

 **LITERARY**
ADVERTISING
— — — **AND THE** — — —
SHAPING *of* **BRITISH**
ROMANTICISM



NICHOLAS MASON 

Literary Advertising and the Shaping of British Romanticism

NICHOLAS MASON

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Entangled Histories

In the summer of 1817 the up-and-coming Edinburgh publisher and bookseller William Blackwood pulled aside John Wilson and John Gibson Lockhart, two free-spirited, Oxford-trained attorneys who frequented his shop, and made them a proposal. The magazine he had launched in April of that year, the *Edinburgh Monthly*, was floundering, and he hoped they would help him make it fresher, bolder, and smarter. More than anything, he wanted his periodical, which would be rechristened *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, to break the stranglehold giant publishing houses had on British literature. While *Blackwood's* would be openly partisan on political matters, as per the custom of the age, it would offer a sharp break from the two dominant literary periodicals (Archibald Constable's *Edinburgh Review* and John Murray's *Quarterly Review*) in its critical impartiality and its dedication to publishing the best original poetry and short fiction of the day.¹

The rebranded magazine Blackwood, Lockhart, and Wilson introduced to an astonished public in October 1817 was, in today's vernacular, quintessentially “indie.” The first issue of “Maga,” as the magazine came to be known, featured open mockery of Leigh Hunt's “Cockney School of Poetry,” a withering critique of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, and the “Chaldee Manuscript,” an outrageous biblical-styled parody of Edinburgh's Whig literary and political establishment. Simply put, this was an all-out declaration of war on the literary status quo, a thorough repudiation of the backroom, backscratching world of mainstream publishing. And from the start, a central fixation was upon reforming literary criticism, which, in the eyes of many, had devolved into yet another branch of the nation's hydra-headed advertising system. “If one looks around among our periodicals,” Lockhart lamented in the March 1823 number of *Blackwood's*,

there is scarcely one of them that is not labouring away to hoist up some heavy bottom. The Quarterly and the British Critic tell us that [Henry] Milman is a mighty poet. The New Monthly Magazine, and five or six inferior books, keep up a perpetual blarney about Barry Cornwall—Waugh [the publisher of the *Edinburgh Monthly Review*] winds his sultry horn for the glory of M. [Felicia] Hemans—Taylor and Hessey [owners of the *London Magazine*] pound the public with [Bernard] Barton and Allan Cunningham. (“*Noctes Ambrosianae*, No. VII,” 376)

If, as this indictment alleges, deeply politicized criticism and advertisements masquerading as book reviews were the norm at other magazines, *Blackwood's* intended to aim for the opposite extreme. William Blackwood informed a prospective contributor to his magazine in 1820, “I would rather see any publication of mine, or of any of my friends, cut to pieces in the Magazine than that there should be the slightest appearance of favour or partiality—for this is perfect destruction to ‘Maga’ and would render her no better than a petty bookselling job” (qtd. in Oliphant, 1:377).

Yet, despite these founding ideals, even before Lockhart's pontification, *Blackwood's* was slipping into the mire of literary puffery. The power to influence which books their readers might purchase proved too great a temptation for a publisher with new titles to promote and a team of magazine insiders anxious about the fates of their own books and those of their friends. A rather telling case in point comes from the spring of 1822, when John Wilson learned that Blackwood had commissioned Henry Mackenzie, the senior statesman of Scottish letters, to review Wilson's new book, *The Light and Shadows of Scottish Life*. After seeing a draft of Mackenzie's lukewarm review, Wilson fired off a letter to Blackwood, calling the piece “loathsome” and “sickening” and demanding that he be allowed to find his own reviewer for the volume. When Blackwood conceded, Wilson contemplated reviewing the book himself before deciding to enlist his close friend Lockhart in the cause. Predictably,

Lockhart's review, which ran in the June 1822 issue of the magazine, dealt in superlatives. *Lights and Shadows*, we are told, was "most indubitably full of exquisite poetry" (670), and "every page overflows with images of the most pure and beautiful tenderness" (677).²

Two years later, while preparing for the release of his own new book, *The History of Matthew Walker*, Lockhart had no compunctions about urging Wilson to return the favor, asking, "Pray write a first-rate but brief puff of *Matthew* for [the] next number [of] Blackwood[']s, or if not, say so, that I may do myself" (qtd. in Strout, 120). When Wilson apparently proved too busy to come through, Lockhart, as promised, took the task upon himself—a fact verified by Blackwood's account book, which shows Lockhart being paid the standard contributor's fee to review his own novel (Murray, 150). Again, not surprisingly, the review was glowing.

Flash forward 180 years and turn 4,500 miles due west and we find another group of booklovers at another northern cultural outpost dreaming up ways to take on the literary establishment through a new medium. This time, though, it is not a group of twenty-something Tories launching literary raids from north of the Tweed but a confederacy of bookworms and computer geeks huddled together in the Seattle office of a new company, visualizing how the Internet might allow anyone anywhere to buy any book in print. In creating "the world's largest bookstore," they imagined themselves wresting contemporary literature away from international conglomerates and corporate superstores and putting it back in the hands of writers and readers. As James Marcus, one of the company's earliest employees, recalls, their principal mission was, quite simply, "to preach the gospel of literature from the Internet pulpit" (22).

