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Although there have been extensive critical studies of the laws and conceptual understandings of early modern copyright in the past few decades, less attention has been devoted to the authorial payments that followed from those developments.¹ Studies of individual authors or genres have collected details of payments to authors, but no comparative study of the values of those payments exists.² This essay assesses 439 examples of copyright payments about which we know enough to match the payment to a particular edition of a book so that we can ascertain the book's physical format and construction and thus estimate a publisher's expenses relative to the price paid for the copy. We offer some comparative context for this data within the larger body of publications across the century, in order to gauge the degree to which these results are representative. We review trends in authorial

¹ *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature*, edited by Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), and his chapter, "Copyright, Authors and Censorship," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, edited by Michael F. Suarez, SJ, and Michael L. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5.118-131; Jody Greene, *The Trouble with Ownership: Literary Property and Authorial Liability in England, 1660-1730*, Material Texts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Ronan Deazley, *On the Origin of the Right to Copy: Charting the Movement of Copyright Law in Eighteenth-Century Britain (1695-1775)* (Oxford; Portland, OR: Hart Publishing, 2004) and *Rethinking Copyright: History, Theory, Language* (Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA: E. Elgar Publishing, 2006); *Global Copyright: Three Hundred Years since the Statute of Anne, from 1709 to Cyberspace*, edited by Lionel Bently, Uma Suthersanen and Paul Torremans (Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2010).

² This is not to indicate any lack of appreciation of such scholarship. Without the work of Peter Garside, Robert Hume, Judith Milhous, James Raven, William St. Clair, Rainer Schöwerling and Richard Sher (all listed in the references in the data spreadsheet) this study would not be possible. We would also like to thank those who offered comments and suggestions when this work was first presented at the SHARP 2009 conference in Toronto, Canada in June 2009. Finally, we would like to thank Austin Gee for his help with various parallel sets of economic data and trends for the period.

payments in relation to genre, gender, format and period of publication. We also compare authorial payments and book prices to general economic patterns of the century to assess the extent to which book prices behave like luxury or everyday commodities.³ Finally, we provide the full data set for others to draw on and to extend. We thus hope to enrich our understanding of the economic realities of authors and publishers in eighteenth-century Britain.

In his 2004 book, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, William St. Clair argued that "we need to compile a cumulative, accurate, database of actual recorded costs, prices, print runs, methods of manufacture, and sales of books, including imports, reprints, adaptations, and abridgements. The production information can be supplemented with reports of actual reading and fictional representations."⁴ St. Clair provides a number of appendixes gathering material for the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁵ *The Reading Experience Database* at the Open University has also made progress in gathering accounts of both actual and fictional reading experiences.⁶ We hope that this essay provides further bases for more accurate and detailed analysis of eighteenth-century British authorship as a profession.

³ For an economic analysis of this same data and its significance for bookselling practices in the century, see David Fielding and Shef Rogers, "Monopoly Power in the Eighteenth-Century British Book Trade," forthcoming.

⁴ William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 444.

⁵ For some cautionary comments about the data in St. Clair's appendixes, particularly Appendix 6, see Thomas F. Bonnell, "When Book History Neglects Bibliography: Trouble with the 'Old Canon' in *The Reading Nation*," *Studies in Bibliography* 57 (2005–2006): 243–61. He especially criticizes St. Clair for not examining copies of the books discussed, a warning we have tried to heed in our work.

⁶ <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/reading/UK/>.

Methodology

After scouring a variety of printed sources for references to authorial payments for works, each item has, if possible, been associated with a specific record in the *English Short-Title Catalogue* (ESTC) and details sought on the book's original sale price. ESTC provides publisher and pagination details, though for multi-volume sets we have had to consult a physical or digital copy to determine page numbers. While this research was being conducted ESTC also added references to the *Bowyer Ledgers*, and those items have additional notes indicating payments to the printer and, if available, the size of print runs.⁷ We too often found ourselves lacking one or more crucial pieces of data, so that there are numerous other payments about which we know something in the eighteenth century, but not enough to be able to contextualise the payment fully in order to compare it with other payments. There are also a number of other types of payments that could contribute to an author's income or find their way into discussions of publishing: gifts to authors from patrons, payments to authors by subscribers, payments to dramatists and musicians for performance rights, and payments among booksellers for shares in particular titles. None of these is examined here, though we do briefly discuss the potential influence of patronage.⁸

In addition to the physical details of the work and the financial arrangements for its publication, the spreadsheet records sources and enables sorting of the works

⁷ *The Bowyer Ledgers*, edited by Keith Maslen and John Lancaster (London and New York: The Bibliographical Society and The Bibliographical Society of America, 1991).

⁸ The single best summary of income possibilities for eighteenth-century authors is Richard Sher's chapter, "The Rewards of Authorship," in *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland and America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 195–261.

by date, place of publication, gender of the author, and genre of the work. The genre classifications are also presented in a simplified set in order to enable comparison with a much larger dataset, the titles in Gale Publications' digitised microfilm set, *The Eighteenth Century*, better known now by its digital title, *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (ECCO), and divided into two parts, ECCO I and ECCO II. The genre data used here combines data from the two parts, to cover 87,741 editions, out of the approximately 340,000 editions we believe to have been produced in the eighteenth century in Britain or in English outside Britain.

