



JESL

Journal of Economic Studies in Literature

JESL, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2026, pp.25-50.

Print ISSN: 3107-3492; Online ISSN: 3107-3506

Journal homepage: <https://www.jesljournal.com>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64058/jesl260102rarm1>



Market Mechanisms in the Formation of Modern Authors' Rights in Eighteenth-Century Britain

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Abstract: The development of capitalism in eighteenth-century Britain gave rise to an increasingly prosperous book market. The juridical subject of property rights, the professional producer operating in the marketplace, and the original genius of aesthetic discourse gradually converged to constitute the basic form of modern authorship. The establishment of modern authors' rights simultaneously entailed a transformation in the relations of production within the literary field: authors increasingly shifted from serving a small number of aristocratic patrons to addressing a large body of anonymous purchasers, while literary production moved from a system of patronage to a marketized mode of production. Both the form and content of literature became deeply permeated by market logic. The development of emergent genres such as literary periodicals and the novel not only enabled literature to adapt formally to an expanding readership but also allowed it to participate more extensively in modern economic life and in the formation of economic discourse.

Keywords: Modern Authors' Rights; Book Trade; Marketization of Literary Production; Eighteenth-Century British Literature

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标题：十八世纪英国现代作者权生成的市场机制

摘要：18 世纪英国资本主义经济发展催生出日益繁荣的图书市场，法律上的财产权主体、市场中的职业生产者与美学上的原创天才逐渐结合，共同构成了现代作者身份的基本形态。作者权确立的同时意味着文学领域生产关系的转变，作者服务的对象逐渐从少数贵族赞助人转向大量匿名的购买者，文学生产从赞助体制过渡到市场化生产阶段。文学的形式与内容深受市场逻辑的渗透，文学期刊和小说等新兴文类的发展，不仅标志着文学在形式上更能适应不断扩大的读者市场，也使文学更深入地介入现代经济生活及思想话语的生成。

关键词：作者权；图书贸易；文学生产市场化；18 世纪英国文学

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On 4 June 1741, Alexander Pope brought a lawsuit against the bookseller Edmund Curll, alleging that Curll's *Dean Swift's Literary Correspondence* (1741) had included, without authorization, letters exchanged between Pope and Jonathan Swift (Rose, 1994, p. 211). The lawsuit, however, was not prompted simply by the unauthorized publication of the letters. For years, Pope had sought to shape his literary image and consolidate his reputation in the book market by editing and publishing his private correspondence. Yet within the culture of gentility at the time, the voluntary disclosure of private letters could readily be regarded as vain and unbecoming. He therefore needed to create the appearance that the letters had been stolen and had entered the print market against his wishes. Pope first arranged for some of the letters to be published in Dublin, beyond the jurisdiction of English law, and subsequently issued an authorized and edited version in his collected works under the pretext of correcting the pirated edition and preserving the integrity of the texts (Rose, 1994, pp. 217-218). Significantly, in the lawsuit he invoked the *Statute of Anne* (1710), commonly regarded as the world's first modern copyright law. His immediate purpose was, of course, to prevent Curll from continuing to sell the letters and to secure the economic returns of the authorized edition. More importantly, however, Pope v. Curll revealed that authors had begun to regard their works simultaneously as personal property subject to their control, as a medium through which to manage their public reputation, and as commodities entering market exchange. The case thus encapsulated the historical transformation of authorship in the eighteenth century. It also

demonstrated that modern authors' rights, the book market, and the production of literary texts were not separate domains but mutually formative and jointly evolving elements in the marketization of literary production.

The formation of modern authors' rights, the rise of the reading public, and the development of genres such as the novel and the periodical have been extensively discussed, gradually revealing the close relationship between literary institutions and market mechanisms.^① Existing scholarship, however, has generally approached these issues from a single perspective and has seldom treated modern authors' rights, professional writing, the book trade, and changes in literary form as distinct components of the same historical process. This article therefore argues that the author was first established as the owner of the work through copyright law and the discourse of property, and subsequently transformed in the marketplace into a professional producer who sold writing to an anonymous readership. Once literature was incorporated into a sustained system of commodity production and consumption, the market not only transformed authors' identities and means of subsistence but also increasingly penetrated the internal workings of literature, promoting the development of genres such as literary periodicals and the novel and shaping literature's representation of individualism, the credit economy, and commercial society. Modern authorship, professional writing, and the evolution of literary forms should therefore be understood as interrelated historical outcomes of the marketization of literary production in eighteenth-century Britain.

1. The Book Trade and the Rise of Modern Authors' Rights

Since the late twentieth century, structuralism and poststructuralism have subjected traditional author-centred criticism to sustained critique and deconstruction. Influenced by Saussurean linguistics, structuralism conceives of language as a system of signs constituted through differential relations, in which the meanings of words and sentences are determined by structural relations internal to the linguistic system rather than by the speaker's subjective intention. The author thus becomes merely "a position within the structure": not an individual who creates meaning *ex nihilo*, but one who combines and rearranges elements within pre-existing structures. In "The Death of the Author" (1968), Roland Barthes criticizes traditional criticism for interpreting the work as an expression of the author's personality and experience and for treating the author as the ultimate source of textual meaning (Barthes, 1977, pp. 142-143). For Barthes, writing entails the disappearance of the originating voice: the text is not a direct emanation of the author's interiority but a "multi-dimensional space" woven from multiple languages, cultural codes, and pre-existing

^① The volume edited by Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi demonstrates that the modern "author" is a historically specific institutional construct jointly shaped by literary conceptions, the print market, capitalist individualism, educational institutions, and copyright law (Woodmansee and Jaszi, 1994c). The works of Ian Watt and Iona Italia, meanwhile, reject explanations that attribute the rise of the novel and the periodical solely to the internal evolution of literature, instead recontextualizing these genres within the socioeconomic structures and print market of eighteenth-century Britain (Watt, 1979; Italia, 2005).

texts (Barthes, 1977, p. 146). To assign an author to a text is, in effect, to impose upon it an ultimate signified and thereby restrict the openness of its meanings. If Barthes liberated the text and the reader, Michel Foucault, in “What Is an Author?” (1969), pursued the question further by examining the discursive function of the “author.” Foucault argues that an author’s name differs from other proper names because it “remains at the contours of texts—separating one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence” (Foucault, 1977, p. 123). In other words, the author-function serves to group a body of texts together, distinguish them from other texts, and shape both their modes of reception and their cultural status. Foucault also reminds us that authorship was initially associated with systems of punishment and only subsequently with property and copyright law (Foucault, 1977, pp. 124-125). Before the emergence of modern copyright, discourse was not primarily regarded as property but as an “act”—one that might be sacred or profane, lawful or unlawful. The attribution of a text to an identifiable author, therefore, was initially intended not merely to celebrate originality but to assign responsibility. To explain how the author-centred model criticized by Barthes and the “author-function” identified by Foucault acquired such a secure position within modern literary and epistemic systems, it is necessary to return to the historical conjuncture at which copyright law, the literary market, and aesthetic discourse intersected, and to examine the “birth” of the author. It was precisely in the eighteenth century, with the establishment of copyright law and the formation of the literary market, that the “author” became both a legal subject and an owner of property, ultimately developing into a stable discursive function. In this respect, the eighteenth century constituted a crucial threshold in the transformation of early modern regimes of textual regulation and ownership into the institutional and conceptual structures of modern authorship.

