A Companion to the
Eighteenth-Century English Novel and Culture

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The authorial modesty Frances Burney attributes to Frances Brooke may not be as valued today as it was in the eighteenth century. We have come to consider the “Modest Muse” a significantly limiting concept, often employed to restrict an author’s access to or productivity within the print marketplace. Burney’s description of the modest “Authoress” with whom she shares authorial initials deftly captures the subtle displacements and inhibitions that propriety enforces upon intellectual labor (or, as she puts it, “known understanding”). Yet if eighteenth-century authors were encumbered by expectations of modesty, no such burden exists for the twenty-first-century critic. Indeed, recent studies of eighteenth-century fiction and print culture suggest that modern critics might profit from a more modest account of the novel. The print medium has, of course, the advantage of a more concrete and accessible body of lasting evidence than many other communications networks. But since the revival of interest in the history of the book in the last decade, this advantage has often encouraged scholars of eighteenth-century prose fiction to grant the novel a crucial and representative role in the communications revolution of the period.

Any explanation of the relationship between print and narrative fiction should begin, however, by admitting that the novel represents a rather modest part of the history of publishing in the long eighteenth century. As the work of Jan Fergus and Paula McDowell has recently suggested, privileging the novel often hampers the study of eighteenth-century print culture. McDowell observes that “Whereas today, students of eighteenth-century literature are most likely to study novels, one publishing historian estimates that the proportion of all fiction (new titles and reprints)
to total book and pamphlet production for the years 1720–9 was only 1.1 percent, rising to 4 percent by 1770. The novel, in other words, was vying for the attention of consumers among a variety of other equally compelling modes of communication in the print sphere. Future work may in fact study the novel’s attempts not only to operate within but also to distance itself from a communications network. If so, this work should consider how fiction creates a particular mimetic domain that both reports and distorts those competing modes of imagining a self, community, nation, or world.

The difficulty facing a modest proposal for the composite field of “the novel” and “print culture” is that neither category is particularly manageable, and both are therefore susceptible to reductive explanations and wide-scale claims. At the same time, both fields require interdisciplinary scope. More than ten years ago Roger Chartier urged those concerned with the history of the book to consider the reciprocal relations among three basic categories: the creation of the text (how authors shape the book’s written content); the nature of the reader (what skills, access, and modes of reading are brought to the text); and the material state of the book (such as its scribal or printed forms, or means of distribution). These are effectively the terms that recent work on the eighteenth-century British novel has invoked to discuss the function of prose fiction in an emerging print culture. At the risk of seeming to discourse, like Frances Brooke, “upon all subjects,” I will examine this scholarship by tracing lines of development, areas of controversy, and implications for the future. Chartier’s principal categories—the author, the reader, and the book—may be usefully described as structural, social, and technological determinants. However distinct these may be, they are fundamentally interrelated. I will thus organize the essay into three parts, each one devoted to one of these determinants, but necessarily related to the others as a comprehensive set of practices.

“Author”

I put “author” in quotation marks (much as Burney highlights “Authoress” in her remarks about Brooke) because the concept of authorship is routinely in a state of suspension. Over time various theoretical approaches have progressively redefined the instrumental role of the writer in print culture. In the 1960s, Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes famously announced the “disappearance” or “death” of the author. By this, they meant that it was preferable to conceive of the published writer as fulfilling an “author function,” the concept by which a given culture draws historically bound assumptions about writing, authority, and originality.

This reconfiguration developed, in part, because structuralism, formalism, and new criticism had shifted attention from biographical analysis of the authored text to examinations of the “objective” features of the work itself. In the 1970s, Jacques Derrida claimed that the author’s role could only be understood effectively as a discursive attribute deciphered through the process of reading. More recently, as critics increasingly consider authorship a collaborative social, legal, and
marketplace enterprise, the equation between the author and "original genius" has consequently been disputed.4

Lately, however, the individual author has reappeared, though in chastened form, as a figure whose identity is to be measured in relation to modernity. This has been especially true of recent work that recovers and claims the (often female) novelist as one of the first real emanations of a modern authorial sensibility. The novelist, that is, becomes an avatar of a new but complex articulation of intellectual property, commodification, and modern sensibility.5 Like the Romantic poets, with whom they share credit for fashioning modern authorship, eighteenth-century novelists supposedly embodied the ideal of the author as a self-sufficient original genius who disclaims the market forces that constrain literary production. Studies of this Romantic mode have been effective in both explaining and critiquing the cult of the author that arose in the late eighteenth century. Nonetheless, they tend to produce a limited construction of the author function by seeking too definitive a time frame and too narrow a set of historical causes in order to pinpoint the emergence of the "modern author."

Central to the arguments about the rise of modern Romantic authorship is the assumption that a particular definition of "author," rooted in the emergence of a professional class and a commodity culture, ultimately trumps all other definitions. That a widespread print culture would manifest different modes of authorship seems likely, but to claim from print's impact that one particular kind of author was incarnated for the first time ignores the variety of forms that authorship assumed in the eighteenth century. As various critics have shown, amateur, patronized, polemical, educational, collaborative, oral, coterie, and manuscript forms of authorship persisted into the nineteenth century.6 It might, therefore, be as useful to consider "author," "writer," or "novelist" as general rubrics that take different points in literary and critical history and in relation to various cultural determinants.

