CHAPTER I

Introduction

My goal in this study of literary patronage is to shed new light on literary texts and to understand how those texts functioned within the literary, political, and economic culture in which they were written. Underlying my argument is the assumption that to consider literary texts and writers apart from the complex system of sponsorship, financing, production, and distribution, is arbitrarily and myopically to abstract literature from its living cultural context, and to misconceive its full *meaning* for its original audiences.

Literary patronage has long been a familiar – if neglected – topic in the literary history of early modern England, though it has not been systematically examined since the two books published by A. S. Collins in 1929, *Authorship in the Days of Johnson*, and *The Profession of Letters*,[1] or even since the older book (which had served as Collins' guide), Alexandre Beljame's *Men of Letters and the English Public in the Eighteenth Century*, first published in 1881.[2] But in my view, neither Collins nor Beljame, despite their knowledge of the period, took sufficient account of the historical context, and neither was sufficiently alert to the nuances in the voices of writers they celebrated. Indeed, their very celebration of their literary heroes as independent "men of letters" limited their ability to understand the system they were describing. For to both Collins and Beljame, and indeed to most writers on the subject, the patronage system was by definition oppressive and demeaning. For them the only *proper* relationship between a writer and society is proud independence. Their moral –

[1] The first and better known book is subtitled *A Study of the Relation between Author, Patron, Publisher and Public, 1726–1780*. The second is offered as a continuation of "the history of the profession of letters" up to 1832.

[2] First published as *Le Public et les Hommes de Lettres en Angleterre au 18e Siècle* (but not widely read in England until it appeared in an English translation by E. O. Lorimer in 1948). Beljame's story, as Collins pointed out (making room for his own work), ends "about 1726." It is subtitled *1660–1744, Dryden, Addison, Pope*.

and implicitly political – stance blinded them, so I argue, to the ways in which the system of literary patronage in fact functioned.

Collins and Beljame inherited their disapprobation of the patronage system from even earlier writers. Boswell and other early commentators on Johnson commonly took note of his manly independence from servility – Johnson's famous letter to Chesterfield was celebrated even in his own day[3] – and Johnson himself deplored the obsequiousness of Dryden's dedications. Isaac D'Israeli's many volumes of literary anecdotes and "curiosities," published from about 1790 to 1840, maintained the bias: he typically treated dedicators and patrons under the general rubric of "the calamities of authors." The nineteenth century retained some critical interest in the dedication as a literary genre: Johnson's many dedications (written on behalf of other authors) were gathered and presented as a separate group in volume III of the 1810 edition of his *Works*. In the wake of Beljame's book Henry Wheatley published *The Dedication of Books to Patrons and Friends* (1887). An antiquarian with very little critical sense except for a strong animus against literary "prostitution," Wheatley predictably deplored Dryden's dedications as fulsome, florid, and extravagant, and approved Johnson's as "the perfection of courtly compliment without adulation" (p. 176).[4]

More recent studies of the financial conditions under which literature was produced in the eighteenth century, whether they focus on the rise of the "professional" writer (as James Saunders does in his 1964 book on *The Profession of English Letters*), on the aristocratic patrons of the eighteenth century (as does Michael Foss in *The Age of Patronage: The Arts in England, 1660–1750* in 1972), or on the booksellers, the copyright debate, or the "commercialization of leisure,"[5] all

[3] Although not published until Boswell printed what he called a "perfect transcript" in the 1791 *Life of Johnson*.

[4] For another compiler's anthology, see *Dedications: An Anthology*, by Mary Elizabeth Brown. Brown includes a bibliography of primarily nineteenth-century discussions of the dedication as a form (pp. 449–51). For a recent survey of eighteenth-century dedications, see Pat Rogers, "Book Dedications in Britain 1700–1799," 213–33.

[5] On copyright and the book trade, see especially John Feather, "The Book Trade in Politics," 19–44; "The English Book Trade and the Law, 1695–1799," 51–75; and "The Commerce of Letters," 405–24; Terry Belanger, "From Bookseller to Publisher," 7–16; and "Publishers and Writers in Eighteenth-Century England," 5–25; and Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners*.