In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, the Stationers’ Company monopolized the national book trade and fostered an embryonic conception of authors’ rights. In early modern England, royal prerogative provided the legal basis for granting the right to print books. The extreme legal assumption at the time was that all written works were subject to the Crown’s disposal (Feather, 1994, p. 192). In other words, the legal right to print a work did not initially arise from the notion that “the author owns the work,” but from royal authorization. In practice, the Stationers’ Company, incorporated by royal charter in 1557, served as an intermediary between the Crown and the book trade and virtually monopolized the printing and trading of books in London and, indeed, throughout England. An ordinance issued during the reign of Elizabeth I underscored the purpose for which the Company had been established: because “ariseth great disorder by publication of vnfruitefull, vaine, and infamous bookes and papers,” the Stationers’ Company was required to ensure that all publications received the approval of official censors and that “nothing therein should be either heretical, seditious, or vnseemely for Christian eares” (Quoted in Pollard, 1915, p. 13). To meet the demands of censorship, the Company established a system of book registration, later known as the Stationers’ Register, under which only registered books were permitted to be printed and published.

John Feather's research demonstrates that the function of this guild registration system gradually began to change. Numerous contemporary records indicate that registration was being transformed from an instrument of censorship into an instrument of property: between 1563 and 1654, the stationer John Sampson was fined twenty pence by the Company for printing another person's "copy"; between 1558 and 1559, the stationer William Copland was likewise punished for "piratical printing" (Feather, 1994, p. 197). It is therefore evident that texts had begun to be regarded as private property protected against infringement by others. A substantial body of subsequent guild records further attests to the propertization of texts: they could be inherited, bestowed as gifts, bought and sold, or used as collateral (Feather, 1994, p. 197). The property rights in texts during this period, however, did not belong to authors; rather, they constituted an internal form of property within the Company's monopolistic system. Authors, theatrical companies, provincial booksellers, and other non-members, even when they were substantively connected with a text, could not directly establish rights in the Stationers' Register.

Within the guild's monopolistic control of the book trade, even authors themselves had yet to develop a clear, modern conception of "authorship." In tracing the history of the term "anonymous," Jeffrey Masten observes that it was not until the late seventeenth century that the word acquired the meaning "bearing no author's name; of unknown or unavowed authorship." Around the seventeenth century, it more commonly denoted "a person whose name is not given, or is unknown" and was not yet associated with the authorship of texts (Masten, 1994, p. 361). On this basis, Masten characterizes Renaissance drama as "pre-anonymous" and "plural and collaborative" (Masten, 1994, p. 363). "Pre-anonymous" indicates that Renaissance plays were not anonymous works in the modern sense, since the modern author-centred textual institution did not yet exist. Many plays first appeared as theatrical performances whose audiences did not know the identity of the playwright; even when subsequently printed and published, they often appeared without an authorial attribution. "Plural and collaborative" refers to the fact that dramatic composition itself was an ongoing collaborative process in which playwrights, actors, musicians, theatre managers, and even licensing officials participated in the production of dramatic texts. Gerald Bentley's research shows that, of the 282 plays mentioned in *Henslowe's Diary*,^① nearly two-thirds were written by more than one person; even when a title page bore only a single name, it often served to "simplify the actual circumstances of composition" (Bentley, 1986, p. 199). It is therefore evident that authorship in Renaissance texts was dispersed rather than centralized as a locus of rights. The publishing system of the period was concerned with controlling the printing, reproduction, and sale of texts, rather than with determining who, as an author, possessed a natural right to an original work. Martha Woodmansee further observes that, in early modern Europe, the writer was regarded merely as one

^① *Henslowe's Diary* comprises the account books and memoranda left by the Elizabethan theatre manager Philip Henslowe, recording the performances, revenues, purchases of plays, payments to playwrights, and operations of London's commercial theatres from the 1590s to the early seventeenth century.

among the many craftsmen involved in the production of a book, “not superior to, but on a par with other craftsmen” (Woodmansee, 1994a, p. 15). At the time, books, like other manufactured objects, were understood as practical instruments, and their production involved scholars or writers, papermakers, typefounders, compositors and printers, proofreaders, and bookbinders, among others (Woodmansee, 1994a, pp. 15–16). Contemporary society, including writers themselves, would have understood the writer “as master of a craft, master of a body of rules, or techniques, preserved and handed down in rhetoric and poetics, for the transmission of ideas handed down by tradition” (Woodmansee, 1994a, p. 16).

The expansion of the British book trade in the eighteenth century and the dissolution of the guild monopoly marked a decisive shift away from the early modern regime of royal privilege and guild-based textual property towards the modern concept of authors’ rights. The early monopoly of the Stationers’ Company derived from royal prerogative, and the Licensing of the Press Act of 1662 repackaged this privilege in the form of parliamentary legislation. When the Act lapsed in 1695, however, the British book trade descended into disorder, and members of the Company could no longer prevent “outsiders” from printing the “copies” over which they claimed exclusive control. Seeking to restore its monopoly over the book trade, the Stationers’ Company began to appropriate the emerging discourses of free trade and Enlightenment thought, introducing authors’ rights into its arguments. The Company reframed its own demand for monopoly privileges as an appeal for the human rights of creators and denounced pirate booksellers for violating authors’ interests. If authors were legally regarded as possessing perpetual property rights in their texts, then the Stationers’ Company, as the purchaser of original manuscripts, would naturally inherit perpetual rights in those texts as well. In an attempt to balance the growing anti-monopoly sentiment in society against the demands of the powerful Stationers’ Company, Parliament enacted the Statute of Anne in 1710. In contrast to the earlier guild system, the statute expressly defined copyright as a limited privilege: books already in print were granted a protection term of twenty-one years, while new books received a term of fourteen years, renewable for a further fourteen years if the author remained alive when the initial term expired (Rose, 2009, p. 119). Its full title, “An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, by Vesting the Copies of Printed Books in the Authors or Purchasers of such Copies, during the Times therein mentioned,” both affirmed the legal definition of the author as the original proprietor of the work and eased the Stationers’ Company’s difficult transition by establishing fixed terms of protection. As Mark Rose observes, before the enactment of the statute, “authors could not be said to ‘own’ their works” (Rose, 1994, p. 213). In early modern England, “it was common to think of a text as an action rather than as a thing”: a text could praise a patron, disseminate religion, satirize corruption, or move its readers, but it might also incite rebellion or propagate heresy (Rose, 1994, p. 213). It was not until the eighteenth century, amid the growing prosperity of the book trade and the enactment of the Statute of Anne, that texts began to be conceived as aesthetic commodities capable of being bought and sold. As early as 1704, the novelist Daniel Defoe had called for

legislation protecting authors' interests: if an author could be punished for the unlawful content of a book, then the author should likewise be entitled to profit when the book possessed value (Defoe, 1704, pp. 20-21).

