INTRODUCTION

The literary coterie in the eighteenth-century media landscape

> Different versions and styles of media history do make a difference . . .
> Should we be looking for a sequence of separate "ages" with ruptures,
> revolutions, or paradigm shifts in between, or should we be seeing
> more of an evolution? A progress? Different answers to questions like
> these suggest different intellectual projects, and they have practical
> ramifications for the ways that media history gets researched and
> written.   (Gitelman, 2006)[1]

This book began with an intent to study networking and innovation
within the world of London print professionals of the mid-eighteenth
century. In the decades of the 1740s and 1750s, the world of letters
functioned through a complex interweaving of traditional patronage and
the commercial print trade, nurtured by the geographical and social over-
lap of London's public and private worlds of politics, business, and friend-
ship. Within this larger system, professional authors, printers, and
booksellers from about 1750 increasingly took on roles as patrons (or
patronage brokers) themselves. This mutuality is neatly articulated by
Samuel Johnson's famous statement that he "supported" the performance
of bookseller Robert Dodsley's tragedy *Cleone* "as well as I might; for
Doddy is my patron, you know, and I would not desert him." Even
industry outsiders like the salon hostess and author Elizabeth Montagu
could observe that in furthering the career of her protégé James Beattie,
"our little Dilly" (bookseller Edward Dilly) "has a Soul as great as ye hugest
& tallest of Booksellers" – and greater than those of the ministers and
bishops who had to date been ineffective in gaining Beattie a royal
pension.[2] Beattie was to obtain that pension soon after, but for aspiring
writers such as Charlotte Lennox, it was as important to win the support of
the printer and novelist Samuel Richardson in order to convince Andrew
Millar to publish her breakthrough novel *The Female Quixote* as it was to
gain the protection of the powerful Duke and Duchess of Newcastle.
Media innovations like the general-interest magazine, the epistolary

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novel written "to the moment," the anthology as modern classic, and the niche market children's book, developed by Edward Cave, Richardson, Dodsley, and John Newbery, respectively, were rewarded not only with prosperity but also with social recognition.[3]

Yet as I examined the correspondences of figures such as Richardson and Dodsley, I was struck by the fact that for these successful professionals, one of their principal investments of time and social capital, and seemingly one of their sources of greatest pride, was in their active membership in a *literary coterie* – that is, a select group of individuals linked by ties of friendship founded upon, or deepened by, mutual encouragement to original composition; the production and exchange of manuscript materials to celebrate the group and further its members' interests; and the criticism of one another's work and of shared reading materials. Somehow, the horizon of literary aspiration for these individuals was different from what I had expected of a system structured entirely according to the norms and values of the medium of print – perhaps, like several of the coterie members discussed in this study, I too had my presuppositions about the narrowly commercial focus of a denizen of the trade. At any rate, the more I looked, the more I saw significant areas of literary production organized as much around scribal coteries as around the printing press. It became clear that one critic's pronouncement about eighteenth-century British literary culture – "Gone was the intimacy which manuscript seemed to offer. Gone too was the authenticity which manuscript seemed to guarantee" – was an overstatement.[4] Scribal culture, with its appeals of intimacy and authenticity, was not in fact gone; a more accurate description, from the perspective of the mid-eighteenth-century person of letters, would have been that this was a culture in which the media of script and print, with their distinctive practices and priorities, were nevertheless in close conversation, sometimes interdependent, sometimes mutually antagonistic, but between them offering a rich array of options for literary expression, exchange, and preservation. To echo Lisa Gitelman's terms from the epigraph above, as the media history I was conceptualizing changed, so did my intellectual project, and this in turn had practical ramifications for the book I was researching and writing. My original plan, then, was reconceived as an attempt to immerse myself in a foreign, hybrid media environment – one just familiar enough, at the start of print's overwhelming dominance of forms of large-scale communication, to be deceptively transparent at first glance, and yet just alien enough to pose puzzles and offer up local variations – in many ways, the

kind of environment with which we have again become acquainted as inhabitants of a swiftly reorganizing media landscape of our own.

Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture, 1740–1790 offers the first broad examination of the workings of manuscript-exchanging coteries as an integral and influential element of literary culture in eighteenth-century Britain.[5] Such a study is needed to reorient literary history of the mid- to late eighteenth century from a narrow focus on the history of print productions to a more inclusive and accurate history of writing in this era of print trade consolidation and expansion. My book's primary aim is to demonstrate the pervasiveness of social networks actively composing and exchanging letters, poetry, and literary prose pieces; the functions of key individuals as nodes and as bridges within these networks; and the esthetic and social work performed by their production, exchange, and dissemination of materials. While a coterie's first allegiance is internal, the eighteenth-century coterie undeniably existed in conjunction with print, and thus the second overarching goal of this book is to explore points of intersection between coteries and the print trade to demonstrate how scribal modes of literary production shaped the marketing and conventions of print in ways that were not simply nostalgic but in fact associated with modernity. These intermediation points include individuals who served as bridges between these cultures; publishing events in which the two cultures collaborated or came into conflict; and forms (both genres and conventions of presentation) adapted from manuscript practice to serve the ends of the print medium.

Literary histories and a theory of media succession

In recent decades, influential studies of the history of print and its culture in Britain and the Atlantic world have rightly fine-tuned our account of the centuries-long process whereby this technology penetrated the habits of thought, the understanding and management of knowledge, and even the structures of social life to the point of becoming the dominant medium of communication. For historians of the book and book culture such as Adrian Johns and David McKitterick, this point of print's saturation of British society, if not of all corners of its nascent empire, was the mid- to late eighteenth century. In separate arguments, Johns and McKitterick assert that this moment could not occur until the productions of the press took on the perceived qualities of trustworthiness, permanence, and stability – and therefore, authority – in place of the untrustworthiness and ephemerality associated with print in previous centuries.[6] Johns and

McKitterick agree further in pointing to the self-consciousness of print as an industry – as evidenced by the appearance of a self-reflexive, trade-oriented discourse of the history of printing which was absorbed in the latter decades of the century into progressivist histories of Europe and England – as the mark of a medium come of age. Alvin Kernan's 1987 study of *Printing Technology, Letters, and Samuel Johnson* traced in detail the influence of these changes in the significance and perception of the trade on the emergence of modern models of authorship and reading. While footnoting the "continuing vitality of manuscript culture in the period," Michael Suarez summarizes "the main story" of the book in eighteenth-century Britain as "the efflorescence of a comprehensive 'print culture' . . . a phenomenon that had profound effects on 'the forging of the nation' – on politics and commerce, on literature and cultural identity, on education and the dissemination of knowledge, and on the conduct of everyday life."[7]

Nor have leading historians of scribal culture quarreled, in the main, with these generalizations. Arthur Marotti, Peter Beal, Harold Love, and Margaret Ezell have argued powerfully for the central significance of manuscript systems to the social and literary culture of the Renaissance and the seventeenth century, despite earlier generalizations about cultural shifts dating from the arrival of the printing press. Observing that "by denying the significance of script authorship, manuscript circles, and social texts, we have in the name of democracy [associated with print] apparently disenfranchised the participation of the majority of the literate population of the period," Ezell insists that an "older notion of the text as a dynamic and collaborative process . . . coexisted [with a proprietary view of author-ship based in print technology] well into the mid-eighteenth century."[8] As Ezell's conclusion suggests, however, one implication of these studies is that print has overwhelmingly "arrived" by the middle decades of the eighteenth century, with the ultimate shift in allegiance of the literary author from script to print represented by the high-profile career of Alexander Pope. Love sees manuscript circulation as increasingly devalued from the reign of George I onward, and as "aberrant" from at least 1800, because of an increasing association of print publication with a required standard of quality; "What was kept in manuscript was increasingly what lacked the quality required for print publication." Beal admits that "people continued to keep commonplace books of various kinds throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," but generalizes that they tend to be less interesting to scholars today than those of an earlier period, "perhaps . . . because they belong less to a flourishing manuscript culture and because most of what they contain is trivial and ephemeral material

copied largely from contemporary printed sources."[9] Along these lines, accounts of the scribal practices of individual authors such as Frances Burney in the latter decades of the century have implied both that these authors were exceptional in the extent and significance of their manuscript production and that this production was subordinate and preliminary to their production of material for the stage or press. Thus, where it is acknowledged that manuscript production and circulation persisted in its own right in this period, and not merely as a preliminary step toward print publication, the tendency has been to treat such practices as anachronistic, aberrant, or simply not worth attending to.[10]