After naming their company after the world's largest river, the group took their website, amazon.com, live in 1995 and quickly began attracting a core of loyal customers. While they were more than happy to sell you an automobile repair manual or the latest Danielle Steele novel, the company's carefully crafted ethos was as a haven for former English majors and other assorted bibliophiles. One day Amazon's home page might recommend Richard Holmes's new biography of Coleridge; the next it might feature an interview with Toni Morrison or Salman Rushdie. And, rather astonishingly, despite stiff competition from Barnes and Noble, Borders, and a host of imitators, Amazon's formula actually paid off. By 1999 it had become the darling of the dot.com boom, with both its sales and its stock price skyrocketing. Even its editorial team—the twenty-five or so bookworms and bohemians charged with writing heady reviews and author profiles—cashed in on the moment. In the words of one Amazon reviewer, their company stock options made them "the best paid editorial staff since the invention of moveable type" (J. Marcus, 77).

Yet, even as the stock price soared and the company's founder, Jeff Bezos, was crowned *Time* magazine's "Person of the Year" for 1999, Amazon's image as the savior of literature was beginning to crack. Behind the scenes, the company had hired a team of corporate veterans who immediately proposed merging the editorial and marketing divisions. (The new division, one high-ranking executive boasted, would be dubbed "Marketorial" [J. Marcus, 107].) Soon the company that at one time had promised to level the playing field occupied by both giant multinational publishers and struggling basement presses began reverting to the old rules of brick-and-mortar retail, where prominent display space comes with a price. The precise moment of Amazon's fall from public grace can be dated to February 8, 1999, when, adjacent to accounts of the Clinton impeachment debates and the death of Jordan's King Hussein, the *New York Times* ran a page-one exposé entitled "For Sale: Online Bookstore's Recommendations." As detailed in that story, Amazon had recently begun offering a \$10,000-per-book package to advertisers that included the top position on its home page, an author profile, and "complete Amazon.com editorial review treatment." In the first few months of the campaign, several \$10,000 books had made their way onto Amazon's supposedly objective lists of

books deemed “New and Notable,” “What We’re Reading,” and “Destined for Greatness,” and nowhere on the website was any distinction made between unsolicited and paid reviews (Carvajal).

Amazon’s eventual solution for this public relations disaster was sacking its editorial staff and replacing them with an army of volunteer reviewers. While most consumer reviews on the site are ostensibly disinterested, this system, too, rapidly morphed into an engine for puffery, as evidenced in 2004, when a glitch in Amazon’s Canadian site temporarily unmasked thousands of hitherto anonymous reviewers. Self-reviewing, it seems, was a pastime not only for the likes of Keegan-Michael Key and Braithwaite, a California high school teacher who promoted his debut novel, *The Wonderlands Murders*, via a series of glowing reviews he had posted under a range of aliases; as it turns out, it was also an occasional hobby of award-winning, highbrow writers like Dave Eggers, John Rechy, and Jonathan Franzen, all of whom were caught pseudonymously dishing out five-star reviews for either their own works or those of close friends (Giles, 14; Harmon).³

What, then, to make of the parallel morality tales of *Blackwood’s Magazine* and amazon.com? For some, such narratives only reinforce the notion that literature is locked with commerce in a long-term battle for its very soul. While many writers and publishers enter the fray with the best of intentions, the commercial logic of late capitalist societies, it would seem, has a way of reducing even the most profound, beautiful, and sacred texts into mere commodities. As Theodor Adorno rather dolefully put it, “Entertainment sells the neutralized dregs of serious art.” The art world, he continues, “has become vulgar ever since the mechanism of exchange has sunk its fangs into artistic production, turning art into a commodity” (434). Rather than surrendering to the commercial impulse, however, many artists contend that art can still be shielded from what Allen Ginsberg dubbed “the nitroglycerine shrieks of the fairies of advertising” (“Howl,” line 56). At the very least, they insist, art should be treated as what the legal theorist Margaret Jane Radin has called a “contested commodity.” In Radin’s ethical system, some goods and services—ranging from adopted babies to donor kidneys to pollution permits—defy the basic laws of commodity pricing and market exchange (xi–xiv, 1–15). Literature, too, many would argue, warrants such protection from the dehumanizing forces of modern markets.

Yet, as persuasive as these arguments might be, three flights up in the marketing division or across the quad in the School of Business, thoroughly reasonable and learned people find such pleas for literary exceptionalism more than a little quixotic. The reality, they tell us, is that a wide range of studies suggest that consumers use the same cognitive processes in selecting books as in choosing among brands of coffee, breakfast cereal, or cigarettes (Holbrook, 96–97). In their world, it makes perfect sense that Amazon would lure a top manager away from the snack food giant Frito-Lay and that Borders would find its new CEO at the supermarket chain American Stores. And, like Len Riggio, the head of Barnes and Noble, they have little patience for “the elitists who say we can’t sell books like we sell toothpaste” (qtd. in Miller, 97; see also Stephen Brown, “Preface,” xiii). When book sales are essentially flat—as they have been in the United States for some time now—the industry has no other recourse, in their estimation, than to borrow marketing methods that have long proved successful in peddling everything from bacon to body wash (Green, 80).