Intense commercial competition in the eighteenth-century British book market drove the continual evolution of the country's copyright system, while legal discourse increasingly began to address questions that had previously belonged to aesthetics and literary theory. Because the Statute of Anne granted already published books a twenty-one-year term of protection, the Company's exclusive rights in many texts began to expire during the 1730s, leading to the proliferation of reprints of canonical works on the market. The Stationers' Company consequently turned to the courts in an attempt to establish authors' "common-law copyright." Common law is not law codified and enacted by Parliament at a single moment, but a body of legal principles developed by the English courts through accumulated precedents, customary practices, and judicial interpretation. Statute law, by contrast, refers to written law enacted and promulgated by Parliament. The booksellers argued that authors' rights in their works had not been created by the Statute of Anne, but constituted natural property rights under common law. Since authors produced works through their labour, they naturally owned them; booksellers, having purchased authors' texts, therefore naturally inherited the same rights. During the second half of the eighteenth century, London booksellers became embroiled in a series of legal conflicts with reprinters. In the 1769 case of *Millar v. Taylor*, the Court of King's Bench ruled three to one in favour of the London booksellers, recognizing a common-law literary property right vested in authors and holding that this right could endure in perpetuity; In *Donaldson v. Becket* (1774), however, the House of Lords rejected perpetual copyright and affirmed that copyright must be limited in duration (Rose, 1988, p. 53). Following *Donaldson*, canonical works by Shakespeare, Milton, and others, long controlled by London booksellers, became "public resources," and large numbers of inexpensive editions entered the market. These legal controversies brought the question of authors' rights to the forefront and led London booksellers inadvertently to "invent" the modern conception of authorship. Drawing upon a Lockean theory of property, they maintained that labour conferred upon individuals a natural property right in the products of their work; literature, as the product of an author's labour, should therefore constitute the author's inalienable natural property. Their opponents, by contrast, emphasized the nature of the "text": if a literary work were material, an author could naturally claim complete ownership of the manuscript; if literature belonged to the realm of ideas, however, it could receive only a limited term of protection, like a patent (Rose, 1988, p. 61). Mark Rose argues that the judgment in *Donaldson* should still be understood within an anti-monopoly economic context: although the London booksellers failed to achieve their legal objective, they succeeded in disseminating the image of "the author as proprietor" (Rose, 1988, pp. 69-70).

The rise of modern authors' rights in eighteenth-century Britain was closely bound up with the development of the book trade, while the convergence of possessive individualism and an aesthetics

of originality gave shape to modern authorship. From the late seventeenth century onward, the rapid expansion of the book trade and the gradual growth of the reading public encouraged the professionalization of writers, making it possible for authors to earn a living solely from the literary market. Mark Rose regards Alexander Pope as a profoundly transitional figure: on the one hand, he continued to uphold the traditional identity of the gentleman, repeatedly emphasizing honour, decorum, and reputation; on the other, he increasingly resembled a modern literary entrepreneur, adept at managing his works, cultivating a favourable public image, and deriving substantial profits from the literary marketplace (Rose, 1994, p. 216). The previously discussed case of *Pope v. Curl* clearly reveals the influence of possessive individualism upon the book trade: like other independent individuals, the author was understood as the proprietor of both himself and the products of his labour. Pope's literary theory likewise exemplifies this transitional character. Although a conservative neoclassicist, he also anticipated certain Romantic theories of genius and originality. In *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), he emphasizes that the poet's task is not to manufacture novelty but to present, in a more appropriate and elegant form, "What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Exprest" (Pope, 1961, p. 273). Yet Pope's theory also contains a distinctly "Romantic" conception of uniqueness, for he suggests that a truly great poet may at times "From vulgar Bounds with brave Disorder part, / And snatch a Grace beyond the Reach of Art" (Pope, 1961, pp. 257-258). Martha Woodmansee argues that, before the eighteenth century, the author was generally conceived either as a "craftsman" who arranged language according to inherited rules or as a passive "recipient" of external inspiration or the Muse; writers therefore possessed no exclusive ownership of their works (Woodmansee, 1984, pp. 426-427). By contrast, this emerging Romantic conception maintained that genuine genius did not merely reproduce what already existed but introduced new elements into the realm of thought. This theory can be traced back to Plato's account of poetic creation, which holds that poets do not compose through a specialized, systematically organized, and teachable "art," but acquire poetic power through divine inspiration from the Muse (divine power) (Plato, 1996, pp. 13-14). Here, the author is already understood as an original creator whose irreplaceable and distinctive creativity constitutes the source of the work's value. It was precisely the development of commercial interests and an aesthetics of originality that facilitated the emergence of modern authors' rights in the legal sphere. Copyright legislation not only established and protected authors' rights and commercial interests but also actively shaped modern authorship: the author was constructed as the legitimate proprietor of the work and the source of creative thought, while the work was constituted as a marketable commodity embodying the author's labour.

Modern authorship was ultimately consolidated by the Romantic literary movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Mark Rose argues that the establishment of the concept of "authors' rights" required three preconditions: first, the book market had to develop on a scale sufficient to sustain commercial cultural production, before the author could be regarded as someone who earned a living through writing; second, an aesthetics of originality had to emerge, enabling

the author to be understood as an original creator of ideas; and third, a Lockean theory of property had to gain widespread acceptance, according to which individuals could transform natural objects into private property through labour, while authors, by applying their intellectual labour to language and ideas, thereby acquired legitimate rights in their works (Rose, 1988, p. 56). Britain in the mid- and late eighteenth century clearly fulfilled all three conditions identified by Rose: the book market continued to flourish, copyright law underwent continual development, and Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) was even regarded in mainstream literary history as the first professional writer (Osteen and Woodmansee, 1999, p. 5). Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) exemplifies the emergence in Britain of a Romantic aesthetics of originality. Young declares: "let not great examples, or authorities, browbeat thy reason into too great a diffidence of thyself: Thyself so reverence, as to prefer the native growth of thy own mind to the richest import from abroad" (Young, 1918, p. 24). Rejecting the neoclassical imitation of classical models, this passage insists that poets should rely upon their own exceptional gifts rather than create in the reflected glory of the ancients. Young also explicitly connects "originality" with "ownership," asserting that "his the sole property of them ; which property alone can confer the noble title of an author" (Young, 1918, p. 24). Woodmansee observes that Young's theory exerted its greatest influence in Germany because German writers in the late eighteenth century, while attempting to earn a living through writing, faced the threats posed by the old system of privilege, political fragmentation, and widespread piracy, and therefore urgently required a theory capable of demonstrating that authors owned their works (Woodmansee, 1984). By the early nineteenth century, the ascendant Romantic conception of authorship further emphasized that what authors owned was neither general ideas nor materials in the public domain, but their distinctive expression, style, imagination, and individual acts of intellectual creation. William Wordsworth actively sought to enlist the power of law in support of his Romantic conception of authorship. In his earlier years, Wordsworth opposed the limited term of protection prescribed by the Statute of Anne and advocated perpetual copyright for authors; when this effort failed, he subsequently supported proposals to extend the copyright term (Woodmansee, 1994b, pp. 4-5). Wordsworth maintained that, unless the law provided long-term protection, it would suppress the authorial spirit and compel writers to devote their talents to inferior occupations (Wordsworth, 1974, p. 312).

2. From Patronage to the Marketization of Literary Production

Literary activity in early modern England was not yet a purely commodity-based economic practice but rather a form of gift exchange deeply embedded in aristocratic networks of power. In *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Samuel Johnson defined "patron" as "one who countenances, supports or protects" (Johnson, 1825a, p. 293) and "patronage" as "support, protection." (Johnson, 1825a, p. 293). Patronage was first and foremost an economic and social institution, typically structured around the relationship between an impoverished man of letters and a wealthy aristocrat.