A few media historians, however, have challenged these attempts to identify a definitive moment of succession, tracing rather the changing meanings of manuscript in coexistence with print. In a provocative essay entitled "In Praise of Manuscripts," Nicholas Barker has argued that manuscript culture itself did not exist until it became an alternative to participation in print exchange during the sixteenth century; it then took shape as "a new kind of communication, linking writers with readers through a system of diffusion, that all its participants cultivated to serve complex and sometimes conflicting ends." McKitterick's study of *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450–1830* dedicates its first chapter to correcting the misunderstandings that have resulted from an artificial separation, in histories of print technology, between script and print. In this spirit, Donald Reiman earlier devoted an entire study to what he designates "modern manuscripts" – those originating in the period of print dominance, between the advent of print in the late fifteenth century and the shift to electronic modes of text transmission in the later twentieth century. Reiman classifies such manuscripts as private, confidential, or public, according to the intention of their author that the audience be restricted to a specific person or persons, to a group sharing values with the author, or to a multiple and unknown audience, respectively.[11]

Scholars have been furthering our understanding of scribal activity in the eighteenth century through the examination of particular cases. Ezell discusses Pope's early career as an example of a media ecology wherein manuscript and print cultures "existed simultaneously (and . . . competitively and companionably)." Kathryn King's analysis of Elizabeth Singer Rowe's "tactical" deployment of the two media systems suggests a historical moment wherein more than one medium might present itself as a viable and effective means of communication, a claim she has elaborated in a 2010 overview of "Scribal and Print Publication" for women writers of the early eighteenth century. Sarah Prescott has similarly argued

that women's literary history up to 1740, at least, should be understood as adhering to a "pluralist" model of complementary manuscript and print cultures. The mixed-gender 1720s urban coterie of Aaron Hill features centrally in Prescott's discussion; its social dynamics and poetic production as discussed by Christine Gerrard in her biography of Hill strongly support the designation of this group as a literary coterie. Similarly, Stephen Karian's book-length study of *Jonathan Swift in Print and Manuscript* not only details Swift's increasing and various use of the manuscript medium as a means of preserving and circulating his work but also presents this author's practice as symptomatic of a state of media "interactivity and fluidity," in which "authors, readers, and the texts themselves modulate and adapt to the differing media." The Reiman study referred to above links the latter half of the eighteenth century with the Romantic era's increasing fetishization of the autograph as a manifestation of the growing "cult of the personal" – what others have described as the growing "aura" of the manuscript in the age of print. In her examination of John Trusler's 1769 production of mechanically reproduced "handwritten" sermons for Anglican clergymen, for example, Christina Lupton demonstrates how the aura of sincerity and guaranteed meaning could be exploited by a remediation of print as script in a phenomenon unique to this historical moment.[12]

Indeed, script has never disappeared from the picture, despite current alarms about the lost art of handwriting. But the challenge is to historically nuance its cultural contribution, rather than simply to carry forward – or backward – an array of meanings from another era. My discussion of manuscript travel writing in Chapter 6 of this study will illustrate how the "repurposing" of scribal practices and forms, in this case as marking the authority of the gentleman and the poetic genius, carries them forward through the final decades of the century. Primarily, however, this book aims to put the spotlight on an element of eighteenth-century literary culture whose prestige, appeal, and practical function were related to its operation in a medium to which little attention has been paid by literary historians. If it is to contemporary coteries that much of eighteenth-century literary print culture looked for its values, its formal models, and its source material, then an awareness of these groups and the mechanisms of their influence is necessary to an understanding of the history of print publication. Moreover, the close interdependence of several key coteries and the London print trade in the middle decades of the century, in part due to the attitudes and relationships of figures such as Thomas Birch,

Samuel Richardson, and Robert Dodsley, creates a unique intermedial moment that is worthy of closer attention.

