

The New College Porters



Robinson Tower, where the Porters' Lodge is situated today—Holywell Quadrangle, New College, Oxford

Those in the know are well aware that the porters at New College are by far the best of any Oxford college, and worthy of many a New College Note. But this is not an essay celebrating them. Nor shall I be discussing that other famous porter of New College, William Porter (c. 1450–1524), warden from 1494 to 1520. The college's ninth warden, Porter hailed from Newent, Gloucestershire. In 1470 he proceeded to New College as a theology scholar from Winchester College, and held a fellowship here until 1483. Eleven years later, he returned to us as warden, before ending his days as Precentor of Hereford Cathedral. He is certainly as well known to Brasenose College as he is to us in New College. In his will he left an important benefaction to

Brasenose (founded 1509), which included endowing a fellowship for a man from the county of Herefordshire, a so-called Porter's scholar.

Our library at New College is not celebrated for its holdings of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fiction;¹ the strengths of our rare book holdings lie largely elsewhere. But New College Library does hold a hitherto unremarked cache of Porter books—seven books written by two sons and two daughters of another William Porter (1735–79), an army surgeon of Irish descent, whose five children, all in some way distinguished, were born during the 1770s in the city of Durham. In 1780, following the death of William Porter, his widow Jane (1745–1831) relocated her family to Edinburgh as a means of alleviating the family's poverty and obtaining a school education more cheaply for her daughters. These daughters were Jane Porter (1775–1850) and Anna Maria Porter (1778–1832), who would go on to become well-known novelists, popular during the time when Jane Austen was first being published: in fact, they penned fiction that was no less widely read than Austen's own was during her lifetime.² The other two writers, two of William Porter's three sons—the eldest son was Colonel John Porter (1772–1810)—were naval surgeon Dr William Ogilvie Porter (1774–1850), who also wrote a novel that until fairly recently had been assumed to have been written by his sister Jane, and the painter, travel writer, and diplomat Sir Robert Ker Porter (1777–1842). Robert married a Russian princess in 1812, and he was knighted some four times throughout his life: in 1806 by King Gustav IV Adolf of Sweden; the following year he was created a knight of St Joachim of Württemberg; the Prince Regent knighted him in England in 1813; and finally in 1832 he became a knight commander of the order of Hanover.

Thaddeus of Warsaw (1803), an early example in English of the historical novel, is possibly Jane Porter's best novel—certainly the most popular in her lifetime—and is often still widely referred to as her first. (This is despite her anonymous authorship of a Gothic three-decker published by Longman and Rees in 1799, *The Spirit of the Elbe*, extant copies of which are exceedingly rare.)³ Likewise published by Longman and Rees, *Thaddeus* first appeared in an edition of 500 copies. Such was the novel's popularity that 1,000 copies were printed for its fourth edition of 1806, from which print run one copy is held in our library: during the nineteenth century, the novel went through at least 84 reprints or editions.⁴ Its hero, Thaddeus Sobieski, is the fictional descendant of John III Sobieski (1629–96), King of Poland, a military hero who was inspired by real-life Polish freedom fighter, Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746–1817). In her prefatory text written for the 1831 Colburn and Bentley's Standard Novels series, 'The Author to her Friendly Readers', Jane Porter insists retrospectively upon the ground-breaking nature of her novel as historical fiction. She imagines how novel readers of the time might have seen in *Thaddeus* but 'a dull union between real history and a matter-of-fact imagination', alongside the prevalent types of sensational novel being published in 1803.⁵ Sir Walter Scott's first historical novel of Scotland, *Waverley*—at the time of its appearance (and often still today) regarded as a first of its kind, heralding a new type of fiction-writing in Britain—was not published until 1814, though Scott most likely started work on it in 1808.⁶ It would be hard to argue that *Thaddeus* is not an historical and national tale, and it

¹ However, New College Library does hold first edition copies of four of Jane Austen's novels of notable provenance, see Christopher Skelton-Foord, 'Jane Austen First Editions: *Aves and the Sparrow*', *New College Notes* 9 (2018), no. 9.

² Jane Porter's date of birth is usually given incorrectly as 1776 (she was baptised in Durham in January 1776), but she herself notes it as 3 December 1775, see Thomas McLean, 'Jane Porter's Later Works, 1825–1846', *Harvard Library Bulletin* 20 (2) (2009), 45–62, at p. 45.

³ Her authorship is attested by a letter of 13 October 1805 Porter wrote, now held by the Pennsylvania State University Libraries: see Nicholas A. Joukovsky, 'Jane Porter's First Novel: The Evidence of an Unpublished Letter', *Notes and Queries* 235 (March 1990), 15–17.