A print-based analysis may help calibrate, if not resolve, the multiple meanings of such concepts as writer, author, and novelist. Since the 1980s, work on eighteenth-century writing has concentrated especially on economic, legal, and philosophical assessments of the "author" in order to explain the Romantic model that prizes originality, autonomy, and genius. This work has customarily focused on canonical literature (such as that by Pope or Johnson). It has often privileged unique historical events, in particular, legal decisions such as the Copyright Act in 1709, Tonson v. Collins in 1760, or Donaldson v. Beckett in 1774. It has, further, mined theories of authorship published in the eighteenth century, as well as theories of intellectual property and the novel (by, for instance, Catharine Macauley, James Ralph, Clara Reeve, or Edward Young) in order to flesh out historical ideas about the "modern" writer. Summarizing this process, Mark Rose notes that the legal, critical, social, and marketplace conceptions of authorship that arose after the 1740s made a literary work seem the "objectification of a writer's self."7 Given, however, that the most striking feature of new novels published between 1770 and 1799 is that "the overwhelming
majority of them were published without attribution of authorship,\textsuperscript{8} we may be hasty in assuming that either high culture or the legal domain offered much actual self-determining power to most novelists. The scribbling Grub Street novelist, in particular, who hardly matched this "modern" ideal, was frequently situated against writers such as Fielding, Sterne, Burney, or Austen. Yet, as Richard Sher has shown, despite the conceptual impact of the legal and professional dimensions of literary agency, the bulk of professional writers (and therefore very many novelists) still operated within a literary marketplace that protected and rewarded publishers more than authors.\textsuperscript{9} Booksellers, in practical terms, did not lose their monopoly powers until after 1800. Furthermore, copyright controversies in the eighteenth century rarely, if ever, involved prose fiction. In fact, novels in the period, especially those produced in "Grub Street," both established competing conceptions of authorship and helped define the Romantic model. Expanding the research on "modern" writing, then, recent scholarship has widened the definitional range of eighteenth-century authorship.

Similarly, the definition of the "novel" has proved as complex a critical issue as authorship. The two categories are, in fact, crucially related, since the novelist's status as an author depended on the status of novels themselves. Current scholarship indicates a general consensus that the mid-century marks the beginning of a "novel culture" in Britain. There are, of course, dissenters from this opinion, such as John Paul Hunter, Cheryl Turner, William Warner, and Ian Watt. But the predominant view seems to be that the 1740s to 1750s were the watershed years. Two main factors have shaped this claim: a fully established commodity economy, and a new market in professional commentators on the novel (particularly in periodical review form). According to Miranda Burgess, "The notion of a distinct and autonomous 'species' of prose fiction was of mid-eighteenth-century provenance,"\textsuperscript{10} suggesting that twentieth-century criticism now tends to accept the period's own late self-determination in this regard.

But, as the eighteenth century amply demonstrates, the volatility and variability of the print marketplace was matched by the variety of novels (or, more properly, prose fiction) that appeared. If, to identify a point of origin, we need to drop or add Behn and Defoe (who alternate in being called early novelists and proto-novelists), how do we avoid a self-fulfilling model of history? Richardson and Fielding never referred to themselves as novelists, yet they, along with late Haywood, routinely fulfill both eighteenth- and twentieth-century definitions of the term. Though access to print may have altered the forms of eighteenth-century fiction in significant ways, is print a necessary condition of the novel? Can a novel be a novel without ever appearing in print? Were the manuscripts that Burney and Austen read aloud, or gave to their families to read, novels before or after they were published? Couldn't one simply identify various types of eighteenth-century authorship or different forms of the novel in the period?

Individual authorial cases only complicate matters. If Defoe is a novelist, he is an odd one insofar as he published long works of prose fiction only late in life (and for
just five years). These were narratives that he refused to call fiction and to which he never assigned his own authorship. His poetry, polemical works, and non-fiction far outweigh his fictional output. Like many other "novelists" in the period, such as Behn, Fielding, or Inchbald, he published a variety of literary and non-literary works and pursued a number of different professions. Similar issues arise with other authors. Does Haywood become a novelist only in the middle of the century, when she stops publishing short narratives and begins composing long multi-volume affairs like *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) and *The History of Jenny and Jenny Jemmy* (1752)? Do print market demands at that point dictate her professional identity? Richardson continued to work avidly as a master printer, even when he was both writing and publishing those monuments of eighteenth-century print, *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1748), and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–4). He then raided these texts to create *A Collection of the Moral and Instructive Sentiments, Maxims, Caution, and Reflections of Pamela, Clarissa, and Sir Charles Grandison* (1755), which was effectively a conduct manual, suggesting that such bits of fiction were something other than fiction. Do these activities make Richardson more or less a novelist? Does the *Pamela* media event (during which such items as fans, teacups, and paintings that depicted scenes from the novel were marketed) confer the status of novelist on Richardson because it suggests that writing has finally become so commodified as to be recognizably modern? Then what of the fact that there was a Crusoë media event too (produced through prints, broadsides, redactions for children, pictures, etc.); is it so radically different as to exclude Defoe from the same process Richardson undergoes?

The difficulties in defining what novelists do are continuous and are connected to extensive bibliographical variables. In the recent and indispensable two-volume bibliography, *The English Novel 1770–1829*, James Raven notes that simply identifying novels produced at the time is a constantly evolving task. He nonetheless argues that novels are an identifiable new form in the eighteenth century because they share certain repeated (though diverse) features. Surprisingly, however, the only ones he cites as consistent are "credibility" and "the ability to communicate knowledge and wisdom." Yet Raven's list contains the translation of Rudolf Erich Raspe's *Baron Munchausen's Narrative of his Marvellous Travels* (1786), hardly a credible fiction, maybe not wise, certainly not English. If we include this translation, shouldn't Dunton's 1691 *A New Voyage Around the World* also qualify? As Edward Mangin opines as late as 1808, "The word novel is a generical term; of which romances, histories, memoirs, letters, tales, lives, and adventures, are the species."

The pervasive critical need to narrow the definitions of "author" and "novel" is also reflected in much of the recent attention given to the relation between gender and print culture. From scholars who note the prevalence of women writers in circulating libraries to those who argue for their ascendancy in the marketplace at the close of the century, there has been extensive examination of the rapid increase in women's access to print from the mid-century on. Motivated by a genuine need to counteract male bias in the history of the eighteenth-century novel, such work has resurrected a large group of neglected but highly accomplished writers. Nonetheless, some of this work
has potentially skewed the view of the literary landscape by assuming that novels and women novelists were, because of their dramatic rise in numbers, the pre-eminent factor in shaping literate culture in the period. Typical is Ann Mellor’s assertion in her provocative Mothers of the Nation that “women could, and perhaps for the first time did, dominate the material production of literature.” This kind of claim may, however, obscure a more diverse en-gendering of the novel by both women and men.

