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ANONYMOUS SIGNATURES: CIRCULATING LIBRARIES, CONVENTIONALITY, AND THE PRODUCTION OF GOTHIC ROMANCES

BY EDWARD JACOBS

Ever since circulating libraries first became commercially successful during the second half of the eighteenth century, social and literary critics have analyzed them primarily as institutions for distributing books. The dominant view has been that circulating libraries vulgarized literature, by pandering fiction to women, servants, and other people who had previously been excluded from reading by the high cost of books or by illiteracy. For instance, near the end of *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt argues, as many eighteenth-century critics did, that during the last quarter of the eighteenth century “the pressures toward literary degradation which were exerted by the booksellers and circulating library operators in their efforts to meet the reading public’s uncritical demand for easy vicarious indulgence in sentiment and romance” caused “a purely quantitative assertion of dominance” by female authors and readers, and by the gothic romance genre.¹

Recently, Paul Kaufman and Jan Fergus have qualified such complaints on documentary grounds.² As their studies show, extant circulating-library catalogs and business records do not verify the assumption that circulating libraries distributed “mainly” fiction, or that they were patronized “mainly” by women, or by “new,” “lower-class” readers in general. Although the evidence does suggest that circulating libraries dealt *substantially* in contemporary fiction, and that they were patronized *disproportionately* by women and by lower-class readers, documents ultimately suggest, as Fergus argues, that “popular novels should be less easily dismissed as hack work directed at a new audience more naive and less educated than traditional readers; these novels and their writers bear closer examination.” Kaufman makes a similar case “In Defense of Fair Readers.”³

But even though Fergus and Kaufman present their evidence in contradiction of the traditional dismissal of “popular novels” as a sub-literature for silly women and servants, their arguments ironi-

cally comply with the elitism and misogyny of that traditional dismissal. For both Fergus and Kaufman justify re-appraising the texts and authors of popular fiction by demonstrating that these texts and authors have less to do with circulating libraries and “more naive and less educated” readers than we had thought. For Watt, popular novels are damned because circulating libraries distributed them to women and servants; for Fergus and Kaufman, they merit renewed attention because circulating libraries did *not* distribute them *only* to women and servants. In both cases, the “class” of readers who patronized circulating libraries is used to determine the “literary” value of the texts available in the libraries.

Most every other published commentary on circulating libraries similarly analyzes them as institutions for *distributing* books.⁴ However, this tradition of evaluating circulating libraries only as distributive institutions misrepresents them as being “passive” institutions, in the same ways that their allegedly female patrons were for centuries supposed to have been “passive” people. For in focusing exclusively on the question of what circulating libraries distributed to whom, critics have ignored the fact that many circulating libraries also published books.

In presenting the preliminary results of my own analysis of circulating-library publishing, this paper will argue that a detailed analysis of circulating-library publishing is critical to our understanding of how “the novel” emerged and functioned as a dominant literary genre. Basically, my analysis indicates that eighteenth-century British circulating libraries specialized in publishing fiction by anonymous and/or female authors who were often novices. Evidence moreover suggests that the libraries run by these publishers institutionally supported this strategy by culturally reproducing reading patrons as these anonymous and/or female authors. Circulating-library publishers pursued this strategy of development, I maintain, because as relative fledglings unconnected to the dynastic publishing houses who since the 1740’s had monopolized “the novel,” these publishers could compete only by developing cheap, new talent and fashions within the fiction genre.

One might immediately assume that these results confirm, from the perspective of production, the traditional argument that circulating libraries lowered the class of fiction, by transforming it into a culture industry that produced dull imitations and trendy sensations rather than “novel” works of ingenuity and exploration. However, in the context of recent arguments about the ways that “the elevation of

the novel” itself defined certain very specific “novelistic” conventions and prescribed imitation of them as an ethical value, the analysis of circulating-library publishing in fact exposes the paradoxical value that conventionality had and still has in discussions of “the novel,” and brings into focus the fundamental ways that such notions of conventionality have interacted with the cultural construction and economic circumstances of female writing in Britain.⁵

I

Because there has been no analysis of circulating-library publishing, I have recently begun a quantitative analysis that compares the kinds of fiction published by publishers who also ran circulating libraries, with the kinds published by publishers who did not. For the moment, this analysis is based upon the approximately 1200 works of fiction listed in the circulating-library catalogs of Thomas Lowndes (1766) and M. Heavisides (1790). Given the fact that, after 1760 or so, hundreds of circulating libraries thrived as businesses, their catalogs offer one of the most convenient and representative selections available of the books published and most widely read during the eighteenth century. Other sources, such as the catalogs in *The Gentlemen's Magazine*, *The Monthly* and *Critical Reviews*, or *The Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalog* (even on CD-ROM), have the disadvantage of being exhaustive. In order to avoid imposing one's own external selection upon these lists, one must either select a limited chronological or demographic span, or else effectively deal with the entire corpus of eighteenth-century fiction. Yet the former course limits the validity of one's conclusions, and the latter is nearly impossible. By contrast, the titles listed in circulating-library catalogs were selected by experienced eighteenth-century proprietors based upon what they knew or thought their clientele wanted to read. This does not of course mean that their lists are not selective, but it does mean that they represent the selections of people who made their living from the business of fiction. Thus the fiction in these catalogs ranges chronologically from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century romances to novels published the same year as the catalogs, and from titles we now teach in our courses to titles of which no extant copies are known. Among the extant circulating-library catalogs, I have chosen the catalogs of Lowndes and Heavisides because between them they give the widest possible circumstantial variety. Lowndes ran one of the earliest and most successful London circulating libraries, and was also a major publisher. By contrast, Heavisides was

not himself a publisher, and ran his modest circulating library of 500 or so titles roughly 25 years later in Darlington, whose locale put him as much in touch with publishers in Edinburgh and Dublin, as with those in London.

Because an analysis of these catalogs involves, among other painstaking tasks, the location of imprint information for the titles of which no copies have survived, my analysis of the 1200-odd titles in these two catalogs will not be completed for some time. However, there are compelling reasons, both intellectual and practical, for my publishing in this article the results of the preliminary analysis that my larger project has been designed to test. This preliminary analysis is based upon Appendix A of Jan Fergus's study of the tiny circulating library run by Samuel Clay in Warwick; here Fergus lists the 85 books actually borrowed from Clay's library from 1770-72, for 81 of which she has managed to recover imprints. Recognizing circulating-library proprietors among the publishers of these 81 books, I performed the analysis summarized in the tables of this article, whose results seemed suggestive enough to warrant my undertaking the larger project just described. For even though the data-base offered by Clay's books is quantitatively negligible, much about the circumstances of Clay's library qualifies his books as typical. Precisely because Clay depended on outside presses for all of his books, his holdings more objectively index the activity of publishers at large than would, for instance, the catalog of the Minerva Press Library, which disproportionately stocked its own publications. Thus, Clay's holdings include works by Millar, Osborne, Rivington, and Tonson, the four publishers most immediately associated with the "rise of the novel." On the other hand, Clay's holdings include works published by Thomas Lowndes and the Noble brothers, probably the two major circulating-library publishers operating during the 1770-72 tenure of Clay's circulating library. As Fergus emphasizes in her study, the Clay records have the additional and unique virtue of being the only known record of actual borrowing of books from a circulating library. We know that people wanted to and presumably did read these 85 books, and we even know relatively how much, as a group, they wanted to read each one.

