CHAPTER I

Introduction

George Justice

Recent scholarly interest in manuscript publication in England has taken place against a backdrop of the computer revolution. Pen, ink, and paper would seem to be far removed from a world in which information technology has digitized most forms of symbolic communication. The text is no longer a material object, made by people in ways that can be seen and described by its creators. This new interest in the old – perhaps anachronistic – form of publication in our current state of flux is not merely coincidental. Looking back at the period 1550–1800 seems more like peering in a looking glass rather than examining a fossil through a microscope – optical or otherwise. Just as we are now extremely self-conscious about the forms of publication and its channels of distribution, writers in Renaissance and eighteenth-century England faced unavoidable social and technological choices in the production and dissemination of their works. Margaret J. M. Ezell (one of the contributors to this volume) has been one of the most far-reaching scholars of manuscript cultures in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Ezell has pushed other scholars to reconsider not only what we see in our research – the object of study – but the ways in which we look. Her work fulfills the promise of the endeavor to make the theory and practice of literary scholarship feed each other. Her most recent book, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*, consists of six chapters dedicated to a rigorous historical analysis of authorship, challenging the widely held belief – now almost a truism – that an expansion of printing in seventeenth-century England led directly to the association of the category "literature" with the mechanisms of print production and distribution. Each chapter comes at the history of authorship from a different direction; taken together, they argue for a broader conception of the practice of authorship, including various modes of collaborative writing and methods of publication that operate outside of the publishing industry centered in London.

2   *George Justice*

In her Postscript, Ezell asks,

What can we learn from early culture of authorship that is relevant to our
current situation? Are we returning to the early modern model of manuscript
text and social authorship, or are we positioned to invent yet another story to
add to this tale?[1]

My answer to Ezell's question, informed by the work of the scholars in-
cluded in this volume and by an analysis of contemporary information
technologies, is "both." Clearly, we are not returning to manuscript cir-
culation if by the word "manuscript" we mean the material product of
a hand applying ink, or another marking substance, to paper or other
writing surfaces. But, as the first part of Ezell's question implies, there
are aspects of the exchange of digital information that seem to point
back to the world of social authorship that coexisted with the beginning
centuries of print culture.

Contemporary information cultures include both professional writ-
ing and other forms of written communication that reject – or merely
bypass – the version of literary authorship common over the past three
centuries. Professional authorship has become increasingly corporate,
and dominant profit-making entities like Disney are attempting to
alter fundamentally the legal and cultural basis of copyright hammered
out over the course of the very long eighteenth century. Mark Rose's
Authors and Owners (1993) demonstrates that the almost accidental history
of copyright in the eighteenth century created the individual, printing
author as a proprietor of "intellectual property." In rejecting the book-
sellers' claim that a "perpetual copyright" existed in common law, the
House of Lords in the Donaldson v. Becket ruling of 1774 asserted pub-
lic interest in information that has been "published." Rose points out
that the legal doctrine of copyright coincides in the eighteenth century
with developing notions of the "author" – usually an individual human
being, whose creation of a *work* from the bare stuff of immaterial lan-
guage renders him, like Chaucer, like Shakespeare, like Milton, like
Samuel Richardson, a creative genius. In his celebrated essay "What is an
Author?" Michel Foucault noted that "texts, books, and discourses really
began to have authors . . . to the extent that authors became subject to
punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive."[2]
By the end of the period under consideration, though, the author was
more like Milton's God than Milton's Satan: authors were celebrated for
their creative self-sufficiency rather than punished for violating the esta-
blished order. The publishing industry and its machinery, comprising

reviews, libraries, reading clubs, schools, and other elements, seemed to change its structures in response to (and in promotion of) the new cultural prominence of the author.

