

# THE WORK OF PRINT

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*Authorship and the English Text Trades, 1660–1760*



LISA MARUCA

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by Lisa Maruca

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LISA MARUCA



A ROBERT B. HEILMAN BOOK

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# *THE WORK OF PRINT*

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## INTRODUCTION: PRINTING PRODUCTION VALUES

*The Tears of the Press were but the Livery of its Guilt; nor is the Paper more stained, than Authors, or Readers.*

—THE TEARS OF THE PRESS, 1681

*We seem to live in an age when retailers of every kind of ware aspire to be the original manufacturer and particularly in literature.*

—MONTHLY REVIEW, 1766

*We write as cyborgs, inventing the language machines that reinvent us.*

—JEFFREY MASTEN, PETER STALLYBRASS, AND NANCY J. VICKERS, 1997

In 1713 a printer from the outskirts of the British kingdom, one James Watson of Edinburgh, found it necessary to clear the name of what he saw as a debased profession. Using his proximity to the communication technology of his day, he printed, distributed, and sold *The History of the Art of Printing*, his own translation of the anonymous French “The History of the Invention and Progress of the Mysterious Art of Printing, &c.” He begins this work with a seemingly innocuous “Publisher’s Preface to the Printers in Scotland.” Under this misleading neutral, if not almost invisible title, however, is a manifesto that clarifies Watson’s intent in reviving this obscure French chronology. Claiming that a spirit of public good underlies “all the Arts and Sciences that are instructive or beneficial to Man,” Watson emphasizes that “the Invention, and vast Improvement, of the no less honourable, than useful and admirable Art of PRINTING, . . . deserves a very eminent Place.”<sup>1</sup> He points to the

“Character of the Men” who were the early printers and “the Marks of Honour paid them” in order to show how “those illustrious Persons were honour’d, and ranked among the best of their fellow Citizens, in those Times” (*History*, 4). No history is written without a specific agenda in the present, and Watson is explicit about his. He wishes to counter a prevailing trend: “Whereas now, we [printers] are scarcely clais’d or esteem’d above the lower Forms of Mechanicks” (*History*, 4).

Watson was not alone in using his resources to promote—and, as we will see, critique—the status of his craft. Instead, his work is representative of a proliferation of text about texts—or, more to the point, print about print—written and produced from within the trade itself. It is also symptomatic of the eighteenth-century discourse of “print anxiety,” detailed in the many tracts of the period in which publishing practices are discussed, derided, or decried. My interest, though, is in a specific subset of these texts. In the chapters that follow, I discuss others like Watson: the workers who cast letters, composed pages, and ran the presses; the retailers who sold tracts and books in stalls or shops; and the variety of figures, well known or anonymous, who wrote texts traded in the literary marketplace. Despite their long marginalization within literary history, even—perhaps most surprisingly—within many recent examples of “print culture” studies, many of them were, in fact, remarkably prolific writers. This project explores what I call their “text work.” I use this term to encapsulate, without delineating as separate spheres, the labor of their bodies, the concrete product of this work (whether a printed page or the press itself); the texts they wrote; and their representations of all this work—the work as a linguistic construction. This understanding configures writing not as purely the product of a disembodied intellect, but as always concrete and physical, mediated by technology, subject to market forces, and shaped by audience demand. It also posits “print” not just as an output—black marks on white paper—or as merely the physical process of the operation of the press. True, “type,” as Harry Carter once famously opined, “is something you can pick up and hold in your hand,”<sup>2</sup> but even those making print (or printing) in this period saw it as more: print is a site in which the book as a tangible, commercial product, subject to the mores of trade and to regulation and control, meets the meaningful text contained within its pages. Thus, I use “text work” to suggest an opposition both to the abstraction and

denial of labor usually known as a “literary work” *and* to descriptions of the print trade assumed by historians to provide unmediated access to real-life routines. Such an approach demands that the rhetoric of print be placed alongside the other discursive practices of the period. This allows print workers to emerge as constructing their text work—but always within a broader cultural terrain that, reciprocally, shapes their notions of their labor. By analyzing the representations they circulated, we gain a much broader and more inclusive understanding of material textuality in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century London.