The re-examination of the relationship between gender and print culture has tended to produce sociological conclusions, often supported by the selective use of statistical data or restrictive definitions of the novel, which merit some qualification. What may apply, for example, to circulating libraries — that they indicate a revolution in what popular literature was read and by whom — may not apply to book consumption generally. For one, religious discourse continued to be, by far, the most pervasive form of printed text. Moreover, there was a wide variety of means to acquire printed matter (including fiction). Book clubs, ranging from those that stocked mostly religious and political material to those that cultivated some interest in prose fiction, preceded the advent of circulating and subscription libraries. In these, male authors and patrons prevailed. Parish libraries, unlike the circulating libraries of bookstalls and stationers to booksellers’ shops, to purchase printed volumes directly, and these texts were frequently, in turn, circulated among family members and acquaintances. It is difficult to conclude from such sources, especially as the majority of transactions have gone unrecorded, that novelists in general, and women novelists especially, had a particularly distinctive purchase on the eighteenth-century reading public. Constituting only four percent of printed matter near the end of the period, the novel can hardly claim to dominate or transform the culture. Similarly, while compilations of women authors, such as that by Cheryl Turner, reveal the impressive contributions of women novelists, and their proportional advance in numbers over the period, they do not prove either dominance or the purported “feminization” of literate culture. According to one recent calculation, “Male writers (292) hugely outnumbered female writers (189). . . . yet the number of individual novels written by men was . . . slightly less than that by women (407 titles compared to 419).” In the early part of the eighteenth century the cultural imaginary was shaped as much by fictional adventure, pirate, and criminal narratives (predominantly written by men) as the now noteworthy novels of amorous intrigue written by Behn, Manley, and Haywood. Later novels ranged across an enormously broad range of types, from oriental narratives to stories supposedly told by inanimate objects, which were embraced equally by women and men.

An exclusive emphasis on gender can, in fact, divert attention from a range of other compelling issues regarding novels and authorship, some of which intersect with gender in interesting ways. Studies of how authors continued to operate within a manuscript tradition or negotiated the conversion from manuscript to print (including, but not limited to, how they related to booksellers or printers), are still needed; these might further illuminate the process of writing as it was understood in the
period. Likewise, there is a call for a deeper understanding of the relation between orality and novels (as Margaret Ezell, Nicholas Hudson, and Patricia Michaelson note). More can also be done on novelists and class. While it is true that eighteenth-century novelists were predominantly of the "middling sort," some were aristocrats, and, as several titles suggest, some in the lower classes published novels as well. Reviewers of the period simultaneously discouraged lower-class fiction and recognized its potential wealth of subject matter, as we see hinted in critiques of *The Fortunate Blue-Coat Boy* (1770), of which the *Monthly Review* lamented "What will become of the Reviewers, if this numerous band of charity-boys should follow their comrade's example, and run their callow heads against the press. Mercy on us! what a deluge of histories, memoirs, lives and adventures, shall we have!"  

A more integrated approach to authorship would open the field of study by drawing wider rather than narrower boundaries around novel writing. The prose fiction that authors produced in the eighteenth century often projected models of writing and publication that were antithetical to the Romantic conception of authorship and, in some ways, closer to a current understanding of "authorship," as a highly mediated media concept. As the next two sections suggest, the full extent of authorial identity should also be linked to how readers consumed the work of authors (and in doing so, helped define the latter) and how the print industry marketed works of fiction, reminding us that the writer depended on the literary marketplace as much as her or his own "originality."

### Reader(s)

The history of eighteenth-century reading, like that of authorship, reveals the complex relationship between production and consumption in the eighteenth-century literary marketplace. As John Brewer notes: "Books, print and readers were everywhere. Not everyone was a reader, but even those who could not read lived to an unprecedented degree in a culture of print, for the impact of the publishing revolution extended beyond the literate. "  

To say that the "revolution" extended to novel reading may be an exaggeration; literacy rates, always difficult to measure with certitude, suggest that the fluency required for the individual silent reading usually associated with novels was not significantly greater by 1790 than it had been in 1720 (in fact, there may have been a decrease in literacy between 1760 and 1780).  

But "the public" so often addressed in the prefaces and narrative content of novels at this time was one for whom prose fiction was competing on a number of levels.

How do we characterize the reader(s) of eighteenth-century fiction? The parenthetical (s) is meant to indicate the distinction one ought to draw between the conceptual figure of "the reader" and specific historical readers, only a small portion of whom left traces of their reading practices. When Samuel Johnson used the term "common reader" to describe public consumers of print who demanded "engagement and entertainment" he established, as Robert DeMaria notes, a modern designation for
the reader which both displaced and reconciled the cloistered scholar and the cloistered reader of romances. But the reader that Johnson and many current scholars extol was not an entirely free agent. Readers were also, of course, hectored, bullied, cajoled, and persuaded by authors and booksellers alike. Just as the cultural function of the author may be considered a feedback loop of production and consumption, so too may the reader be best understood as both authorizing and conforming to given texts.

If the author has been, in a sense, demoted in recent years, the reader has been generally promoted, and has, as a result, become radically multifarious. Some critics focus on the representation of readers in fiction (Ellen Gardiner, for instance); some on data about readers of fiction (Raven). Others have begun to examine the role of non-readers’ exposure to fiction, fueled in part by the controversies over rates of literacy. Indeed, the full extent of eighteenth-century reading habits needs better accounting. Most research has assumed that silent reading is the primary model of fictional consumption. Lately, however, the work of Barbara Benedict, Ezell, Michaelson, and others, has intimated that, despite long-standing historical claims that print isolates readers in a sphere of private and silent reading, the medium constantly reinforced the social mediations at work in published texts. New questions now range from whether silent reading is really so solitary to how readers regarded an authorial “voice.” Eighteenth-century literary criticism frequently commended the reader’s ability to amplify a writer’s expressions with what Lord Kames called “a ready command of the tones suited to those expressions,” or what Priestley regarded as the ordinary reader’s capacity to “give the language the assistance we can from pronunciation.” Naomi Tadmor argues, moreover, that reading in the eighteenth century often coalesced with other social transactions involving various civic networks. From purchasing, lending, and borrowing books to reading in company or to groups engaged in household or workplace labor, the consumption of texts was often anything but solitary, idle, or frivolous. Raven similarly notes the sociability that public and private libraries fostered. The larger libraries, he argues, “provided space or books for the individual, silent reader, and yet supported, in different ways, the social celebration of books and the communal reading performance.” Almost all libraries nourished, he adds, “selection, browsing and the part-reading of a variety of books, but also encouraged concentrated reading, either silently or, as in the case of many domestic libraries, aloud to company.”