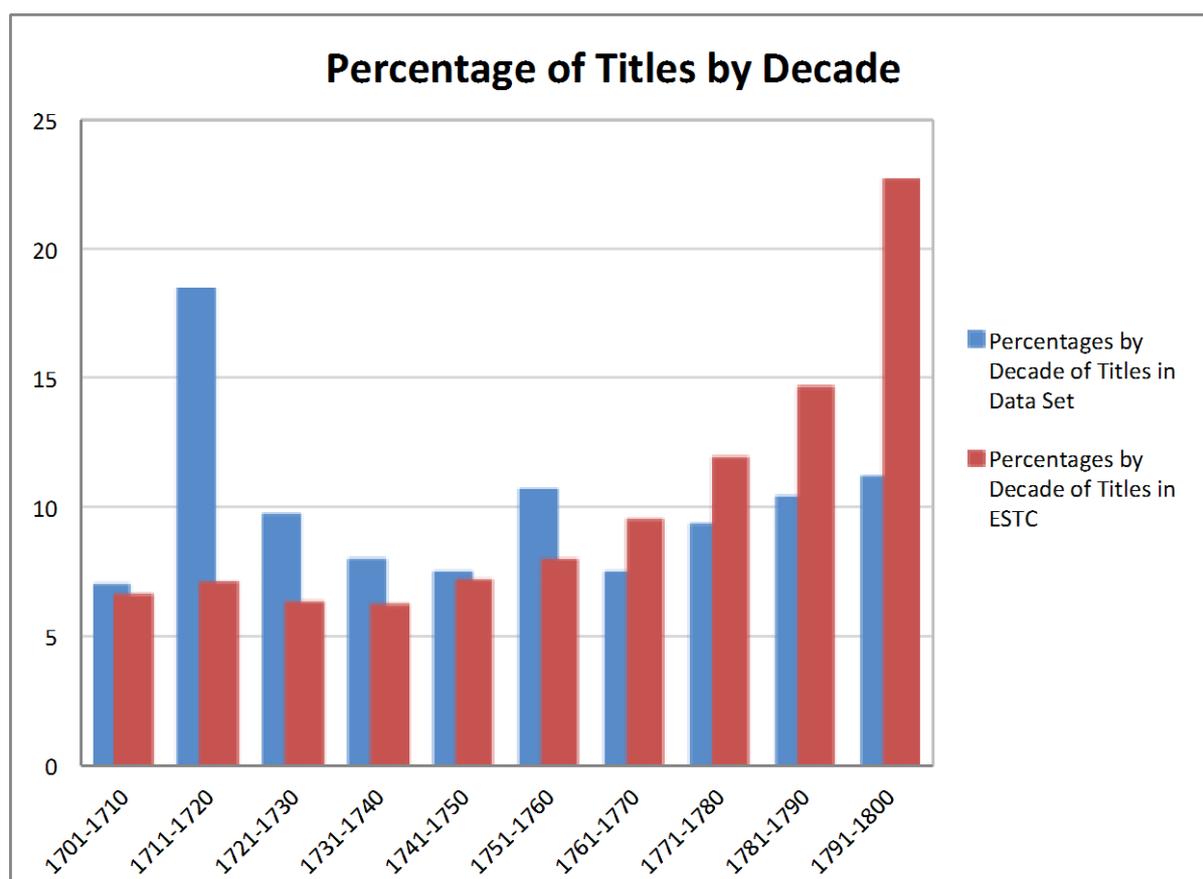
Finally, the spreadsheet lists a number of basic ratios of costs and prices. There is a set of ratios for each individual title, and a set of average ratios for the data selected, either the full set of 439 records, or any subset that a user creates by filtering the data. These average ratios use Microsoft Excel's subtotal function to adjust automatically as the data is sorted. For readers who are not economists, it is perhaps easiest to think of the ratios as follows:

- The payment/price ratio is equivalent to the number of copies an author could buy of his or her book using the copy money received for that book.
- The Sheet/Price ratio provides a rough indication of value to the consumer—a higher ratio means more pages per pence than a lower ratio. The reason for measuring by sheets is that paper was a significant cost of a book's production, somewhere between one-third and one-half of the total, and page counts cannot provide an accurate gauge of paper consumption without considering the number of pages on a sheet. The database calculates the sheet count based on pagination totals and format.

- The Payment/Sheet ratio measures essentially what each sheet cost the publisher to purchase from the author, translator or reviser. It provides a useful comparison for books of different lengths, though it is most accurate to compare books of the same format, which are more likely to share sheet and type sizes.

How Representative is this Data?

Thanks to the care and accuracy of the data in the *English Short-Title Catalogue*, we have a fairly accurate picture of the number book editions published in the eighteenth century.⁹



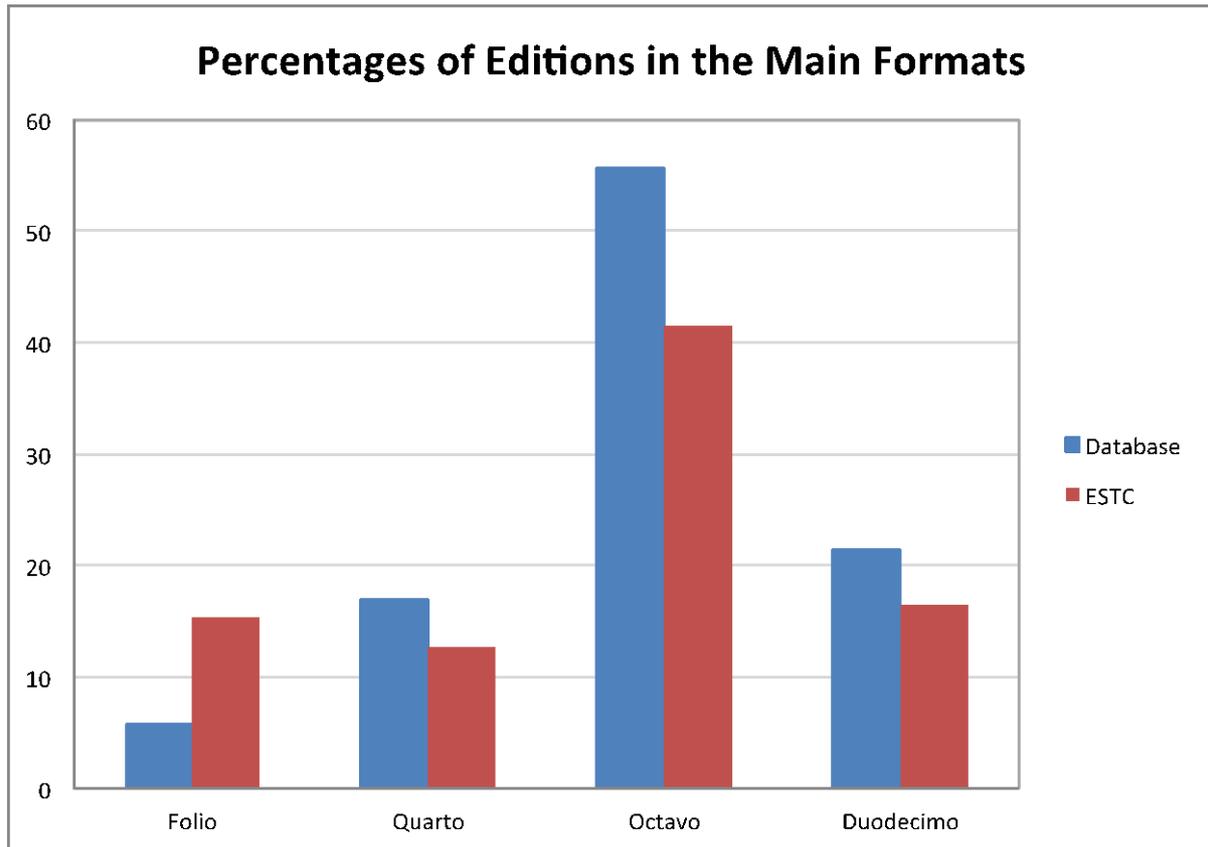
⁹ For a considered statistical overview of book publishing in the period, indicating some of the limitations of ESTC data, see Michael F. Suarez, SJ, "Towards a Bibliometric Analysis of the Surviving Record, 1701-1800," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, edited by Michael F. Suarez, SJ, and Michael L. Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5.39-65.