While I have no fantasies about definitively resolving such debates with this book, one of my major aims is to provide fresh historical perspectives on the 250-year-old clash between literary idealism and market realism. Specifically, this book is an endeavor to show that, far from being inherently antagonistic institutions, modern literature and advertising actually share a common genealogy and in very real ways can be said to have co-produced each other, having both arisen out of the historical and unprecedented cultural and economic upheavals of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Britain. As the chapters that follow will suggest, such basic components of modern literature as periodical criticism and the author function were born out of the advertising logic that permeated

Britain during what has come to be called the “Romantic Century” (1750–1850).⁴ At the same time many of the core methodologies and philosophies of modern advertising trace their origins to the British literary book trade of this era. And, in perhaps the oddest historical twist of all, the very literary idealism that inspired the founders of both *Blackwood’s* and amazon.com can be seen as a distinctive outgrowth of Romantic-era advertising culture.

Although this is the first extended attempt to trace the shared “rise” narratives of advertising and modern literature, it draws heavily upon two generations of theoretical and historical scholarship on advertising’s methods and cultural impact. In the 1970s and ’80s, thinkers as diverse as Roland Barthes, Raymond Williams, and Dick Hebdige reflected at length on how advertising shapes our relation to the world and, by extension, our interactions with written and electronic texts.⁵ Following Barthes’s lead, structuralist and poststructuralist theorists proved particularly adept at teaching us to read advertisements more discerningly, and in several instances—most notably Gérard Genette’s *Paratexts* and Sara Thornton’s recent study *Advertising, Subjectivity, and the Nineteenth-Century Novel*—they have helped us better understand the structural links between advertising and literature. Genette’s book meshes particularly well with the project at hand, as he devotes an entire section to tracing how our interpretive experience is often shaped by such extratextual (or “epitextual”) materials as book advertisements, prearranged reviews, and authorial commentaries. The “public epitext,” as Genette suggests and this book reaffirms, can play as great a role in determining our experience with a text as the actual story or poem itself.

This book is equally indebted to a wide variety of literary critics and historians who over the past two decades have begun filling the sizeable gaps in our understanding of advertising’s modern development. Until relatively recently, two commonly accepted myths thwarted the in-depth study of advertising history. The first of these held that, as *Time* magazine proclaimed in its 12 October 1960 cover story, advertising is “a uniquely American contribution to economic life” (“The Mammals of the Mirror,” 85). According to this school of thought, modern advertising began, for all intents and purposes, with P. T. Barnum and the mass-circulation American magazines of the late nineteenth century. Beholden to this view, conventional American histories of advertising have often completely bypassed British precedents. A case in point is Stephen Fox’s widely read *The Mirror Makers* (1980)—hailed by the *New York Review of Books* as “arguably the best general history of advertising” (Draper, 14)—which asserts that advertising as we know it originated in the post-Civil War United States. All prior modes of marketing, he alleges, belong to advertising’s “prehistory” and are thus of little consequence (Fox, 13). In addition to perpetuating the fallacy that advertising is fundamentally American, Fox’s study upholds the second myth of advertising history: that advertising did not begin to assume its modern forms until the late nineteenth century. This latter belief appears to have taken root sometime around the turn of the twentieth century, as evidenced in Earnest Elmo Calkins and Ralph Holden’s *The Art of Modern Advertising* (1905), which maintains that the entire history of advertising, “from the first spoken announcement down to within the last fifty years, or even later, would be of no value to the advertising man of to-day. Advertising, as we understand it, is the development of the past half century” (13).⁶ Three-quarters of a century later, in his otherwise penetrating essay “Advertising: The Magic System” (1980), Raymond Williams repeats this story line, arguing that “in the last hundred years, ... advertising has developed from the simple announcements of shopkeepers and the persuasive arts of a few marginal dealers into a major part of capitalist business organization” (184). Elsewhere in his essay, Williams pushes modern advertising’s birth date even farther forward, claiming that, “if we look at advertising before, say, 1914, its comparative crudeness is immediately evident” (179). More than thirty years after Williams’s essay, this basic chronology remains widely unquestioned, especially in advertising circles. For evidence of this, or

need look no farther than the title of a recent trade history by the French advertising conglomerate Publicis: *Born in 1842: A History of Advertising* (Pincas and Loiseau).

Not surprisingly, as scholarly interest in the historical structures and mechanisms of consumer culture surged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a wide range of scholars began challenging both the place of birth and date of birth of modern advertising. In eighteenth-century studies, Neill McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb's groundbreaking collaboration, *The Birth of a Consumer Society* (1982), sparked widespread interest in how the rise of advertising contributed to the so-called "consumer revolution" Britain experienced in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The result has been a range of publications—most notably those by Hoh-Cheung Mui and Lorna H. Mui, Peter M. Briggs, James Raven, Jill Campbell, and Cynthia Wall⁷—detailing, in Briggs's words, "how extreme various and vital eighteenth-century advertising actually was" ("News from the little World," 30). The impulse to reassess advertising history has been equally strong in Victorian studies. As one might expect, given their disciplinary prejudices, Victorianists have often too-readily accepted the traditional "advertising as late-nineteenth-century invention" narrative. Thomas Richards, for instance, insists in *The Commodity Culture of Victorian Britain* (1990) that, prior to the Great Exhibition of 1851, advertising remained in a "primitive state," controlled by a small band of hucksters who "had a few old tricks, a fixed repertoire at least several hundred years old, and nothing more" (6). And Lori Anne Loeb's *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (1994) leans heavily upon the assumption that pre-Victorian advertisements were "almost always simple announcements that relied on repetition, bold headlines, and small logos," promoting "a small range of products by a few well-publicized producers" (7).