Let me emphasize that I do not imagine that these circumstances qualify the results presented here as conclusive. But surely they do give us good reason to view these results as probable (if imprecise) indications of the trends that my wider data base will produce. And practically, by publishing this study in its preliminary form, I hope to

solicit criticism about the design of the analysis, and to invite collaboration, corroboration, or challenges from other scholars who may be at work on similar or related projects. Such early response is especially urgent for this project because the kind of analysis described above is by its nature slow and expensive work, and because, so far as I know, no one has yet attempted such an investigation. Given these circumstances, publishing this paper as a suggestive proposal will inevitably make my work more efficient, and might also expedite the work of others involved in or contemplating related projects.

My analysis of Clay's books most immediately suggests that the overwhelming stock-in-trade of circulating-library publishers was fiction by anonymous authors. Overall, novels accounted for 86% of the books published by circulating-library publishers, and 68% of those published by non-circulating-library publishers. Notably, as a group, the 7 circulating-library publishers were 1.8 times more prolific than the 35 non-circulating-library publishers.⁶ More specifically, as Table 1 shows, 12 of the 22 total books published by circulating-library publishers—52% of their total output—were by anonymous authors, while 6 (27%) were by female authors, and only 4 (18%) were by men. By contrast, only 11 of the 59 books (19%) published by non-circulating-library publishers were by anonymous authors, while 17 (29%) were by women, and 31 (53%) were by men. As a comparison of the "prolificity ratios" from Table 1 shows, these percentages mean that, proportionally speaking, circulating-library publishers were 5.7 times more likely to publish works by anonymous authors, 1.8 times more likely to publish works by female authors, and .7 times less likely to publish works by men. Given the minuscule data base represented by Clay's books, the latter two disproportions are scarcely large enough to be genuinely suggestive, and must be interpreted very tentatively. However, it is much more likely that the disproportion respecting anonymous authors suggests a wider trend, since this disproportion is over half an order of magnitude. Clay's books thus strongly suggest that, proportionally, circulating-library publishers dominated the production of anonymous fiction.

The other major disproportions between circulating-library publishers and other publishers suggest that in 1770-72, the anonymous fiction in which circulating libraries specialized was the wave of the future. Overall, anonymous works were 2.25 times more contemporary than female works, and 4.5 times more contemporary than male

works (Table 2). These ratios would indicate that, as the publication date of works gets closer to 1772, male authors were being replaced, or at least challenged, first by female authors, and then by anonymous authors. Even more significantly, the contemporaneity index of anonymous works by circulating-library publishers is 1.3 times higher than that for anonymous works by other publishers, while the circulating-library contemporaneity index is .4 times less for female authors, .03 times less for male authors, and .2 times less overall. These proportions suggest that circulating-library publishers not only preferred anonymous authors, but also that they had been doing so for a relatively long time. Admittedly the disproportions between these contemporaneity indices are not so statistically suggestive as those respecting the sheer prolificity of circulating libraries with anonymous authors. Still, one might hesitantly interpret these indices as evidence that circulating-library publishers largely pioneered the growing historical trend toward anonymous fiction that is more graphically indicated by the cumulative average contemporaneity indices of Clay's books.

TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF THE PROLIFICITY AND POPULARITY OF CIRCULATING-LIBRARY PUBLISHERS VS. NON-CIRCULATING-LIBRARY PUBLISHERS, CATEGORIZED BY AUTHOR GENDER, AND BASED UPON BOOKS BORROWED FROM CLAY'S CIRCULATING LIBRARY, 1770-72

	Anonymous Authors	Female Authors	Male Authors	Totals
# of books published by 7 circulating library presses	12 (55%) (52%)	6 ⁷ (27%) (26%)	4 (18%) (11%)	22 (100%) (27%)
# of borrowings	20 (49%) (56%)	15 (37%) (33%)	6 (15%) (10%)	41 (100%) (29%)
prolificity ratio (# of presses : # of publications)	1:1.7	1:0.9	1:0.6	1:3.1
popularity ratio (# of publications : # of borrowings)	1:1.6	1:2.5	1:1.5	1:1.9
# of books published by 35 non-circulating library presses	11 (19%) (47%)	17 ⁸ (29%) (74%)	31 (53%) (89%)	59 (100%) (73%)
# of borrowings	16 (16%) (44%)	31 (31%) (67%)	52 (52%) (90%)	99(100%) (70%)
prolificity ratio	1:0.3	1:0.5	1:0.9	1:1.7
popularity ratio	1:1.5	1:1.8	1:1.7	1:1.7
Total # of books	23 (28%) (100%)	23 (28%) (100%)	35 (43%) (100%)	81 (100%) (100%)
Total borrowings	36 (26%) (100%)	46 (33%) (100%)	58 (41%) (100%)	140 (100%) (100%)
Cumulative prolificity ratio	1:0.5	1:0.5	1:0.8	1:1.9
Cumulative popularity ratio	1:1.6	1:2	1:1.7	1:1.7

TABLE 2: COMPARISON OF THE CONTEMPORANEITY OF THE BOOKS PUBLISHED BY CIRCULATING-LIBRARY PUBLISHERS VS. NON-CIRCULATING-LIBRARY PUBLISHERS, CATEGORIZED BY AUTHOR GENDER, AND BASED UPON THE BOOKS BORROWED FROM CLAY'S CIRCULATING LIBRARY, 1770-72

	Anonymous Authors	Female Authors	Male Authors	Totals
Sum of Contemporaneity Indices ¹⁰ for Books Published by 7 Circulating-Library Publishers	53	58 ⁹	16	127
Total Books Published by 7 Circulating-Library Publishers	12	6	4	22
Average Contemporaneity Index for Books Published by 7 Circulating-Library Publishers	4.4	9.6	4.0	6.0
Sum of Contemporaneity Indices for Books Published by 35 Non-Circulating-Library Publishers	40	148 ¹¹	590	778
Total Books Published by 35 Non-Circulating-Library Publishers	11	17	31	59
Average Contemporaneity Index for Books Published by 35 Non-Circulating-Library Publishers	3.7	8.7	19.0	10.5
Cumulative Sum of Contemporaneity Indices	93	206	606	905
Total Books	23	23	35	81
Cumulative Average Contemporaneity Index	4.0	9.0	17.0	10.0

The most immediate questions raised by this data are why circulating-library publishers specialized in recent fiction by anonymous and female authors, and how their specialization related to literary publishing at large. The first question obviously involves the vexing problems of who anonymous authors were, and why they published their works anonymously. Certainly, throughout the eighteenth century, many authors remained anonymous for the sake of respectability. If modesty was the common motive, then the anonymous-author trend may in fact articulate with the preference for female authors. For especially where fiction was concerned, writing could much more easily compromise a *woman's* honor, than a man's.¹² On the other hand, for both men and women, publishing with a circulating-library press would have compounded the general onus on writing novels for money, since by mid-century circulating libraries were widely associated with crass pandering to a vulgar audience.¹³ Hence the disproportionate number of circulating-library authors who remained anonymous may have done so simply because circulating-library publishers carried a disproportionate stigma.