In reconstructing eighteenth-century readership of the novel, we should therefore acknowledge its communal aspects. Active, if often unrecorded, discussions of fiction, for example, undoubtedly shaped its literary impact. Patricia Crain notes that American readers of British novels, which booksellers imported to the colonies increasingly in the eighteenth century, were admonished, often by novelists themselves, that the seductions of fiction could be counteracted by talking about the novels. In the opinion of a character in William Hill Brown’s 1789 novel The Power of Sympathy (often called the first American novel): “Conversation only can remedy this dangerous evil, strengthen the judgment, and make reading really useful.” This comment echoes the well-documented responses in Britain and America to the
perceived moral corruption of prose fiction, especially among women, children, and the lower classes. In America, the essay “Observations on Novel-Reading” argued that “the legislature of the UNITED STATES, would not act beneath their dignity, if they should, among other restraints on the licentiousness of the press, lay a very heavy duty on all novels whatsoever for the future – as well those imported, as those printed within their jurisdiction.” In Britain, similar concerns were expressed about how the novel, as James Beattie observes in Dissertations Moral and Critical (1783), “breeds dislike to history, and all the substantial parts of knowledge; withdraws the attention from nature and truth; and fills the mind with extravagant thoughts, and too often with criminal propensities” (574). While the extent and intensity of these adverse reactions may not, in fact, have been commensurate with the relatively small output of fiction, they do reflect the concern that novel reading produced and the variety of strategies, from proscription to monitoring, that were offered to constrain what many regarded as readers’ unregulated habits.

Greater attention to the diversity of “reading” in the eighteenth century may, in fact, alter various assumptions about literary consumption. One of the most famous instances of the Pamela media event is the reported jubilation and ringing of church bells when the town of Preston heard, from a public reading of Richardson’s novel, that Pamela had finally married her would-be suitor, Mr. B. This story has most often been discussed as a sign of the consumer mania that Richardson’s novel stoked, but it also reveals the enormously unfixed nature of reading in the period. If, as Ezell has documented, vibrant forms of social authorship persisted in the eighteenth century, an extensive social readership also probably existed. For instance, there appears to have been considerable reading aloud (though how often novels were orated requires further scouring of memoirs). This attention to orality raises certain fundamental questions. Does a text routinely read aloud carry a different sociological charge than a text read silently and only once? Lord Stanley reported in 1789 that a party to whom he was reading aloud The Castle of Otranto (1765), on a foggy, atmospheric, boat trip through the Faroe Islands, was “sorry to leave off the story before we knew to whom the great enchanted helmet belonged.” Frances Burney records that her aspiring family routinely read aloud literature (including novels), and she continues to remark on this practice in relation to her domestic life with her husband and son. The mercer and draper, Thomas Turner, and his wife Peggy daily read to one another, including extensive, though intermittent progress through Clarissa. As Tadmor observes, the reading was shared between the Turners during arduous workdays in the house and the shop adjoining. Part of a disciplined religious life, it eventually included family, friends, and servants (activities that, in fact, parallel the reading of books in Samuel Richardson’s household). Do such acts as these challenge the long-standing assumption that intensive reading (the deep rereading of a select number of texts) gradually replaced extensive reading (the rapid reading of a broad selection) over the course of the eighteenth century? Is it entirely useful, in fact, to separate intensive and extensive reading? Johnson, while admittedly an extraordinary reader, was, according to DeMaria, constantly shifting between different modes of reading.
that he himself termed "study" or "hard reading," "perusal," "mere reading," and "curious reading." Among the texts he read, those Johnson describes as "captivating" were fictional, but he may have read them in any number of ways.  

The recorded experiences of individual eighteenth-century readers reveal not only a wide range of reading modes but also a diverse process of selection. While novel reading seems to have increased in the period, it still accounted for a small portion of overall reading. John Brewer has noted that an avid reader such as Anna Larpent was not consumed by novels. Of the more than 440 titles she read between 1773 and 1783, sixty-eight (or fifteen percent) consisted of English and French novels. While a sizeable number, it is only equal to what she read in history, biography, and political economy, and does not approximate, in terms of repetition, the amount of time she spent studying the Bible, sermons, and pious tracts. Likewise, Stephen Colclough tabulates that the 15-year-old Sheffield apprentice, Joseph Hunter, read in the space of one year (1798) roughly comparable amounts of fiction, travel, divinity, history, and reference works, but much more largely in periodicals and newspapers, in addition to "consumption of sermons at the chapel." More dramatically, perhaps, not one of the many books Walter Shandy enumerates in *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) is a work of fiction. Novel reading must therefore be understood as a highly contingent form of consumption. Extracts from published material in such records as diaries, logs, memoirs, and autobiographies indicate, for instance, that readers were constantly making strategic decisions about what and how they read. Even where readers obtained and consumed texts probably affected the kind of reading to which they subjected a work. The purported "rage" for reading novels from circulating libraries, for instance, must be understood in relation to how such volumes were presented to the public. Often hastily produced and loaned for only short periods of time, many such texts may have been regarded as largely dispensable reading. A variety of sources, from moral tracts to fire insurance advertisements, complained of hair powder and candle wax in borrowed books, signs of the slovenly and combustible habits associated with bedroom or boudoir reading. That is, we may be attributing to the avid consumption of light reading profound cultural implications that simply reverse the equally overstated denunciations of fictional material by eighteenth-century moral commentators.