These historical biases aside, however, scholars of Victorian advertising have brilliantly countered the Americentric tendencies of advertising history and have done more than scholars of any other period to begin contemplating the historical and structural ties between advertising and literature. Perhaps the best such study is still Jennifer Wicke's groundbreaking *Advertising Fictions: Literature, Advertisement, and Social Reading* (1988), which argues that advertising, as "a preeminent discourse of modern culture," is "a language and literature in its own right" and that the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century novel "relies on the conditions of advertising to permit it to become the major literary form" (1). In very real ways, the book you are reading functions as something of a revision and extension of Wicke's thesis, sharing her interest in the dialectical engagement of advertising and literature but locating their historical relationship a century earlier.

In contrast to the widespread interest in advertising history among eighteenth-century scholars and Victorianists, Romanticists have engaged relatively infrequently with the subject. Advertising usually receives passing notice in studies of Romantic-era book history and print culture,⁸ but rarely has been treated as a major mode of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century commercial or literary discourse. The two laudable exceptions to this are Marcus Wood's *Radical Satire and Print Culture 1790–1822* (1994) and John Strachan's *Advertising and Satirical Culture in the Romantic Period* (2007), both of which, as their titles suggest, focus particularly on advertising's enormous impact on the satirical literature of the age.⁹ For its part, Wood's book offers a wealth of evidence related to advertising's central place in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century popular culture, showing particularly how heavily influenced radical satirists such as William Hone and George Cruikshank were by the marketing forms and techniques of well-known manufacturers. Strachan picks up where Wood leaves off, setting out first to examine "the cultural practices evident in contemporary advertising literature in the context of the wider aesthetic landscape of the [Romantic] period" and then to treat "advertising as a cultural form that is sociohistorically revealing" (13). In chapters covering everything from shoe-blackening verses to lottery jingles to "the poetry of hair-cutting

Strachan compellingly catalogues an enormous array of Romantic-era advertisements and the satirical texts that engage them.

While this book joins Wood and Strachan in calling for broader recognition of the profound effect the fledgling advertising system had on Romantic-era Britain, my subject matter is more traditionally literary than either of theirs. Wood's principal focus is radical publishing and Strachan's is popular culture in all its modes, while mine is specifically literary culture. Essentially, this book asks two interrelated questions, neither of which has been extensively explored. First, what role did British writers and publishers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries play in the development of the modern advertising system? And, second, how did the new forms, methods, and philosophies of advertising influence the production, distribution, and reception of Romantic-era literature?

My first chapter provides a historical overview of the systemic changes advertising and literature underwent in Britain between 1750 and 1850, showing how a series of economic, social, and legal milestones dramatically transformed these fields. The chapters that follow offer a loose chronological survey of literature's and advertising's shared histories. [Chapter 2](#) focuses on the mid-to-late eighteenth century, chronicling the rise of "puffery," the various methods merchants and manufacturers developed to pass off paid advertisements as news stories, public service announcements, or objective book reviews. In particular, I describe how the two great literary genres to emerge from eighteenth-century Britain, the novel and the book review, originated largely in booksellers' needs to creatively promote their works in an increasingly crowded marketplace. [Chapter 3](#) examines another major innovation in late-eighteenth-century marketing, the birth of the brand-name product. After chronicling the arrival of household brands, I show how the marketing campaign behind cantos 1 and 2 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* appropriated both the logic and the techniques of branding to transform Lord Byron into the world's most successful literary brand.

[Chapter 4](#) turns to the poet many hailed as "the female Byron," Letitia Elizabeth Landon. Moving beyond traditional studies of Landon's engagement with the marketplace, which focus primarily on her strategic employment of the initials "L.E.L.," I argue that the commercial genius of Landon and her publisher, William Jerdan, was actually best displayed in their pioneering experiments with the bandwagon and visual marketing. [Chapter 5](#) returns to the subject of puffery, recounting how the techniques developed in the eighteenth century became normalized in the early nineteenth century. So rampant did puffery become during the later Romantic period that, when the book market floundered following the banking crash of 1826, a chorus of renowned cultural commentators, including Carlyle, Macaulay, and *Blackwood's* "Christopher North," hastened to charge puffing booksellers, critics, and authors with having "killed" literature. Paradoxically, though, at this very moment, other writers began contemplating the idea that, far from the death of literature, advertising might actually revitalize the literary arts. This is the story told in my conclusion, which documents how advertising became so naturalized and so conjoined with literature and commerce that from the 1820s forward the British commentariat increasingly spoke of the "art of advertising" and imagined the ad-man as a close cousin to the inspired, solitary genius of Romantic poetry.

I hope that by book's end readers will have come to think of literature and advertising differently, appreciating both their common history and the commercial and aesthetic pioneers who brought them together.