Authors depended heavily upon patrons for annuities, gifts, or financial support for publication, while patrons could also facilitate their entry into the royal court, aristocratic households, the Church, or government service. Sir Philip Sidney exemplified the ideal literary patron of the Elizabethan period. He received the dedications of approximately twenty-five works and used patronage to promote his poetic ideals (Parry, 2002, p. 123). Sidney was particularly renowned for supporting the poet Edmund Spenser: his generous assistance ensured the publication of *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579), and he also advanced Spenser's career by recommending him for the position of secretary to the newly appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland (Parry, 2002, p. 123). At a time when authors' rights had not yet been established and the book market remained underdeveloped, writers depended upon patrons rather than market exchange for their livelihood, and literary works functioned more as gifts than as commodities. According to the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, the gift economy entails a threefold obligation: the obligation to give, to receive, and to reciprocate (Mauss, 2002, pp. 16-17). Within patronage relations, aristocratic status required the display of generosity, while accepting an author's dedication amounted to acknowledging the author's request for dependency and reciprocating through appreciation, favour, or protection. As the cultural critic Lewis Hyde observes, "It is the cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people, while the sale of a commodity leaves no necessary connection" (Hyde, 1983, p. 56). Unlike the commodity economy, which emphasizes rational calculation and separates individuals from one another, the continuous circulation of gifts leaves enduring traces of social relations and ultimately helps constitute a cultural community. In practice, the English public sphere after the Reformation was rife with personal and social antagonisms as well as factional conflict, and the public circulation of a book exposed its author to social criticism, religious censorship, and political suspicion. Early dedications therefore repeatedly invoked the author's need for a patron's protection against such attacks as "malicious tongues," "backbiting," and "serpents" (Parry, 2002, p. 118). Close association with a prestigious patron could undoubtedly deter many reckless accusers. Early literary patronage, therefore, involved more than financial support: the patron's reputation also constituted an important source of legitimacy for the work.

Although early modern English literature remained broadly embedded in relations of patronage, the market and the reading public increasingly became important targets and motivations of literary production. English literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could still scarcely detach itself from patronage structures in the broad sense, and authors continued to depend upon aristocrats for financial support, symbolic capital, and social legitimacy. With the development of printing, the growing power of the Stationers' Company, and the commercialization of the theatre, however, authors began to confront a large reading public composed of anonymous, dispersed, and paying consumers. Innovations in printing expanded the circulation of texts: literary manuscripts no longer circulated exclusively within the royal court and aristocratic households but reached a much wider

readership through booksellers' distribution networks. Although authors' rights had not yet been established and writers could not directly profit from copyright or book sales, once a text entered the marketplace, it inevitably had to accommodate the tastes of purchasers. The coexistence of literary patronage and the book market—and the tensions between them—was reflected in the dedication and the address to the reader that framed many early modern texts: whereas the former was often filled with tributes to aristocratic patrons, the latter revealed the author's desire to attract readers' purchases, attention, and approval. In George Turberville's poetry collection *Epitaphs, Epigrams, Songs and Sonnets* (1576), for example, the author dedicated the work to the Countess of Warwick in order to secure a source of legitimacy, while in his address to the reader he turned towards a general audience, describing his poems as "the unripe seedes of my barraine braine," intended to entertain the reader's weary mind (qtd. in Marotti, 1991, p. 8). The theatre more clearly exemplified a situation in which both aristocrats and the public constituted audiences, with princes and nobles as well as paying spectators serving as the "patrons" of drama. Shakespeare, for instance, was a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, whose patron was the Lord Chamberlain, a court official under Elizabeth I; when the newly enthroned James I became the company's patron in 1603, it was accordingly renamed the King's Men. In practice, despite royal or aristocratic patronage, Shakespeare's company and many other theatrical companies of the period relied primarily upon audiences at public theatres and other market-based spectators. Elizabeth I even shrewdly arranged for the public to finance the touring expenses of the Queen's Men through ticket purchases, while the company undertook political propaganda on behalf of the Queen and her ministers (Westfall, 2002, p. 41).

With the advent of the eighteenth century, the sustained expansion of Britain's population and economy created a large and prosperous book market. Throughout the century, Britain—and England in particular—experienced significant population growth: England's population rose from approximately 5.118 million in 1696 to about 6.149 million in 1756, 7.206 million in 1781, 8.671 million in 1801, and approximately 13.254 million by 1831 (Suarez, 2009, p. 3). Although demographic expansion cannot be directly equated with an increase in the number of readers, it nevertheless indirectly indicates the growth of the potential book-buying public. Britain's population growth occurred alongside economic development: between 1680 and 1820, British gross domestic product increased by approximately 246 per cent, far exceeding that of its continental European competitors (Suarez, 2009, p. 4). Britain also underwent sustained urbanization. In 1700, approximately 17 per cent of England's population lived in towns of more than 5,000 inhabitants; by 1800, this proportion had risen sharply to 28 per cent (Suarez, 2009, p. 5). Population growth, economic expansion, and urbanization collectively broadened the social basis of literary consumption, enabling literary works to be produced and sold to a readership that was larger, possessed greater purchasing power, and was more spatially concentrated. Admittedly, literary works remained highly expensive in the early eighteenth century, and the Stationers' Company was

still able to maintain high prices by virtue of its monopolistic position. In 1774, however, the House of Lords ruled in *Donaldson v. Becket* that copyright was limited in duration, rejecting the booksellers' claim to perpetual copyright in older works. Canonical works by Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, and others, which had previously been monopolized by major London booksellers, abruptly lost legal protection. New printers and retailers entered the market, prompting a proliferation of inexpensive reprints and allowing canonical literature to circulate at lower prices. J. E. Elliot supplements the material evidence of eighteenth-century book consumption by examining auction catalogues from the second-hand book market (Elliot, 2010).^① Elliot observes that fixed-price auctions emerged in the mid-eighteenth-century book market. Unlike conventional competitive auctions aimed at collectors, fixed-price auctions involved booksellers offering their stock to the general public at low prices determined in advance (Elliot, 2010, pp. 361-364). This suggests that readers of limited means did not necessarily have to pay monopoly prices, since comparatively inexpensive literary materials had already become available through auctions and the second-hand book trade. The market also began to offer multivolume literary anthologies, such as the 109-volume octodecimo edition of *Poets of Great Britain*, published between 1776 and 1782 (Elliot, 2010, p. 369). Such collections allowed readers to purchase selected volumes at lower prices rather than pay for an expensive complete set. Macroeconomic and demographic expansion, combined with copyright reform and innovations in market circulation, thus paved the way for the commodification of literature, gradually transforming it into a form of mass cultural consumption.

With the emergence of professional men of letters, literary production increasingly came to operate according to market principles: writers became merchants, and works became commodities. In 1832, reviewing the newly edited *Boswell's Life of Johnson* (1831), Thomas Carlyle presented Samuel Johnson as the pivotal figure in literature's transition from aristocratic patronage to market support. Carlyle observed that, when Johnson first entered the literary world, "Literature, in many senses, was in a transitional state"; "It was in the very act of passing from the protection of Patrons into that of the Public; no longer to supply its necessities by laudatory Dedications to the Great, but by judicious Bargains with the Booksellers" (Carlyle, 1852, p. 329). Carlyle described Johnson's letter rejecting the patronage of the Earl of Chesterfield as the "Blast of Doom" that proclaimed the demise of the patronage system (Carlyle, 1852, p. 330). During this period, authors were largely liberated from dependence upon the aristocracy and came instead to rely on booksellers, readers, and copyright income for their livelihoods. In this sense, writers began to assume the character of "merchants." Although they neither possessed capital nor controlled the channels of publication as booksellers did, they increasingly understood their writing through a commercial logic. Writers had

^① Elliot's original purpose was to use evidence from second-hand book auction catalogues to challenge the "cheap literature hypothesis" in traditional cultural history: namely, the claim that the 1774 decision in *Donaldson v. Becket* flooded the market with inexpensive editions of canonical works, thereby generating a middle-class reading public and shaping the British national literary canon. At the same time, the article also provides substantial evidence that literary works were becoming more affordable.