In other ways, too, fiction’s consumers proved volatile. Reading was, for instance, intimately connected to writing, as the famous examples of Lady Bradshew’s and Lady Ethlin’s separate rewritings of the ending to *Clarissa* demonstrate. In such cases as these, reading becomes a resistant act of writing that shows how such readers could be both reactive and proactive figures. At the same time, given that Richardson was inviting written responses to his drafts of the novel, the circuit also worked in the other direction. Clearly, as Richardson was writing his fiction, he was also watching readers read the text, and writing in light of those responses. He was, in fact, still revising his novels in reaction to reader response up until his death. Similarly, the robust market in spurious sequels to Defoe, Richardson, and Sterne’s fiction, which, in turn, incited sequels by those writers, signals the interplay of reception and conception that characterizes the novel’s economics.
A full understanding of eighteenth-century "novel culture" would need, therefore, to carefully parse these various acts, spaces, and habits of reading. The nature of the evidence already indicates that a monolithic assessment is probably untenable. Admittedly, the access we have to reading practices is very limited and often inconclusive, but the range of reading tactics we can glean from the historical record will broaden our understanding of the variable responses of readers within a probable range of practices. Sterne's (or Fielding's) characteristic addresses to the reader (at once personal and yet comprehending a wide range of possible readers) are, one could argue, the flip side of Austen's frequent last-chapter personalizations of the author-reader relationship. Such textual moments alert us to how eighteenth-century novelists self-consciously cultivated a wide readership and struggled with the seeming paradox of making intimate a relationship that was, in fact, the product of an increasingly anonymous exchange between writer and reader.

Recognizing this complex range of reading is crucial to understanding the novel's cultural function because it both confirms and complicates a major strain in print culture and novel studies, one based on the seminal work of Jürgen Habermas. Nowhere, perhaps, has the instrumental function of the reader been more visible than in discussions of the public sphere. Most scholars of print culture have confronted Habermas' argument that "the commercialization of cultural production," particularly through the dissemination of printed matter, fostered a uniform public sphere in eighteenth-century Britain (and Europe generally). The popularity of the novel, the increased influence of the press, and advances in the circulation of printed literature in such discourse networks as the coffee house, the library, the music hall, and the theater, fueled public opinion, which became effectively a media event. This activity, in turn, helped create modern nationalism by the end of the century. According to Benedict Anderson (another seminal figure in print history), "print-capitalism" enables the "imagined political communities" necessary to create a unified national identity. As he argues, "fellow-readers" were made aware "via print and paper" that there were "hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that only those hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged" (47). The unifying and rationalizing effects that Habermas and Anderson describe were, of course, regarded as complementary; their enlightenment force derived from the conviction that an individual's active cultivation of reason would necessarily benefit the social welfare of the state. The effect of rationalizing and consensus-building modes of communication was to create a national unity in which readers could help generate public awareness and reasoned debate. This, largely, is the story that has structured many of the latest studies of eighteenth-century readership and the reception of the novel.

While many authors have been credited with shaping eighteenth-century national consciousness, public opinion is, in fact, most often allied with readers. Part of the successful marketing of eighteenth-century prose fiction resulted, in part, from the mobilization of different mechanisms for distributing published work to readers. As several scholars have shown, these significantly increased means of circulating printed
material constituted forms of "cultural technology" that enabled productive social exchange. For Habermas, the novel, especially in episryl form, played a significant role in fostering personal critical reasoning among readers that helped them participate in the governance of their society.

The close study of print culture, both in its larger, more theoretical orientation and in its often more modest empirical mode, will help dispel or refine certain assumptions about British readership and the role of the public sphere in shaping a nation's governance. A number of scholars have lately complicated the deployment of the terms "public sphere" and "nationalism" in relation to the eighteenth-century novel. Many, for instance, have added the concept of the "counter public sphere" to offset the hegemonic force of Habermas' conceptualization of the public sphere. The insistence on a single public sphere (rather than multiple spheres of public opinion), and a dependence on the distinction between it and a counter public sphere, only partly explains the complexity of the literary marketplace. The similar claim that "Literature" or the "Novel" constituted a counter public sphere also needs some adjustment.

A more adequate approach might construe literature as the range of products created by a loose body of actors (authors, publishers, printers, readers, distributors, commentators, etc.) who are themselves at various points active, to various degrees, in various public spheres that intersect, often temporarily, and that function sometimes in agreement, sometimes in contention, and sometimes simply coincidentally.

To account more accurately for the variety of public opinion in eighteenth-century Britain, several scholars have lately begun to apply Pierre Bourdieu's principles of "cultural production" to eighteenth-century prose fiction. Bourdieu's elaborate analysis of the cultural field, in which different public activities (from the literary and artistic to the economic and political) occupy different fields of production, offers a flexible model that can accommodate public dissension. The popularity of a work did not, in all instances, confirm that it was perceived as a culturally central document, and a thoroughgoing analysis of its mode of cultural production might yield a sophisticated explanation of how marketing, reception, and judgment are interrelated. In terms of the novel, relations among authors and the other producers of the printed text also modify how readers might have consumed the fiction they read. Bookseller relations, both in terms of how writers regarded printers and publishers and how the publishing profession managed an author's status, represent one key element in the cultural production of novels. Some of this history can be retrieved by examining the fate of authorship as described within novels or by a novelist's written record, but it would also be helpful to know how other producers, distributors and handlers—from printers and booksellers to reviewers and readers—processed works of fiction.

Reviewing, anthologizing, and canonizing have become, perhaps because they are among the most visible and best-preserved forms of literary reception, the means by which cultural production has most often been studied. Sterne's incorporation not only of such readers as "Dear Sir," "Dear Madam," or "Your Worships," but also of "You Messrs. the monthly Reviewers" who "cut and slash my jerkin," testifies to the
writer’s market awareness in eighteenth-century literary spheres. But Sterne is only the most overt example of how an author internalizes a whole apparatus of reading, and anticipates a text’s dynamic literary reception. As readers come to publish remarks about writers, authors begin to write about their own reading of how readers wrote about them. Professionalized reading becomes a model (or perhaps anti-model) for how to read that is reinternalized in the author’s text.