⁴ Michael Adams, 'Jane Porter', in *British Romantic Novelists, 1789–1832*, ed. Bradford K. Mudge (Detroit: Gale, 1992), pp. 264–70, at p. 264.

⁵ Jane Porter, *Thaddeus of Warsaw* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831), p. xi.

⁶ See Peter Garside, 'Popular Fiction and National Tale: Hidden Origins of Scott's *Waverley*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 46 (1) (1991), 30–53.

clearly pre-dates Scott's first novel. Certainly, it would have seemed an historical novel to Poles themselves, who saw in Porter one who was championing their nationalist cause. A member of Tadeusz Kościuszko's own family wrote a letter in French to Porter, extolling her: 'Vous êtes pour tous les Polonois cette divinité qui la première ait élevée sa voix, du fond de l'impériale Albion, en leur faveur'.⁷ Scott might well have read *Thaddeus* when it appeared (he knew both Jane and Anna Maria Porter from their childhood days in Edinburgh), and Porter's novel might indeed have served as inspiration for his writing *Waverley*. New College Library's copy has its own Scottish connections. It was formerly part of the *Bibliotheca Lindesiana*, a magnificent nineteenth-century private library assembled in Scotland, and it carries the heraldic bookplate of Alexander Lindsay, the 6th Earl of Balcarres (1752–1825), with volume three of this four-volume set bearing the inscription 'Balcarres 1815'.⁸

Porter next wrote *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810), another historical novel blockbuster of its day—and the other book on which her fame now largely rests—relating the tale of William Wallace (*d.* 1305), the valiant Scottish insurgent against England's Edward I. New College is fortunate to hold a first edition copy, again with an interesting Scottish provenance. Our copy, in a fine twentieth-century George Bayntun (1873–1940) binding, once belonged to the Glasgow businessman and photographer Leslie Hamilton Wilson (1883–1968), and it bears his bookplate.⁹



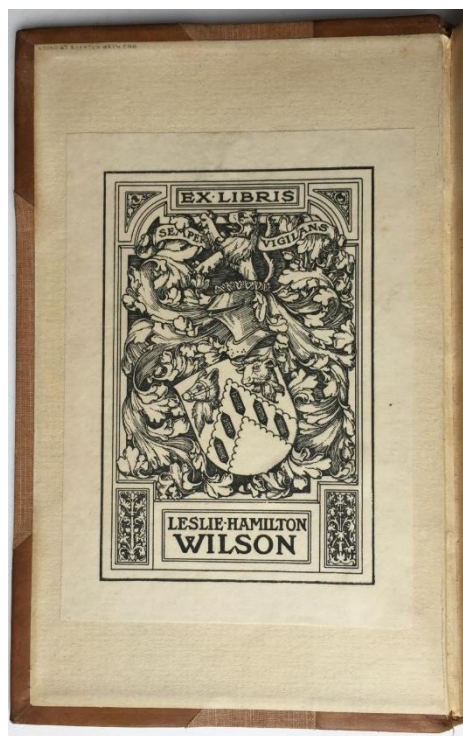
New College Library, Oxford, NB.66.3–7

⁷ Porter, *Thaddeus* (1831), pp. xv–xvi.

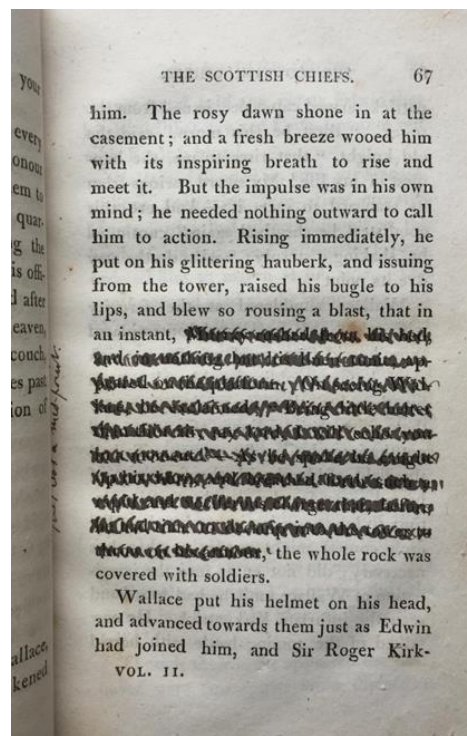
⁸ Jane Porter, *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, 4th edn., 4 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1806), New College Library, Oxford, NB.66.11–14.

⁹ Jane Porter, *The Scottish Chiefs. A Romance*, 5 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810), New College Library, Oxford, NB.66.3–7.