### *MATERIAL(IZED) PRINT*

N. Katherine Hayles points to the signifying function of books as physical artifacts, a process that operates to make meaning even when (and precisely at the moment that) one is least aware of it. Indeed, she argues that even for “transparent” interfaces, “this very immediacy is in itself an act of meaning-making that positions readers in a specific material relationship with the imaginative world evoked by the text.”<sup>3</sup> My interest lies in the ways in which transparency functions to position readers to understand certain elements in a text and ignore others. Literary transparency has been a seductive mechanism, working to render the material nature of print—the business, technologies, and labor of writing—as virtually invisible for well over two hundred years. The study of literature until recently has not been the study of *books*, after all, but the study of *writing*, that is, a special sort of discourse, distinguished as such, and set apart from other forms of discourse by, as Michel Foucault noted, its affiliation with and origins in an author.<sup>4</sup> This looming figure obscures other contributors. Books become merely convenient carrying cases for the author’s will and “work”—the abstract literariness—we read. In this regime of reading, the physical medium (page, typography, binding) is screened out through unconscious processes taught to us when we are introduced to the alphabet. Richard Lanham describes the procedure:

[A]n alphabet that could support a high literate culture had to be simple enough to be learned easily in childhood. Thoroughly internalized at that time, it would become a transparent window into conceptual thought. The shape of the letters, the written

surface, was not to be read aesthetically; that would only interfere with purely literate transparency. “Reading” would not, except in its learning stages, be a self-conscious, rule-governed, re-creative act but an intuitive skill, a literate compact exercised on the way to thought.<sup>5</sup>

While Lanham does point to a time before reading, when individual letters might be thought of as having a separate, opaque reality, he universalizes the process through which, one assumes, all members of all literate cultures forget their childish ways and get down to the task of really reading—and thinking. I suggest, however, that we interrogate this transparency, for that which is the most “internalized” or “intuitive” is that which is also the most ideological. Rather than take the invisibility of print for granted, then, one might usefully examine the text work of print for alternative configurations.

Before engaging in historical exegesis, however, it may be helpful to highlight the contingent nature of print’s transparency by comparing it to the development of a more opaque medium; “commonsense” understandings of print-based communication are destabilized when contrasted to alternative technological practices of textual production and accreditation. The term *production values*, used in the title of this chapter, usually registers solely within the discourse of film. I intentionally deploy this term in this alien context, however, to highlight the confluence of meanings that inform my work and which I elaborate on throughout this study. *Production values* refers, literally, to the physical quality of a film or television show. Good production values depend on numerous variables, including set design, sound, lighting, cinematography, and editing. The production of these “values” is thus a collaborative enterprise, contributed to by many workers. The film industry is markedly different from the book industry in that it credits these workers. While a film may highlight its director or the famous actors it stars, it never fails to mention, as it closes, those who brought it materially into existence. The director may be charged with supervising, with bringing the disparate elements together, but it is dozens if not hundreds of individuals who are charged with providing a production’s literal and figurative value. *Value* here suggests many meanings, all of them applicable to moviemaking: the perceived image, made up, at the most basic level, of

shades of light and dark registering chemically on film; the artistic worth of the film-as-work, sometimes perceived as being an intrinsic quality, but actually judged by specific cultural and critical standards; and the amount of money that the film-as-product returns to the studio or backers who invest in it.

The film world, except for rare cases or occasional lapses into auteurism, is usually quite frank about the multiple levels of production and reception that structure its participation in the market. Talk of grosses and rankings of summer hits are as common in the popular media as gossip about stars. Even foreign films and “independents,” which self-consciously situate themselves outside the crass maneuvers of Hollywood, are judged in terms of their relative financial success (or lack thereof) and their relatively low production costs, especially if they win multiple awards. Even the most “artistic” film, the one positioned the farthest outside of the mainstream, calls attention to itself as the work of multiple hands (even if these hands are seen to be organized by an artiste-director) precisely because of its superior production values.