to sell their words, manage their reputations, and cultivate their readerships. In 1715, for example, the poet Alexander Pope placed a commercial advertisement in a newspaper for an engraved portrait of himself. The advertisement stated that the print was available for purchase between the Temple Gates, “where his Translation of Homer, and all his other Pieces may be had.” (qtd. in Egan, 2016, p. 1). This provides compelling evidence that literary authors did not enter the market passively but actively managed their public images and participated directly in commercial promotion and market operations. The expanding middle class became the principal consumers of books. For these readers, books were constructed not merely as luxury objects for domestic display and private collection, but as cultural instruments for disseminating politeness and taste and for signalling class identity. In response to this tendency, eighteenth-century booksellers began to package books as distinctive and recognizable commodities. The commodified book was no longer simply a vehicle for content but a visualized, fashionable, and even class-coded object of consumption. Booksellers became involved in every aspect of book production, emphasizing features that “included recognizable title page and typographical styles and the pre-retail binding of books in a house design” (Raven, 2009, p. 86). As one commentator observed in 1776, “we seem to live in an age when retailers of every kind of ware aspire to be the original manufacturers, and particularly in literature” (qtd. in Raven, 2009, p. 87).

The marketization of literary production also had its irrational underside, and “Grub Street” became the central geographical symbol through which Augustan writers satirized “low-end writing.” Grub Street was originally a street in one of London’s poorer districts. Its exceptionally low rents and proximity to the centre of London’s printing industry attracted large numbers of impoverished writers who were unable to enter mainstream literary circles. Over time, “Grub Street” developed into a pejorative cultural symbol denoting vulgar, inexpensive, and mass-produced commercial literature, as well as the “hack writers” willing to write almost anything in order to earn a living. In *The Distrest Poet* (1736), the celebrated eighteenth-century satirical artist William Hogarth depicts a typical scene of Grub Street life: dressed in rags, a poet sits deep in thought in a cramped and dimly lit attic, attempting to compose a poem that might earn him enough money for bread; his wife mends clothes nearby, while a creditor demanding payment for milk stands at the door.^① Johnson bluntly observed in his *Dictionary* that the street was “much inhabited by writers of small histories, dictionaries, and temporary poems; whence any mean production is called grubstreet” (Johnson, 1825, p. 849). The radical commercialization of literature in the eighteenth century generated a range of disorders: hack writers could produce propaganda for either the government or the opposition, or manufacture scandal, satire, and entertainment specifically for the market. The quantitative growth of writing provoked anxieties about literary quality, prompting fierce satire and criticism from Augustan writers such as Pope and Swift. In the introduction to *A Tale of a Tub* (1704),

^① For the painting, see the online resource of the Metropolitan Museum of Art: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/403258>

Swift associates Grub Street with cheap collections of jokes, comic tales, and popular entertainment, satirizing a mode of writing that sought readers' attention not through genuine learning or literary value but through vulgar tastes, commercial gimmicks, and rapid consumption (Swift, 1930, p. 6). His other work, *The Battle of the Books* (1704), may likewise be read as a satire on the commercialization of Grub Street literary production. Its most famous analogy represents the conflict between ancient and modern literature through the figures of the bee and the spider: modern commercial literature resembles the spider, spinning entirely from itself and producing something enclosed, dark, and self-centred; the ancients, by contrast, resemble bees, gathering materials from nature and tradition and bringing sweet honey to humankind. In *The Dunciad* (1728-1743), Pope satirizes literary profiteers in still more caustic terms: they are "dunces" branded by the Goddess of Dulness, an "industrious tribe" driven by "Glory, and gain" ("Glory, and gain, th' industrious tribe provoke"), yet possessing "Less human genius than God gives an ape" (Pope, 2009, pp. 151, 134).

Women's participation made the literary market more dynamic: "as readers, writers, topics and targets in literature, women and female concerns leapt into the forefront of literary culture" (Benedict, 2004, p. 5). Throughout the eighteenth century, literacy rates in Britain rose steadily, with female literacy increasing particularly rapidly and far outpacing that of men. By 1759, the literacy rate among adult British men had stabilized at approximately 60 per cent; it rose only slightly thereafter, reaching about 66 per cent by 1830. By contrast, female literacy increased from approximately 25 per cent at the beginning of the eighteenth century to 40 per cent by mid-century, and by 1830 nearly half of all women were literate (see Suarez, 2009, pp. 9, 11). Even more striking was the rapid growth in publications by women: 913 identifiable female authors are known to have written during the long eighteenth century (see Grundy, 2009, p. 146). Given the constraints imposed upon female identity at the time, women frequently published anonymously or under male personae, suggesting that the actual number must have been considerably higher. Women were particularly closely associated with the emerging novel. According to Judith Stanton's estimate, women constituted the majority of the most prolific novelists; among the most successful novelists, whether success is measured by reputation or by the number of editions and reprints, women and men were represented in roughly equal numbers (qtd. in Grundy, 2009, p. 147). In his account of the rise of the novel, Ian Watt identifies the ample leisure time available to eighteenth-century women as an important factor in the expansion of the market for novel reading. Watt argues that the gendered division of labour excluded women of the middle and upper classes from politics, commerce, and estate management, while the increasing specialization of labour and expansion of market exchange also substantially reduced women's domestic work. Inexpensive reading and literary discussion, both of which could take place within the home, consequently became important forms of leisure (Watt, 1979, pp. 47-50). Richard Sheridan's play *The Rivals* (1775) satirizes the contemporary phenomenon of women's fascination with sentimental fiction: in Act I, Scene II, the "reading" Lydia sits in her room surrounded by books and repeatedly asks after various sentimental novels, while

her maid Lucy, having just returned from the circulating library in Bath, produces a succession of novels from beneath her cloak and from her pockets (Sheridan, 1988, p. 14). The female market also attracted the attention of periodical literature, giving rise to numerous periodicals either written with women's participation or directed specifically at female readers. Many periodical titles began to incorporate gendered designations such as "ladies' magazines, museums, companions," while the editor of *Ladies Journal* (1727) promised that the periodical would concern itself with "nothing . . . but the lighter Affairs of the Ladies', such as Love and Gallantry" (qtd. in Italia, 2005, p. 4).