Hypertext and its machinery of publication, primarily the World Wide Web accessible through the Internet, would seem to pose an obvious challenge to the ideology of the creative author. Challenges to the publishing author predate the existence of the category, of course. The theatre has always been in English culture a collaborative enterprise, the best example being the imposition of "Shakespeare" on the plays he wrote in the centuries following his death. Film and television were the dominant cultural forms of the second half of the twentieth century, and even if individual directors and producers are lionized as *auteurs*, films and television shows remain essentially corporate undertakings. However, publication via the World Wide Web poses a more fundamental threat to the cult(ure) of authorship in that successful designs, containing content, operate from the anticipation of a user's interaction with a site. No longer does the information provider bring us the product of inspiration; instead, so the argument goes, the user controls the dynamic exchange, picking and choosing at will among a variety of options. The web provides a crude literalization of Barthes's poetic essay, "The Death of the Author": content providers must fight for the eyes and ears of a mass public in what Michael H. Goldhaber has called "an economy of attention."[3]

In this way, non-professional forms of writing may come to seem more important than the paid work of writers providing content for the electronic outlets of multinational corporations. The cultural meanings as well as practices of publishing will change as the new technology suffuses people's lives. The Internet has already given rise to a number of methods through which "private publication" occurs. Email correspondence, including listserv mailing lists, Usenet, web-based news boards, and text-based chat rooms, create structures of communication that break down the paradigms set up by print culture. Publication through the Internet is not always promiscuous: various networks (or various sites) create voluntary interest groups, many of which are technically public but which function with semi-permeable boundaries. The relevant definition from the Oxford English Dictionary for "publication" dates from 1576: "The issuing, or offering to the public, of a book, map, engraving, photograph, piece of music, or other work of which copies are multiplied by writing, printing, or any other process; also, the work or business of producing and issuing copies of such work."[4] It is clear that such a definition for publication must change when digital technologies come to dominate

4   *George Justice*

the process of publication. The notion of what a "public" is has already
come into question. As I discuss below, and as the contents of this volume
imply, when "writing" was the technology of publication, the form and
meaning of the "public" addressed had not yet been fixed as the bour-
geois structure identified by Jürgen Habermas.

Not surprisingly, those profiting from information technology laud
the future and predict the demise of now-outdated technologies. Jakob
Nielsen, for example, a leading expert on contemporary information
technologies, boldly proclaims the demise of print in his book, *Designing
Web Usability*: "Most current media formats will die and be replaced
with an integrated Web medium in five to ten years. Legacy media
cannot survive because the current media landscape is an artifact of
the underlying hardware technology. Whenever the user experience is
dictated by hardware limitations, it is a sure bet that something better will
come along once these limitations are lifted."[5] Early in his book, Nielsen
preempts attacks on his own use of the soon-to-be-outdated mode of
print by acknowledging the current superiority of books to the web in a
number of different ways, including poor screen resolution (a hardware
problem), poor web browsing user interfaces (a software problem), and
readers' inexperience at dealing with hypertext documents (a cultural
problem).[6] He sets the date of 2007 for the demise of books and says
"legacy publishers be warned: This *will* happen."[7] Nielsen posits a world
in which communication is shaped directly by technology, and in which a
better technology "wins." It is a version of economic determinism with an
interesting consumer-oriented twist. The fittest technology will survive
a bitter struggle with other "legacy" technologies, but it will survive
not because it meets the demands of an impersonal "history." Rather,
Nielsen argues, consumers will adopt web communications from free
choice because the new technologies are more useful. Nielsen's book is
directed at the supplier in a capitalist communications world of supply
and demand, but his book is a warning rather than a celebration. To be
useful, communications technologies must be "usable."

Thus we are, to use Ezell's phrasing both, "returning to the early mod-
ern model of manuscript text and social authorship" *and* "positioned to
invent yet another story to add to this tale." The "official" culture of
web-based distribution of information exhibits a tension between cor-
porate entities – including universities, traditional media industries, and
newcomers like Yahoo! and America Online – and individual authors.
On the one hand, even if these "publishers" often empower indivi-
duals to create their own sites, posting family photos of a trip out west or

their ungrammatical assessment of current political and cultural trends, it is the provider, the corporation, whose logo adorns the "pages" and whose advertising creates profits. On the other hand, there has been a genuine explosion of cultural production operating not only without central control, but without the need or even existence of a "center," as users manipulate technologies that have remained stubbornly resistant to state – or corporate – control. The shape of communications remains to be determined by the advance of technology and the instruments of social control. For every advocate of "filters" placed on Internet browsers in schools and public libraries there are many users of potentially revolutionary technologies like data encryption and the copyright-busting Napster file-sharing system. Information cultures are being made by users engaging in struggles in the world. Neither "the system," nor "the technology," nor even "history" is determining the world of communications.

Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550–1800, operates from a similar presupposition about the relationship between culture – here, particularly literature – and the technologies that allow for communication beyond the face-to-face. The writers discussed in the various essays all used manuscript rather than print for the circulation of their various works. Although the essays included here are heterogeneous in subject matter and approach, they all operate from the working premise that the decision to use manuscript rather than print publication resulted from a set of choices, made in positive terms for the most part. "Scribal publication"– a term that can limit the range of manuscript practices and that does not describe all the literary cultures discussed in this volume – turns out to be more "usable" for the writers and readers it connects. The variety in these essays therefore should be seen as a necessary laying of the groundwork for further study that would build upon research into actual practices rather than proceeding inductively from abstract social theories. Writers used manuscripts (or print technology, for that matter) because it suited their needs.

The particular focus of the essays in this volume is the use of manuscript circulation by women writers in England in the Renaissance and eighteenth century. Many previous studies of women writers – including self-consciously feminist interpretations – have assumed that women published their writings in manuscript rather than print as a direct and simple result of social prohibitions placed upon women writers. Women, it has been argued, faced even more than male courtiers what J. W. Saunders influentially labeled "the stigma of print."[8] For example,

6   *George Justice*

Mary Ellen Lamb's important *Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle* ope-
rates from the principle that print publication should be considered the
norm in the Renaissance: women were therefore relegated to an inferior
mode of distribution of their writing by prohibitive social codes. The bias
toward print as a norm is suggested by her thesis – that women writers
represent female authorship as powerless in their writings – and betrayed
by language that probably would have passed unnoticed when the book
was published in 1990. Lamb writes, for example, that "unfortunately,
many writings by women . . . have undoubtedly been lost, for relatively
few works by women *achieved* publication" (emphasis added).[9]

In contrast, the essays in this volume take varied approaches toward
the problems (and opportunities) confronting women writers in historical
circumstances that made manuscript circulation a necessity, or an option,
for the distribution of their works. Not only do these essays reject a notion
of essential womanhood across historical periods, but they refuse as well
to see "women" as a monolithic category within the time periods covered
by their breadth. The essays focus in different ways upon women's active
agency within the overarching constraints placed upon them by cultures
structured upon rigid hierarchies of gender and social class. Following
the lead of critics like Lamb and Ezell, the authors of these essays focus
on the biographical and literary particularities of the subjects of their
study. In doing so they question some of the presuppositions of earlier
writers on the circulation of ideas in early modern England.

The history of publication in recent years has been dominated by an
interest in the material circumstances of script and print that has ex-
tended beyond the specialized fields of paleography and bibliography
into British literary history and literary criticism more broadly. Interest
in "print culture" led the way, inspired by Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean
Martin's *L'Apparition du livre* (1950 – translated as *The Coming of the Book* in
1976). McLuhan's controversial *The Gutenberg Galaxy: the Making of Typo-
graphic Man* (1962) and Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent
of Change* (1979) were large-scale attempts to see the "history of the book"
as crucial to the course of western history. The historical and socio-
logical approaches taken in these works dovetailed with trends in literary
theory, which moved from establishing either the author's intention, or,
in the New Criticism, the structural unity of the "text," to exploration
of the social meaning and uses of literature. "Reception" and "reader-
response" theories located the meaning of literature in the interaction
between work and audience. This critical move allowed for a more accu-
rate hermeneutic (when the audience's "horizon of expectation," to use

Hans Robert Jauss's term, is used to delineate possible responses) and simultaneously to open up interpretation through acknowledging the wide range of uses that could be and were in fact made of literary texts. Texts could be liberating acts of communication (as argued, for example, in Jürgen Habermas's *Strukturwandel der Öffentlicheit* [1962 – translated as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in 1989]) or oppressive carriers of power (in popular Anglo-American interpretations of Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses* [1966 – translated as *The Order of Things*, 1970]). In either case, literary critics and literary historians required an understanding of the material structures of communication – writing, publishing, distribution, reading – to make their broad claims even slightly plausible.