But if circulating-library authors remained anonymous because they felt particularly ashamed of their publishers, then why did they choose these publishers in the first place? One logical answer is that these authors had no other choice, because they were novice or otherwise high-risk authors. This answer in turn implies that circulating-library publishers were themselves somehow obliged to specialize in such novice and/or high-risk authors, and indeed their economic position in the publishing business imposed precisely such an obligation.

This obligation arose from the largely unacknowledged historical "accident" by which Robert Walpole's Whig ministry partly financed the emergence of "the novel" in Britain.¹⁴ As Michael Harris and other newspaper historians have made clear, by 1720 the business of publishing in England was substantially monopolized by a group of London booksellers and printers. During the late 1720's and the early 1730's, Robert Walpole's newspaper war against Bolingbroke's *The Craftsman* enormously increased the power and position of this coterie. For by providing government subsidies and free postal delivery to his mouthpieces—principally *The London Journal*, *The Daily Courant*, and *The Daily Gazetteer*—Walpole's ideological defense of enlightened modernity poured money into the accounts

of the printers, publishers, and booksellers who within a decade would elevate the novel. Thus by 1730 Samuel Richardson printed and had part interests in both *The London Journal* and *The Daily Gazetteer*, and was working within a network that included Tonson, Rivington, Millar, and most of the other publishers who later published the definitive “novels” of the 1740’s, and who produced the critical journals that defined those texts as the center of the “novel.”¹⁵

Economically, the simultaneous consolidation of a publishing dynasty and of a disciplinary “novel” genre obliged circulating-library publishers and other novice publishers to seek out and develop new talent and new fashions within the fiction market. Among its other effects, the “elevation of the novel” foregrounded novel-publishing as a profitable enterprise. Yet fledgling publishers who wanted to get in on this burgeoning enterprise could not compete in terms of money, author prestige, or business connections with the established publishers. Even with the (limited) capital surplus potentially generated by their libraries, circulating-library publishers were little better off than other fledgling publishers, since they were still outsiders unconnected to the network of printers, booksellers, reviewers, and financiers centered around Richardson. Given this inability to buy into the center of the market, new publishers could only break into the publishing business either by producing “cheap imitations” of the definitive novels, or else by producing an alternative kind of fiction, and thus opening up a “new” market. In either case, they needed to discover and exploit new authors who would work for cheap.

Together with the specific ideologies articulated by the Richardsonian novel, these economic connections between Robert Walpole and the publishers of the hegemonic novels help to explain why circulating-library publishers specifically developed new anonymous and/or female talent. For as recent studies make clear, what William Warner calls “the elevation of the novel” both devalued women’s fiction and prescribed reproduction of generic (male) models as the proper form for female writing. Yet ironically, this devaluation of female writing and prescription of its form as reproductive constructed women as precisely the kind of writers whom circulating-library publishers and other fledgling publishers needed to develop in order to compete against the dynastic publishing coterie subsidized by Walpole’s political wars. For this devaluation made female writing a relatively cheap resource for fledgling pub-

lishers, while the specific prescription of its form made female fiction an eminently reproducible resource.

Through a combination of historical accident and overt cultural engineering, Walpole's subsidization of the publishers who served him drastically reduced women's participation in the business of publishing, and thus institutionally contributed to the devaluation of female writing later consolidated by the novel's "elevation." As Margaret Hunt and others show, "by a complex process that we still do not fully understand," during the 1720's and 30's, the "mercuries" and other women who since the Civil War had occupied significant positions within the London publishing world, were "replaced by men."¹⁶ Hunt's own analysis suggests that the Walpole-Bolingbroke war contributed to this replacement, because most of these women worked for the political and religious opposition presses, and thus they were simply on the wrong side of the financial fence when Walpole's subsidies consolidated the monopoly of the publishing coterie that served him.¹⁷ Notably, the network of publishers centered around Richardson were also concerned in coffee-houses, where the didactic, critical discourse that helped elevate the "novel" developed, but where entrance was refused to women, whose public presence was stigmatized as part of the "carnavalesque" bar culture to which coffee-houses opposed themselves.¹⁸ Hence, by financially backing the publishers who helped him in his struggle against Bolingbroke, Walpole "accidentally" caused and substantially paid for the early-eighteenth-century attenuation of women's role in the business of publishing.

At a more discursive level, the particular ideologies articulated in and around the novels of Richardson also helped culturally to construct female fiction writing as a devalued, reproductive mode of discourse. Indeed, the profound extent to which the process of "elevating the novel" culturally devalued female fiction writing and prescribed its form as reproductive is the major theme of most recent studies of early British fiction.¹⁹ By speaking of the novel's "elevation," Warner stresses, as do the other critics cited above, that the novel did not spontaneously "rise" into generic precision and credibility as a natural part of historical progress; rather, at a certain juncture, British literary culture institutionally constructed and maintained "the novel" as a hegemonic discipline.²⁰ More specifically, these critics agree that the major ideologies "elevated" along with the novel were an equation of "the novel" with moral didacticism, and the historiographical disparagement of previous female fiction as

an outdated and immoral continuation of the French “romance” tradition. In fundamental ways, both of these ideologies at once devalue female fiction, and insist that reproduction of virtuous male models is the only legitimate form for female fiction writing.