On the "commercialization of leisure," see J. H. Plumb, "The Commercialization of Leisure in Eighteenth-Century England," 265–85; Deborah Rogers, "The Commercialization of 18th-Century English Literature," 171–78.

broadly share the view that patronage was an old and dying cultural form that never provided adequate support to authors and fortunately gave way, in the eighteenth century, to a superior system in which authors were at last properly recognized as independent owners and professionals.

One salutary exception to this trend is Paul Korshin, who in a pioneering article in 1974 called for a reconsideration of the topic of literary patronage on a sounder historical (and even statistical) base. In a brief survey he distinguished among many different forms of patronage, and suggested that fuller study would show that, although it "benefited relatively few writers" and provided rather small amounts of support, the system of literary patronage in the eighteenth century was in fact "surprisingly workable," and that it "survived because it was necessary."[6] Since 1974 we have learned a good deal more about the various forms of patronage, about the economic careers of individual writers, and about the network of patronage and dependency that sustained eighteenth-century society. This book takes up the sustained reconsideration of patronage that Korshin implicitly calls for, and although it does not proceed along the lines he proposes, tries (as he does) to shed the prejudice that the patronage system was inevitably demeaning to writers and a cultural practice that had well outlasted whatever usefulness it once had.[7]

But in attempting a responsibly contextualist study of literary patronage in the eighteenth century, it is well to begin by acknowledging the late-twentieth century context, in which we (not only as descendants of the proudly alienated Romantics, but also as marginalized intellectuals) prefer to see great writers of the past as proud, independent, and adversarial (even subversive) in relation to the culture of their day, or at least to the hegemonic authority that they covertly or overtly resist. We prefer to think of the *Aeneid* as a profoundly troubled vision of the sacrifices, both personal and political, required by the founding of imperial Rome, than to think of Virgil as a celebrator of Augustus, would rather see Horace as a sly skeptic than as a "court slave," would rather find in the great writers of the "American Renaissance" a tradition of doubt and dissent than national self-discovery and affirmation. Such preferences

6 "Types of Eighteenth-Century Literary Patronage," 473.
7 Even Korshin, however, sees "dependence" as offensive. For more on this, see below, pp. 254–55.

reflect the academy's sense of itself and of its present relation – which it thinks of as independent and even adversarial – to the larger culture. Acknowledging the preferences myself, I would admit and even argue that both the academy and high culture generally continue in our own time to be dependent on, and the beneficiaries of, a system of patronage, disguised though it may be in the form of foundation grants, tax policies, fellowships, academic appointments, art collectors, theatre subscribers, and private contributors. To recognize the surviving forms of patronage, along with the imbeddedness of the academy in a predominantly commercial culture, may help us to understand more completely literature's *dependent* status in early modern England. Second, any present-day discussion of literary patronage in the eighteenth century takes place (or should take place) in the context of the current historiographical debate between the descendants of the old "Whig" interpretation of early modern English history – focusing on progress toward modernity, the growth of a commercial middle class, and the rise of parliamentary democracy – and a "neo-Tory" school of historians which since about 1980 has been increasingly emphasizing that the eighteenth century is not so much the age of the rising bourgeoisie as it is an "aristocratic century," more remarkable for the persistence and even strengthening of an "*ancien régime*" than for the arrival of "revolution" or even "reform."[8] My sense is not only that most literary critics are – perhaps without knowing it – in the "Whig" camp, but that they are inadequately familiar with the "neo-Tory" account of the eighteenth century. My discussion of literary patronage will suggest that John Cannon and Jonathan Clark, while they have not completely won the day, have successfully challenged the older view.[9]

It was once assumed that the "historical context" of a literary topic such as eighteenth-century patronage was simply *there*, and available for any student of history or literature to retrieve. But renewed historiographical debates, along with arguments by Hayden White and others that history-writing itself is always a form of literature, if only because it *decides* what constitutes a piece of "evidence" and *selects* from the available materials, have made us

[8] John Cannon, *Aristocratic Century*; J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1688–1832*. See also Linda Colley, *Britons*. For an earlier study relatively innocent of historiographical consciousness, see James Lees-Milne, *Earls of Creation*.