This graph shows alongside the percentage of records in our data for each decade the percentage of dated records in the ESTC for that same period. A graph for each individual year of the century is less smooth, because many works have estimated dates and those estimates cluster around the decade and half decade years, creating spikes across the graph. However, when you aggregate the ESTC data by decades, what results is a relatively smooth rising curve from the 1750s on, with a slight dip in the 1720s and 1730s. A graph in 25-year segments makes it even more apparent that in fact there was no growth until after 1750 (the total number of editions for the first two quarter-centuries is exactly the same, 57,004). So we have a clear context for our data, and what is most obvious is the relatively high number of titles in our data that were published in the first half of the century. This is directly attributable to two sources: John Nichol's *Literary Anecdotes* (where he records payments from Bernard Lintot to a large number of authors, primarily literary figures, in the first two decades of the century) and Judith Milhous and Robert Hume's study of dramatic publications that also includes data on a reasonable number of authors from earlier in the century.¹⁰ While we would prefer data that more evenly paralleled the proportions across the century, our economic analysis shows that the year of publication is not a significant determinant of price per sheet, and that payment per sheet at the beginning of the century is not significantly different from payment per sheet at the end (only the middle period is different). Over-sampling at

¹⁰ John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, 8 vols. (London, 1814), 8.293–304; Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, "Playwrights' Remuneration in Eighteenth-Century London," *Harvard Library Bulletin* n.s. 10 (1999): 1–90.

the beginning of the century and under-sampling at the end do not therefore undermine our conclusions.¹¹

Our data also differs from the ESTC data in that more of our examples relate to smaller format books, due in part to the bias in the sources we have drawn upon, which have often focussed on literary works.



However, in so far as there is a trend across the century, it is away from large format works in favour of smaller formats, while the cost pressures on publishing in the later part of the century also seem to have encouraged printing in smaller formats.¹²

One of these pressures was payments to authors, which rose fairly consistently

¹¹ See Fielding and Rogers, "Monopoly Power."

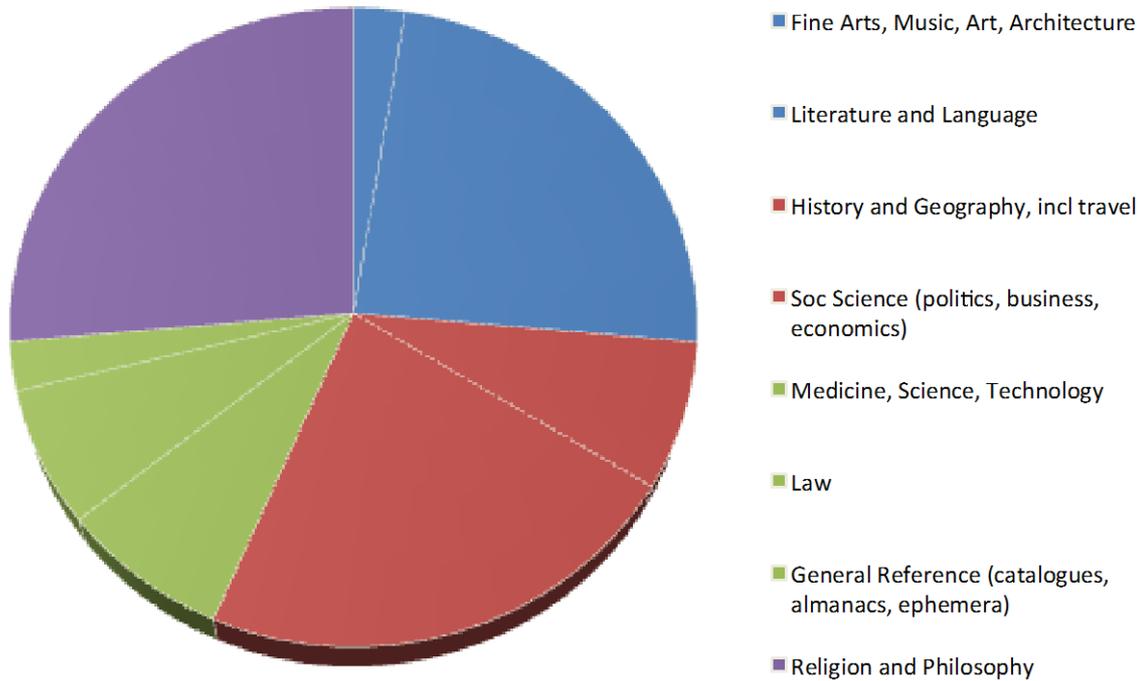
¹² The average number of pages per title in our data set rises consistently across the century, but the number of sheets drops and then evens out in the final two decades, a further indication of cost pressures on publishers. Once economies of printing layouts had been fully realized by about 1790, publishers turned to a variety of different royalty and cost-sharing arrangements in lieu of flat payments to authors. For a discussion of these experiments in author remuneration, see St. Clair, *Reading Nation*, examples in Appendix 9, and Sher, "Rewards," cited above.

(though with much variability depending upon the genre of the book and the gender of the author), so that the most interesting variations in copyright payment arrangements are likely to occur in relation to smaller format works.