Advertising in the Romantic Century

Of the preeminent transitional years in British literary history, none is more appropriately situated than 1850. Not only did this year witness the symbolic culmination of Romanticism in the death of William Wordsworth and the posthumous publication of his great Romantic epic, the fourteen-book *Prelude*, but it also saw the enshrinement of High Victorian poetics in the appointment of Tennyson as Wordsworth's successor to the poet laureateship and the publication of his *In Memoriam*. It was not just in regards to literature, though, that midcentury Britons had occasion to contemplate the medallion of their moment. In the build-up to the Great Exhibition of 1851, many famously hailed the event as the birth of a new age. Less enthusiastically, in 1852 a spiritually bereft Matthew Arnold mused that his society was “wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born” (“Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse,” lines 85–86).

Among the most insightful contemporary reflections on the Janus-like nature of 1850 was George Henry Francis's six-part *Fraser's Magazine* series, “The Age of Veneer,” the first installment of which fittingly preceded in the September 1850 issue the magazine's review of *In Memoriam*.¹ The once-heralded but now little-known essay series functions as a valuable retrospective, using the century's midpoint as an opportunity to reflect on the advances and disappointments of the previous half-century and to chart a better course for the half-century to come.

In Francis's estimation, one of the most lamentable developments of the century's first fifty years was the rise of a culture of deception, or “veneering.” And at the heart of this new hucksterism was advertising. So insidious was advertising, in Francis's mind, that he opted to devote the entire final installment of his series to it. Appearing in January 1852, this concluding essay, titled “The Science of Puffing,” offers both an astute analysis of midcentury marketing norms and, perhaps more importantly, one of the earliest histories of British advertising. What makes Francis's essay particularly relevant here, though, is how closely its claims anticipate my own. To begin with, both this book and “The Science of Puffing” argue that the modern advertising system was in Britain by the early nineteenth century. While conceding that “charlatans have existed in every age and in every country,” Francis insisted that there was something distinctive about the modern age of “manufactured opinion.” In recent generations, his account suggests, advances in transportation and the availability of printed materials had given birth to a commercial environment in which “the tradesman, who had hitherto been content with the profits of private custom, found it to his account to seek a more extended patronage” through advertising. Consequently, advertising “became regularly reduced to a system” and was “scientifically employed” throughout Britain (87, my emphasis).

In and of itself, this suggestion that advertising had come to function as both a system and a science by the late Georgian age is remarkable enough, offering as it does a counternarrative to twentieth-century theories of the Victorian invention of advertising (see Introduction). But Francis's argument even more directly anticipates my own when he proceeds to speculate that nineteenth-century advertising's fundamental modernity was inextricable from its literariness. “Advertising,” he asserted, “may be said first to have attained the dignity of an art when it employed its own Laureate, and could poetry sought inspiration in the neighbourhood of Aldgate” (87). While this observation requires some unpacking for the modern reader, the point is crucial. In essence, Francis implied that the first clear sign of advertising's sophistication and fundamental modernity came early in the century, when several famous poets were rumored to have descended from Parnassus into Grub Street (or, in the

case, working-class Aldgate), where they were reportedly paid lavish sums to pen puffs and jingles for such household products as Packwood's razor strops and Warren's boot blacking.²

Unfortunately, after briefly entertaining this notion, the essay immediately veers off into a stylistic analysis of recent puffs, never to return to the historicity or literariness of advertising. Perhaps Francis lacked the chronological distance or archival resources to flesh out his narrative, or perhaps he simply took the propinquity of advertising and literature as self-evident, requiring no elaboration. Regardless of what Francis began to hypothesize at the midpoint of the nineteenth century can be substantially proven a century and a half later. As the remainder of this chapter will demonstrate, Francis was fundamentally correct in suggesting that by the dawn of the nineteenth century not only had advertising emerged as a system and a science but "the art employed by modern advertisers far transcend[ed]" (88) anything previously imagined.

PRECONDITIONS FOR MODERN ADVERTISING

As almost every historian of advertising has pointed out, there is nothing distinctively modern about the act of publicizing one's wares.³ Several ancient records portray street criers making their rounds in Athens, muralists publicizing coming gladiator bouts on the walls of Pompeii, and Roman shopkeepers posting fliers on the pillars of the Forum. As might be expected, prior to the era of mass literacy most merchants relied primarily on oral advertising. In early modern Europe, this often meant employing street criers or doorway barkers to drum up business. Thus, on a typical trip to the high street, a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century shopper was likely to be greeted at several doors by barkers demanding, "What do you lack, mistress?" (Presbrey, 14). Another strategy shopkeepers used to attract the attention of illiterate passersby was hanging ornate signs outside their premises. Over time a language of symbols and colors developed on these signs: three golden balls came to stand for the pawnbroker, a figure of a black boy became the trademark of tobacco shops, and an ivy bush represented the tavern (Gloag, 19–21). In response to this growing practice, Shakespeare quipped in the epilogue to *As You Like It* that "Good wine needs no bush."

With the coming of the printing press in the fifteenth century and the gradual emergence of print culture and the bourgeois public sphere in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, advertising was thoroughly transformed. Significantly, each new milestone in the spread of print was accompanied by a corresponding breakthrough in advertising. For instance, William Caxton published the first English advertising handbill only a year after bringing the first press to Britain in 1476. An interval of less than five years passed between publication of the first English newspaper (1621) and appearance of the earliest English newspaper advertisement (1625). And the introduction of printing presses to the provinces was quickly followed by the posting of broadsides, handbills, and campaign posters on town walls and rural park palings.