By contrast, the contemporary book world does not display so prominently its multiple levels of production. Even best sellers are perceived to be the work of one superior man or woman, whether that superiority is seen to be based on fine artistic sensibility or the ability to pander successfully to the base desires of the mass market. Little or no attention is ever paid to the many workers who, like film denizens from best boys to gaffers to costume designers, build the print product from the ground up. A few editors and agents might achieve moderate fame within a small literary circle if they prove their worth by discovering and supporting the unknown genius, but editorial assistants, typists, cover designers, printers, publicists, and sales staff provide invisible if nonetheless essential services, shaping both the product itself and the public’s perception of it. There are few credits in a book acknowledging their work.<sup>6</sup>

Thus I come to another meaning suggested by the chapter title. *Production values* refers to those values—the social standards or community agreements as to what is worthy of notice and is best to uphold, and likewise what must be repressed in order to maintain those standards—that are promulgated both *through* the act of textual production and *about* textual production. I have suggested that literary studies has supplied us with a specifically ideological view of history, in which works



(not books) are produced only by authors. This study strives to disrupt that history and recover from erasure the workers who set type, ran presses, distributed pamphlets, or organized all these activities, as well as the material components they made, sold, or circulated. In doing so, I show how print technology in the hands of its workers, and in the words of its purveyors, manufactured and circulated its own system of production values. Reading has not always been a process of screening out the physicality of the print product and those who manufactured it. The research presented in the following chapters shows that in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, many of those most closely allied with bookmaking assumed that their work was indeed visible. They represented themselves not merely as helpers or supporters of authors but as creative collaborators in their own right. They believed that the tangible goods they created spoke for them and that readers read in their books the signs of their contributions. I reveal these values in my analyses of their text work.

I therefore depart from Lanham when, constructing a history that starts with the creation of the alphabet and ends with electronic writing, he asserts that, after Gutenberg and the rise of transparent type, “unintermediated thought,” an “unselfconscious transparency,” became the “stylistic, one might almost say a cultural, ideal for Western civilization.”<sup>7</sup> Lanham is making assumptions about early modern printing based on the logic of today’s print culture. Print did not become transparent until the real “work” was understood as existing “behind” the letters rather than inhering in them and was deemed to be the true essence of the book. For this to happen, the creator of the written work—rather than the produced book—first had to be constructed as superior to other sorts of print workers. That idea did not occur in tandem with Gutenberg’s invention, as Lanham suggests. Instead, this study shows that our “natural” view of transparency emerged only through a process of linguistic negotiation and contestation played out in the English print culture of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

### *PRINT AS TEXT*

The years covered in this study thus coincide with the end of an era in England, an era in which print workers enjoyed predominant responsi-

bility for the production and circulation of texts. These years also cover, not coincidentally, a particularly active period in the formation of the print culture of London, as a brief overview will suggest. The texts I discuss in the following chapters illustrate changes in the rhetoric and representation of print that accompanied the economic and cultural transformation in the print trade as it developed from a government-regulated, yet loosely defined, enterprise, producing a chimera of texts, tracts, and tales, to a staid and efficient market-regulated business, promoting taste and genteel authorship to a large middle-class readership. The second half of the seventeenth century was marked by much turmoil in the print trade, a term I use in this study to encompass the official guild of Stationers as well as those who worked for, with, and sometimes against them, including unofficial printers, lowly street hawkers marketing cheap pamphlets—and writers. These various participants in the production of texts were the objects of much discursive scrutiny in this period. The monarchy and the public alike worried that the press had toppled one government and could do it again. Anxiety about print—who should print, who was responsible for print, what should be printed, what the effects of print were—became a frequent topic in print. As I detail later, the government moved from straightforward suppression (through the Licensing Act of 1662, for example) to a realization that the press could be used to influence political events, without wholeheartedly accepting either extreme.<sup>8</sup>