The emergence of serial publication in the nineteenth century marked a new stage in the marketization of British literary production: even while a novel was still being written and its text had yet to assume a definitive form, it was already deeply embedded in commercial mechanisms. Lee Erickson argues that the rise and decline of literary forms cannot be explained solely in terms of aesthetic developments internal to literature but must instead be examined in relation to publishing technologies and the book market (Erickson, 1996, p. 3). Erickson observes that poetry, once highly favoured by publishers, fell into disfavour during the 1830s, while prose and literary periodicals became the new dominant forms of the market, suggesting the existence of an "economy of literary forms" jointly constituted by reader demand and authorial production (Erickson, 1996, pp. 3-8). As literary production became increasingly marketized, forms capable of sustaining readers' interest and lending themselves to wide circulation or serialization acquired greater economic competitiveness. Writing became increasingly profitable and professionalized over the course of the nineteenth century, and periodicals gradually emerged as the dominant mode of publication. Compared with separately published volumes, periodicals generated more stable and predictable profits, entailed a lower cost for each individual purchase, could be more readily incorporated into readers' everyday lives, and encouraged repeated consumption through regular publication. As the pre-eminent representative of nineteenth-century British serial fiction, Dickens combined the roles of novelist, editor, periodical proprietor, and literary entrepreneur, and possessed an intimate knowledge of both the commercial operation of periodicals and the compositional principles of serialized literature. As he himself remarked, he had become, in the art of serializing fiction, "by dint of necessity and practice, rather cunning" (qtd. in Grubb, 1942, p. 143). In 1860, when Charles Lever's *A Day's Ride* was to appear in the periodical *All Year Around*, Dickens, its editor, wrote to the author: "The only suggestion I have to make (and that arises out of the manner of publication) is, that we ought to get at the action of the story, in the first No. and that I therefore would, by a little condensation there, and a little enlargement of the quantity given in the first week, get at the invitation to dinner, as the end to the first weekly part" (qtd. in Grubb, 1942, pp. 141-142). Gerald Grubb identifies six central dimensions of Dickens's habitual method of serialization: the arrangement of chapter structure, the manner in which characters are introduced, the sustained development of readerly interest, the careful positioning of major scenes, the preparation of plot developments at an early stage, and the rapid pacing of the narrative (Grubb, 1942, p. 143). It is

evident that, for Dickens, each instalment of a serialized novel had to function as an effective narrative unit in order to become a commercially successful unit of sale. Literary production was thus closely aligned with commercial demand: because readers paid regularly to purchase each issue of a periodical, every instalment had to provide a sufficient quantity and intensity of literary content.

3. The Marketization of Literary Form and Content

The commercialization of literary production precipitated transformations in literary form, and eighteenth-century British drama, after evolving from neoclassicism to bourgeois tragedy, ultimately entered a period of relative decline. From the late seventeenth to the early eighteenth century, the generic conventions of French neoclassicism came to constitute an almost universally accepted dramatic authority across Europe. Brander Matthews observes that French neoclassical theory only superficially inherited the ancient Greek tradition and was in fact composed of a set of restrictive and largely negative precepts: a properly regulated tragedy had to consist of five acts, adhere strictly to the three unities, avoid prose, adopt elevated and solemn subject matter, and feature princes, nobles, and other socially exalted figures as its principal characters (Matthews, 1903, p. 2). As theatre revenues became increasingly dependent upon paying audiences, however, theatre managers had to ensure that plays were both intelligible and emotionally compelling to spectators of different social ranks. Accordingly, within a theatrical market grounded in box-office receipts and public consumption, tragedy no longer derived its significance primarily from the noble status of its protagonists but instead established audience identification through middle-class moral sensibilities, domestic relations, and economic life; human worth thus came increasingly to be understood as a form of intrinsic moral value rather than as a function of social rank. Eighteenth-century drama consequently underwent a major transformation from conventions of status and hierarchy to an emphasis on inward moral value, a process that Laura Brown describes as a shift from “heroic action” to “moral action” (Brown, 1981, p. 145). George Lillo’s *The London Merchant* (1731) may be regarded as a paradigmatic example of eighteenth-century drama centred on “moral action.” As Lillo observes, “it is more truly august in proportion to the extent of its influence and the numbers that are properly affected by it...Plays founded on moral tales in private life may be of admirable use by carrying conviction to the mind with such irresistible force” (Lillo, 1965, pp. 3-4). It was precisely on this basis that Lillo departed from neoclassical convention by making a London merchant and his apprentice the protagonists of tragedy, thereby refracting the collective anxieties generated by social unrest during a period of transformation in eighteenth-century economic thought (Tao Jiusheng and Yin Bo, 2025, p. 1). Laura Brown likewise argues that, although eighteenth-century drama adopted a new form of bourgeois morality, it could express that morality only through the flat characters, restricted scope, and inherited conventions of Restoration drama (Brown, 1981, pp. 180-181). The novel, by contrast, was not constrained by so powerful and rigid an established tradition and was therefore able to develop psychological representation and expansive social

narrative with greater freedom; it consequently displaced drama and gradually became the principal literary form for representing bourgeois private experience and everyday life (Brown, 1981, pp. 185-186).

The rise of newspapers and periodicals coincided with the increasing commercialization of the eighteenth-century literary market, and their forms and contents were shaped to a considerable extent by market structures. Subscription publishing constituted an important mode of publication in the early eighteenth century: readers subscribed and paid in advance on the basis of a proposed publication plan, thereby financing the production of a work and subsequently receiving a limited-edition copy (Benedict, 2004, p. 9). As the number of middle-class readers increased, however, “speculative” publishing directed towards a broader readership became increasingly profitable. Booksellers consequently required a form that combined relatively low production costs with the capacity to attract repeated consumption, and periodical publication emerged in response to this demand. Periodical publication initially took the form of newspapers. The British newspaper press expanded continuously throughout the eighteenth century, covering not only political and economic news but also such cultural materials as literary extracts and reviews, and thereby giving rise to the two principal forms of periodical literature: the essay-periodical and the magazine.^① In the early eighteenth century, periodical literature was disparaged by mainstream culture as disposable writing rapidly produced by professional writers for financial gain. Even conventional modern literary histories have failed to take periodical literature seriously: genres are commonly classified according to the internal structure, subject matter, or style of texts, so that the individual essay is often treated as a literary genre, whereas the periodical itself is regarded merely as a form of publication and distribution. Iona Italia (2005), however, argues that the periodical cannot be understood simply as a neutral publishing format, since an article produces entirely different meanings and reading experiences when it appears in a separately published volume, a single-sheet weekly, or a substantial monthly magazine. Italia observes that eighteenth-century essay-periodicals had already developed a recognizable body of literary conventions, most notably the widespread adoption of “fictional personae” (Italia, 2005, p. 13). *The Tatler* (1709 – 1711) and *The Spectator* (1711 – 1712) are exemplary in this respect: the former created the elderly gentleman Isaac Bickerstaff as its editor, while the latter invented the silent yet morally authoritative “Mr Spectator.” These fictional personae enabled authors to criticize social failings without appearing conceited or hypocritical; while enhancing the entertainment value of the periodicals, they also established a narrative centre capable of sustaining readers’ interest and preserving stylistic continuity across

^① The “essay-periodical” was generally published once or several times a week, with each issue centred on a relatively substantial principal essay and sometimes supplemented by a small amount of domestic and foreign news and advertising. It usually consisted of only two folio sheets and was often independently written and edited by a single author, thereby possessing a relatively distinctive and unified narrative voice. The “magazine,” by contrast, was generally published monthly, was considerably longer, and contained highly heterogeneous materials, including reprinted articles, political news, scientific matters, readers’ correspondence, literature, book reviews, and various forms of commercial information (Italia, 2005, p. 3).

successive issues. The widespread imitation of this model by later periodicals (Italia, 2005, p. 15) demonstrates that the essay-periodical had developed a recognizable set of literary conventions and therefore cannot be regarded merely as an external vehicle for the circulation of essays. In this sense, the commercial market not only provided the conditions for the distribution of periodicals but also participated in the creation of the periodical as a genre. Regular publication required periodicals to supply new material continuously, while intense competition compelled each publication to establish a stable style and identity amid a crowded newspaper and periodical market. It was within this commercial environment of continuous production and sale, and of repeated competition for readers, that the periodical gradually acquired its own narrative structure and developed from a mode of publication into a literary genre.