And so the most grandly (or most absurdly) ambitious scholars and critics turned to paleographers and bibliographers for their expertise in the history and meaning of the physical objects of manuscripts and books. Until then, the focus of these specialists had for the most part been on reconstructing their micro-histories and determining authoritative texts. Scholars of publishing history were, in many cases, more interested in the workings of printing houses than in the interplay between publishing (whether via the press or through script) and literature. Works like Philip Gaskell's *New Introduction to Bibliography* (1972) and the many essays and books by D. F. McKenzie have narrowed the gap between bibliography and literary criticism from the "book history" side of the relationship, providing critics, teachers, and students with a framework for applying material history to understanding of literary art. The result has been a common acceptance that the "meaning" of a literary work can no longer be fixed in bare rhetorical structures, untainted by the circumstances of composition and dissemination. The material history of a book and its meaning as a work of the imagination can now be understood as inextricably linked. Books make and are made in history by women and men who use, and delight in, the possibilities of writing.

Adrian Johns's *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (1998) is the best recent account of the convergence of book history, literary theory, and the history of knowledge. In this lengthy tome, Johns questions some of the central assumptions made by McLuhan, Eisenstein, and their various followers about the cultural characteristics determined by the technology of the printing press. Johns looks closely at (and doubts) the heretofore widely accepted triumvirate of print culture's "standardization, dissemination, and fixity" established by Eisenstein, taking the last particularly to task and refuting the notion that fixity (and the perception of fixity) engendered trustworthiness. Johns argues

that the phrase "print culture" should express the effect rather than the cause of the "cultural construction of print" in early modern London.[10] He therefore focuses on the actions of a number of important agents who create the uses and understanding of print by actions taken in precise historical and geographical times and spaces. A literary history emerging from an application of Johns's stunning work must calibrate the realms of print publication and manuscript circulation in new ways. We should no longer see the conventions and properties of manuscript circulation as peripheral to a simple set of procedures established by a dominant world of print publication. Instead, it is necessary to look at manuscript culture as a persisting set of procedures with its own history and customs as well as balancing manuscript and print as unfinished, in-process cultures with strong cross-fertilization. The essays in this volume take up Johns's challenge to the history of the book by locating manuscripts in ecclesiastical and political history; in the technological history of the production and dissemination of information; and in the history of imaginative writing.

Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550–1800 points to the notion that women writers created a number of "manuscript cultures." Women responded to the medium's particular advantages and opportunities, even if their adoption of manuscript circulation was influenced by external social and political conditions. The work in this volume builds on scholarship on manuscript culture undertaken in the past decades, particularly the prescient work of a few literary critics such as J. W. Saunders. Saunders had called for the integration of literary criticism, book history, and sociology before the impact of flashy arguments like McLuhan's could be made known. In "The Stigma of Print" (1951) Saunders argued that "if literary history is to be history in anything more than name . . . criticism must be supplemented by sociology."[11] His article breaks ground in differentiating among possible meanings of literature in courtier and professional (manuscript and print) literary cultures. While the contributors to the present volume may dispute the existence or the valences of the "stigma of print," they nearly uniformly trace their own critical lineage to Saunders's exploration of the meaning of Tudor court verse in a manuscript culture understood through the scholarly recovery of actual practices.

The past two decades have witnessed an increased knowledge of the circumstances of scribal publication in the early modern period. Peter Beal's *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* covering the years 1450–1700 (published 1980–93) has enabled research into the forms and meanings of literary works published either solely or additionally in scribal form.