The first few decades of the eighteenth century, though calm politically, continued to witness great changes in the print trade. By 1700 printing had begun, as Alvin Kernan notes, “to affect the structure of social life at every level.” He details the “very ordinariness” of the everyday print products that became common in this period: “theater bills, newspapers and magazines, hand-bills, bill-headings, labels, tickets, . . . [and] marriage certificates.”<sup>9</sup> Social and institutional life depended increasingly on print. Such cultural acceptance of print as an unavoidable fact of life meant booming business for those in the trade. Booksellers began to specialize as customers indicated preferences for old or new fiction, trade manuals, or scholarly material. Reading became a national leisure-time activity as well as a necessity for many middle-class professions, and the now highly commercial trade of printing and publishing reorganized and formed new trade practices to meet the

diverse needs of its customers. Networks of distribution grew within London and into the provinces, for example, and the conventions of advertising and reviewing books in newspapers were initiated to inform consumers of what was now a plethora of choices.<sup>10</sup>

While the trade was busy producing new print commodities and new ways to promote and distribute them, it was also active discursively (re)producing itself and its work. Increased business brought with it new forms of print anxiety. Wealth was consolidated into the hands of a few, and changes in economic status reconfigured the network of sociocultural positions. Printers, once a dominant force in the trade, were reclassified as lowly “mechanicks,” while booksellers used their affiliation with the rising merchant class to boost their cultural capital. I investigate the effects of this rearrangement in later chapters. Here, though, it is important to note that these new socioeconomic affiliations situated the trade within a new discursive network of manners and morals, which brought new understandings of the role of business and its relation to aesthetic concerns—and restructured the value(s) of print.

This period between the Restoration, when the Stationers lost monopolistic control of the print and publishing market, and the mid-eighteenth century, which witnessed the consolidation of large capital-intensive publishing houses, was also a time of fruitful indeterminacy within English print culture. Indeed, many of the literary categories that later emerged as rigid “natural” dichotomies—text versus book, creative thought versus manual labor, intellect versus economics—had not yet developed into commonsense inevitabilities. Certainly, many print workers, from booksellers to compositors, did not always see themselves as confined to one side of the binary. However, such freedom was not without contestation—nor was it usurped in a sudden, dramatic way. Instead, the terms deployed by text work are multivalenced and overwritten with meanings from other spheres. Foucault has written that “[a]n event . . . is not a decision, a treaty, a reign or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriating of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it.”<sup>11</sup> In these terms, the texts emerging from the print trade can be seen themselves as crucial Foucauldian “events” in a cultural shift in the understanding of this sort of labor. They reveal the complex and sometimes

contradictory processes through which a group struggles to garner and preserve enough linguistic capital to fund its version of print.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, the print market itself can also be usefully understood as a Bourdieuan field. This sort of system is “not the product of a coherence-seeking intention . . . but the product and prize of a permanent conflict”; that is, “the generative, unifying principle of this system is the struggle, with all the contradictions it engenders.”<sup>13</sup> The idea of the “struggle,” however, is usually employed in literary history (even by Pierre Bourdieu himself) as a way of conceptualizing *aesthetic* debates inasmuch as it accounts for the strategies writers and those attendant on them use to authorize the artistic product. This is true, for example, of Clifford Siskin’s useful study of the generic and professional reclassification of writing in the late eighteenth century. My argument is much in sympathy with his, especially in his articulations of the ways in which, “as with other kinds of work, the act of writing was subject to conflicts over who could and should use the technology, in what ways, and with what consequences.”<sup>14</sup> Paradoxically, however, my study is both broader and narrower: instead of the technology of writing, I am more generally interested in the many technologies of bookmaking, of which I consider writing as just one; more specifically, I focus on conflicts over representations of *one* of writing’s manifestations, print.

This distinction is important. The texts by the printers and booksellers I examine—many working before the ideological veil of “disinterest” worked to obscure and defame the economic investments of authorship—do not just legitimate the value adhering to the text work of others, but they produce authorizing representations of print workers themselves, along with their technologies, whether “technology” is used broadly in the Foucauldian sense or in its literal, mechanic sense. This adaptation of the “field of cultural production” allows us to investigate the ways in which writing on print reveals a constant and vigorous negotiation of the source and flow of power within the realms of textual production and circulation. As the case studies I discuss will show, while this linguistic conflict sometimes reflected a straightforward rivalry between divergent economic interests, it more importantly represented a nexus of competing ideologies: different ways of imagining the process of textual creation as it evolved from the glimmer of an idea to the solid book in a reader’s hands.