This copy contains one inked-over word in volume one, as well as an extensive section of text inked over in volume two, along with the marginal note: ‘This was a mis-print’. These inked-over lines were indeed excised by Porter for her second edition, which was published the following year (1811), as she describes them: ‘alterations from the original text . . . suggested by a more mature deliberation, than circumstances would allow [me] to dedicate to the first composition of these volumes’.¹⁰



Bookplate in New College Library, Oxford, NB.66.3-7



New College Library, Oxford, NB.66.4, p. 67

With the success of Porter’s *Thaddens* behind them, Longman’s were emboldened to publish a first edition print run of 2,000 copies of *The Scottish Chiefs* (a number indicative of an established novelist), followed by 1,500 copies for the second, and 750 each for the third (1816), fourth (1820), and fifth (1825) editions. Altogether, *Scottish Chiefs* went through around 75 editions or reprints over the course of that century, and the novel enjoyed the distinction—as *Thaddens* had done—of being republished for Colburn and Bentley’s Standard Novels series. Comparisons with Walter Scott are inevitable. His spectacular success in both book sales, and to the extent to which contemporary circulating libraries stocked his novels (an indicator of library loans), nevertheless both easily eclipsed those of Jane Porter. Increasingly throughout her literary career, to try to reclaim for herself the reputation for innovation she felt she deserved—when all the plaudits had gone Scott’s way—she hitched her wagon to the star that was Scott and his tremendous renown as the pioneering author of historical novels—just as the books she continued to pen proved less and less popular with the public. In his postscript to *Waverley* (1814), Scott acknowledges ‘the admirable Irish portraits drawn by Miss [Maria] Edgeworth’, and two other works by female writers which preceded his own first novel, Elizabeth Hamilton’s novel *The Cottagers of Glenburnie* (1808) (into its fifth edition by 1810), and Anne MacVicar Grant’s *Essays on the Superstitions of the Highlanders of Scotland* (1811). But his omission of Jane Porter was one she felt keenly—resented even. Her 1831 preface to *Thaddens* tried to set the record straight. Scott, ‘chief of novel-writers’, she says,

¹⁰ Jane Porter, ‘Postscript to the Second Edition’, *The Scottish Chiefs*, 2nd edition (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1811), vol. 1, p. [xii]. A copy of this edition is held in the Fürstliche Bibliothek Corvey, at Castle Corvey in Höxter, Germany, which houses the world’s finest collection of British fiction of this period.

did me the honour to adopt the style or class of novel of which “Thaddeus of Warsaw” was the first:—a class which, uniting the personages and facts of real history or biography, with a combining and illustrative machinery of the imagination, formed a new species of writing in that day.

And just to remove any possible cause for doubt, she drives her point home:

for “Thaddeus of Warsaw” . . . and the “Scottish Chiefs” . . . were both published many years before the literary wonder of Scotland gave to the world his transcendent story of *Waverley*.¹¹

But did he do her any such honour? A letter of 23 September 1821 Porter wrote to her brother Robert Ker Porter records an exchange she had with the Scottish physician Sir Andrew Halliday (1782–1839). In it, Sir Andrew had related to her his conversation one year earlier with Sir Walter:

“Well Sir, who ever may be the author of those Novels; you, Sir Walter, must allow that the foundations of them all, were laid by Miss Porter in her *Scottish Chiefs*.”—“I grant it;” replied Sir Walter, “there is something in what you say.”¹²

Both she and her sister Anna Maria—in private at least—took umbrage in contesting claims of Scott’s originality; in 1823, Anna Maria wrote to her sister about what she saw as Scott’s pilfering, using ‘*our* novels as a sort of store house’ for ‘whatever odd bit of furniture strikes his fancy for his own pompous edifice’.¹³ There were, however, many novels written prior to Scott’s that evidence some degree of semblance to historical fiction; one reliable bibliographer lists some 211 ‘pseudo-historical’ novels pre-dating *Waverley*.¹⁴ Notable among such novels are: *William of Normandy: An Historical Novel* (1787) and *The Duke of Exeter: An Historical Romance* (1789), both of which the *Critical Review* slammed mercilessly for their lack of historicity;¹⁵ Anne Fuller’s *The Son of Ethelwolf: An Historical Tale* (1789), one of a number of novels dedicated to the Prince Regent (of which more anon); four novels published in 1791, *The Duchess of York: An English Story*, *Lady Jane Grey: An Historical Tale*, *The Siege of Belgrade: An Historical Novel*, and Henry Siddons’s *William Wallace: or, The Highland Hero* (published some nineteen years before Porter’s own retelling of Wallace’s history in the *Scottish Chiefs*); Mrs E. M. Foster’s *The Duke of Clarence. An Historical Novel* (1795); Cassandra Cooke’s Cromwellian *Battleridge: An Historical Tale, Founded on Facts* (1799); John Agg’s *Mac Dermot; or, The Irish Chieftain. A Romance, intended as a Companion to The Scottish Chiefs* (1810); and Elizabeth Strutt’s *The Borderers. An Historical Romance, Illustrative of the Manners of the Fourteenth Century* (1812). (The anonymously published *Bannockburn; A Novel* appeared in 1821; a Philadelphia edition

¹¹ Porter, *Thaddeus* (1831), p. vi.