Probably the most common theme among these recent studies is that “the elevation of the novel” distinguished “novels” from previous fiction not so much because of novels’ innovative “formal realism,” as because of their insistence upon moral didacticism. And indeed, as several of these studies demonstrate, earlier female writers of fiction such as Aphra Behn, Mary Delarivière Manley, and Eliza Haywood had already developed the fundamental “novelistic” techniques of “formal realism” and of “factual fiction.”²¹ Although novelists and critics did often claim that the “novels” of Richardson and Fielding were uniquely “natural” and “realistic,” according to these studies eighteenth-century literary culture most overtly and consistently promoted Richardson as the center of the novel genre because his virtuous, didactic style offered an antidote to the allegedly immoral and “corrupting” tradition of fiction practiced by women like Behn, Manley, and Haywood. Certainly the content of the fiction by these women was far more openly erotic than that of either Richardson or Fielding, and Gardiner and Warner demonstrate how Behn’s narrative structures put moral and social values in question, instead of didactically confirming them. But regardless of whether this early female fiction merited the charge of “immorality,” the fact that the novel was publicly elevated as a moral antidote to perverse *female* writing foregrounded the cultural “need” to discipline female writing, and hence devalued it. In turn, as Ballaster and Spencer especially stress, the emergence of the didactic “novel” as the hegemonic genre of fiction subjugated female writers to Richardson as a moral patriarch, and prescribed strict imitation of his style as the only proper mode for female writing. Any sallies by women into original, controversial themes or any experiments in ironic, decentered structure inevitably classed them with the perverse women writers whom the novel was supposed to discipline and replace.²²

Historiographically, the elevation of the novel misexplained Behn, Manley, and Haywood as developments of an outdated French “romance” tradition, and hence reconstructed these early female fiction writers not merely as moral degenerates, but also as historical regressions to a “romantic” past that enlightened modernity, with its new constitution, institutions, and “novels,” had now happily sur-

passed.²³ Obviously, this genealogy devalued female fiction writing, since it associated earlier fiction by British women not merely with the chaotic, brutal “gothic” past, but also with French culture. More subtly, the notion of Behn, Manley, and Haywood as practitioners of the French romance tradition also historically naturalized the reproductive mode of female fiction writing: beyond their immorality, these women were no more than crass imitators of a foreign tradition.

Such studies of the novel’s elevation have brilliantly analyzed the ways in which literary and critical discourse accomplished this elevation, but they have generally overlooked the historical and bibliographical evidence, summarized above, that Robert Walpole’s political struggles also fundamentally determined the emergence of the novel. Although above I stressed the “accidental,” economic impact of Walpole on the novel, clearly there are basic ideological connections between Walpole’s response to Bolingbroke and the novel’s response to earlier female fiction. A detailed comparison of these two very public constructions of value is beyond the scope of this essay, especially since one must be careful not to reduce the intricate interactions between economics, politics, literature, and ideology during the 1730’s and 40’s to a base-superstructure model.²⁴ However, the basic rhetorical similarities are clear: much as Walpole’s progressive, periodic historiography disparaged Bolingbroke’s defense of England’s ancient, “gothic” constitution as an outdated romance, and charged Bolingbroke and his Scriblerus club with immoral discourse, the “novel” was elevated by constructing the fiction of Behn, Manley, and Haywood as historically outdated and morally corrupt.

Notably, in both the literary and political realms, these constructions of an immoral and unusable past served to centralize and stabilize British culture. Yet ironically, insofar as the “elevation of the novel” actually succeeded in making women writers especially adept at reproducing models, and insofar as it economically obliged fledgling publishers to develop novice female writers as their monopoly, the elevation of the novel prepared generic female fiction to be the next major challenge to the hegemony of the novel. For as I argued above, the widespread devaluation of female writing recommended it as the cheap resource needed by circulating-library publishers and other fledgling publishers in order to compete, while the construction of its form as reproductive encouraged the development of any singularly successful new work into a successful new *genre*.

Significantly in this respect, evidence suggests that circulating libraries helped their proprietors compete as publishers not so much by generating surplus capital, as by physically and culturally encouraging writing that reproduced models, and by facilitating these publishers' contact with new, prospective authors, and particularly with prospective female authors. Most basically, because proprietors constructed circulating libraries as social sites, the libraries allowed reading patrons and other prospective authors an unusually direct and familiar access to the publishing business. Circulating-library publishers also had a unique ability more or less to guarantee "circulation" for the books they published, even if they were by novices, and this ability would presumably have attracted prospective authors. Of course, the libraries also served these publishers' own need to speculate wisely in new talent, since, as librarians, circulating-library publishers had regular contact with a ready-made test-market, and were thus especially well equipped to judge whether or not a manuscript would fit the current market trends.

The paucity of surviving business records for circulating-library publishers makes it difficult to verify how often the reading patrons of circulating libraries actually developed into the "new talent" published by library owners, or how much of this new talent was female. Yet precisely because documents indicating how authors and circulating-library publishers encountered each other are meager, this lack of documentary evidence scarcely disproves the occurrence of such transactions. Moreover, the circumstantial evidence for the development of circulating-library patrons into the authors of "anonymous" and "feminine" fiction is compelling. For both the physical nature and public discourse of circulating libraries (re)constructed their reading patrons as authors whose writing was "feminine" in the historically specific sense that it was an "anonymous" reproductive "signature" on generic conventions.²⁵

Most basically, the physical nature of the circulating library institution fostered patrons' ability to obey the novelistic prescription of female writing as a reproduction of models because circulating libraries made larger numbers of books available to readers. By doing so, the libraries gave readers an unprecedented material basis for recognizing intertextual relationships, and for identifying generic conventions. Before circulating libraries, readers could more easily view a book as a singular, unique practice; with circulating libraries, readers were better able to see books as members of classes. Quite "accidentally," patrons' sensitivity to genre was also emphasized by

the physical ordering of books in circulating-library catalogs, advertisements, and label illustrations. For in all cases, these orders grouped generically similar books together. At the most general level, and for practical reasons, catalogs and shelving divided books into broad categories such as “Novels, Romances, &c.,” versus “Medicine.” However, their bibliographic orders also distinguished more precise genres within these broad headings. For instance, because circulating libraries cataloged and shelved books alphabetically, they grouped books into genres defined by “keywords” in the titles: most “Mysteries” were cataloged and shelved together, as were most “Memoirs and Adventures.” Because catalogs and shelving also grouped books by format, even a little experience would teach patrons to look for “modern romances” among duodecimo volumes. Such ordering made it easy for readers to find other books like ones they had enjoyed, and perhaps more importantly, it encouraged readers to perceive and sample books as members of genres.

Simply by the physical presentation of their wares, circulating libraries thus offered patrons institutional support for the reproductive kind of writing that “the elevation of the novel” had prescribed as proper for women specifically. And if circulating libraries were patronized disproportionately by women, as Jan Fergus argues, then biological women had disproportionate contact with this institutional support for the prescribed “feminine” style of writing.²⁶ Admittedly, such material and demographic connections between circulating libraries and the production of “feminine” styles of fiction by women may seem largely accidental, but circulating-library publicity shows that circulating libraries also quite deliberately promoted both “feminine” styles of fiction and biologically female writers of fiction. Most broadly, one can note that this publicity represented circulating libraries not merely as social sites, but as specifically feminine social sites. For example, all of the circulating-library advertisements and book labels reproduced in Devendra Varma’s *The Evergreen Tree of Diabolical Knowledge* that show people inside circulating libraries include women, and many of them picture only women.²⁷

More specifically with respect to female fiction-writing, circulating-library publicity consistently advertised an interest in signatures by women on the “gothic romance” and “mystery” genres. Not coincidentally, as I suggest below, the definitive texts of the gothic genre were published almost exclusively by circulating-library publishers. Perhaps more coincidentally, the specific conventions of gothic romances and mysteries discursively co-operated with the

physical ways in which circulating libraries stimulated readers' sensitivity to the generic skeletons of individual books. For as various critics have demonstrated, because gothic romances and "mysteries" challenge readers to detect and circumvent the narratorial "cons" played by the texts, these genres challenge readers to be critical or "writerly" readers, and thus sensitize readers to certain *conventional* tricks—such as the paraliptic set-ups for Radcliffe's "explained supernatural."²⁸ By soliciting reproductions of such texts, circulating-library publicity "elevated" not only a genre that circulating-library publishers monopolized, but also a genre that textually articulated with the libraries' institutional foregrounding of the genericism of all texts.