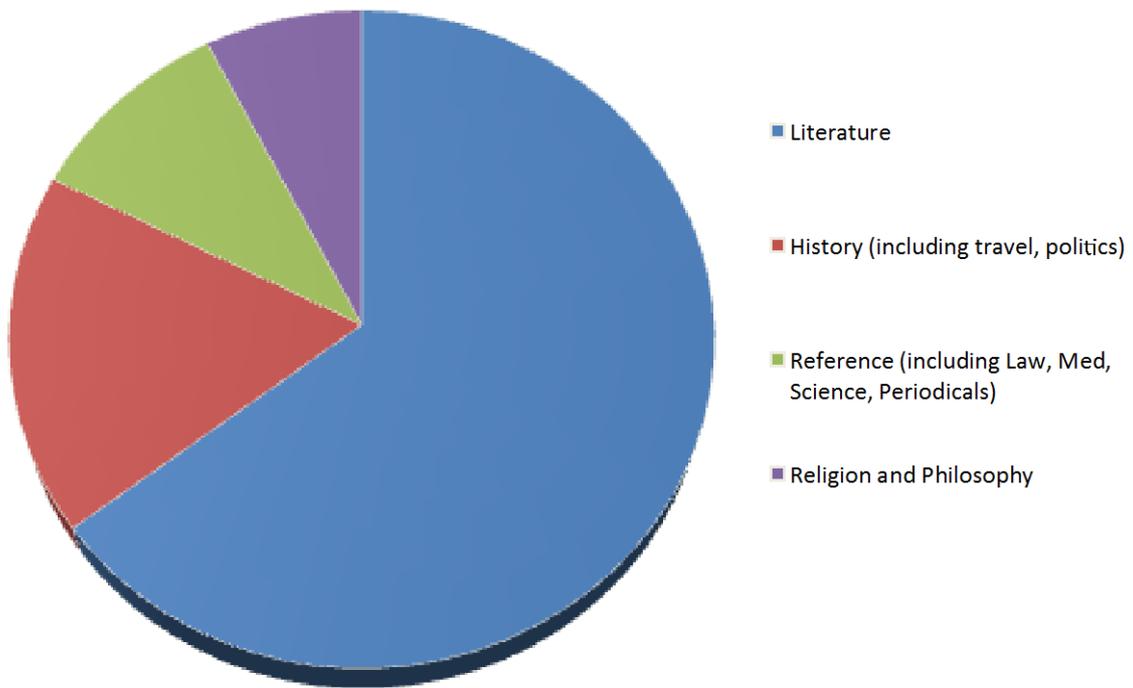
While data for genres of books published across the century are less detailed than for format and number of editions, it is still possible to draw some useful comparisons. ECCO attempted to classify all of the works it digitised into eight general groupings. We have further reduced those to only four, because the ECCO categories are not entirely reliable and because our data set does not include all genres of works. The first pie chart shows the genres of the works in ECCO colour-coded to the four genres we have used, but with segment lines to indicate the breakdown of all eight of its categories.¹³ The second pie chart shows the genres of the works in our data set.

¹³ John Feather's 1986 survey by genre yields a very similar pie chart, despite using earlier sources, so the proportions of content are likely to be fairly representative. See "British Publishing in the Eighteenth Century: A Preliminary Subject Analysis," *The Library*, 6th ser., vol 8, no. 1 (1986): 32-46, based on the data depicted on p. 36.

Genres of Works in ECCO



Genres of Works in Data Set



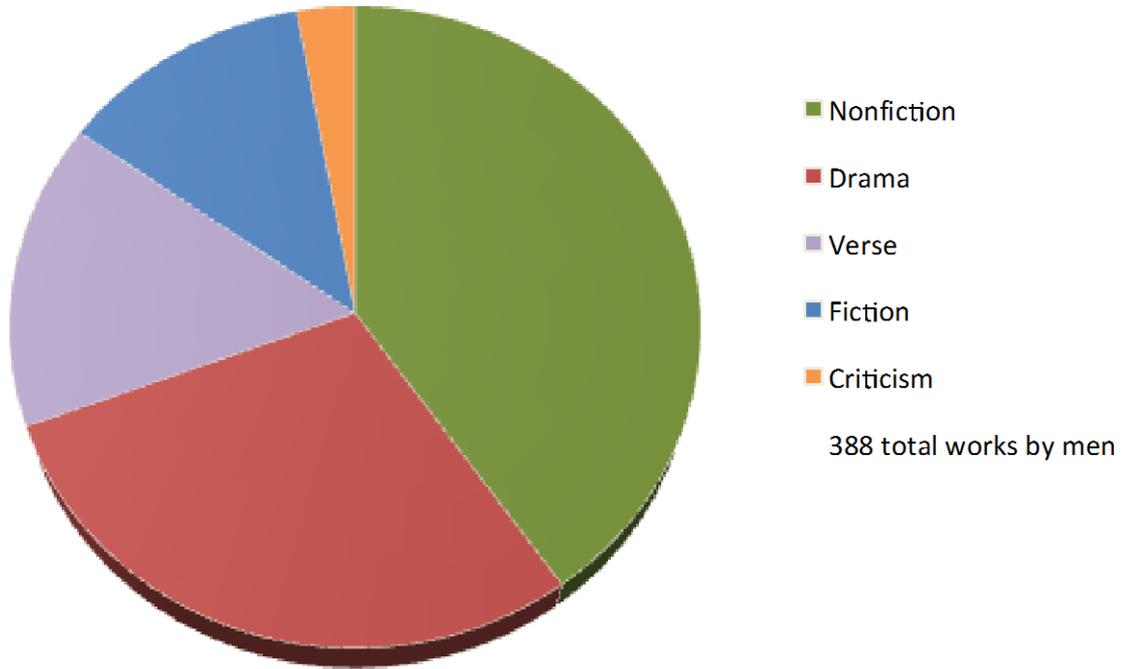
In comparing these two graphs, the literary bias of our data becomes glaringly obvious, while religion is correspondingly under-represented. It may be that there were relatively fewer copy payment agreements for religious works, since many of the authors may have been happy to see their work published without payment, though some of the payments that we do know about for sermons are significant.¹⁴ Reference works, probably the genre most frequently commissioned by booksellers, and thus most likely to have involved a contract and a payment to the author or compiler, are regrettably underrepresented, primarily, we suspect, because their authors were often little-known figures whose correspondence or records are unlikely to have been preserved, or, if they have survived, to have been studied. The major sector of publishing not reflected here, of course, concerns the publication of reprints, texts for which the booksellers did not have to pay copyright fees. It is there that one has to look for more affordable print products in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.¹⁵

If we separate the data along gender lines and further subdivide the literature category, we can also see that the association of women with prose fiction (usually represented disparagingly) has some basis in economic reality, though women were also quite active in theatre.