Private reading, then, is only one part of overall reception in the period. It is one of Burgess’ insights, for example, that the canonization of earlier novels may have been a response by booksellers to the 1774 Donaldson decision, which limited their propriety rights to copyrighted material.38 While booksellers continued to compete for new copyrights, they found new editions of older works to be increasingly profitable. The canonization of novels may thus be seen as a consequence, in part, of the development of a literary “marketplace” that the Donaldson decision legitimized. Similarly, reviews often functioned as a means to predetermine reader reception. Various scholars have thus taken Frank Donoghue’s lead on eighteenth-century literary reviewing and applied it to the novel.39 Using such sources as the Monthly Review, Critical Review, Gentleman’s Magazine, and London Review, they have provided insights into the process by which novelists were as much products as producers. Especially noteworthy in recent assessments of this process has been the impact of Barbauld’s “Essay on the Origin and Progress of the British Novel,” the preface to her edition of The British Novelists (1810). But Clara Reeve’s The Progress of Romance (1785), Vicesimus Knox’s “On Novel Reading” (1778), Francis Coventry’s “An Essay on the New Species of Writing” (1751), and John Dunlop’s The History of Fiction (1814), among others, have also received renewed attention for their accounts of the novel as a genre.40 Many other writers of fiction could be further mined as professional readers – Wollstonecraft’s reviews of novels in the Analytical Review, for instance, or Smollett’s in the Critical Review. In addition, the synergy between anthologies and fiction has been treated effectively by Benedict and, in a more concentrated fashion, by Leah Price, who postulates that “a history of the conventions through which novels have been reproduced and reduced could contribute more generally to a genealogy of late-twentieth-century academic criticism.”41 These are areas, then, in which even more critical work can be done (the Novelist’s Magazine alone is worth a monograph study). Less often studied in detail, though frequently noted, is the mass of fiction that appeared throughout the period in such outlets as periodicals, chapbooks, and other so-called ephemera that surely shaped what value readers accorded novels and novelists. By neglecting these other forms of fiction we may be attenuating a field of cultural production that is more extensive and diverse than conventional definitions of the novel allow.

Ultimately, the wide-ranging reactions to fiction in eighteenth-century Britain indicate the plural nature of print’s effects. In their several ways, they attest to the dialectical energy of print as a medium. Prose fiction often endorsed the Enlightenment rationality that seemed implicit in printing technology and yet continuously revealed how communication exceeded the boundaries of rational, reproducible,
standardized, and commodified discourse. It is precisely this dynamic that shapes one of the most vexed issues in the history of print: whether increased circulation of, or technological advances in, printed matter transforms how people read, think, and interact socially, or whether such advances are themselves the result of changes in modes of cognition and social behavior. Seeing print culture as either simply effecting, or, conversely, the effect of a revolution in consciousness tends, I would argue, to remove print as an element from the very culture it ostensibly produces. As I propose in the final section, the material texts that readers of fiction consumed in the eighteenth century were hardly stable artifacts that simply mediated the work of the author and the play of the reader.

Book

I have underlined book because, of the three areas in print culture that this essay examines, the study of novels as material objects may require less rather than more modesty. Until recently, criticism has barely addressed the brazen display of text or the awareness of the physical life of the book that frequently punctuate fiction from the long eighteenth century. Scholars are just beginning to examine the "printedness" of these texts in close detail, focusing mostly on Sterne or Richardson. But such interest has long been implicit in the study of eighteenth-century fiction. Both Watt and Lennard Davis have asserted that the novel owed its particular existence to print technologies, and Justice has recently called it "the first overwhelmingly commodified type of writing." While these may be overstatements, they reflect a pervasive link between novels and the materiality of books. As Tom Keeney notes, eighteenth-century fiction shows "the readiness of novelists to explore the impact of print technology and publishing format on literary meaning and the reading experience."

To a large extent, this correlation between eighteenth-century novels and print reflects transformations in the production and circulation of texts. In this period, Britain experienced a dramatic consolidation of print technology and dissemination that included the passage of modern copyright law; taxation of printed material; advances in domestic papermaking; the emergence of wholesale marketing, copy-owning congress, and trade sales; the establishment of the modern library system; the appearance of large-scale printing firms; dramatically increased production by provincial presses; the institution of serialized publication and advertising lists in books and periodicals; and the accelerated growth of newspapers, journals, and magazines. These and other innovations unquestionably produced new conceptions of literary expression. Moreover, they seem to support Elizabeth Eisenstein's claim that modern structures of thought derived from the "advent of print" because "the flow of information had been reoriented to make possible an unprecedented cumulative cognitive advance." Certainly by the eighteenth century the link between enlightenment and print was fully established.
Prose fiction in the long eighteenth century provides particularly strong evidence for the assumption that newness, modernity, and print were common bedfellows, even when that principle was derogated. Among canonical writers, for example, Swift’s use of asterisks and glosses in _A Tale of a Tub_ (1704) or Richardson’s manipulation of typographical effects such as fragmented text printed diagonally and upside down, cursive print that imitates a character’s handwriting, and creative italics, florets, bullets, and marginal pointing fingers in _Clarissa_ reveal their authors’ distinct responses to the possibilities of the print medium. Similarly, the varied length of dashes in Sarah Fielding’s _David Simple_ (1753) or parodic footnotes in Edgeworth’s _Castle Rackrent_ (1800) show that eighteenth-century novelists of all sorts exploited the expressive function of print. Even more obscure fictions, such as Amory’s _The Life of John Bunce, Esq._ (1756), Kidgell’s _The Card_ (1755), the anonymous _Life and Memoirs of Mr. Ephraim Tristram Bates_ (1756), Lady Morgan’s _The Wild Irish Girl_ (1806), and a host of narratives produced by Sterne’s imitators, depend on typographical devices that underlie the tension between writing and its public modes of production. Other writers such as Fielding, Haywood, and McKenzie use more conventional effects, such as comic and self-reflexive chapter headings, overly elaborate tables of contents, and parodic prefatory materials, but they also intimate a writer’s awareness that authorship derives as much from the material processes of print culture as from his or her own labor.