¹² Letter from Jane Porter, Long Ditton (Surrey) to Sir Robert Ker Porter (23 September 1821), Jane Porter Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, POR 2045, cited in Thomas McLean, ‘Nobody’s Argument: Jane Porter and the Historical Novel’, *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 7 (2) (2007), 88–103, at p. 95.

¹³ Letter from Anna Maria Porter, Long Ditton (Surrey) to Jane Porter (18 June [1823]), Porter Papers, Huntington Library, POR 819, cited in Devoney Looser, ‘The Porter Sisters, Women’s Writing, and Historical Fiction’, in *The History of British Women’s Writing, 1750–1830*, ed. Jacqueline M. Labbe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 233–53, at p. 244.

¹⁴ Rainer Schöwerling, ‘Sir Walter Scott and the Tradition of the Historical Novel before 1814—With a Checklist’, in *The Living Middle Ages: Studies in Medieval English Literature and its Tradition*, ed. Uwe Böker et al. (Stuttgart: Belsar, 1989), pp. 227–62.

¹⁵ Reviewed, respectively, as: ‘a very imperfect attempt: historical novels are a pleasing species of composition, when well executed; but William of Normandy wants the support of history, of probability, of interest, and even of typographical accuracy’, *The Critical Review* 63 (April 1787), 307; and, ‘As an historical romance, this novel is contemptible, since not one trait of history or of the manners of the times is preserved’, *The Critical Review* 67 (June 1789), 476.

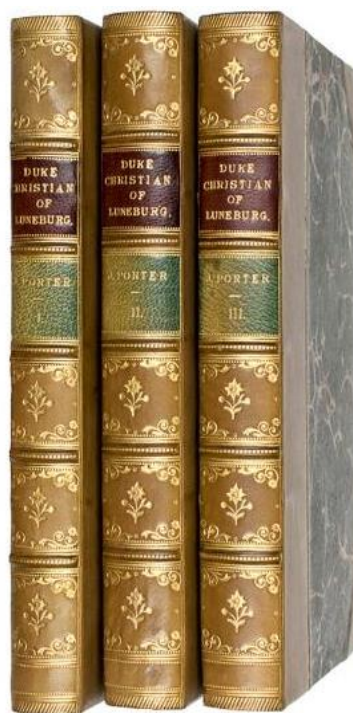
was published the following year as ‘*Being a sequel to The Scottish Chiefs by Miss Jane Porter*’, though this attribution—intended to capitalise on a well-known novel and author—is erroneous.)

Jane Porter’s next novel was again an historical fiction, this one relating a tale of the 1720s and of Louis, the fictional English son of the Dutchman and Spanish Prime Minister, the Duke de Riperdá (1680–1737). On the strength of her earlier successes with *Thaddens* and the *Scottish Chiefs*, Longman’s ventured to print 5,000 copies of *The Pastor’s Fire-Side* (1817) across two editions—both published in 1817; the 1821 third edition was reduced to just 500 copies (but the novel would still reach thirteen editions by 1892).¹⁶ Much less lauded than its predecessors, *The Pastor’s Fire-Side* proved to be Porter’s third most successful book, and the third and last one of hers to make its way, in 1832, into the reputable Standard Novels series. New College Library holds a first edition copy, again with a Scottish provenance. It bears the heraldic bookplate of the Drummond family, and belonged to one of the Viscounts Strathallan.¹⁷

The novel Porter followed this with, *Duke Christian of Luneburg; or, Tradition from the Hartz* (1824), is also held by New College, a first edition with another notable Scottish provenance. The library’s fine three-decker set bears armorial bookplates of the 3rd Marquess of Bute, John Patrick Crichton-Stuart (1847–1900).¹⁸ At the age of 21, Bute caused a sensation in Victorian society when he converted from the Presbyterianism of his upbringing to be received into the Roman Catholic Church. (Benjamin Disraeli, in between his two terms as prime minister, wrote the anti-Catholic novel *Lothair* (1870), with his eponymous Scottish nobleman hero based on Bute. This in turn gave rise to a parody, written by the American writer Bret Harte (1836–1902), *Lothaw or, The Adventures of a Young Gentleman in Search of a Religion* (1871), a copy of which New College also holds.)¹⁹



Bookplate in New College Library, Oxford, RS5248–50



New College Library, Oxford, RS5248–50

¹⁶ Ann H. Jones, *Ideas and Innovations: Best Sellers of Jane Austen’s Age* (New York: AMS, 1986), p. 136.