It wasn't until the early eighteenth century, however, that print advertising came into its own as a major market force in Britain. Three fundamental social and technological shifts paved the way for advertising's explosion in the eighteenth century. First, literacy rates climbed to the point where printed advertisements could reach a large percentage of the populace. Of course, given the paucity of reliable evidence and shifting definitions of what exactly makes a person literate, computing historical literacy rates is notoriously difficult. According to John Brewer's admittedly rough figures, in 1500 approximately 10 percent of English males and 1 percent of English females were literate. Over the next two centuries, as the commercial world increasingly relied on reading and writing and many Britons embraced a Protestant emphasis on personal Bible study, the number of readers and writers surged. By 1714 the literacy rate had reached roughly 45 percent for men and 25 percent for women and by 1750 it had climbed to 60 percent for men and 40 percent for women (Brewer, 167; see also 1

Vincent).

Closely related to the rise of literacy—and the second development paving the way for the advertising boom of the eighteenth century—was the gradual harnessing of print’s capacities. As has been well documented elsewhere, however much Gutenberg’s contemporaries marveled over the printing press, it wasn’t until two centuries later that European society began to realize the full potential of print (see Kernan, *Samuel Johnson*, esp. 48–90; McLuhan; Ong; Plumb; and Sher, esp. 2–6). Print’s greatest institution, the periodical press, did not emerge in England until the 1620s, and another century passed before newspapers became widely popular (Harris, 82; Feather, *The Provincial Book Trade*, 44; and Plumb, 268–69). The number of London dailies rose from one in 1702 to six in 1730, nine in 1770, and sixteen in 1793 (Raven, *Business of Books*, 258). Over the course of the same period the number of printing presses in the metropolis rose by some 400 percent, and much of what they produced either functioned as direct advertising (e.g., trade cards, handbills, posters) or as a medium for advertising (e.g., newspapers and magazines) (St. Clair, *The Reading Nation*, 87–88). The combination, then, of a government generally willing to allow the spread of print, a citizenry increasingly capable of reading advertisements, and a network of printers with the capacity to flood the marketplace with promotional materials left eighteenth-century Britain ideally suited to witness its first advertising boom (R. Williams, “Advertising,” 171; Ferdinand, 393).

The third, and perhaps most significant, cultural development facilitating the growth of British advertising during the eighteenth century was the dramatic transformation of the nation’s productive capacities and consumer attitudes. While capitalism’s European roots stretch back to the sixteenth century, most economic historians see eighteenth-century Britain, with its expanding stock market, burgeoning networks for global trade, and growing fascination with political economy, as the first fully capitalist society (E. Wood; Fulcher, 19–22). In terms of its domestic retail economy, Britain had a significant advantage in its push toward full-fledged capitalism in having a geographically concentrated market (largely in the south of England) and an extensive system of roads and canals (Corley, 158). As a result, by the latter half of the eighteenth century, two interrelated economic “revolutions” were under way in Britain: the industrial and the consumer. Little need be said about the former, as the basics of the nation’s shift from a rural-agricultural to an urban-industrial economy have long been widely understood. This early initiation of the “consumer revolution,” however, has until relatively recently been widely ignored or underappreciated.

As noted earlier, the collection that has had the greatest impact in encouraging scholars across several disciplines to study eighteenth-century British consumerism is McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb’s *The Birth of a Consumer Society*. McKendrick’s chapters in that volume have proved particularly influential, as at the heart of his argument is the claim that, in the eighteenth century,

more men and women than ever before in human history enjoyed the experience of acquiring material possessions. Objects which for centuries had been the privileged possessions of the rich came, within the space of a few generations, to be within the reach of a larger part of society than ever before, and, for the first time, to be within the legitimate aspirations of almost all of it. Objects which were once acquired as the result of inheritance at best, came to be the legitimate pursuit of a whole new class of consumers. (Introduction, 1)

Drawing heavily upon Veblen’s theories of conspicuous consumption, McKendrick suggests that most of the energy behind Britain’s consumer revolution came from its newly affluent middle classes whose growing preoccupation with social status and respectability led to obsessive efforts to emulate aristocratic fashions and tastes. Manufacturers in textiles, china, shaving products, and the like were quick to recognize and exploit this shift in consumer attitudes, aggressively advertising their products as the “must-have” items of the season. Under the spell of marketing geniuses like the china manufacturer Josiah Wedgwood—the tradesman who, above all others, emerges as the hero of

McKendrick's tale—Britain's grocers, bank clerks, and attorneys, not to mention their spouses developed insatiable desires for the newest "Queensware" table settings or Chippendale chairs.

Among literary scholars in general and Romanticists in particular, perhaps the most intriguing offshoot of McKendrick's consumer revolution thesis is Colin Campbell's *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (1987). As his title suggests—with its overt allusion to Max Weber's landmark study, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905)—Campbell seeks to update the Weberian theory that European society's transition from feudalism to capitalism was facilitated by the rise of Protestantism and the accompanying social emphasis upon personal accountability and the gospel of work. Equally central to Campbell's project is revising McKendrick's claims that middle-class emulation of the aristocracy fueled Britain's late-eighteenth-century consumer revolution. Using Weber and McKendrick as his starting points, then, Campbell sought to develop a better understanding of the sociological shifts that prompted so many late-eighteenth-century Britons to display consumer instincts so dramatically different from their forebears'.