Such textual display indicates the correspondence implicitly drawn in the period between writing and print production, as it emphasizes both printing-house conventions and the author’s relation to the publishing industry. It underscores as well the collaborative aspects of printed texts. Since typographical layout is usually conducted by printers and compositors, authorial interventions reveal the customarily shared creation of published work. While typographical play allows writers to control a text beyond its manuscript phase, it can also reinscribe their dependence. It implies that “modern authors” frequently considered writing in terms of its modes of publication, anticipating the effects of particular techniques from their knowledge of the print trade.

Not all textual self-consciousness in eighteenth-century fiction, however, is presented in the physical layout of the page. The narratives themselves often provide elaborate reflections upon the material effects of print. In one episode from _Tristram Shandy_, whose very appearance in print was considered indecent, Tristram describes the interplay between typographical and narrative content that typifies eighteenth-century literature. In the scene (volume 5, chapters 27–28), a hot chestnut drops into a “hiatus” in the “breeches” of one of the novel’s minor characters, Phutatorius. Seeking relief for the pain, he is advised by Eugenius to “send to the next printer, and trust your cure to such a simple thing as a soft sheet of paper just come off the press.” As Sterne elaborates the conceit, Yorick and Gasphreres join Eugenius in discussing the variables at work in the application of printed paper to Phutatorius’ genital wound. They argue whether the dampness of the paper or the “oil and lampblack with which the paper is so strongly impregnated, does the business,” and
whether it is better to spread the latter “thick upon a rag, and clap it on directly” or
“so infinitely thin and with such mathematical equality (fresh paragraphs and large
capitals excepted) as no art or management of the spatula can come up to.” They
consider whether the “type” used should be large or small, and whether the text’s
content contributes to the remedy (Yorick urges them not to employ a text that
contains “bawdry,” such as Phutatorius’ own treatise, which “is at this instant in the
press”). The puns here, mixing references to the printing shop and its tools, to
masculine virility and size, to textual, sartorial and somatic hiatuses, and to the
instruments and consequences of illicit sex, reinforce Sterne’s complex integration of
social, sexual, and print subjects. Perhaps the most recondite allusion occurs when
Yorick complains that spreading the lamp-black too thickly “would make a very devil
of it,” as it calls to mind both the notorious black page eulogizing Yorick himself in
Sterne’s own book, and the boys known as “printer’s devils” who removed finished
sheets from the tympan and thus come to be covered in black. These references,
especially those governing the printing house, reveal the degree to which Sterne
indulged his fascination with the publishing process. For Sterne, any writer, like
Phutatorius, is trapped in an economy in which his own writing returns upon him in
unexpected ways. Such moments as this mark the intersection of the writer’s discourse
with the specific material practices that governed both the aesthetic and economic
productions of texts. It also suggests that writing does not necessarily precede but is
often coterminous with the printing process. 46

On a broader level, then, the study of the book (the novel included) needs to
account for the role of the printing house in the production of literature. When Swift
secretly had the unattributed manuscript of *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) deposited at the
bookseller’s, he left instructions for it to be published in whatever manner Motte saw
fit. Later, Swift somewhat disingenuously complained about the license taken with his
manuscript and sought to ensure corrected versions in subsequent editions. Nonethe-
less, Gulliver’s narrative still bears witness to those initial textual decisions, whether
made by the bookseller, editor, compositor or pressman. As the elaborate history of
editions and editorial decisions that texts undergo certainly attests, a book is invari-
ably a highly mediated version of a given text. Books also retain, of course, the history
of contributions made in the print room. Tracing the circumstances that obtain
between authors and the various figures of the printing trade can thus serve effectively
to flesh out the dense social nature of the published work.

Like the “republic of authors,” however, the print industry was also beholden to
readers. Many of its material decisions were based on maximizing contact between
texts and suitable audiences. As Warner has shown, this objective involved an
elaborate mobilization of resources. Applying the term “media culture” to the early
modern period, he notes that print media fused “continuity of form (each printed text
is the same)” and “portability.” These aims reflected new forms of distribution
couraged by a regularized postal system, new turnpikes, and commercial lending
libraries. Such socioeconomic changes promoted commodified literary forms such as
the novel whose content followed “proven formulas” intended to “win new purchases”
and increase "the speed of cultural exchange." However, although hasty or commercially instituted, these formats also intensified the immediacy and personal tone of eighteenth-century fiction. The small octavo and duodecimo formats favored by booksellers for the production of novels not only manifested a particular market attitude toward such literature, they also fostered, as Brewer shows, a companionate attitude toward books. Such volumes could be slipped into a pocket, carried easily to favorite reading locations, and retrieved quickly for immediate reference. As numerous painted, sculpted, engraved, and printed images reveal, more and more people felt personally attached to their books. Furthermore, throughout much of the period, consumers recognized a greater proportion of books by the publisher's rather than the author's name. For instance, the explosion of Gothic narratives fostered by William Lane's Minerva Press aligned their status with the publishing house and the venues at which such works were sold (like Lane's own circulating library) more than with the author. Indeed, the blue covers of these books became, in effect, a trademark means by which the publisher brought books and consumers together and assured readers of the expected content they would be purchasing.

Thus, one of the sobering insights into eighteenth-century culture is that the textual history of most novels in the period dramatizes the author's decreased engagement. Scholars now generally agree, for example, that changes in copyright were not principally about recognizing authorial rights. Similarly, McKenzie notes that the rise of trade publishing led, in practical terms, to "the dissociation of author, printer and bookseller from one another, and all of them from their market, turning books into mere commodities." Perhaps most threatening to authors was the possibility that they were merely products of market forces. John Feather argues that the demand for new books increased the need for writers, and notes that "literary" authors were affected by the evolution and growth of the book trade, with many of them now acknowledging pecuniary motives for writing. Despite the demand, the writing of popular fiction was still mostly characterized by obscure toil, paltry remuneration, and abuse by the bookselling establishment. At the same time, as Brewer notes, it needs to be acknowledged that booksellers were not exclusively motivated by profit; they often regarded their work as contributing to the "republic of letters" in a supportive, ideological, and moral fashion. Many of them, moreover, fared as badly as the authors they supposedly exploited. More work on the relationship, whether intense or slight, between authors, readers, and what we might loosely call "producers" and "distributors" of texts (keeping in mind that writers and printers, for example, may frequently cross over those boundaries), should increase our understanding of the novel's social and economic reach.