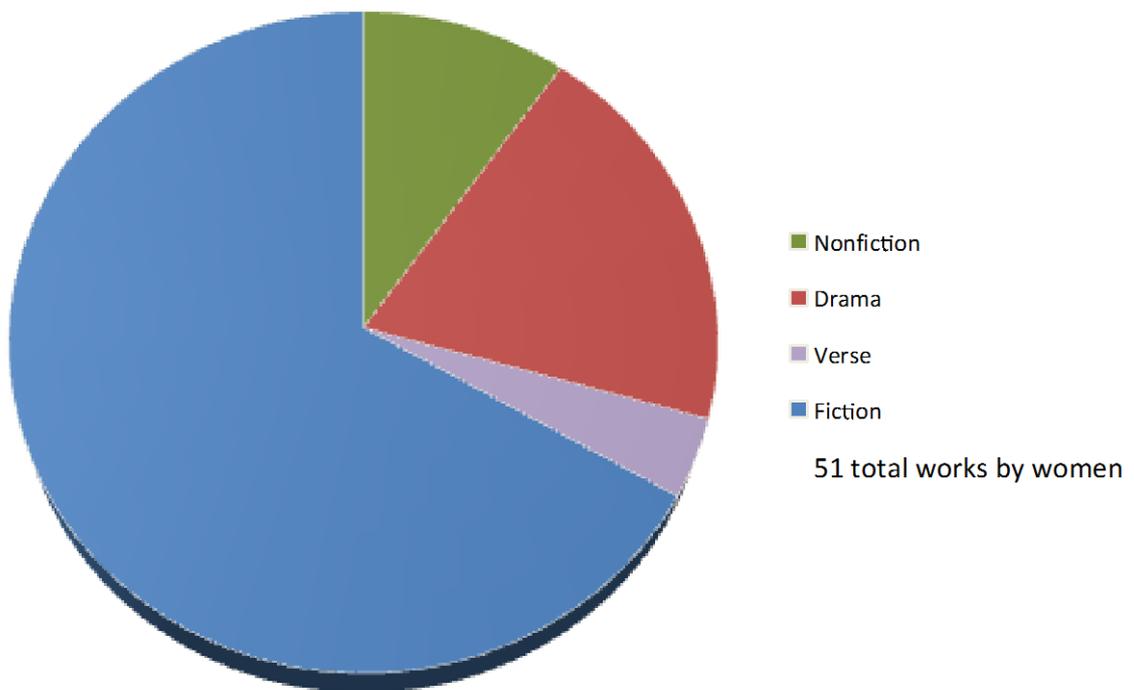
¹⁴ Hugh Blair was exceptionally well remunerated for his sermons, but even William Leechman received £160 for his sermons.

¹⁵ For a thorough assessment of both the impressive number of literary reprint sets and of their economics of production, see Thomas F. Bonnell, *The Most Disreputable Trade: Publishing the Classics of English Poetry, 1765–1810* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). There were also large numbers of sets of reprinted travel books and smaller numbers of sets in other genres.

Genres of Works by Men



Genres of Works by Women



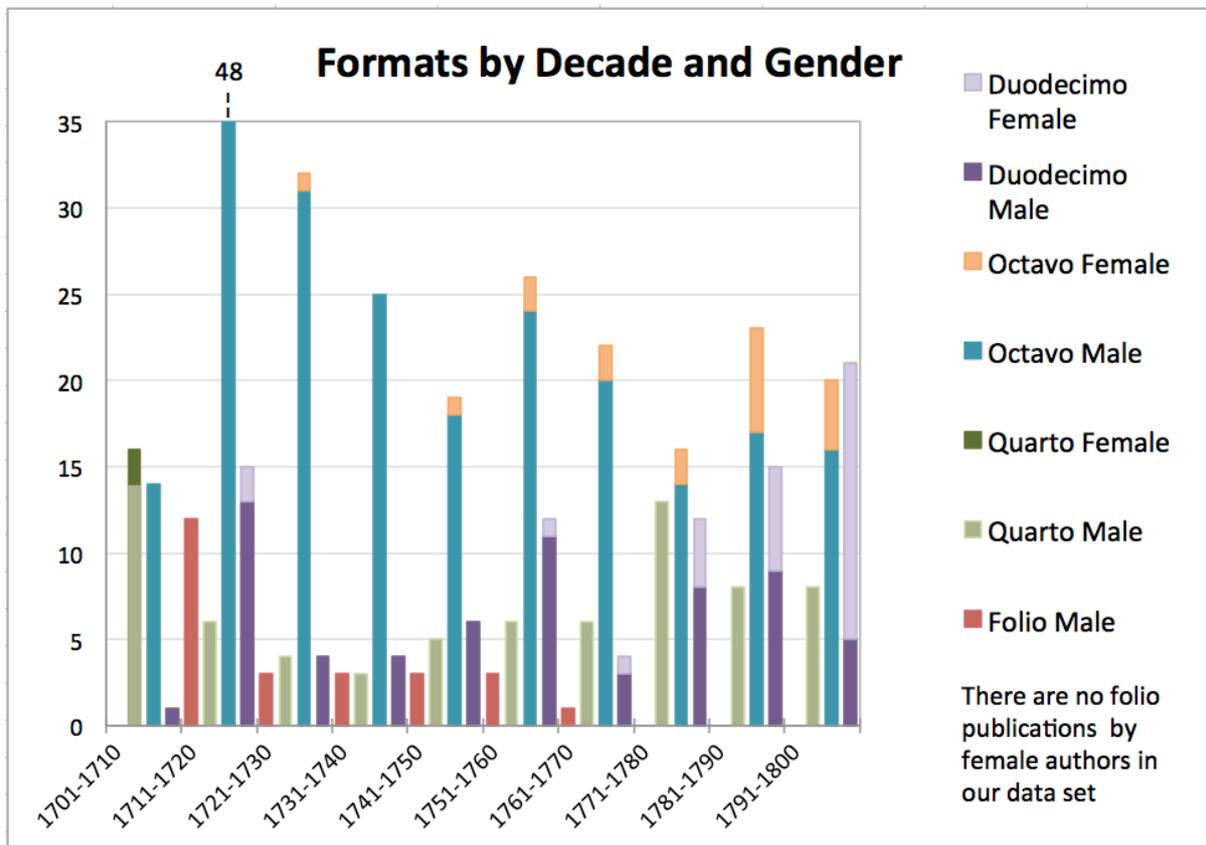
The colours in this graph do not correspond to the genres in the previous two graphs—because the database is so heavily literary, we have broken down the literature into three divisions of verse, drama and fiction, with an additional slice for criticism for men. Bright green represents the non-fiction (corresponding to 75% of the ECCO graph: history, social science, medicine/science/technology, law, general reference, religion and philosophy). Clearly women for whose works we know copyright payments wrote a lot of fiction, and there is probably some validity in Smollett's representation of the publishing world in *Humphry Clinker* (1771). The main narrator, Jerry, shares a Sunday meal with a crowd of writers in London, including