[9] Cannon and Clark have both recently written books on Samuel Johnson, in which they comment briefly on patronage and pensions. See Cannon, *Samuel Johnson and the Politics of Hanoverian England*, 173–82; and Clark, *Samuel Johnson*, 193–97.

properly wary of the old positivist view of history. We cannot simply suppose that we all look at the same eighteenth century, or that we can with confidence assume that what we see are the "facts." Reconstruction of an eighteenth-century historical context will inevitably reflect one's own late-twentieth-century assumptions and limitations. My own limitations are those of a literary historian and critic working on a topic that requires considerable knowledge of political, social, and economic history. But establishing a context in which to consider texts is not simply a matter of accumulating enough knowledge. Choices have to be made about which parts of the various world of the eighteenth century are to be defined as relevant context. We use the literary texts under scrutiny to establish the "context" and then use the context to illuminate the texts. There is a constant moving back and forth from text to context, and a circularity that, if it cannot be avoided, can at least be kept constantly in mind.[10] The proof will be in the pudding: do the interpretations I provide of literary careers and literary texts adequately take account of what seem to be the pertinent phenomena?

I take the view that, especially with a matter like literary patronage, the relation of text – whether dedication, preface, or poem – to context is not that of "figure" and "background" but of fish to sea: context is the vital element from which text derives its nutrients, and through which it swims its particular path. To examine text within context is to gain a sense of the circumambient medium which sustains it, and the currents and pressures with which and against which it moves and to which it responds. Context does not determine meaning, but it alerts us to a wider range of possibilities, and proposes a world of diverse interests and controversies in which original writers and readers operated.

In the chapters that follow I propose that the patronage system is a pervasive feature of eighteenth-century English culture, and that the relevant context is therefore a broad one. Previous studies of patronage have focused too narrowly on the growth of a literary marketplace which apparently made patronage outmoded. I argue that the patronage system was a complex institution, and that literary patronage took many forms, and try to bear in mind a number of features – most of them well substantiated in recent historical work on early modern Britain – of the socio-political

[10] For a good discussion of the theoretical implications of contextualizing, see Robert Hume, "Texts Within Contexts," 69–100.

landscape. Except where I think a point has received inadequate attention, I here offer concise summaries of these features as a way of setting the stage.

(1) *The consolidation of a central governmental apparatus in the 1690s.* In order to fight foreign wars William III had to organize a system of public credit – the Bank of England, deficit financing, and a strong administrative state to implement it– so that the burden of taxation would not be intolerable. The so-called "financial revolution" and "administrative revolution" concentrated greater power and resources in the hands of the crown and the ministers, and both required and enabled them to use the resources of the crown (pensions and places) to reward their friends and promote their political programs in the emerging periodical press. Hence followed, through the Civil List and through Secret Service funds, a program of state support of friendly or useful writers that was to remain in place throughout the eighteenth century. It is probably not mere coincidence that among those officials accused of the misappropriation of state funds were two of the major patrons of the day, Halifax and Walpole,[11] and that another of the most generous patrons, the Duke of Chandos, made his fortune as Paymaster of the Forces under Marlborough. Although attacked throughout the century, the system of rewards had its defenders (including Burke), who argued that effective government required its use.

(2) *The rise of "Country Party" ideology and rhetoric.* As the central state grew stronger, country gentlemen feared the loss of their own power and authority and the increase of the land tax to pay the increasing costs of government. In response to the perceived threat, they constructed an ideology of the independent citizen-soldier-landowner, the bulwark of traditional English liberties, and warned against the dangers of court influence as extended through pensions and places. Pope's vaunted "independence" from patronage cannot be divorced from his political affiliations with Country Party ideologues. Descendants of the Country Party continued to complain about the abuse of pensions and places in the 1760s.

(3) *The well-developed system in which political "patrons" controlled the electoral process*, insuring that their hand-picked (and beholden) candidates were nominated, stood without opposition, or received enough votes to be elected.[12] One historian has estimated that more than

[11] See H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 109.

[12] Sir Lewis Namier long ago described and analyzed the power of government and some

half of the seats in the House of Commons were "under the control of private patrons or Government departments," and that private patrons "gained rather than lost influence as the century continued."[13] Modern commentators on the system of political patronage commonly see it as a "network" or a "web." Cobbett in the 1820s still saw it as a "chain of dependence running through the whole nation" (quoted in Cannon, *Aristocratic Century*, p. 169). This system often drew in "literary" men, including Young, Addison, and Soame Jenyns (who stood for parliament), and Congreve, who was granted a freehold so that, as an elector, he would cast his vote for his patron's candidate.