The rise of the novel was shaped by the ascendancy of the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie and the growing influence of individualism, ultimately developing into a modern form of prose fiction centred on the everyday experience of ordinary individuals. Iona Italia argues that the periodical and the novel shared a number of important historical characteristics, “most notably its historical youth, relatively low price, dubious respectability, widespread availability and particular association with female readers” (Italia, 2005, p. 7). The flourishing of newspapers and periodicals in the eighteenth century not only cultivated stable reading habits among the public but also promoted an accessible and lucid prose style suited to a mass readership. The eighteenth-century reading public was no longer confined to aristocrats and clerics with a classical education; merchants, artisans, servants, and women increasingly entered print culture. Prose may therefore be understood as a “middle style” situated between forms of expression dependent upon classical learning and the language of the street, and thus particularly well adapted to the needs of the broad middle ranks. As middle-class readers increasingly desired stories about characters whose circumstances resembled their own and who inhabited the same social world, the novel emerged in response. Ian Watt defines the distinguishing feature of this new prose form as “formal realism” and unites both the social conditions and the epistemological foundations of its emergence under the principle of “individualism.” Watt defines formal realism as the novel’s presentation of itself as a full and authentic account of individual experience: it must provide readers with the particular identities of its agents, together with the specific times and places in which events occur, and these details must be conveyed through a prose language centred on reference to reality (Watt, 1979, pp. 34-35). Why, however, should the experiences and private choices of ordinary individuals merit such almost epic particularity? Watt’s answer lies in the rise of individualism, encompassing not only economic individualism but also a Protestant individualism that emphasized personal salvation (Watt, 1979, pp. 66-67). The prosperity of the market economy brought an increasingly specialized division of labour, accompanied by a loosening hierarchical structure and a relatively open political environment. Individuals were thereby detached from traditional communities and became the basic units responsible for determining their own economic, social, political, and religious roles. Defoe is

widely celebrated as the “father of the English novel,” and *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) not only exemplifies the narrative method of formal realism but also gives concentrated expression to the rise of individualist thought. Defoe’s own formulation perhaps reveals still more clearly the influence of the marketization of literary production upon the emergence of the novel. Writing, he declared, “is become a very considerable Branch of the English Commerce. The Booksellers are the Master Manufacturers or Employers. The several Writers, Authors, Copyers, Subwriters, and all other Operators with Pen and Ink are the workmen employed by the said Master Manufacturers” (qtd. in Watt, 1979, p. 59).

The eighteenth-century British Financial Revolution not only brought about profound changes in the representation of value but also became intertwined with the legitimacy of novelistic fiction and the psychology of readerly reception, since both financial investment and novel reading depended upon a form of imaginative trust. Following the establishment of the Bank of England in 1694, a financial system centred on public debt and company shares expanded rapidly, drawing increasing numbers of investors into the market and generating a sustained speculative boom in London’s financial world. The development of the credit economy produced epistemological anxieties, as wealth became increasingly detached from land, gold and silver, and tangible property, and instead assumed the form of paper value embodied in bonds and shares and sustained by expectation and trust. The South Sea Bubble of 1720 exposed the fragility of this credit economy, bringing questions of reality and fiction, trust and suspicion, to the forefront. Catherine Ingrassia argues that financial investment and novel reading are closely analogous imaginative activities: the value of a financial instrument lies not at the moment of purchase but in a future yet to arrive, while readers of novels must likewise suspend disbelief, initially extending trust to the narrative before investing their emotions and desires in the act of reading (Ingrassia, 1998, pp. 2, 6-7). Similarly, Sandra Sherman contends that the novel and finance are structurally homologous and may be understood as a cross-generic “discursive continuum” (Sherman, 1996, p. 4), together constituting a historical discourse concerned with fictionality, credibility, authenticity, and responsibility. In this sense, both the investor’s anticipation of future value and the reader’s acceptance of fictional narrative depend upon a mechanism of credit through which judgement is made before sufficient evidence is available. The credit economy fostered a new semiotic consciousness, gradually accustoming people to the distance between signifier and signified. Novel reading demanded a comparable mode of thought: readers knew that the story did not consist of direct facts from actual life, yet remained willing to acknowledge that it possessed a certain truth and significance. “Fiction” thereby gradually acquired a legitimate status distinct from falsehood: although it was not fact, it could nonetheless function as an effective representation of reality. Within this epistemological transformation, the novel’s formal realism acquired a broader basis of acceptance, while fiction was progressively established as a relatively stable generic category. Mary Poovey further argues that one of the most important functions of imaginative writing, including poetry and fiction, was to “mediate value”: “help people understand the new credit economy and the market model of value

that it promoted” (Poovey, 2008, pp. 1-2). When the credit economy rendered “value” abstract and unstable, imaginative writing translated this new form of value, through character, plot, and narrative, into social experience that readers could apprehend and evaluate. It may therefore be concluded that imaginative forms such as the novel not only emerged from a society organized around credit but also shaped the ways in which people understood and judged credit.

A substantial number of eighteenth-century British writers had commercial backgrounds, and their literary works inevitably incorporated commercial elements and economic commentary. With the marketization of literary production and the emergence of professional authors, many writers were able to sustain themselves through the book market. Beyond entering market exchange through writing, numerous eighteenth-century authors had themselves engaged in commerce. Richard Steele exemplifies the merchant-author: *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, which he helped to establish, were themselves successful cultural commodities, and he was also appointed to participate in the management of the highly profitable Drury Lane Theatre (Aitken, 1968, pp. 47-48). Significantly, Steele actively pursued commercial speculation. He once applied for a patent for a vessel designed to transport live fish, which kept them fresh during long-distance journeys through the continuous circulation of air and water (Aitken, 1968, pp. 157-158). It may have been Steele’s commercial experience that prompted him to create Sir Andrew Freeport, the merchant member of the “Spectator Club,” as a morally upright, exceptionally intelligent, and patriotic modern businessman. Through Sir Andrew Freeport, Steele and Addison articulated the economic views of the emerging commercial class: wealth should derive from industry and productive activity rather than idleness; commodity prices should be reduced through the division of labour rather than through the suppression of wages; and a nation’s true strength lay not in military conquest but in the industriousness of its people and the free circulation of trade (Gras, 1945, p. 159). The literary figure of Freeport marked the beginning of a more positive, rational, and sympathetic representation of merchants in British literature, a shift inseparable from both the marketization of literary production and writers’ own experience of trade. Daniel Defoe is perhaps the most representative example of a figure who combined the roles of merchant and man of letters. He began his commercial career in the wholesale hosiery trade and the importation of wine and later ventured into overseas shipping, property development, and brick-and-tile manufacture (Novak, 2003, pp. 76, 94, 139). The critic Maximillian E. Novak observes: “As a businessman, he was essentially a gambler, excited by new deals, new prospects” (Novak, 2003, p. 83). Defoe was adept at identifying new consumer demands and commercial opportunities, yet he frequently relied on borrowing and credit to expand several ventures simultaneously; as a result, he repeatedly fell heavily into debt, declared bankruptcy, and was even confined in a debtors’ prison. The influence of Defoe’s commercial experience upon his fiction extended beyond the appropriation of subject matter, shaping at a deeper level the ways in which he organized plots and constructed verisimilitude. In *Robinson Crusoe*, *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* (1724), *Moll Flanders* (1722), and several other novels, economic activity becomes a central mechanism driving narrative development: characters continually calculate their property, accumulate capital, exchange commodities, seek markets, and transform their social positions through labour, marriage, crime, and colonial enterprise.

