting to transform Charles into a merchant: 'I shall have employment for you; not in my counting-house, for *that* would not suit your taste, and you would only do mischief there: I mean to place you in your proper sphere, in which every person appears to most advantage'.[47] Here, Mr Bertills gently teases Charles in asking him to accompany

Rhoda to London, by giving him the task of being escort to his daughter and her friend as they go shopping and visiting. Underlying this teasing humour is the serious point that each person does, indeed, have a proper sphere, a place appropriate to his gifts, training and character.

In between the shopping trips Mr Bertills continues to enlighten Charles in his role as an active benefactor by asking him to meet with Mrs Brown, a woman who had applied to a charity aiding poor female orphans that Mr Bertills supports. Rather than asking Charles to join the committee as a regular member, he asks Mrs Brown to visit Charles and Rhoda on a personal visit in order to tell her story, in the hopes of transferring her to their care. Mr Bertills's hopes are fulfilled, and as a result of hearing Mrs Brown's story – a story that moves Charles to tears of sympathy – Charles 'proposes to place her and her family in a small farm, now vacant, upon his estate in Sussex' and is determined that her family 'shall suffer no more from pecuniary distresses'.[48] Thus, Mr Bertills reinforces Charles's social standing, but adds a purposeful and charitable industry, and a broader knowledge of his responsibilities to it.

In his understanding and sympathetic management of business transactions, Mr Bertills promotes not only the circulation of money but also the circulation of benevolence, both of which are necessary for the maintenance of a strong and productive community. Those who inhibit this circulation are deeply criticized. Hence, Fanny, a daughter of a merchant, is treated quite severely in the novel, which may be surprising given that Gomersall married a merchant and created a title character who is a merchant.[49] Yet Fanny follows a disastrous and wretched trajectory in the course of the novel; she is the fallen woman whose eager ambitions drive her to ruin rather than success. She stands in marked contrast to the virtuous daughter of Mr Bertills, Rhoda, and certainly shows Gomersall's awareness of the sharp distinctions that existed in the merchant class, between the London merchant with his international concerns and the petty trader intent on personal gain. The account of Fanny's 'horrid' death while 'in a state of insensibility and intoxication' ends the novel, warning readers about the mortal dangers related to a selfish ambition that blocks the circulation of wealth and charity necessary for a vital and prosperous society. Fanny serves as an example of an extreme private selfishness that runs directly counter to the lessons that Mr Bertills teaches Charles. Her marriage to Mr Wilkins is based on the selfish desire for gain – she wants a secure financial position and her future husband needs her £1,000 dowry to save his failing business – and so is doomed, along with the business.

Gomersall does not restrict her criticisms to petty traders, but also includes the dissipated members of the nobility, represented by Lady Gertrude Carruther, Lady Bab Stansfield and the Duke. These characters who should be leaders of society are focused solely on personal pleasure and have no regard for the larger community. They stand in marked contrast to the more responsible and benevo-

lent peers represented by Lord and Lady Lucan, and the Earl and Countess of Castleton. In the broad array of characters presented in *The Citizen*, Gomersall makes her readers aware of the universally negative effects of self-centred behaviour, contrasting them starkly to the virtuous characters.

By the end of the novel, Charles has learned the true value of his inheritance and understood the responsibilities that accompany his wealth. Mr Bertills, in blessing the marriage of his daughter to Charles – a union that symbolically joins the opposing forces of landed wealth and mercantile industry – gives his benediction to them as they begin 'to act [their] part in the great theatre of the world' and reminds them that: 'You are blest with affluence; let it not be a snare to draw you into indolence, but rather consider it as a loud call upon you to exercise industry in using it properly. Visit the abodes of sorrow; dispense your bounty, with a liberal hand, to the indigent'.[50] In urging his daughter and son-in-law to be the 'delegates of heaven' who are blessed by the Almighty, Mr Bertills combines Hume's three virtues, 'industry, knowledge, and humanity', with Christian ideas of blessings and rewards.