Such historical reconsiderations corroborate recent theoretical critiques of a simplistic succession model of media history. Logically speaking, it is problematic to extrapolate from the reality of print's expansion the conclusion that scribal production was a thing of the past. Theorists of media historiography, especially of so-called media shifts, have noted that no medium is pure or static but is rather, in the words of David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins, "touched by and in turn touches its neighbors and rivals"; "to comprehend the aesthetics of transition, we must resist notions of media purity." Thorburn and Jenkins posit several modes of interaction: that "established and infant systems may co-exist for an extended period," "older media may develop new functions and find new audiences," "competing media may strengthen or reinforce one another," or "significant hybrid or collaborative forms . . . [may] emerge." In his turn, Charles Acland has lamented the "paucity of research [that] has concentrated on the tenacity of existing technologies or on their related materials and practices that do not magically vanish with the appearance of each successive technology." These scholars are responding to Raymond Williams' foundational definition of the "residual" as that which "has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present."[13] It is as just such a residual medium, formed in the past but functioning as an effective element of the cultural process in the present, that this study considers the medium of the handwritten manuscript. This is not to deny the well-established fact of the ever-expanding demographic, geographical, and conceptual reach of print. Rather, I examine the particular equilibrium in existence between manuscript and print systems in the middle and later decades of the eighteenth century. In fact, I will suggest that even over these few decades, it is a question of multiple and shifting equilibria, as scribally oriented coteries adapt their practice to the increasing availability of print, and as the print trade devises new ways to interact with, and exploit, the possibilities of manuscript production. It is precisely this unique set of circumstances which makes manuscript activity of the eighteenth century, not trivial and uninteresting, *pace* Beal, but rather, an object demanding critical attention.

The eighteenth-century literary coterie

The extent of active practices of manuscript production and circulation in eighteenth-century Britain has been obscured in part because of our

reliance as literary historians on the print record. However, one need only consider the "hypermediacy" exhibited by so many influential mid-century print publications, offering themselves as a letter to a patron, or a collection of epistles between friends, or a manuscript found "in an old buroe," for an indication that the norms of sociable manuscript exchange continued to wield some kind of influence not only over its most dedicated adherents but also over the wider reading public.[14] In a sense, the evidence is hiding in plain sight, and we may begin simply by considering such apparently awkward and transparently false devices, not as symptoms of nostalgia or a naive understanding of fictional truth, but rather as gestures toward familiar and authoritative modes of exchange. Moyra Haslett's 2003 *Pope to Burney, 1714–1779: Scriblerians to Bluestockings* has provided a detailed examination of the wide array of generic forms common to eighteenth-century print, particularly the epistolary novel, the verse epistle, the dialog, and the periodical, which invoke the media of conversation and script. Haslett's useful study, however, illustrates the limitations of an exclusively print-oriented approach to the evidence of manuscript exchange in the period. As noted at the start of my introduction, while recognizing the characteristic sociability of eighteenth-century print-based authors and their productions, she associates this sociability with an attempt to recuperate a literary culture that was irrevocably "gone." As a result the social circles she selects for discussion – primarily the Scriblerians and the Bluestockings of her subtitle – are examined in terms of the materials they generated for print, and the book's focus is on the forms of sociability enacted in printed works and encouraged in their readers: forms of sociability that are imagined or virtual in some way.[15] Believing that "different versions and styles of media history do make a difference," my study sets out to examine persistent coterie activity in the period, not simply as a source of copy for the printing press – although it certainly was that – or as a compensatory measure, but as a living phenomenon in its own right, evolving and adapting not only to new pressures such as the increasing association of print publication with fame but also to new opportunities like the massive expansion and improvement of postal service in the period.