¹⁷ Jane Porter, *The Pastor’s Fire-Side, A Novel*, 4 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1817), New College Library, Oxford, NB.66.16–19.

¹⁸ Jane Porter, *Duke Christian of Luneburg; or, Tradition from the Hartz*, 3 vols. (London: Long, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1824), New College Library, Oxford, RS5248–50.

¹⁹ Bret Harte, *Lothaw or, The Adventures of a Young Gentleman in Search of a Religion* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1871), New College Library, Oxford, RS5260. Disraeli’s two surviving younger brothers, Ralph (1809–98) and James (1813–68), were both Wykehamists; and his nephew, the politician Coningsby Disraeli (1867–1936), was educated first at Charterhouse and then at New College, Oxford.

If Scott acts as touchstone, fairly or unfairly, for literary and publishing history assessments of *Thaddeus* and the *Scottish Chiefs*, then for *Duke Christian* it is Jane Austen—and specifically *Emma* (1816)—that acts likewise. In both instances, though, Porter inescapably suffers by such comparison. (How could she not?) These two books—*Emma* and *Duke Christian of Luneburg*—are, for both women, a fourth major novel to appear in print. But the literary fortunes of both novelists were moving in very different directions. Once again, off the back of Porter’s previous—though declining—successes, a decision was taken for her new novel, *Duke Christian*, to be produced in a very respectable print run—of 3,000 copies—and Porter received a pleasing payment of £630 from Longman’s, in expectation the novel could live up to the popularity of her previous books. But *Duke Christian* received comparatively little notice from critics, and must be judged a relative failure. *Emma* had appeared (at the very end of 1815) with her publishers John Murray in a print run of 2,000 copies—the largest to date for Austen—and it attracted a favourable review in *The Quarterly Review* by no less than the great Walter Scott. But it is to whom both women dedicate their novel—and the authors’ very different responses to the prospect of royal favour—that comparisons are inevitably drawn.

As is well-known, following written confirmation in November 1815 from royal librarian, James Stanier Clarke, that Austen might indeed dedicate her soon-to-appear *Emma* to the Prince Regent, Austen did just that; the dedication reads: ‘TO / HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS / THE PRINCE REGENT, / THIS WORK IS, / BY HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS’S PERMISSION, / MOST RESPECTFULLY / DEDICATED, / BY HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS’S / DUTIFUL / AND OBEDIENT / HUMBLE SERVANT, / THE AUTHOR.’²⁰ (Can one almost detect a shade of ironic bandying about on Austen’s part with those three Highnesses?) Following publication of *Emma*, though—when the royal librarian next suggests to Austen in March 1816 that ‘when you again appear in print you may chuse to dedicate your Volumes to Prince Leopold: any Historical Romance illustrative of the History of the august house of Cobourg, would just now be very interesting’—her response, though politely phrased, is unequivocal and forthright:

You are very, very kind in your hints as to the sort of Composition which might recommend me at present, & I am fully sensible that an Historical Romance, founded on the House of Saxe Cobourg might be much more to the purpose of Profit or Popularity, than such pictures of domestic Life in Country Villages as I deal in—but I could no more write a Romance than an Epic Poem.— . . . No—I must keep to my own style & go on in my own Way.²¹

How different is Porter’s response when she is confronted five years later with a similar request! In the letter (cited earlier) of 23 September 1821 to her brother Robert—by which time the Prince Regent had ascended to the throne—Jane Porter relates how ‘Sir Andrew [Halliday] suddenly asked me, whether I had ever turned my mind towards the interesting annals of His Majesty’s Hanoverian ancestors?’ Sir Andrew goes on to suggest *Duke Christian of Brunswick-Lüneburg* as the biographical subject for her next novel: ‘I can assure you, nothing would please the king so much, as your writing a romance on that hero!’²² And the rest is history. She is given

²⁰ Jane Austen, [Dedication to] *Emma: A Novel*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1816).

In a letter (The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, MA 1034–10 and 11) of 16 November 1815, Clarke writes to Austen: ‘It is certainly not incumbent on you to dedicate your work now in the Press to His Royal Highness: but if you wish to do the Regent that honour either now or at any future period, I am happy to send you that permission which need not require any more trouble or solicitation on your Part’, *Jane Austen’s Letters*, ed. Deidre Le Faye, 4th edn. (Oxford, 2011), pp. 308–9.

²¹ A letter (The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, MA 1034–13) of 27 March 1816 from James Stanier Clarke to Jane Austen; and her letter reply (bequeathed to the Jane Austen Memorial Trust, 1969) to him of 1 April 1816, *Letters*, ed. Le Faye, pp. 325 and 326.