His answer came via a detailed survey of how the asceticism of early Protestantism gradually gave way to its mirror image, what he calls the hedonism of Romanticism. At the heart of the Romantic project, Campbell explains, are two interconnected impulses: to seek pleasure and to imagine future pleasures. Not surprisingly, then, when Romanticism gained cultural preeminence in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, heeding these impulses became increasingly socially acceptable, nowhere more so than in the marketplace. What resulted was "a distinctively modern form of pleasure-seeking," a sort of "autonomous, self-illusory hedonism." In contrast to traditional hedonism, which turns to material goods to alleviate life's discomforts, modern Romantic hedonism produces an endless series of imagined desires, none of which once attained offers more than fleeting pleasure. Hence, the modern consumer-cum-hedonist "is continually withdrawing from reality as far as he encounters it, ever-casting his day-dreams forward in time, attaching them to objects of desire and then subsequently 'unhooking' them from these objects as and when they are attained and experienced" (86–87). Viewed from this perspective, it was not through—as McKendrick would have it—the instinctual desire to emulate one's social betters or the individual's helplessness in the face of the modern advertising machine that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century consumerism came to be, rather it was through the ascendance of a Romantic ideology that trapped consumers in a cycle of constantly imagining that their next purchase would finally be the one that delivered the long-anticipated gratification.

As influential as McKendrick's and Campbell's theses have been, they have their detractors. Within the humanities the liveliest set of debates in their wake has focused on whether the eighteenth century (rather than the seventeenth, the nineteenth, or even the twentieth) was indeed the moment when consumer society was "born" and whether this "birth" actually first occurred in Britain or elsewhere (see Richards; de Vries; and Benson and Ugolini). Among economists the most pointed critiques of the eighteenth-century consumer revolution thesis charge that McKendrick and his followers have developed an oversimplified narrative of consumer behavior around a dataset composed almost wholly of exceptional retailers and products. Were we to concentrate less on fringe products like Wedgwood china and high-end clothing, they argue, and more on staples like grain and coal, the narrative would look quite different. As Ben Fine has remarked, "It would be far-fetched to view the rise in coal consumption as originating out of the emulative behaviour of the lower classes (with fashion emanating from London as the major domestic market)" (164). Instead, a coal-centered narrative leads us back to the more traditional industrial revolution model, in which shifts in productive capacities rather than consumer demands serve as the principal catalysts for socioeconomic change.

Yet, even if McKendrick, Campbell, and others have oversold the historical particularity of the eighteenth century or how widely experienced the new consumer mindset may have been, it is impossible to deny that widespread changes occurred in the demand side of the British economy between 1700 and 1800. Perhaps nothing better demonstrates these changes than the growth of advertising. A wealth of evidence, both statistical and anecdotal, illustrates how, over the course of the Georgian era, advertising moved from the periphery to the center of the British retail economy. In 1713, the year after the first advertising duty took effect, 18,220 advertisements were taxed in Britain. This number rose to nearly 125,000 per year in 1750 and 500,000 per year in 1800—marking a twenty-five-fold increase in less than a century (Bruttini, 21; Nevett, *Advertising in Britain*, 26–27). Even Adriano Bruttini’s counts, “during the period 1700–1720 London newspapers carried an average of 1 advertisement per edition, and the provincial ones carried five; in 1720–1745, the figures rose to 3 and 12 respectively and finally, during the period 1750–1800, London newspapers and those from ‘industrial areas,’ which took the lion’s share, had an average around 45” (21).⁴ So great did the demand for periodical advertisements become in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that newspapers were for the first time able to wean themselves from the government subsidies they had traditionally received (Asquith, “The Structure,” 111). In some cases, in fact, newspaper proprietors not only got by on advertising income but became fabulously wealthy. James Perry, the owner of the *Morning Chronicle*, for instance, died in 1821 with a net worth between £130,000 and £190,000, almost all of which was attributable to his paper’s popularity with advertisers (Asquith, “Advertising and the Press,” 721).

As one might expect from these figures, anecdotal and circumstantial evidence of advertising’s growing cultural presence in Georgian Britain appears at every turn. In the realm of semantics, the rise of advertising brought a range of new usages, such as the commercial sense of the verb “advertise” (as in “I will advertise my books”) in 1750 and the participial form “advertising” (as in “the advertising merchants of London”) in 1779.⁵ In the age’s leading periodicals, such luminaries as Addison, Fielding, and Johnson offered detailed analyses of the new advertising system and its potential impact on the national character (see [Chapter 2](#)). Also taking up the pen to comment on the proliferation of newspaper advertisements were London’s coffeehouse owners, who made up a sizable percentage of the average newspaper’s subscriber base. In 1728 several of them banded together to publish *The Case of the Coffee-Men of London and Westminster*, in which they protested:

[We] stipulate for *News*; not for *Advertisements*: Yet the Papers are ordinarily more than half full of them. The *Daily Post*, for Example, is often equipped with Thirty; which yield *Three Pounds Fifteen Shillings* that Day to the Proprietors, for the lease. And sometimes that Paper has more. Well may they divide Twelve Hundred Pounds a Year and upwards: They are paid on both Hands; paid by the *Advertisers* for taking in *Advertisements*; and paid by the Coffee-Men for delivering them out. (Coffee-Man, 16)