*PRINTING VALUES*

A brief return to Watson's *Art of Printing* will enable us to see some of the issues that emerge in treating print as "text work." While Watson's text is of course unique to his specific time and place, the production values articulated within it usefully set up some common themes. The first I discuss is the most obvious and yet the easiest to overlook: its status as a print text on the subject of print. Stating that his purpose is to inquire into "how we came to lose that Honour and Respect due to our Profession, (since the present Age is much more learned, and I believe as just too, and discerning of Merit as their Ancestors)" (*History*, 4), Watson appeals to his audience's sense of the naturalness of historical progress. By placing his current profession in a larger and grander narrative, Watson is literally writing—in fact, printing—himself and his text into the history of print. In doing so, he creates what N. Katherine Hayles calls a "technotext"—one that "interrogates the inscription technology that produces it."<sup>15</sup> He thus participates in what Hayles has elsewhere described as the "informational feedback loop" of "reflexivity." The works on print that I take up in this study can be seen as part of "a movement whereby that which has been used to generate a system is made, through a changed perspective, to become part of the system it generates."<sup>16</sup> This changed perspective allows us to see processes that may have been occluded in a more straightforward reading. As Hayles suggests, "reflexivity has subversive effects because it confuses and entangles the boundaries we impose upon the world in order to make sense of that world."<sup>17</sup> Paralleling M. C. Escher's drawing of the hand drawing a hand that Hayles sees as emblematic, representations of print *in print as print* problematize the art and fiction of boundary making itself, revealing not only their contingency but their instability in a state of flux, of construction and reconstruction. The machine printing the machine is not a fixed or stable essence.<sup>18</sup> This is not to impose on writers such as Watson a postmodern metafictional intent, but to see in their texts a reflexivity engendered by their proximity to the grounds of material textual production.

Recasting boundaries allows us to see the text work of print as porous and in dynamic interaction with other discourses. This is a matter not of straightforward influence but, often, of mutual renegotiation of the lin-

guistic terrain. Watson's text itself bears traces of this struggle. He claims a moral authority by insisting he writes for "the common Benefit of these practicing the Art [of printing] in this Part of Britain; without proposing any other Advantage or Gain by it, but the Improvement of the Art. . . . And since we are, I trust, all of us honest Men, and of better spirits than to propose the Earning of our Bread as the chief and only End of our Labour" (*History*, 5). His need to at once invoke and deny the crude reality of "earning our bread" reveals this as a vexed issue. We can see rhetoric such as Watson's as symptomatic of a cultural dissonance between the competing claims of economics and "improvement" within a maturing and consolidating literary market and a struggle to reconceptualize the role of writing, work, machines, and money within the terms of the polite bourgeois public sphere. While his text is thus part of the larger eighteenth-century cultural-aesthetic project, what is notable here is its manifestation in the printing house itself: the source, the literal engine, of the textual forces that created and sustained Enlightenment values.

Although the works I study in the following chapters all originated in London, it is notable that Watson strikes his defensive pose at a distance from the metropolitan center, in Scotland. When, for example, he laments the fact that "our former Authors have been forc'd to . . . go to other Countries to publish their Writings, lest a learn'd Book should be spoil'd by an ignorant or careless Printer," and urges his brethren to "make it our Ambition, as well as our Interest and Honour, to furnish them with Printers that can serve them . . . well" (*History*, 6), he calls on notions of both ethnic and trade loyalties: Scottish writers are not well served by inferior Scottish printers. While the complex issue of Scottish independence and the thorniness of Anglo-Scottish relations in this period lie outside the scope of this brief analysis, Watson's text does serve to highlight (in its simultaneous denial of and subservience to) the dominant discourse of English print superiority that emanated from London. In doing so, it participates in a discourse of nationalism that was written by and on the print trade more broadly. As the references to both "interest" and "honour" make clear, however, national identity is just one of the many *intertwined* cultural ideologies structuring print. Thus when Watson concludes this section with a rallying cry—"Thus, Gentlemen, we shall have this Honour, which is truly more valuable

than immense Sums of Money or opulent Estates, that, for the Glory of our Country, we have retrieved the Art of PRINTING, and brought It to as great Perfection as ever It was here in former Times” (*History*, 6)—he is compressing anxieties about aesthetics and technology, commerce and class, nationalism and nostalgia that, as I show, were played out with a variety of purposes and effects, across different texts, times and cultures of print.