²² Letter from Jane Porter to Sir Robert Ker Porter (23 September 1821), Jane Porter Papers, Huntington Library, POR 2045.

manuscripts by the royal librarian to aid her research, and she duly writes the novel about the heroic exploits during the 'Thirty Years' War of King George IV's ancestor, Duke Christian. If Porter seems overly malleable in comparison with a principled Austen, then it is only fair to Porter to remind ourselves of the fact that historical fiction *was* her chosen genre, when it was most decidedly not Austen's. However, there is no denying that in *Duke Christian*, Porter's very lengthy dedication to the King (it extends to four pages), commencing simply and formally—'TO / HIS MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY, / GEORGE THE FOURTH, / KING OF / ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, AND IRELAND, / THE UNITED BRITISH EMPIRE, / KING OF HANOVER, / DUKE OF BRUNSWICK AND LUNEBURG / DEFENDER OF THE FAITH, / &c. &c. &c. &c.'—rapidly becomes laudatory to the point of effusive obsequiousness.²³ An excellent modern account of Jane Porter, which suggests complicated motives on the part of Porter, stresses her desire to help her brother Robert's career, and her own straitened circumstances and her eagerness to receive a royal pension.²⁴ By 1840, when Porter puts into print her account of the royal genesis of her novel, she has elaborated on the tale of 'his Majesty's gracious request' that she write *Duke Christian* (tellingly, there is now no mention of Scottish physician Sir Andrew Halliday as conduit to the royal request): 'I could but obey so distinguishing a command', she says.²⁵

Where Porter *can* be seen to have had greater success than Austen, though, is the extent to which circulating libraries of her day stocked her novels. Analysis of library holdings of a selection of 60 mainstream British novels—from the period when Austen was writing and publishing her novels—reveals novelists' relative popularity within the library market. *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1816) were each held by 60% of circulating libraries in Britain—and *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Mansfield Park* (1814) each by 52%. Porter's novels were stocked in the following proportions: *The Pastor's Fire-Side* (1817), 83.33%, and *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810), 76%—while for her more prolific, though less talented, younger sister Anna Maria Porter, the figures for her books are: *Don Sebastian; or, The House of Braganza* (1809) and *The Recluse of Norway* (1814), both 60%, and *The Hungarian Brothers* (1807), 51.85%. All newly minted British novels of this period, however, were being stocked less heavily than those penned by the unstoppable Walter Scott. *Waverley* (1814), along with *Guy Mannering* (1815) and *The Antiquary* (1816), were held by *all* libraries surveyed; *Tales of My Landlord* [First Series] (1816), by 95.83%; and *Rob Roy* (1818), *Tales of My Landlord. Second Series* (1818), and *Tales of My Landlord, Third Series* (1819), each by 95.65% of them.²⁶

New College Library holds three more Porter productions, two of which were published in 1809 (by Longman's)—both relating to Portugal. One is the aforementioned novel *Don Sebastian; or, The House of Braganza. An Historical Romance* (1809), which is a wildly fanciful account of the life of King Sebastian of Portugal (1554–78). It was very favourably reviewed on account of its characters and circumstances by *The Critical Review*: 'we think that very high praise is due to the author . . . Miss Porter is entitled to rank among the best of our living novelists . . . this novel possesses a merit which few can boast'.²⁷ The second historical novel by Anna Maria Porter, who had—inspired by her elder sister's achievement and renown—gravitated from writing sentimental fiction to penning historical novels, *Don Sebastian* also reveals its author's sister's same concern to uphold a reputation for innovation when she insists: 'I am told that there has been a novel written in French on the same story, which forms the ground work of mine, but I have not seen it'. In her prefatory remarks, she purports her aim has been 'to keep as close to historical records, as was

²³ Jane Porter, [Dedication to] *Duke Christian of Luneburg; or, Tradition from the Hartz*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1824), vol. 1, pp. [v]–viii, New College Library, Oxford, RS5248–50.

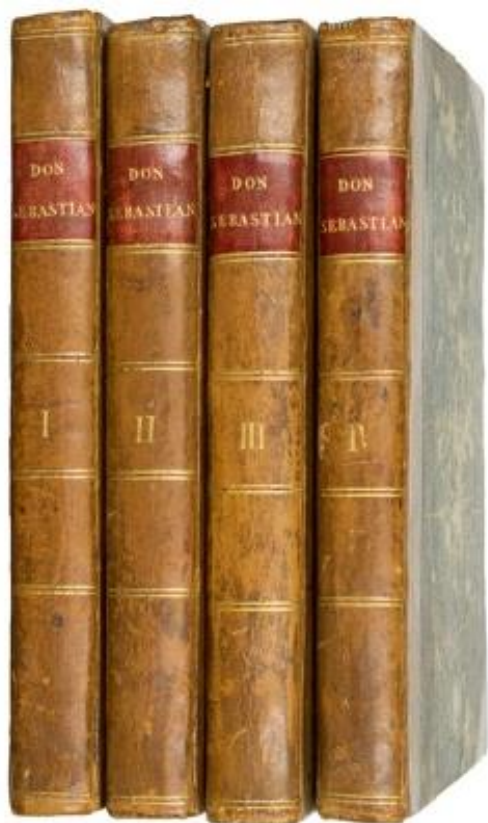
²⁴ Devoney Looser, *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750–1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 141–67.

