

## LITERATURE, COMMERCE, AND THE SPECTACLE OF MODERNITY, 1750–1800

Paul Keen explores how a consumer revolution which reached its peak in the second half of the eighteenth century shaped debates about the role of literature in a polite modern nation, and tells the story of the resourcefulness with which many writers responded to these pressures. From dream reveries which mocked their own entrepreneurial commitments, such as Oliver Goldsmith's account of selling his work at a "Fashion Fair" on the frozen Thames, to the *Microcosm's* mock plan to establish "a licensed warehouse for wit," writers insistently tied their literary achievements to a sophisticated understanding of the uncertain complexities of a modern transactional society. This book combines a new understanding of late eighteenth-century literature with the materialist and sociological imperatives of book history and theoretically inflected approaches to cultural history.

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*For John Barrell, and for Neve, Abbey, and Morgan,  
distinguished scholars, the lot of them.*

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Literary space is not an immutable structure, fixed once and for all in its hierarchies and power relations. But even if the unequal distribution of literary resources assures that such forms of domination will endure, it is also a source of incessant struggle, of challenges to authority and legitimacy, of rebellions, insubordination, and ultimately, revolutions that alter the balance of literary power and rearrange existing hierarchies ... From the point of view of the history and the genesis of worldwide space, then, literature is a type of creation that is irreducibly singular and yet at the same time inherently collective, the work of all those who have created, reinvented, or reappropriated the various means at their disposal for changing the order of the literary world and its existing power relations.

Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*

For the materialist historian, every epoch with which he occupies himself is only prehistory for the epoch he himself must live in. And so, for him, there can be no appearance of repetition in history, since precisely those moments in the course of history which matter most to him, by virtue of their index as “fore-history,” become moments of the present day and change their specific character according to the catastrophic or triumphant nature of that day.

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcade Project*

Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>		x
1 The ocean of ink: a long introduction	I	
The more things change	I	
The last masquerade at the Pantheon	6	
This invisible je ne scay quoi	16	
The fashion fair	30	
2 Balloonomania: the pursuit of knowledge and the culture of the spectacle	40	
Beautiful invention	40	
The present rage	44	
Adventurous heroes	54	
Cautious philosophers	64	
The world as it goes	68	
3 Bibliomania: the rage for books and the spectacle of culture	78	
Bedlam	78	
Curious libraries	82	
The <i>cacoethes scribendi</i>	91	
The <i>Helluo Librorum</i>	94	
Men of taste	98	
4 Foolish knowledge: the little world of microcosmopolitan literature	102	
Diffusing knowledge far and wide	102	
The historian of character and manners	107	
The miscellany of life	111	
Trifling occurrences and little occupations	118	
The politics of politeness	125	

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
5	Uncommon animals: literary professionalism in the age of authors	133
	“The low-life of literature”	133
	Houseless wanderers	136
	The highways of literature	146
	The crowd of life	151
	Scattered seeds	157
6	The Learned Pig: enlightening the reading public	165
	Illiterate readers	165
	Erudite swine	173
	Wonderful knowledge	182
	Advertising culture	188
	Incredulous readers	195
7	Afterword: A swinish multitude: the tyranny of fashion in the 1790s	202
	<i>Notes</i>	209
	<i>Bibliography</i>	223
	<i>Index</i>	242



Figures

1	Frontispiece, <i>Encyclopaedia Britannica</i> , 3rd edn. 1797. By Permission of Encyclopaedia Britannica.	page 48
2	<i>The New Mail Carriers, or Montgolfier and Katterfelto Taking An Airing in Balloons</i> . Engraving. Etching. Anonymous. From <i>Rambler's Magazine</i> . January 1, 1784. © The Trustees of the British Museum.	58
3	<i>The New Mode of Picking Pockets</i> . Engraving. August 1784. Published in Grand-Careret et Detteil, <i>La Conquête de l'air</i> , 1910. © The British Library Board: 1800.a.26.	59
4	Paul Sandby, <i>The English Balloon, 1784</i> . Etching and aquatint. 1784. © The Trustees of the British Museum.	62
5	<i>The Downfall of Taste and Genius, or, The World As it Goes</i> . Etching. By S. Collings. Published by W. Humphrey, 227 Strand. c. 1784. © The Trustees of the British Museum.	72
6	<i>Love in a Balloon</i> . Etching. Anonymous. From <i>Rambler's Magazine</i> . November 1, 1784. © The Trustees of the British Museum.	75
7	<i>The Quacks</i> . Etching. Published by W. Humphrey, 227 Strand. 1783. © The Trustees of the British Museum.	186
8	<i>Bubbler's Medley, or a Sketch of the Times</i> . Etching and engraving. Published by Carington Bowles. 1720. © The Trustees of the British Museum.	200

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xi

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