(4) *An equally powerful – and controversial – system of church patronage, in which appointments to "livings" were in the gift of the local landowner, whether peer or squire.* The Duke of Chandos, for example, not only had his own chaplain but also controlled eight ecclesiastical livings.[14] The traditional system – still alive in the Mansfield Park of Jane Austen's day – came under continued fire (particularly in Scotland) from proponents of the "popular election" of ministers, and was sustained by equally vocal defenders, as witnessed by a stream of pamphlets, from *A Discourse of Patronage* (1675), by "Z. C.," to *The Nature of Patronage* (1735), by "Generosus," and a flood of tracts published in Scotland from *The Right of Patronages Considered, and Some of the Antient and Modern Arguments for the Exercise of that Right in Presenting to Churches, Surveyed* (Edinburgh, 1731) to *Patronage Anatomized and Detected* (Glasgow, 1782).[15] The issue was (so to speak) not merely a parochial one: Johnson and Boswell discussed the "much agitated" question of the rights of church patrons in 1772 and 1773.[16]

(5) *The intricate interweaving of the systems of literary, political, and church patronage.* Not surprisingly, since a single landowner/patron might control several church livings and several seats in Parliament, and

private patrons: some had "absolute authority" of "nomination," others such "influence" that electors would adopt their candidate. See *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III.*

13 J. B. Owen, "Political Patronage," 377–78. See also Owen, *The Rise of the Pelhams*, 62; J. H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England, 1675–1725*, 188–89; Cannon, *Aristocratic Century*, esp. 112–15.

14 *Ibid.*, 70.

15 Other titles of rare pamphlets in the ESTC include *Considerations on the Right of Patronage*, *The Cause Between Patronage and Popular Election*, and *The Case of Patronage Stated*, among many more.

16 Johnson even dictated a formal "opinion" on the matter. See Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, II, 149, 242–46.

might have both political and literary interests, a client too might operate in several arenas at once. Two brief examples might make the point. In the late 1750s William Warburton, author of *The Divine Legation of Moses* (1738–41) and Pope's literary executor, was married to the niece of Ralph Allen, of Prior Park, near Bath, best known now as friend and benefactor of Pope and Fielding. Allen was a substantial landowner and an important political power in Bath. In the 1750s he often corresponded with William Pitt, Prime Minister and MP for Bath. In October 1759, for example, he wrote to Pitt asking that Warburton be appointed Bishop of Gloucester, and two months later wrote to thank Pitt for arranging it.[17] The next week Warburton wrote to Pitt with his thanks, and enclosed a copy of an address (previously approved by Allen) to Pitt from the electors of Bath.[18] The correspondence from Allen to Pitt continues, Allen reporting in October 1760 that the members of the Bath corporation want Pitt to represent the constituency again, and in March 1761 that Pitt has been unanimously elected. As the Pitt–Allen–Warburton nexus suggests, literary, church, and political patronage are all interrelated parts of what one should perhaps call not the chain but the interwoven braid of dependency.

That the interweavings were much on the mind of eighteenth-century observers of patronage is suggested by a manuscript commonplace book in the British Library entitled "The Patron or a Portraiture of Patronage and Dependency."[19] The unknown author gathers anecdotes from the lives of Spenser, Cowley, Otway, Oldham, and other writers, as well as English history generally, to illustrate the perils of dependency, and addresses them "to a Gentleman who upon the Loss of Friends was about to settle in a Great Family" – presumably as a chaplain or a private secretary.[20] Many of

17 Chatham Papers, PRO 30/8 vol. 17.

18 Chatham Papers, PRO 30/8, vol. 66, fos. 148–53.

19 Add. MS 12523, catalogued as William Oldys, "Patronage and Dependency," in a "Common-Place Book," 1718. But the attribution is doubtful and the title and date are clearly wrong. The commonplace book, dated on its title page "1730," includes passages copied from the *Dunciad*, 1727, and from John Kelly's comedy, *The Levee*, 1741 (fos. 43, 76). The book may be attributed to Oldys because it includes two epigrams from Plautus with translations attributed to "Oldys." Oldys was himself a dependent of Edward Harley, second Earl of Oxford, whom he served as librarian and literary secretary (*Dictionary of National Biography*).