Watson’s discourse articulates another important boundary as well. His rhetorical folding of himself into the polite category of honorable gentlemen, “us honest men,” and his use of the misleadingly universal and transparent “we” foreground the *gendered* nuance of all these concerns: part of his project is constructing the appropriately gendered man and woman of print. This is most apparent in Watson’s construction of an explanatory narrative showing how Scottish print has fallen from its former glory. Seeking an appropriate scapegoat, Watson castigates at some length one Mrs. Anderson, a printer’s widow and a shrewd and successful businesswoman in her own right, who controlled Bible printing through her late husband’s monopoly as King’s Printer. His description of her as the moral decay undermining righteous print and disrupting its natural progress blends notions of religious duty with properly gendered behavior in a manner reminiscent of the period’s conduct manuals:

Nothing came from the Royal Press (as Mrs. Anderson vainly term’d it) but the most illegible and uncorrect Bibles and Books that ever were printed in any one Place in the World. She regarded not the Honour of the Nation, and never minded the Duty lay upon her as the Sovreign’s Servant: Prentices, instead of the best Workmen, were generally imploy’d in printing the Sacred Word of GOD. And, in fine, nothing was study’d but gaining of Money by printing Bibles at any Rate . . . that no Body could want them. (*History*, 13)

His opprobrium works by linking her unnatural neglect of the chief feminine virtues—her failure of duty, neglect of honor, resistance to subordination, and lack of veneration of the sacred—to an excess of reproduction resulting in faulty progeny, the flawed text. Paralleling the

morally righteous endings of other eighteenth-century stories of unsanctioned sexuality and reproduction, Watson uses the standard narrative of the fallen woman to chart the predicted results: “[T]hose, who formerly were her Friends . . . began to be asham’d of her Practices and turn’d their Back upon her” (*History*, 13–14).<sup>19</sup> The metaphor of the press as a sexually reproductive machine has many precedents in early modern culture, of course, which work to express and produce congruent changes in gender and sexuality as well as authorship and technology.<sup>20</sup> Watson’s invocation at this juncture, however—though certainly calling on that familiar history—is unique to his period in that it encapsulates anxieties about recent changes in the understanding of male and female identities as they were reconstituted through text work, the print market, the sexed body, and gendered language. It is these changes and these sorts of connections that I explore in the chapters that follow, in which I see gender as a social(izing) category, a performative gesture, a marker of the boundaries of acceptable behavior, and a producer of generic textual distinctions. At the same time, I use gender to discuss the real-life effects on the working bodies of women in print.

In constructing this world of gendered print(ers), Watson freely mixes history, current events, biography, personal vitriol, technical know-how, and advertisement—an odd mix to twenty-first-century readers trained in the genre categories founded in Enlightenment precepts. However, Watson’s text is representative of others in this study in the way it segues seamlessly from the political to the domestic to the realms of machine, labor, and trade. For Watson, the circulation of a well-regulated and honorable, indeed, properly gendered, text is inseparable from his more material concerns: the importance of paying well “a good Press-Man, who brings Reputation to my Work” (*History*, 21); the superiority of a Dutch-made press, which worked so well for twenty years that “neither Smith nor Joiner [were] call’d for to her” (22); or the use of good, cold lye to “preserve your Letter and other Materials, or to make your Work beautiful, or to have your Servants appear neat and clean” (23). Finally, he ends his diatribe on the problems of Scottish print with a type specimen that shows off the letterforms he has available in his printing house. This explicit form of “product placement” calls attention to the economic transactions in which the text as printed book must by necessity participate, for it serves to advertise Watson’s trade in book-