²⁵ Jane Porter, 'Retrospective Preface to the Illustrated Edition. 1840', *The Scottish Chiefs*, 2 vols. (London: George Virtue, [1840]), vol. 1, pp. 12–51, at p. 39.

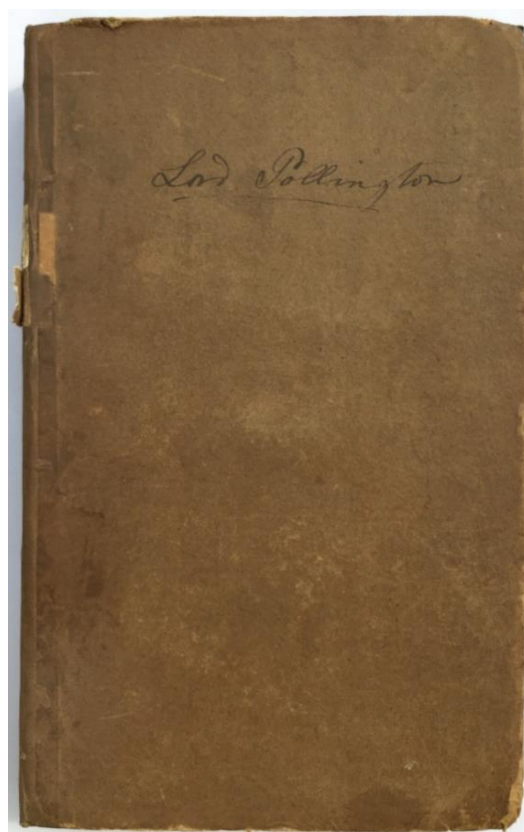
²⁶ See Christopher Skelton-Foord, 'Walter Scott and the Engendering of the Popular Novel: Circulating-Library Holdings of British Fiction, 1805–1819', in *The Corvey Library and Anglo-German Cultural Exchanges, 1770–1837*, ed. Werner Hüber (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2004), pp. 101–16.

²⁷ *The Critical Review* 18 (December 1809), 356–63, at pp. 356 and 363.

consistent with a work wherein imagination is allowed to make up for the deficiencies of actual tradition'.²⁸ But this is merely a conceit. The liberties the writer has taken are considerable: Porter has Sebastian survive the 1578 Battle of Alcácer Quibir, when history has generally assumed he died fighting in that battle. Our library's copy was once owned by Poor Law and Rebecca Riots commissioner, the baronet Sir Thomas Frankland Lewis (1780–1855), and it bears his armorial bookplates.



New College Library, Oxford, NB.66.20–23



New College Library, Oxford, NB.66.26, upper board

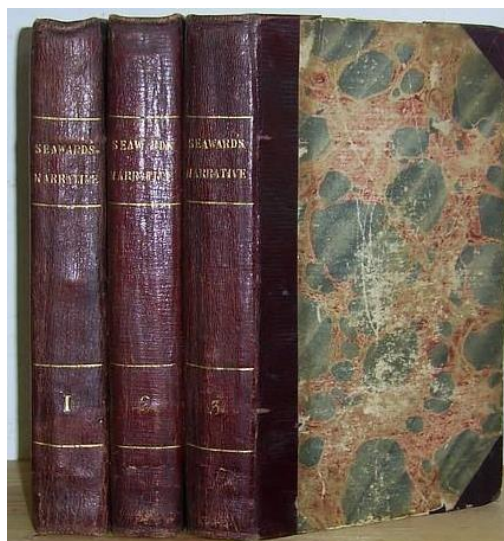
The other Portuguese Porter publication in New College is a more distinguished book, illustrated with fine aquatint plates, and with a more notable provenance. Ownership marks reveal two previous owners. There is a bookplate of Hugh Ker Colville (1847–1930) of Bellaport Hall, Shropshire, with the coat-of-arms and motto of the Clan Colville, a Lowland Scottish clan. But before Colville owned the book, John Savile, 3rd Earl of Mexborough (1783–1860), and MP for Pontefract, would have done, as the inscription 'Pollington 1809' on the inside upper board and another inscription 'Lord Pollington' on the front of the upper board both attest.²⁹ The book is Robert Ker Porter's *Letters from Portugal and Spain, written during the march of the British troops under Sir John Moore* (1809), one of the fruits of Porter's composite military, travel-writing, and painting career (the superb aquatint drawings are done by Porter). He wrote it as a result of accompanying the British army and Lieutenant-General Sir John Moore to Spain for the Peninsula War: Porter was at Corunna when the lieutenant-general was fatally wounded in the famous battle.³⁰

²⁸ Anna Maria Porter, *Don Sebastian; or, The House of Braganza. An Historical Romance*, 4 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1809), vol. 1, p. vi, New College Library, Oxford, NB.66.20–23.

