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978-0-521-06592-4 - Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past,
1700-1770

Jonathan Brody Kramnick

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This book offers an original examination of the formation of the English canon during the first two thirds of the eighteenth century, looking in particular at the treatment of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton. Through close readings of periodical essays, editions, treatises, reviews, disquisitions, pamphlets, and poems, Jonathan Brody Kramnick recounts the origins of modern literary study and situates the rise of national literary tradition in the broad context of the making of a public culture. He argues against the consensus view that locates the beginnings of literary criticism comfortably within the rise of the public sphere, and suggests instead that the makings of the canon lie in a combined evolution of publicity and specialization. Much of what we understand as professional criticism, literary language, and national literary tradition, he proposes, received its definitive shape during the mid-eighteenth century, when the century-long effort to define “modern” literature against the earlier achievements of the “ancients” culminated with a new idea of national antiquity.

Jonathan Brody Kramnick is assistant professor of English at Rutgers University.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521641272

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First published 1999
This digitally printed version (with corrections) 2008

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Kramnick, Jonathan Brody.
Making the English canon: print-capitalism and the cultural past, 1700–1700 /
Jonathan Brody Kramnick.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0 521 64127 6 (hardback)

1. English literature – Early modern, 1500–1700 – History and criticism – Theory. etc.
2. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616 – Criticism and interpretation – History – 18th century.
3. Spenser, Edmund, 1552?–1599 – Criticism and interpretation – History – 18th century.
4. Milton, John, 1608–1674 – Criticism and interpretation – History – 18th century.
5. Great Britain – Intellectual life – 18th century.
6. Criticism – Great Britain – History – 18th century.
7. Canon (Literature) I. Title.

PR421.K73 1998

820.9'005–dc21 98–21089 CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-64127-2 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-06592-4 paperback

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For my parents

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

| | |
|--|------------------|
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | <i>page</i> viii |
| Introduction: the modernity of the past | i |
| PART ONE | |
| 1 The structural transformation of literary history | 15 |
| 2 The mode of consecration: between aesthetics and historicism | 54 |
| PART TWO | |
| 3 Novel to lyric: Shakespeare in the field of culture, 1752–1754 | 107 |
| 4 The cultural logic of late feudalism: or, Spenser and the romance of scholarship, 1754–1762 | 137 |
| PART THREE | |
| 5 Shakespeare’s nation: the literary profession and the “shades of ages” | 193 |
| Afterword: the present crisis | 237 |
| <i>Notes</i> | 246 |
| <i>Index</i> | 282 |

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the William Andrew Clark Memorial Library and the Center for the Critical Analysis of Contemporary Culture at Rutgers University for their generous assistance during the writing of this book. I would also like to thank *ELH*, *MLQ*, *PMLA*, and *Profession* for allowing me to reprint material that appeared, in earlier form, in their journals.

I am grateful for the kind guidance of Ronald Paulson, who saw me through early drafts. I am also grateful for John Guillory's reading, inspiration, and friendship. Jonathan Goldberg has been the most demanding of readers and closest of friends; the book has been enriched by both. I began writing this book in the warm and supportive community of Jared Gardner, Elizabeth Hewitt, and Michael Trask. Since then, I've profited greatly from the careful reading and friendly advice of Michael McKeon and Adela Pinch.

Rosalinda Stone has been my soulmate and counsel from the beginnings of this project to its end. My debt to her is inexpressible.

NOTE ON THE TEXT: EPIGRAPHS

The epigraphs for chapter two are from Max Weber, *Economy and Society: an Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, 2 vols., trans. Ephraim Fischhoff *et al.*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1978) 608; and Georg Luckács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971) 137.

The epigraph for chapter five is from Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (London and New York: Penguin, 1968) 106–107.