Most consistently, circulating-library publicity solicited signatures on gothic romances and mysteries by itself practicing the conventions of those genres. A 1798 prospectus for the Minerva Circulating Library illustrates this technique. The prospectus opens by advertising the "Catalogue of This GENERAL LIBRARY, containing all the WORKS OF GENIUS AND TASTE, BOTH ANCIENT AND MODERN, whether History, Biography, Philosophy, Voyages, Travels, Poetry, &c., &c." Thereafter it flourishes, in various combinations of bold, italic, and capital print, such canonical holdings as the works of Shakespeare and Milton, and *The Critical* and *The Monthly* Reviews. Only in normal print in the middle of its second page does the prospectus mention that Minerva has "Also, for Pleasure and Amusement, every Novel, Romance, Tale, and Adventure in the English Language, together with all Dramatic Publications."²⁹

By "hiding" the central information about fiction in its textual margins, this prospectus affords privileged status to readers familiar with the ways gothic romances and "mysteries" make margins central and centers diversionary. For only people who were familiar with this "mystery" convention could get the in-joke here: the prospectus communicates *about* fiction by using a generic convention of gothic romances and "mysteries." Hence the prospectus not only assures romance and mystery readers that Minerva understands their "slang," but moreover promotes it as a form of power that yields communicative profits.

More aggressively, the frontispiece of an actual 1790's Minerva Circulating Library catalog asks for patrons' help in writing Minerva's romances. This frontispiece represents Minerva, attended by another female figure, writing the categories of "Minerva's Library" on a stone pillar. The list reads, from top to bottom, "History, Voyages,

Travels, Poetry, Novels, Ro”—the advertising artist having caught Minerva just in the act of adding “Romances” to her list of literary wares.³⁰ Most directly, this scene celebrates Minerva’s library for being in the act of writing romances into her canon. But significantly, in Minerva’s canon, romances are being written *after* “Novels.” This ordering overtly challenges “Novels” as the last word in fiction, and by associating Minerva with this order, the image not only advertises Minerva’s interest in a kind of romance that is “newer” than novels, but also encourages patrons to produce such “new” romances. For, after all, the image also represents Minerva’s writing of romances as incomplete; Minerva’s happily insurgent romances, this image implies, must be produced by their readers from fragments, just as the central, celebratory word “Romance” in this picture must be derived from the fragment “Ro-”. In the image, Minerva provides a generic cue, and readers finish the writing of “Romance,” much as real circulating libraries provided generic models, and writerly patrons performed signatures on the conventions exemplified in these models.

Significantly, however, this image remains ambiguous about whether the writing of romance entails more innovation or reproduction. Because “Ro-” is a fragment, the image on one hand suggests that Minerva’s “new” kind of fiction is still open to definition, and thus encourages innovation; even though “Ro-” obviously stands for “Romance,” the fragmentary sign suggests that, for Minerva, the meaning of even the complete word “Romance” is not yet spelt out. On the other hand, because linguistic conventions and context together do unambiguously determine this fragment as a sign for “Romance,” the image, like the prospectus above, reflexively uses a paraliptic “gothic” romance convention to insist on the specific romance genre that Minerva and her patrons are writing into literary culture.³¹

Notably, by remaining ambiguous about whether Minerva has an interest in innovative or reproductive female romance writing, this frontispiece simultaneously promotes the two different ways in which circulating-library publishers and other fledglings could develop “new talent.” As I argued above, fledgling publishers could profit either by producing cheap imitations of the “definitive” novels, or by developing “new” kinds of fiction over which they might extend their own monopoly. The scarcity of business records for circulating-library publishers again makes it difficult to document publishers’ overtly contracting authors for either kind of writing. However, the

basic fact of this dual developmental strategy can be illustrated by the careers of Frances Burney and Ann Radcliffe, who are probably the two most important late-eighteenth-century authors of fiction to be developed by circulating-library publishers.

As its epistolary style, didactic impetus, and its critical reception indicate, Burney's *Evelina* (1778) is an epitome of the strategy of imitation. By saying this I do not mean to belittle the grace, importance, or even the ingenuity of Burney's novel; I merely want to emphasize that its basic narrative and thematic forms were reproductions of the Richardsonian "novel," as that genre had been defined and elevated during the 1740's. By contrast, with respect to prescribed novelistic conventions, Radcliffe's first popular success, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), was a relatively "novel" kind of fiction. I cannot make an argument here about Radcliffe's originality, and certainly many of the conventions of plot in Radcliffe and in other gothics were reproductions of *Pamela* and *Clarissa*. However, the title page calls the book a "Romance" instead of a "Novel," and its soon-to-be-famous "explained supernatural" style involved original experiments in narrative focalization and voice that, I contend, repeatedly destabilize the didactic "virtue" of the book. Moreover, as a "gothic" romance, *The Romance of the Forest* was a watershed for an alternative genre of fiction that, beginning with Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), had been published almost exclusively by circulating-library publishers.³² The fact that fledgling, circulating-library publishers produced a woman both as the heir to the Richardsonian tradition and as the major alternative to that tradition epitomizes how fundamentally the development of new female fiction writers by novice publishers sustained the literary vitality of British fiction.

On the other hand, these two famous careers indicate how the strategy of developing new talent could back-fire on circulating-library publishers. While "anonymous" and cheap, authors like Radcliffe and Burney gave circulating-library publishers a way to compete with established publishers. But once these authors literally "made a name," they usually sold it to members of the established network of publishers against whom circulating libraries were trying to compete in the first place. Thus, as is now notorious, Burney anonymously sold *Evelina* to Thomas Lowndes for twenty guineas, while Radcliffe anonymously published her first three novels, including *The Romance of the Forest*, with Thomas Hookham.³³ But after *Evelina* and *The Romance of the Forest* made Burney and Radcliffe

famous, they abandoned these publishers for more established houses, who bought from them some of the most expensive copyrights of the century.³⁴

The publication history of Mary Darby Robinson followed a similar pattern, as Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus have shown.³⁵ Robinson began her novel-writing career with John Bell, a circulating-library publisher, and then switched for five years to Thomas Hookham, the circulating-library publisher who launched Radcliffe. As Fergus and Thaddeus stress, Robinson's association with Hookham was not profitable, if only because Hookham let her publish "by commission," an arrangement that made her responsible for the capital investment, and let her choose the size of press runs. But even though Robinson repeatedly "misjudged the market" for her books, and thus lost money, her association with Hookham did establish her reputation, so that in 1797 she could begin selling copyrights of her books to the Longman dynasty, and finally become more profitable.