Tim Cropdale, the most facetious member of the whole society, [who] had happily wound up the catastrophe of a virgin tragedy, from the exhibition of which he promised himself a large fund of profit and reputation. Tim had made shift to live many years by writing novels, at the rate of five pounds a volume; but that branch of business is now engrossed by female authors, who publish merely for the propagation of virtue, with so much ease and spirit, and delicacy, and knowledge of the human heart, and all in the serene tranquillity of high life, that the reader is not only enchanted by their genius, but reformed by their morality.¹⁶

There are indeed five two-volume novels published after 1770 in the database, for which their authors were paid ten guineas or less, all by men, anonymously, and one slightly earlier, by a woman, Phebe Gibbes's *Francis Clive* (1764; 5 guineas). The only

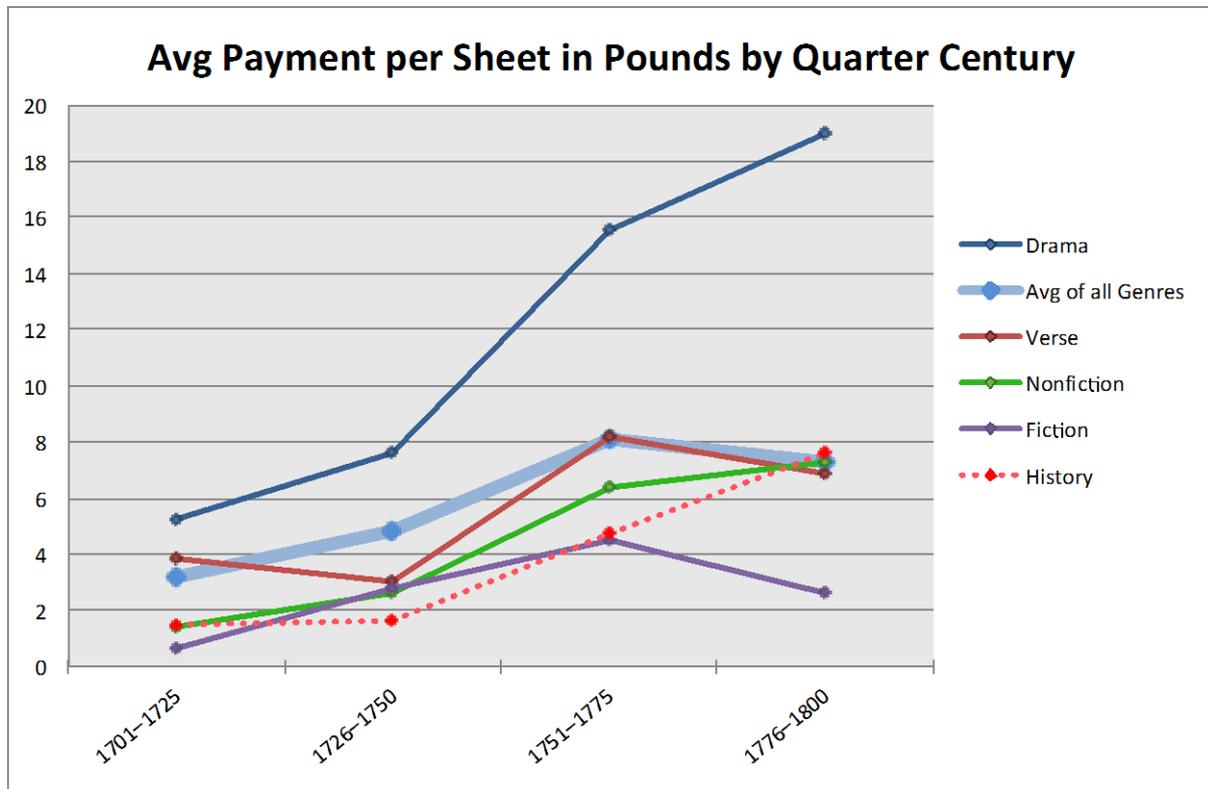
¹⁶ Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, edited by Thomas R. Preston and O M Brack, Jr. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 125–26.

other works sold for such low rates were translated works and an edition, published in 1726 by Edmund Curll, of Andrew Marvell's poems.