Thus, I aim in this study to illuminate the workings of coteries in a period in which media networks were increasingly complex, far-flung, and commercialized. I will do so by examining several key groups that were highly visible to their contemporaries and that touched many lives through the models of cultivation and the possibility of participation in up-to-the-minute literary culture that they offered. One irony of the general lack of attention paid to this eighteenth-century phenomenon is the fact that this

is the period in which the term "coterie" enters the English lexicon. Bearing with it from France the negative association of an organized cabal, the label "cotterie" is first offered in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a 1760s synonym for "club." Catherine Talbot and Elizabeth Montagu are thus right on time and on tone when the former teases Montagu in 1761 about her and Carter being subservient members of the aging, card-playing "Lady Ab:s [Abercorn's] Tunbridge Cotterie" and the latter writes in mock anger in 1771 from the same fashionable watering-hole to her close friend George, Lord Lyttelton, "PS We are all in a violent rage that your Lordship calls our Sober Society by ye name, the horrid name of *Coterie*." Yet just a year later in each case, these women invoke the notion more positively, Talbot reporting that she "battled stoutly for the *coterie of Beaux esprits*" (presumably the Montagu circle) against an individual who thought him- or herself too "critically wise" for the group, and Montagu writing about a visiting French marquis who writes elegant verses that "I wish he may spend this winter in London he will certainly be an agreable addition to our Cotterie."[16]

Where the term "coterie" is invoked in scholarly discussions of the period's literary production and authorship, it is employed in effect as a loose synonym for "circle" or "network." The most regular invocation I have found is in Haslett's study of literary sociability; although not explicitly defined, coteries in her most specific usage appear to be more or less equivalent to "clubs," "cabals," or "special interest groups," as in the dictionary examples just noted, and at their broadest, represent just one phenomenon of the period's characteristic "public sphere conversations," parallel to print trade congers, anthologies, and circulating library user groups.[17] While Haslett's discussion thus identifies an important and widespread print phenomenon of the time, one that is a starting point of my investigation, I define a literary coterie more precisely as a physically realized entity, a relatively cohesive social group whose membership may undergo shifts over time, but which is held together as a continuous identifiable whole by some combination of kinship, friendship, clientage, and at least occasional geographical proximity. Most importantly, a literary coterie's cohesiveness is based on, and is maintained to a significant degree by, strong shared literary interests, expressed in the scribal exchange of original compositions, reading materials, and critical views.[18] The specificity of this definition must be underscored. A couple of the individuals central to my study – Samuel Richardson and Elizabeth Montagu – are well known to have been surrounded by extensive networks of readers and fellow-authors,

in Richardson's case, and by cultural leaders, including the most prominent intellectual women of the day, in the case of Montagu's "Bluestocking" assemblies. The coteries I am looking at are more restricted clusters within these large networks; while their boundaries cannot be defined absolutely, there is an intensity and reciprocity of their scribal literary relationships that makes them stand apart from the looser arrangements in which their members are involved. Although I will draw on terms such as "circle," "group," or "network" as stylistic variations of this key term, then, the social formation with which this book is consistently concerned is the literary coterie.

The four coteries whose character and influence are featured in this book, while certainly not the only ones active during this period in Britain (provincial and Scottish literary circles, for example, have begun to invite similar examination[19]), have been selected because of their high visibility in their time and their interconnections with each other, whether synchronous or sequential. These groups are the Yorke–Grey coterie of the 1740s and 1750s, the Highmore–Edwards–Mulso coterie centered around Samuel Richardson in the early 1750s, the coterie surrounding Elizabeth Montagu and George, Lord Lyttelton from about 1758 to 1773, and that formed by William Shenstone of the Leasowes, near Birmingham (at times referred to as the Warwickshire coterie), in the 1740s and 1750s. While each existed for its own purposes and exhibited its own distinctive character, all were engaged in some way with the London-based print trade. This engagement continued beyond the most active life of the coterie into ensuing decades, in some cases characterized by hostility, but most often by cooperation. Either way, these groups influenced what emerged in the eighteenth century as literary culture – writing, reading, and critical discussion of works of imagination. While some of their members have retained a place in literary histories of the time, others virtually disappeared as the groups they were part of faded from view. Chapter 7 of the book explores obscurity even further: it is devoted to a handful of unknown coteries that have left their traces in personal manuscript miscellanies without being fully identifiable either as a collective or in terms of their individual members. A number of figures who played key cross-coterie roles in relation to the four groups featured appear and reappear at multiple points in this study; these are Catherine Talbot, Thomas Edwards, Hester Mulso Chapone, Elizabeth Carter, and George Lyttelton. Another, Samuel Johnson, functions as a kind of counter-coterie force in a number of key instances.