²⁹ Lord Pollington would have been his courtesy title in 1809, as current heir to the 2nd Earl of Mexborough, also John Savile (1761–1830).

³⁰ Robert Ker Porter, *Letters from Portugal and Spain, written during the march of the British troops under Sir John Moore. With a map of the route and appropriate engravings. By an officer* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1809), New College Library, Oxford, NB.66.26.

The remaining Porter in our library is another composite publication—this time the work of two Porter siblings—and once again a novel of renown. But the authorship of *Sir Edward Seaward's Narrative of his Shipwreck . . . Edited by Miss Jane Porter* (1831) was for a long time held as uncertain. The preface by the editor—whom Jane Porter always acknowledged to be herself—sets up a construct that ‘manuscript books, constituting the Diary from which the following Narrative is taken, were put into my hands by the representative of their much-respected writer’. Early reviews were divided as to whether to take this at face value, and some were inclined to assume the Crusoe-like narrative of eighteenth-century shipwreck-and-survival adventures was a factual one.³¹ Jane Porter dealt with Longman’s over publication of the book; the publishers produced a print run of 1,000 copies for the first edition, which met with success, and they subsequently printed 1,250 copies for a second edition of 1832. (A third was issued in 1841, and the novel was reissued a few more times over the course of the century.) This second edition received a review in the *Quarterly Review* of December 1832, mistakenly referring to the book’s editor as ‘the late Miss Jane Porter’ (her sister and fellow novelist Anna Maria Porter had died earlier that year). It concludes the book is a work of ‘pure, unmingled fiction from first to last’, and in so doing makes the assumption, which became a general understanding, that the book’s statement of editorial responsibility is but a literary ploy for Jane Porter to conceal her authorship of the novel: ‘we must, however reluctantly, set down the late Miss Jane Porter as having been herself both the *founder* and the *representative* of the family of the *Sewards*’.³² But the truth Porter was concealing was a very different one. She toyed with the conceit over the book’s authorship, with reference to the anonymously published Waverley novels—and one which, to type, enabled her to yoke herself to Scott: ‘Sir Walter had his great secret: I must be allowed to keep this little one’.³³ However, in 2002, autograph letters of the Porter family held in Durham University Library were brought to attention, which verify that Jane Porter’s surgeon brother William Ogilvie Porter was this novel’s author.³⁴ Though she corrected and improved the writing—as his letter of 10 March 1831 to her attests—this novel was his, not hers.



New College Library, Oxford, RS5251–3

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³¹ William Ogilvie Porter, *Sir Edward Seaward's Narrative of his Shipwreck, and Consequent Discovery of Certain Islands in the Caribbean Sea: With a Detail of Many, Extraordinary and Highly Interesting Events in his Life, from the year 1733 to 1749, as written in his own diary. Edited by Miss Jane Porter*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1831), vol. 1, p. [iii], New College Library, Oxford, RS5251–3. A favourable review in the *London Literary Gazette*, which notes the narrative’s verisimilitude, is ultimately equivocal about the veracity of the tale told, concluding: ‘So in the end, with its good moral inculcations, its style well beseeeming the period to which it is assigned, and the general interest of the story; we can very cordially recommend this work—*si non e vero e ben trovato*’, *The London Literary Gazette* 751 (11 June 1831), 375.

³² *The Quarterly Review* 48 (December 1832), 480–507, at pp. 501 and 507.

³³ Cited in Graeme Morton, ‘The Social Memory of Jane Porter and her *Scottish Chiefs*’, *The Scottish Historical Review* 91 (2) (2012), 311–35, at p. 325.

³⁴ Letters by William Ogilvie Porter of 2 and 8 October 1830 and of 10 March 1831, along with some related materials, are held in Durham University Library, Porter Family Correspondence, GB-0033-POR, within the volume, Porter MS E: <<https://n2t.durham.ac.uk/ark:/32150/s1qr46r082g.xml>> (Accessed: 3 April 2024). See Fiona Price, ‘Jane Porter and the Authorship of Sir Edward Seaward’s Narrative: Previously Unpublished Correspondence’, *Notes and Queries* 49 (1) (March 2002), 55–7.