This graph demonstrates the increasing activity of women as professional authors, the rise in popularity of smaller formats, and the disproportionate likelihood that a woman author would publish in one of those smaller formats. The rise in particular of the duodecimo format meant that publishers could publish books with more pages, but printed on fewer sheets of paper, and reduce production costs. Whether the move to smaller formats also represents a reduction in the prestige of literature rather than just a pragmatic response to the greater length of prose fiction works is debatable, but the association of women with the smaller formats (and those formats' generally lower payments per sheet no matter what the

genre) does indicate some social or market pressure against valuing prose, and especially fiction, as highly as drama or verse.¹⁷



The higher financial value placed upon drama and verse is very clear in this graph of average payments per sheet, but the graph also provides further insights into the world of prose publishing.¹⁸ The typical payments for non-fiction and fiction part company from mid-century, with the average payment per sheet for non-fiction paralleling and then slightly surpassing the average while fiction drops in the last twenty-five years of the century. Given the very high payments for works such as William Robertson’s *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* (1769; £3400) and

¹⁷ The fact that women most often published fiction has encouraged the perception that female authors were less well paid than male authors. When we disaggregate the examples in our dataset by either format or genre, the gender difference in payment per sheet to authors becomes insignificant (except, marginally, in the case of price per sheet for duodecimo publications, which is because the top of the distribution for men is higher than the top for women). The significant difference between men and women overall results from women being over-represented in duodecimo and fiction publications. See the Wilcoxon test data for details.

¹⁸ This graph has grouped the data into 25-year periods because the numbers of publications in the less-represented genres are too small to indicate clear trends when broken into decades.

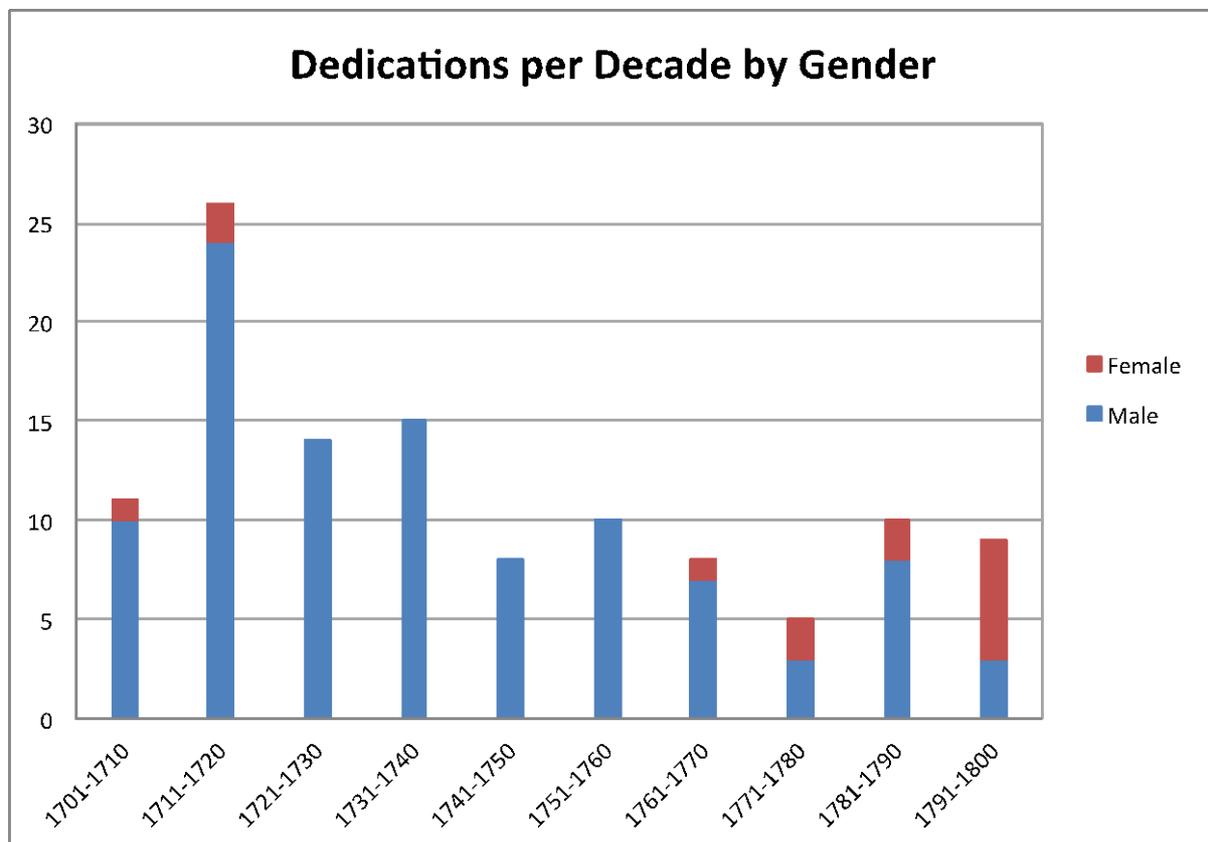
Edward Gibbons's *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776; £4000), one would naturally expect history to figure as an important genre within non-fiction. A sufficient number of payments for historical works exists in the database to track trends in the discipline reasonable confidently, with the dotted line in the graph above indicating that for much of the century historical writing brought authors even less income per sheet than fiction.¹⁹ The data thus afford us a much clearer picture of the realities of publishing in this period than do the famous examples, most of which were notorious precisely because they sold for extraordinary amounts.

It is worth considering briefly other means by which an author could realise income from publication. Although Samuel Johnson had declared the end of patronage, it is clear that authors still at least hoped that dedications might encourage the person honoured to offer a gift of either money or other professional support.²⁰ Nonetheless, in these cases where we know an author's payment, the trend away from dedications is apparent. What is more surprising, however, is the frequency with which women, as they become more active as professional authors, dedicated works. Of the ten titles with dedications in the last decade of the century, six were written by women, and all six were duodecimos. Small of stature had clearly come of age, at least for books by women authors. Our data cannot distinguish the extent to which women were composing dedications as a means to

¹⁹ The data set includes 51 payments for historical works. 9 were published 1701–1725; 9 from 1726–1750; 19 between 1751 and 1775, and a further 14 from 1776–1800.

²⁰ For a useful initial examination of some of the complex tensions in the transition from a patronage-based to a payment-based publishing world in England between about 1690 and 1720, see J. A. Downie, "Paying for Poetry at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century, with Particular Reference to Dryden, Pope, and Defoe," *Digital Defoe: Studies in Defoe & his Contemporaries* 6.1 (2014): 1–18.

elicit financial or professional rewards versus using dedications to invoke the authority of the dedicatee in order to validate the act of publishing, but the trend warrants further investigation.