But even if circulating-library publishers often lost the new talent they developed just when that talent became most lucrative, the examples of Burney and Radcliffe stress how substantially and disproportionately these and other novice publishers did develop both traditional and innovative female fiction. Exactly how this economic development of female fiction writers by circulating-library publishers interacted with other cultural constructions of women and of female writing is obviously a very complex question, but some of the basic issues involved are manifest in the critical reception afforded these two most famous discoveries of circulating-library publishers. Specifically, these receptions show how fledgling publishers' economic development of female fiction complicated the ideal of female *reproductivity* rather than *novelty* in writing that had been elevated along with the didactic "novel." For the reviews of Burney and Radcliffe paradoxically see female imitation of "novelistic" models as virtuous, while stigmatizing female signatures on alternative models as a disease and degeneration.

Thus, in reviewing Burney's *Camilla*, *The British Critic* of November 1796 praises her for practicing the conventions which "are found in great perfection in those English novels which are admitted as models; those of Richardson, Fielding, and Smollet," and contrasts her loyalty to these models with "the favourite designs of many writers of novels," which is "to astonish by the marvellous, and appal by the terrific."³⁶ On the contrary, while critics acknowledge Radcliffe's

skill in pursuing her own “favourite designs,” they stigmatize her *novelty* of design as “unnatural” in ways that echo the attacks during the 1740’s on the immorality of Behn, Manley, and Haywood.³⁷ Yet paradoxically, at the same time that reviewers call Radcliffe “unnatural” because her designs are innovative, they judge her way of writing to be “degenerate” because it is conventional. For example, the June 1798 *Critical Review* notice of *The Italian* opens by declaring that it was

not difficult to foresee that the *modern romance*, even supported by the skill of the most ingenious of its votaries, would soon experience the fate of every attempt to please by what is unnatural, and by a departure from that observance of real life, which has placed the works of Fielding, Smollett, and some other writers, among the permanent sources of amusement.

Yet in specifying the fate of Radcliffe’s fictional design, the review paradoxically condemns her conventionality. For the review in this context recalls another of its sage predictions, that the

modern romance . . . as its constitution (if we may so speak) was maintained only by the passion of terror, and that excited by trick, and as it was not conversant in incidents and characters of a natural complexion, . . . would degenerate into repetition, and would disappoint curiosity.³⁸

Because the review speaks of “the modern romance” genre rather than of Radcliffe specifically, this criticism is not equivalent to the complaint that all of Radcliffe’s romances are the same thing warmed over. Rather, the statement is itself an instance of the conventional complaint by critics during the 1780’s and 90’s that the “novel” as a genre was being quantitatively overwhelmed by the “repetition” of generic “departures” from it.³⁹ According to these two reviews, “the modern romance” is “degenerate” because it repeats “departures” such as Radcliffe’s from the “models” provided by the “novel,” whereas Burney is virtuous because she adheres to those “models.” Overtly, the review of Radcliffe justifies its charge of degeneracy by insisting that repetition of modern romance conventions is simply boring, and “disappoints curiosity.” Yet the parenthetical metaphor of a “constitution” for the modern romance implies profound anxiety about the ways that even “degenerate” repetition could turn a single, minor perversion into a generic revolution. For this metaphor overtly compares the modern romance genre to an organized political state. In context of the French Revolution and of the debates

between Burke and Paine about the meaning of England's "constitution," such a political figure ironically recognizes the modern romance as a revolutionary challenge to the state of the novel.⁴⁰

As I have argued, fledgling publishers' economic development of women did indeed constitute female fiction as a generic revolution against the novel's domination of British fiction—although this development also perpetuated the traditional novelistic models, as the case of Burney shows. More basically, of course, the economic strategy of these second-generation fiction publishers was revolutionary because it offered so many women a new source of income. Yet ironically, because upstart publishers' development of women as their monopoly made female fiction such a visibly prolific and commercial alternative to the "novel," what was perhaps the most important economic breakthrough for female writers in Britain ultimately intensified the cultural stigma on female writing. As the contradictory values attributed to Burney's and Radcliffe's conventionality epitomize, the development of female writing by circulating libraries publicly and institutionally deconstructed the opposition between virtuous female reproductivity and perverse female novelty that had been made hegemonic by the elevation of the novel. By supporting the novelistic construction of female writing as reproductive, yet at the same time developing new, alternative kinds of fiction such as gothic romances, circulating-library publishers demonstrated that reproductivity could both perpetuate hegemonic "models" and turn singular "departures" from hegemonic values into full-fledged sub-cultures. And crucially, these publishers' quite accidental demonstration of this latter, disturbing capacity of "feminine," reproductive writing to overwhelm rather than confirm received values coincided with the emergence of a quantitatively "mass" audience for fiction that circulating libraries, increasing literacy and leisure, and other cultural factors had produced.⁴¹ Consequently, the development of female fiction by circulating-library publishers both motivated and justified the equation of mass culture with a diseased, metastatic version of the female capacity for reproduction that, according to Bradford Mudge and others, developed into a cultural commonplace during the Regency and early-Victorian periods.⁴² Hence, in a particularly bizarre historical turn, insofar as the "elevation of the novel" actually succeeded in making women writers especially adept at reproducing models, and insofar as it economically forced fledgling publishers to develop both innovative and reproductive female fiction as their corner of the publishing market,

Robert Walpole's subsidization of a particular publishing coterie during his political war against Bolingbroke prepared women to be blamed for the advent of "mass literature," and to be articulated as the transcendent sign of its mode.

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NOTES

¹ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1957), 290, 298. Clive Probyn, *English Fiction of the Eighteenth Century, 1700-89* (New York: Longman, 1987), 6 and 9 echoes this view in defending Watt's analysis against recent critiques. David Richter, "The Reception of the Gothic Novel in the 1790's," in *The Idea of the Novel in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Robert Uphaus (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1988), 126, connects circulating libraries and the rise of more naive readers. On the eighteenth-century origins of this tradition see John Tinnon Taylor, *Early Opposition to the English Novel* (New York: King's Crown, 1943); for a critical commentary on some of its cultural functions, see Bradford Mudge, "The Man with Two Brains: Gothic Novels, Popular Culture, Literary History," *PMLA* 107 (1992): 92-104.