20 The author cites Oldham's "Fable of the Two Dogs" and "Of Chaplains," references apparently to his "Satyr. Address'd to a Friend, that is about to leave the University, and come abroad in the World" – which warns against the servility that awaits the private chaplain, and concludes with a "tale" of a dog and a wolf.

his anecdotes are from literary history – he is familiar with the tradition of distressed poets from Spenser to Cowley and Oldham – but, with a cue from Lucian, he broadens his focus to include "Followers or Domestic Dependants or those who enlist themselves in great Families and submit to the Commands of Rich Men for an Annual Stipend Sallary or Wages" (fol. 67).[21] The topic of "Patronage" for him embraces the 1675 *Discourse of Patronage* (on church patronage) – which he cites by title[22] – as well as a letter from Francis Osborn in his *Miscellaneous Works* (1722) on those who attend "Honourable Persons . . . in any near Relation" (fol. 43). Dependent writers are clearly for him a species of the genus "Domestic Dependents."

The two examples will perhaps serve to suggest the pervasiveness of patronage in eighteenth-century England, woven as it was into the very fabric of a hierarchically organized culture. And it may suggest how patronage might take one or more of many forms, from gifts (which have been given undue attention in studies of patronage) to pensions and places at court, to appointments in the church or universities.

(6) *The commercialization of culture.* In the course of the century high culture became increasingly accessible to (and paid for by) large numbers of people, though in new cultural forms – subscription concerts, public exhibitions of painting, landscaped pleasure grounds.[23] But it is important not to overestimate the cultural shift from aristocratic to middle-class sponsorship. Many of the arts in eighteenth-century England still depended heavily on the patronage of the aristocracy and the gentry. Painting and music required the support of those wealthy enough to commission portraits or collect paintings, and the space required even to house a chamber ensemble. Opera, architecture, and landscape gardening all required large sums from private sources to sustain. Even porcelain-makers, furniture-makers, and dressmakers relied on wealthy patronage to set the fashion. The landed gentleman retained considerable authority in matters of culture as well as politics.[24]

21 "On Salaried Posts in Great Houses," cast in the form of advice to a young man against taking up such a post (*Lucian*, III, 411–81). Lucian's work is clearly Oldham's model.

22 "Disc. of Patronage 4°," by "Z. C."

23 See J. H. Plumb, *The Commercialization of Leisure in 18th-Century England*; Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society*; and Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, esp. chs. 5–6.

24 See John Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730–1780*, esp. "Introduction: Artificers and Gentlemen," 17–49.

It is within such a context that I want to situate my argument about literary patronage, an argument that I lay out baldly here in the form of a series of propositions.

(1) The patronage system, as inherited from the Renaissance and strengthened during the first part of the eighteenth century, operated in such a way as to sustain the cultural authority of the traditional patron class – peers and country gentlemen.

(2) Despite the conventional view, there was no rapid or complete changeover during the century from an aristocratic culture to a commercial culture, no sudden change from a patronage economy to a literary marketplace.

(3) The "golden age" of literary patronage, in which all the best English poets enjoyed handsome pensions from the court or from aristocrats with literary tastes, is a myth fostered by disappointed writers in later years who assumed that things *must* have been better in the past, and that England *must* have once been as enlightened in this respect as Louis XIV's France.

(4) The system of patronage was never simply a form of *noblesse oblige* or disinterested generosity. It was in effect an "economic" arrangement that provided benefits to both parties.

(5) The system of patronage was *always* political. Walpole, usually branded as the villain who politicized literature and patronage, was simply making effective use of well-established principles, and his practice does not significantly differ from that of the ministries that preceded or followed him.

(6) During the course of the century booksellers gained both economic power and cultural authority, but did not supplant the traditional patrons: the period is characterized by overlapping "economies" of patronage *and* marketplace.

(7) Patronage in the later eighteenth century depended relatively less than previously on wealthy peers like Dorset and Halifax, and relatively more on other forms of support such as subscription and employment in church or civil service, but in many respects the patronage system of 1800 was similar to that of 1700: it never involved an exclusive and dyadic arrangement between a patron and a loyal client; it always involved job-related patronage and relatively small grants; it almost always provided not primary but supplementary income.

(8) Although the system sustained patronal authority, it was roomy enough to allow for resistance and manipulation on the part of the