Implications

Even though this compilation of author payments is a reasonably large dataset for the early modern period, any general conclusions have to be somewhat tentative. The main caution is that it is always best to compare like genres and formats in seeking trends over time. For example, although the average cost of books rose in value across the century, it was not until 1796 that booksellers managed to budge the price of a play from 1s 6d to 2s. The sole exception to this rule was John Dennis's tragedy, *Appius and Virginia* (1709), published in quarto at 2s 6d. Dennis's is by no

means the only quarto play in the database, though most are octavo, but it is the only one to exceed the standard price for nearly the entire century.²¹

The second major caution is that literary genres dominate this data despite our best efforts to locate payments for other genres. The highest payment/price ratio is for James Thomson's poem *Liberty* (1735–1736), closely followed by Elizabeth Raffeld's *Experienced English Housekeeper*, 1769, but Raffeld easily tops the list for the payment:sheet ratio, followed at a fair distance by John Hawkesworth for his three-volume edition of *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of His Present Majesty for Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere* (1773). Given this generic variety among the top titles, it is clear that both booksellers and customers valued practical and informative works as well as literary works, even if we do not have as many examples on which to base our findings.

Despite these limitations, we can still draw some reasonably sound conclusions. The first of these is that authorship became an increasingly viable profession over the course of the century, though not necessarily a well-paid one. As a general rule, entertainment (in the form of plays and novels) was more rewarding for authors, but brought the booksellers less per sheet than practical and historical works. The most lucrative genres for authors as measured by the payment/sheet ratio were drama (topped by tragedy, then comedies, afterpieces and operas), followed by medicine and then satire. The worst-paid genres were philosophy, law, politics, history, and criticism, though history did improve its standing in the latter part of the century.

²¹ Such an extraordinary sale price may signal that we should reconsider Dennis's status among his contemporaries, if not his critical significance. He was no inconsiderable literary figure for the young Alexander Pope to attack in the *Essay on Criticism*, even if his work is not as highly regarded today.

Publications in verse retained prestige until nearly the end of the century, and, on average, were in turn outranked by drama, as witnessed by William Whitehead's payments of about ten guineas for each of four poems published between 1741 and 1744 versus payments of about one hundred guineas for each of his three plays published between 1750 and 1762. The most successful fiction titles were the novels of Frances Burney and Anne Radcliffe, whose receipts testify to the value of a high reputation. Burney initially received a below-average payment of twenty guineas for *Evelina* in 1778, followed by a quite good payment of £250 for *Cecilia* in 1782, and the impressive sum of £1000 for *Camilla* in 1796.²² Radcliffe received £500 in 1794 for *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and then £800 for *The Italian* three years later. In both of these women's cases, the payments were in inverse relation to the critical reputations of their novels, and the same applies to Henry Fielding, who received far more for *Amelia* (1751) than *Tom Jones* (1749). On the other hand, given the fairly large number of novels published in the century, it is impressive to note that of the thirteen novels for which authors received more than £200, only Samuel Jackson Pratt and John Moore seem unusual company among Henry Fielding, Frances Burney, Laurence Sterne, Tobias Smollett and Anne Radcliffe. It would appear that booksellers were actually extremely good at judging quality even if the payments did not reflect the relative quality of individual works by each author.²³

²² The disparity between the payments for *Cecilia* and *Camilla* resulted in part from Burney's efforts to secure subscribers for the latter novel. No record survives of how much, if any, of the £1000 was contributed by her publisher, Thomas Cadell, Jr.

²³ It could have been the case that the demand for individual works (and therefore their profitability) depended just on the quality of the author's previous works. If readers distrusted the reviews then they would not be able to evaluate the quality of an individual work until they had paid for it, and their expectation of its quality would depend on the author's past performance.

The database also highlights the financial value placed on originality (as opposed to compilations, translations or editions), an economic reality that also became an aesthetic reality over the course of the century. Translations in general were not well remunerated, though there were exceptions. All of the sixty-one translations identified in the database were composed by men, even the translation of a 1787 French novel, *The Conversations of Emily*, for which Lewis Lyons was paid five guineas. There was a hierarchy of languages, with French being the least rewarding to translate, though Fenelon's *Telemachus* brought Smollett £70 in 1767. Translations from Latin and Greek classics were often more valuable, most notably Pope's Homer, but also James Hampton's translation of Polybius's *General History* (1756) at 250 guineas, William Melmoth's translation of the *Letters of Cicero* at £600, and John Gillie's translation of Aristotle's *Ethics and Politics* (1797) at £400 for the first edition. Sacred writ similarly proved valuable for Anthony Purver, the rights for whose *New and Literal Translation of the Old Testament* sold for £1000 in the mid-1760s. The one European vernacular work that rewarded its translator well was William Julius Mackie's 1777 translation of Camoes *Lusiad*, sold for £1000. Epic poetry apparently still retained prestige even in translation.

As a whole, the values of payments and the prices of books both behave more like luxury items than like commodity prices, rising higher than the broader economic cycle and falling faster. This economic reality may offer a further caution against too readily assuming that print became an essential part of daily life during the eighteenth century in Britain. While literacy rates did increase dramatically over the century, the size of print runs for trade books (as opposed to school titles or

worship books) held fairly steady at around 750 copies per edition. More people were reading, but they were more likely to be reading the numerous newspapers and periodicals that became widespread in this period than to be buying their own books. Books became more numerous over the century, but also more expensive per sheet, and so still represented a significant cost for most people.

Nonetheless, booksellers clearly worked hard to meet their markets, experimenting with smaller formats (and smaller type) to make books more affordable and to accommodate the new, longer genre of the novel. And on the whole, they were successful, deriving profits more efficiently from the books they published and reducing prices even as they increased the overall payments to authors. The value of the payment/sheet ratio shows an average underlying increase of about 0.8% per year over the century, faster than the wage index, holding constant economic conditions and the mix of books in any particular year. In a period of very low inflation the booksellers clearly managed to refine their operations to enable them to support a new class of professional writers. While the authors complained frequently about the sharp practices of booksellers, they nonetheless enjoyed gradually improving circumstances and some became quite well off from their writings, though they were the minority.

Our aim in this essay has been to provide others with a structural model as well as an initial set of data on which to construct an even fuller understanding of the world of print and authorship in eighteenth-century Britain. While scholars are in general agreement that widespread access to print fostered the enlightenment, we

still have only rather murky glimpses of just how that process took place. We hope this study casts some further light on such an important cultural moment in Britain.