² Paul Kaufman, "The Community Library: A Chapter in English Social History," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s., 57 (1967): 3-67; Jan Fergus, "Eighteenth-Century Readers in Provincial England: The Customers of Samuel Clay's Circulating Library and Bookshop in Warwick, 1770-2," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 78 (1984): 155-213. Kaufman's classic study of 22 extant circulating-library catalogs found that among the 17 catalogs for large libraries, with average holdings of about 5000 titles, only an average of 20%, or 1000 titles, were fiction. However, among the 5 catalogs of smaller libraries, with average holdings of 430 titles, Kaufman found an average of over 70% fiction, a figure corroborated by Fergus's study of the only known record of actual borrowings from a circulating library. According to Fergus's study, from 1770-72, 72% of the 85 books borrowed from Samuel Clay's tiny library/bookstore in Warwick were novels. Other evidence also suggests that the figure for smaller libraries may be more generally accurate. *The Use of Circulating Libraries*, a 1797 How-To manual for proprietors (reprinted in Devendra Varma, *The Evergreen Tree of Diabolical Knowledge* [Washington: Consortium Press, 1972], 195-203), recommends 79% fiction. Moreover, according to a 1798 advertisement by William Lane's Minerva Press Circulating Library, larger libraries may often have circulated as many as "twenty five copies of each modern and approved work" (quoted in Varma, 53). One cannot assume that "each modern and approved work" was a novel, but demonstrably "novels" made up a considerable proportion of "modern" works, especially during the last two decades of the century. Consequently, we might reasonably suppose that larger circulating libraries more often stocked multiple copies of novels than of other titles. If they did so, then of course their catalogs inaccurately represent their actual holdings and potential lendings. For a critical summary of this evidence that is marred only by its omission of Fergus, see Lee Erikson, "The Economy of Novel Reading: Jane Austen and the Circulating Library," *Studies in English Literature* 30 (1990): 573-90. The records studied by Fergus of the actual borrowing from Clay's small combination circulating library-bookstore are the only

trustworthy documents respecting the clientele of circulating libraries. These records show that 54% of the total customers of Clay's *circulating library* were women, so that, as Fergus generalizes, "although fewer women than men were recorded by Clay as customers, proportionally far more of them were interested in borrowing books" (178), than in buying them. The proportions of women in these records gain significance in the context of the generally lower literacy rates for women, especially in provincial areas.

³ Fergus (note 2), 192; Paul Kaufman, "In Defense of Fair Readers," *Review of English Literature* 8 (1967): 68-76.

⁴ The other major studies are Alan McKillop, "English Circulating Libraries, 1725-50," *The Library*, 4th series, 14 (1934): 477-85; and Hilda Hamlyn, "Eighteenth-century Circulating Libraries in England," *The Library*, 5th series, 1 (1947): 197-222. See also Hamlyn's M. A. Thesis, "The Circulating Libraries of the Eighteenth Century," (London University, 1948), whose first appendix provides a list of known circulating libraries, complete with addresses and authorities for their existence. James Raven, "The Noble Brothers and Popular Publishing," *The Library* 12 (1990): 293-345 is the only study of actual publishing by circulating-library proprietors. It masterfully summarizes and interprets the archival evidence respecting the Nobles, but it does not analyze in any depth the connections between their library and publishing businesses.

⁵ William Warner, "The Elevation of the Novel in England: Hegemony and Literary History," *ELH* 59 (1992): 577-96; Ros Ballaster, "Romancing the Novel: Gender and Genre in Early Theories of Narrative," in *Living by the Pen*, ed. Dale Spender (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1992), 188-200; Judith Kegan Gardiner, "The First English Novel: Aphra Behn's *Love Letters*, the Canon, and Women's Tastes," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 8 (1989): 201-22; Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), esp. 3-103; Laurie Langbauer, *Women and Romance* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990); Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen* (London: Routledge, 1992). These arguments are discussed below in section II.

⁶ See Table 1: 7 circulating-library publishers (17% of the total publishers) published 22 (27%) of the 81 total books with recoverable imprints, while 34 non-circulating-library publishers (83% of the total publishers) published 59 books (73% of the total). The circulating-library publishers of Clay's books are: John Bell, Thomas Carnan, Thomas Lowndes, John and Francis Noble, James Pottinger, and Thomas Vernor. See Appendix 1 of Hamlyn's "The Circulating Libraries of the Eighteenth Century" (note 4) for authorities, dates, and addresses.

⁷ Includes two titles (11N and 13N in Fergus's Appendix), "By a lady."

⁸ Includes two titles (12N and 20N in Fergus's Appendix), "By a lady"; and one title (17N), "by an injured fair."

⁹ Includes 11N in Fergus's Appendix (index of 7) and 13N (index of 3), both "By a lady."

¹⁰ This index equals the difference in years between 1772, the end date of Clay's borrowing records, and the original publication date of the book. Thus the lower the index, the more contemporary is the book.

¹¹ Includes 12N in Fergus's Appendix (index of 5) and 20N (index of 3), both "By a lady"; and 17N (index of 4), "by an injured fair."

¹² Ballaster (note 5); Spencer (note 5), 75-77.

¹³ Taylor (note 1), 21-86.

¹⁴ On historical “accident,” see Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977); see also *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

¹⁵ The postal subsidies, together with the interest generated by the political controversy, also vastly increased the circulation of the newspapers that these men published and printed—and in which they advertised the novels and other books that they published. On the identity between novel publishers and Walpole’s newspapers, compare Michael Harris, *London Newspapers in the Age of Walpole* (London: Associated Univ. Presses, 1987), esp. 65–81; and the entries for the printers and publishers specified by Harris in Henry Plomer, *A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers . . . from 1726–1775* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1968). See K. T. Winkler, “The Forces of the Market and the London Newspaper in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Newspaper and Periodical History* 4 (1988): 22–35, for a review and criticism of Harris’s arguments. On the political and ideological contexts of the Walpole-Bolingbroke war, see Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968); and “Augustan Politics and English Historiography: the Debate on the English Past, 1730–5,” *History and Theory* 6 (1967): 33–56.

¹⁶ Margaret Hunt, “Hawkers, Bawlers, and Mercuries: Women and the London Press in the Early Enlightenment,” *Women and History* 9 (1984): 41–68, esp. 63.

¹⁷ Hunt, 42–59 stresses the connection of women publishers and mercuries to *The Craftsman* and *Mist’s Weekly Journal*, but see also Leona Rostenberg, “Richard and Anne Baldwin, Whig Patriot Publishers,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 47 (1953): 1–42.

¹⁸ Harris (note 15), 71; Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), 94–96.

¹⁹ See Ballaster, Gardiner, Spencer, and Warner (note 5). On the construction of female writing as reproductive, see also Ruth Perry, “Clarissa’s Daughters, or the History of Innocence Betrayed: How Women Writers Rewrote Richardson,” *Women’s Writing: The Elizabethan to Victorian Period* 1 (1994): 5–24.

²⁰ Throughout this essay, I use “discipline” in Michel Foucault’s sense of the new form of power that emerged in European cultures during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See especially *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage, 1979); “Two Lectures,” “Truth and Power,” and “The Eye of Power,” all in *Power / Knowledge*. Notably, in context of my discussion below of the gothic genre as a challenge to “disciplinary” conventionality, in “The Eye of Power” Foucault offers Ann Radcliffe’s gothic “architecture” as a direct contrast to Bentham’s Panopticon, which is Foucault’s paradigm of “disciplinary” culture (153–54).