The Citizen envisions a society where industry and commerce are harmoniously allied with landed wealth, and humanitarian benevolence circulates as freely as material goods. In many ways, eighteenth-century England did embody such a society, prompting Joseph Addison at the start of the century to exult in the bustle and activity of the Royal Exchange and the blessings of the English in living at the centre of an international community united by 'common interest'. Historically, the nation did feel that the period was an 'age of benevolence' and an 'age of charity', statements that were given ample weight by the number of charitable organizations that were founded during the century.[51] And yet, as her own experience showed, Gomersall's depiction of the 'Citizen' and his example of benevolent commercial practices was, in many ways, still an idealistic vision. The advertisement announcing the proposal for subscriptions to her first two novels stated that Gomersall had turned to writing in the hope of raising enough funds 'to enable her husband again to enter into business'.[52] In 1788, Leeds experienced a commercial crisis that resulted in a series of bankruptcies, which felled the Gomersalls.[53] While these novels received favourable reviews in both the *Critical Review* and the *Monthly Review*, neither sold enough to give Ann Gomersall a profit and, in fact, the subscriptions did not even cover the printing costs.[54] Unlike Mr and Mrs Clements, the fictional couple in *The Citizen* who are rescued from mercantile troubles by the generous benevolence of Mr Bertills, the Gomersalls never recovered from their financial troubles. By the mid-1790s, the Gomersalls had left Leeds and moved to south-west England, 'from where Mrs. Gomersall's family seems to have originated'.[55] They eventually moved to Newport on the Isle of Wight, where her husband died in 1814, leaving her with little or no money and obliging her to 'labour with her hands'.[56] As her petitions to the

Literary Fund Committee attest, Ann Gomersall's plight was severe. Unlike the characters in her novel, the circulation of resources never fully reached her, but *The Citizen* presents her hope for an ideal society in which the moral philosophies of Hume and Smith can work hand in hand with Christian principles in managing the great wealth of the new empire for the benefit of all.

Notes

1. Deep thanks go to Karen Edwards and Jane Spencer for reading drafts of this introduction, and to Adeline Johns-Putra for generously sharing her knowledge of Ann Gomersall. Thanks also go to the Chawton House Library for granting a fellowship to research this project.
2. James Raven notes only the records of Gomersall's death (17 June 1835), but the *Orlando Project* authors list both dates of birth and death. Her birth date (24 January 1750) may not be accurate since the *Orlando Project* entry also states that 'Gomersall died at Newport in the Isle of Wight, aged just past eighty'. If the dates are correct, Gomersall died well past the age of eighty, at the age of eighty-five. See J. Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750–1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) ftn. 11, pp. 114–5; and S. Brown, P. Clements and I. Grundy (eds), 'Ann Gomersall', in *Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Online, 2006).
3. Letters to the Literary Fund Committee, 1815–1834, Loan Ms. 96 RLF 1/332 (British Library, London) letter 10. This archive contains letters from Ann Gomersall to the Literary Fund Committee, as well as letters from Lord Spencer, the Duke of Somerset, and citizens of Newport writing on behalf of Gomersall.
4. 'The Literary Fund (later the Royal Literary Fund) was established in 1790. Its primary goal was to offer monetary support to financially distressed authors and their dependants. Its secondary aim was more ambitious; to restore literature and authorship to the cultural pre-eminence the charity claimed they had all but lost as the eighteenth century drew to a close' (J. Batchelor, *Women's Work: Labour, Gender, Authorship, 1750–1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 144–5).
5. Batchelor's work offers an important reading of how literary women's 'labours' were marginalized even as organisations such as the Literary Fund were founded to justify writing as productive labour and legitimize writers as part of a profession. Alongside letters from lesser-known women writers, Batchelor notes that Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Love Peacock also petitioned the Literary Fund Committee for aid.
6. *Creation* has not received much attention, either from Gomersall's contemporaries or from modern scholars. A catalogue search of the major research libraries in the US and the UK uncovered only one copy, at the British Library. Adeline Johns-Putra finds the poem interesting in light of its epic qualities and, in particular, the radical stance Gomersall takes in representing Eve as Adam's 'intellectual equal': 'Woman she shall be call'd – her proper name / From man she sprang, her nature is the same'. See A. Johns-Putra, *Heroes and Housewives: Women's Epic Poetry and Domestic Ideology in the Romantic Age (1770–1835)* (Berlin: Peter Lang AG, 2001), p. 115.
7. Markman Ellis discusses the 'new criticism of the novel in the 1780s' and 'the controversy of sentimentalism' of which both writers and readers were aware, in *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), ch. 6. Paul Goring argues that it was the questionable