The marketization of literary production prompted literary texts to intervene more directly in debates over economic questions and thereby contributed to the formation of the free-market discourse of classical political economy. The rapid development of the eighteenth-century market economy not only created a flourishing book market but also radically transformed the economic environment itself, as economic thought shifted from traditional mercantilism towards free-market principles. With the expansion of transoceanic trade and the continuing advance of colonial expansion, exotic commodities such as tea, porcelain, sugar, and tobacco poured into Britain in vast quantities, rapidly arousing enthusiasm for consumption across different social classes. As Neil McKendrick observes, “There was a consumer revolution in eighteenth-century England. More men and women than ever before in human history enjoyed the experience of acquiring material possessions” (McKendrick, 1985, p. 1). The vogue for luxury consumption alarmed both advocates of the moral economy and mercantilists: the former regarded it as injurious to religious virtue, while the latter viewed imported luxuries as a drain on the wealth of the kingdom. Bernard Mandeville responded to contemporary anxieties about consumption in his poem *The Grumbling Hive* (1705), which depicts a hive pervaded by deception, luxury, and private desire, yet prosperous and powerful precisely because of these vices; when the bees suddenly become honest and frugal, economic activity instead declines. Mandeville subsequently added commentary and several prose essays to elaborate his economic thought, and when the work was expanded and published as *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), it rapidly provoked widespread controversy. The work’s most distinctive feature is that its economic ideas initially appeared not in the form of a systematic economic treatise but as an animal fable and a rhymed poem. By condensing social and economic theory into accessible and memorable verse, Mandeville endowed these propositions with an apparently self-evident and axiomatic quality. His arguments generated intense public debate, eliciting responses from writers such as Pope, Johnson, and Fielding, as well as thinkers including Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Voltaire (Clery, 2022, p. 55). Adam Smith, a foundational figure in classical economics, condemned Mandeville’s thought in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) as representative of “licentious Systems” (Smith, 1984, p. 306). In the later *The Wealth of the Nation* (1776), however, Smith accepted a similar principle in a more moderate form: social order and the public good may arise not from individuals’ moral intentions but unintentionally from self-interested actions. Literature, then, did not merely represent market society but participated directly in the conceptualization and legitimation of modern market logic. Free-market discourse did not emerge entirely within an autonomous discipline of political economy; rather, it gradually took shape through the interaction and contestation of fable, satire, periodical writing, and economic argument. As Tao Jiusheng observes, one of the central tasks of research into the history of economic thought in British literature is to examine how, once economic discourse entered literature, writers employed economic narratives to represent and respond to the economic ideas of particular historical periods (Tao Jiusheng, 2024, pp. 60-61).

The concept of the literary canon took shape in the eighteenth century, and it was the interaction between booksellers' publishing activities and the literary market that forged the British literary canon. Although notions of a literary canon had already existed in early modern England, such judgements generally remained "private conceptions," embodied in the personal records of men of letters or the private collections of aristocrats (Bonnell, 1990, p. 55). When patronage remained dominant, defences of poetry rarely attended to the reading experience of an external public, and literary value was assessed primarily within the community formed by writers and their aristocratic patrons. By the eighteenth century, however, the expansion of the print market and the professionalization of authorship had stimulated the rapid development of such mediating activities as literary criticism, compilation, and literary history, gradually shifting the centre of literary evaluation towards reader reception. Texts from the past began to be systematically edited, reprinted, and reviewed before being introduced to successive generations of readers, and canonization consequently became an act of cultural reproduction conducted within an extensive book market. Booksellers functioned as the largely invisible selectors in the process of literary canonization. In addition to publishing, printing, and retailing books, they undertook advertising, commissioned new work, and organized editorial projects, thereby determining which works merited investment and would ultimately be presented to the market. Booksellers' selection and market response shaped one another. The 1774 decision in *Donaldson v. Becket* released the copyright of traditional literary works, prompting numerous booksellers to organize large-scale programmes for reprinting British literature. Thomas Bonnell argues that *The Poets of Great Britain* (1776-82) and *The Works of the English Poets* (1779-81) "Defined for the first time in uniform print were the poets, the works -in effect, canons of English poetry, worthy of honor, study, and preservation" (Bonnell, 1990, pp. 53-54). Bonnell draws particular attention to the claims of comprehensiveness used to promote these two collections: the former announced itself as containing "all the British Poets from the time of Chaucer to Churchill," while the latter claimed to include "all the English Poets of reputation, from Chaucer to the present time" (Bonnell, 1990, p. 58). An edition that genuinely included every poet was clearly neither practically nor commercially feasible; once publishers declared a series "complete," however, they effectively demarcated the boundaries of English poetry and constituted the included writers as the normative tradition. Moreover, the material and visual forms of the collections themselves operated as mechanisms for producing canonical value. Through a uniform appearance and arrangement, works previously dispersed across different periods and genres were organized into an apparently continuous and coherent literary tradition. Even before reading the individual texts, readers received a judgement from the books' physical appearance: these authors belonged to the same cultural rank, and their works collectively formed a unified body worthy of preservation. The book market, therefore, was not merely a site for the exchange of economic

interests but also a space in which cultural value was produced. In pursuing commercial profit, booksellers used the publication of literary collections to transform market selection gradually into a literary tradition endowed with aesthetic authority.

The expansion of eighteenth-century British commerce gradually freed book production and sales from court, Church, and aristocratic control, making them increasingly dependent on broader social demand. Population growth, urban development, and rising literacy rates enabled and encouraged growing numbers of people to purchase books. At the same time, improvements in printing technology, the expansion of book-distribution networks, and the increasing vitality of the second-hand book trade substantially enlarged both the speed and geographical range of book circulation. Books consequently ceased to be cultural resources controlled by a small minority and became commodities offered for sale to the public. Within this context, the relationships among authors, works, booksellers, and readers underwent significant transformation. Authors were first established in law as the proprietors of their works and subsequently became professional producers who sold their writing in the marketplace. Once literature was incorporated into a continuous system of commodity production and consumption, the market not only altered authors' identities and modes of subsistence but also began to intervene in the construction of literary form, literary content, and hierarchies of literary value. Natalie Roxburgh and Anna Auguscik propose the concept of the "Literary Marketplace," arguing that the eighteenth-century literary market was not merely a market for commodity exchange but also a market of value judgements (Roxburgh and Auguscik, 2016, p. 41). Its various participants pursued distinct economic interests while also holding divergent conceptions of literary value. For booksellers, the value of a work was manifested primarily in its price, profitability, and sales prospects; for authors, although economic income was indispensable, social reputation was equally important (Roxburgh and Auguscik, 2016, p. 41). Throughout the eighteenth century, writing for financial gain was still frequently regarded as compromising literary dignity. Pejorative labels such as "Grub Street" and "hack writer" reflected contemporary contempt for professional authors. A fundamental contradiction within modern conceptions of literary value thus gradually emerged: authors were materially dependent upon the market, yet also needed to demonstrate that their creative genius was not governed by it. By the nineteenth century, literature and economics, two domains that had previously been closely intertwined, began to be differentiated, while Romantic ideology constructed aesthetic value and monetary value as two mutually opposed forms of value (Osteen and Woodmansee, 1999, p. 4). Although literature has never in practice been able to detach itself from the publishing market and commercial mechanisms, this ideal of literary autonomy has persisted to the present and has profoundly shaped modern understandings of the relationship between literature and economics.

Fund program: This study is sponsored by Major Project of National Social Science Fund of China “Economic Thoughts in English Literature” [22&ZD289] and Key Project of National Social Science Fund of China “Trade Empire Construction in English Literature of the Age of Great Discovery” [21AWW008].

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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