Harold Love's *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (1993) follows up his essay from 1987 and presents a compelling account of the mechanics and meaning of scribal publication primarily in the seventeenth century. Studies by Arthur F. Marotti, Mary Hobbs, and Steven W. May, among many others, have situated sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writing in the context of "manuscript cultures." In these cultures, literary works are enmeshed in a complex world comprising personal situation, political power, and the technologies of script and print. Central to the essays in this volume is the work of Margaret Ezell. Her three books, *The Patriarch's Wife* (1987), *Writing Women's Literary History* (1993), and *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (1999), establish the phenomenon and explore the meaning of women's participation in networks of publication that have, until recently, remained invisible to literary scholars. Women, Ezell demonstrates, published widely through the formal and informal exchange of manuscripts. Ezell hopes to recover for our time writing that has been lost and, as well, wishes to reconfigure the shape of literary history to take into more accurate account the amount and importance of women's writing. The essays in this volume build upon the work of the line of scholars of manuscript culture from Saunders to Ezell, moving back and forth between theoretical models and the difficult to recover (and sometimes stubbornly resistant to theorizing) traces of what was a thriving world of literary manuscripts.

The essays in this volume hope to alter our broader understanding of the relationship of technology to literary history. Instead of working according to a "decline and rise" model of competing technologies, in which a "legacy" technology dies out to be replaced by a more efficient, more powerful competitor, the overlap between various literary cultures of print and manuscript suggest that a "growth into" model more accurately describes the relationship of technologies in periods of change. Mary Hobbs and H. R. Woudhuysen both describe, for example, an explosion of interest in literary manuscripts in the third decade of the seventeenth century. They account for this odd blip in a number of ways, including the dire political situation faced by the social class most accustomed to writing and reading poetry. Another explanation might be that the increased availability of written language through the medium of print fueled all sorts of poetic culture, even when those engaged in literature did not, for various reasons, wish to use the printing press. The phenomenon addressed by Hobbs and Woudhuysen may be related to the development of print technology, but it neither signals the "triumph" of print nor the demise of manuscripts as means for producing

and distributing literary writing. Because writers and publishers working with print were fully aware of manuscripts – and vice-versa – the two modes should be seen in relation in this period. Further study of miscellaneous collections of verse might concentrate on the interpenetration of manuscript with print across a range of manuscript and printed sources – even within particular miscellanies, either printed or written. The various cultures of manuscript and print may have aided each other rather than locking in battle in a Darwinian struggle to the death.

Again, we might turn to the contemporary situation to understand better what was happening in the period 1550–1800, and then reapply scholarship on the older period to our understanding of the uses of information technology more generally. The mid-1990s witnessed the dream of the "paperless office," an efficient and money-saving use of information technology to replace the consumption of paper in ordinary settings of communication. Companies were promised that an investment in computers hooked into networks would save time and material resources, since most routine communications could be made through email and most databases of information placed online in easily revisable form. The typewriter was dead, and the computer printer was merely a transitional technology. Manufacturers like Hewlett-Packard scrambled to move into other areas of information technology. As it turns out, though, printers have become even more integral to the actual use of information networks. Users take advantage of printing technology in new (and mostly unforeseen) ways that foster a hybrid between "purely" electronic information and old-fashioned uses of typewriters and the printing press. This is bad news for trees, but it points out that the historical model argued for by Eisenstein and her followers too easily assumes the "replacement" of an "outdated" technology by a new technology. Instead, we see a burst of activity in the "legacy" technology even with the rapid growth of the new "superior" technology. Near the end of his book, Jakob Nielsen admits that his own predictions for the future of information technology will almost certainly turn out to have been wrong. A continued integration of "legacy" technologies with the Internet might very well be one of his errors, if this volume's analysis of manuscript publication in the period of "the rise of print" can establish new ways of thinking about the history of the production and dissemination of knowledge.

Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas overturns simplified misconceptions about book history and literary history that have plagued many discussions of early modern women's writings. Individually its essays