Such trade concerns also necessarily complicate our notions of where "composing" occurs. Focusing on the book, in fact, seems a particularly effective way to reveal the interrelatedness of writers, publishers, and readers. On the one hand, it can undermine conventional ways of reading by exposing the material and technological conditions for the production of discourse, challenging received notions about literary exchange. At the same time, however, material study of the book also demonstrates
the varied means by which a body of agents that included writers, publishers, distributors, and readers were able to produce, disseminate, consume, and evaluate novels. The behavior of such agents was not simply determined by technology; it also manifested the inventive and unpredictable nature of encounters between people and books.

The physicality of the novel relates, then, not only to the individual textual condition of a work, but also to the manner in which novels were moved and used as physical objects in the cultural landscape. The eighteenth-century British novel, of course, intersects with a series of events that modified its status as an object. It became a culturally sanctioned and institutionalized force that participated widely in a synchronic public sphere fostered by developments in print technology. As a cultural technology that enabled individuals to reconcile personal and civic experience through rhetorical incorporation of the public, it also retained notable traces of disjunction. One major concern in scholarship on novels and the material form of the book thus relates to how, as physical objects, they came to be placed and used in the public sphere. The circulation of the objects in this respect becomes a measure of the dispersion rather than the consolidation of people and things. The history of the novel's materiality, then, also has to confront its more unexpected uses. And, indeed, the novels in the period reveal an obsession with unreadierly uses of text, from curling one's hair or wadding a gun to serving as toilet paper, lining a trunk, or wrapping cheese and fish.

A broad synthetic approach to book production in the eighteenth century will thus enable scholars to deepen our understanding of the material circumstances of literary production in the British eighteenth century. There is still room, that is, for a fuller exploration of the relation between novels and various print contexts. The appearance of fiction in other material forms than the bound book (such as periodicals and broadsides) is still in the initial stages of investigation. Much more can also be said about the interrelation of printed words and printed illustrations or about novels and the reprint market. And the persistent lament of women writers that the “female pen” is not granted equal access to the printed page, despite the notable increase of women novelists, may be better understood in relation to constraints at the level of material production. Despite some instances of typographical play in novels by women, particularly after the publication of Tristram Shandy, there are still very few examples compared to those by male writers. That many female novelists were barred from easy access to the printing house or direct negotiation with booksellers (often having to act through male intermediaries) may correlate with their decision to thematize the manipulation of the printed page rather than practice it directly. Explaining this strategy undoubtedly requires a firmer grasp of how novelists such as Frances Burney, Elizabeth Inchbald, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen sublimated their authority over print while preserving the formal integrity of their texts.

Finally, the range of locales within which texts can be situated — from metropole and province to nations, colonies, and empires — complicates assessments of the physical movement of works in the eighteenth-century public sphere. While much
has been done to explore connections between Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and English production of prose fiction, other geographies offer fresh possibilities. The eighteenth-century trans-Atlantic trade in publications meant that novels were a part, however modest, of cultural encounters in Asia, the Americas, and the European continent. As Srinivas Aravamudan has recently argued in Tropicopolitans, literary critics have to incorporate "glocal" histories of production, reception, and institutionalization. Such an approach, joined to the study of the novel's material life, may very well yield revisionary estimates of how the commodification of fiction shaped such categories as class, race, nationality, and ethnicity.

We should attend more, in other words, to the complex ways in which literatures and marketplaces intersect, tracking the various individual agents who were engaged in the conflicting and conflicted activities of eighteenth-century print media. This involves assessing the intricate and highly personal decision-making that authors, booksellers, and printers made to get their products into print, that distributors considered in ensuring wide circulation of their goods, and that readers enacted when purchasing those products. The history of the book is necessarily a diffuse subject that calls into question such categories as authorship, publishing, reading, and material culture; it is, therefore, both a useful interdisciplinary category and a loose and baggy monster that often consumes the very field of study it is meant to constitute. Moreover, since we live in a period whose technological developments seem to portend the end of the book, the study itself may constitute a belated and desperate act. We should remind ourselves, nevertheless, that more books are currently produced per capita in the West than at any other time in history. The digital era, at least for the time being, has increased (some may say exacerbated) books as a cultural medium. Yet in its origins print technology seemed to threaten a book culture centered on scribal and illuminated modes of production. A modest goal, then, might simply be to acquire the sort of "known understanding" of the book that Frances Burney long ago admired in Frances Brooke, one that would now comprehend how human agents and such material as paper, feather quills, ink, leather, wood, and metal intersect to produce a diverse print culture.

See also: chapter 1, Crusoe's Further Adventures; chapter 2, Fiction/Translation/Transnation; chapter 6, Representing Resistance; chapter 7, Why Fanny Can't Read; chapter 16, An Emerging New Canon.

Notes

4. Here, the work of such scholars as Chartier, The Order of Books, Mark Rose, Authors and
Christopher Flint

Owner: The Invention of Copyright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), and Martha Woodmansee, The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) has been crucial to our understanding of the author's history.


7. Rose, Author and Owners, 121.


14. Mellor, Mothers of the Nation, 88.


20. Hudson, Writing and European Thought, 112.


25. Ezell, Social Authorship, 141.


32. Raven, "From Promotion to Proscription," 180.
37. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays in Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). Bourdieu’s theory must be modified somewhat to accommodate the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century each field might be limited to "a separate social uni-

verse having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy" but it would probably be less structured in the prior century.
40. See, for example, Burgess, *British Fiction*, 1–24, and Warner, *Licensing Entertainment*, 1–44.
FURTHER READING