²¹ See Watt (note 1), 9–34 on “formal realism.” For an alternative way of defining the novelistic style, see Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia, 1983).

²² Ballaster (note 5), Spencer (note 5), and Warner (note 5) all make this point.

²³ On the historiographical re-positioning of Behn and others as “romancers,” see Ballaster and Langbauer (note 5); see also Davis (note 21) on the “romance” tradition.

²⁴ See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 75–82.

²⁵ See Leslie Fiedler, “Archetype and Signature,” in *Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler*, 2 vols. (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), vol. 1. In speaking of “signatures”

on a *genre*, I am adapting Fiedler's notion that literary performance is always a "signature" that articulates individual, historically-determined experiences onto received cultural "archetypes," since Fiedler's archetypes are Jungian "immemorial patterns of human response to the human situation in its most permanent aspects" (537), rather than literary genres, *per se*. However, as the homology between Fiedler's concept and the Saussurean relation of *parole* to *langue* emphasizes, the notion of "signature" does seem apt for describing how writers exploited received discursive "forms" or models in their own work. My notion of "signatures" on genres is also indebted to the concept of "variatio[n]" proposed by Gardiner in her defense of Behn's *Love Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* as the "first" English "novel" (note 5), 219. For a survey of current genre theories that similarly emphasize the ways genres historically determine literary production, see Ralph Cohen, "Genre Theory, Literary History, and Historical Change," in *Theoretical Issues in Literary History*, ed. David Perkins (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1991), especially 104-13. For such a historical view of the "romance" genre specifically, see Jean Radford's introduction to *The Progress of Romance: the Politics of Popular Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1986), 1-22, discussed in Cohen, 105-7.

²⁶ Fergus (note 2), 178.

²⁷ Varma (note 2), 52; 112-33.

²⁸ See, for example, David Punter, *The Literature of Terror* (New York: Longman, 1980), where Punter says that gothic authors like Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis "are playing a confidence trick on the reader, by using all the resources in their power to convince us of the reality of phantoms and then sneering at the belief" (76); consequently, he argues, the conventional Radcliffian gothic text "demands a type of discrimination largely unnecessary in the reading of earlier realist fiction and only dimly foreshadowed by Walpole, Reeve, or Lee, for they are based on . . . the virtually insoluble problem of the text which lies" (96). For related analyses of the ways gothic texts trap and trick readers, see Robert Kiely, *The Romantic Novel in England* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972); Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975); Terry Heller, *The Delights of Terror* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1987); William Patrick Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986); and Kate Ellis, *The Contested Castle* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1989).

²⁹ This Prospectus is reprinted in Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1939), 313-14. Taylor (note 1), claims that such diversion was a common practice in circulating-library catalogs (21).

³⁰ Blakey (note 29), plate 9, 122-3.

³¹ The "Quaint, Queer, and Curious Advertisements" in the third appendix of Devendra Varma's *The Evergreen Tree of Diabolical Knowledge* (note 2) manifest similar in-jokes for romance readers, and similar solicitations of women to support circulating-library fiction.

³² Walpole's "Gothic Story," with its prefaces that overtly theorize the need for a new, less prescriptively "modern" kind of novel, was published by Thomas Lowndes, who also published *Evelina*. Thus Lowndes as an individual circulating-library publisher reiterates the dual productive strategy represented by Burney and Radcliffe as novice authors: like circulating-library publishers as a group, Lowndes succeeded both by publishing imitations of "the novel," and by investing in the

“elevation”—or at least the presence—of a “new” kind of fiction. On the ways in which Walpole’s prefaces and story contest “the novel” and enlightened, progressive modernity in general, see Edward Jacobs, “Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* and the ‘Semiotics of Waste,’” *Revista da Associação Portuguesa de Estudos Anglo-Americanos* 1 (1991): 25-37; and “Unlearned Monsters: An Archaeology of the Gothic Romance” (Ph.D. Diss., Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1990), 250-327.

³³ For a cogent summary of Burney’s transaction and the documentary bibliography, see Edward Bloom’s “Introduction” to Fanny Burney, *Evelina* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), esp. ix.

³⁴ Burney published *Cecilia* and her other works with Cadell, Davies, and Payne, a group attached through Cadell with Andrew Millar, Fielding’s early publisher/patron, and a key member of the coterie who had elevated “the novel.” Similarly, after *The Romance of the Forest* became a best-seller, Radcliffe dropped both her anonymity and Hookham, first for George Robinson, who had been subsidized early in his career by the Longman dynasty, and who by the 1780’s was one of the leading buyers of copyrights in London; and then for Cadell and Davies, to whom Burney also moved. See Plomer (note 15) for the histories of these publishers. See Turner (note 5), for the prices reputedly paid for copyrights to Burney’s and Radcliffe’s later works (114).

³⁵ “Women, Publishers, and Money, 1790-1820,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 17 (1987): 191-207, esp. 196-7.

³⁶ Ioan Williams, *Novel and Romance, 1700-1800: A Documentary Record* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 433.

³⁷ As an instance of the former stigma, take Coleridge’s famous description in the *Critical Review* for August 1794 of Radcliffe’s patented “mysterious” style as a shameful sort of tease:

Curiosity is raised oftener than it is gratified; or rather, it is raised so high that no adequate gratification can be given it; the interest is completely dissolved when once the adventure is finished, and the reader, when he is got to the end of the work, looks about in vain for the spell which had bound him so strongly to it. (quoted in Williams, *Novel and Romance* [note 36], 390)

³⁸ *The Critical Review*, ser. 2, 23 (1798): 166-69, esp. 166.

³⁹ On the eighteenth-century origins and contexts of this tradition see Taylor (note 1).

⁴⁰ For a cogent analysis of these debates, see Steven Blakemore, *Burke and the Fall of Language* (Hanover: Univ. Press of New England, 1988).

⁴¹ On the causes of mass readership, see Watt (note 1), 35-59; Richard Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1957), 15-80; Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 3-46; Terry Lovell, *Consuming Fiction* (London: Verso, 1987), 19-53; J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1961).

⁴² Mudge (note 1), 97-101. For bibliography on the critical reaction to gothic romances and other late-eighteenth-century fiction, see also W. F. Gallaway, “The Conservative Attitude Fiction Toward Fiction, 1770-1830,” *PMLA* 55 (1940): 1041-59; H. E. Haworth, “Romantic Female Writers and the Critics,” *Texas Studies in*

Literature and Language 17 (1976): 725-36; Joseph Bunn Heidler, *The History, from 1700 to 1800, of English Criticism of Prose Fiction*, *University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature* 31, 2 (1928); Derek Roper, *Reviewing before the Edinburgh* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1978); and Ioan Williams, *Novel and Romance* (note 36).