So ubiquitous, it seems, was advertising by century’s end that even the consecrated ground of the country church had become fair game. Since the early nineteenth century, visitors to the parish church in Goldalming, Surrey, have been greeted by a tablet in the south chapel which reads:

SACRED
To the Memory of
NATHANIEL GODBOLD Esq.^r
Inventor and Proprietor
of that excellent Medicine
The Vegetable Balsam,

Nearly a half-century later, a *Notes and Queries* entry on this epitaph quipped, “I submit that the inscription is so clearly a posthumous advertisement, that if the Chancellor of the Exchequer were to charge an annual duty in respect of it, no one could blame him” (“Monumental Advertisements,” 33)



Figure 1.1. Memorial tablet to Nathaniel Godbold in the Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul, Godalming, Surrey. (Photo by author, courtesy of the Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul, Godalming.)

The tax referred to here, of course, is the national advertising duty, which, along with the stamp tax, was first levied in the early eighteenth century as a means of slowing the spread of potentially seditious periodicals. Not even these duties, however, could halt advertising’s proliferation. When the advertising and stamp duties became law in 1712, initial rates were set at one shilling for each printed advertisement and one penny for each stamped sheet of newsprint. Over the next century, the stamp tax quadrupled to four pennies per sheet and the advertising duty grew nearly as quickly, peaking at three shillings and six pence in 1815 (Presbrey, 74–75; E. S. Turner, 24–48; Nevett, *Advertising in Britain*, 25–27).⁷ Yet, by this time advertising had become so essential in many industries that the taxes seem to have had little effect. If anything, the rising expense of newspaper advertising fueled creativity. One response to the advertising duty was to experiment with tax-exempt modes of marketing. As is detailed at length in [Chapters 2](#) and [5](#), several merchants outwitted both the taxman and the ad-resistant reader by bribing editors to insert “puffs,” or paid advertisements masquerading as news stories, heralding the arrival of a new line of exotic hats at the local haberdashery or the discovery of a miracle cure by the town pharmacologist. Less cunningly, other merchants distributed trade cards in their shops or on street corners. Not only were these cards tax-exempt, but they also allowed much greater freedom than the traditional newspaper advertisement in such design elements as typography and illustration (Nevett, *Advertising in Britain*, 22; McKendrick, “The Commercialization of Fashion,” 83–84).

What the trade card was to the high-end shop, the poster was to the common advertiser. Traditionally, bill-sticking has been considered a Victorian phenomenon, largely because of the

descriptions by Dickens and other mid-nineteenth-century writers of a London pasted over with posters. In reality, the professional bill-sticker was well established a century before Dickens's time, having emerged in the wake of the advertisement duty (Nevett, *Advertising in Britain*, 21–22). In the 1805 *Prelude*, for instance, Wordsworth portrays a late-eighteenth-century London in which “files of ballads dangle from dead walls; / Advertisements, of giant-size, from high / Press forward, in a colours, on the sight” (Book 7, lines 209–11). Less grand forms of advertising that arose or reached new levels of popularity in the era of the advertising tax include the handbill, the horse-drawn billboard, and the sandwich-board carrier. The lengths to which some tradesmen resorted to attract tax-exempt publicity is seen in such stunts as the barber who exhibited a live bear in his shop to promote his bear's grease and the quack medicine dealer who painted his pony a garish purple to attract the gaze of all as he rode through London's streets (Strachan, *Advertising and Satirical Culture*, ch. 5; McKendrick, “The Commercialization of Fashion,” 93).

In contrast to such outlandish tactics, newspaper advertisements remained relatively conservative through the end of the Romantic period, largely because of industrywide column-width and typeface restrictions. That said, the rhetorical flair of newspaper advertisements noticeably intensified between the reigns of George I and George IV. The greatest impetus for this change was the proliferation of the number of advertisements in the average day's paper. In 1710, for instance, when most newspapers printed only a small number of advertisements, each notice had a high probability of being read; but in the latter half of the century, when the number of advertisements per issue rose to fifty or more, advertisers had to resort to gimmickry and puffery to stand out from the crowd. By the first half of the nineteenth century, several advertisers employed jingles, slogans, and clever word play to attract the attention of newspaper readers. Typical of the times was the fad of pulling in readers with bold headlines (“*The Duke of Wellington Shot ...*”) before introducing them to the product in smaller print (“... a glance of admiration at our hats”) (E. S. Turner, 60).

The more familiar one becomes with the advertising norms of this period, the more apparent it is that slick and sophisticated marketing campaigns are by no means original to the electronic age. As James Raven puts it, in the eighteenth century “advances were made in customer psychology which would cheer any twenty-first-century marketing consultancy” (*The Business of Books*, 269). One medicine dealer's trade card from this era pledges, “NO CURE, NO PAY.” Another trade card carries a chimney sweep's promise to refund his customers' money if they aren't fully satisfied with his services (McKendrick, “The Commercialization of Fashion,” 83–84). Not to be outdone, the potter Josiah Wedgwood offered free delivery to any customer able to pay ready cash, and several grocers experimented with “loss leaders,” advertising products at or below cost in hopes that bargain hunters would buy additional items with a higher markup (McKendrick, “The Commercialization of Fashion,” 94). Even product placement traces its roots to this era, with Wedgwood and Matthew Boulton bestowing complimentary dinnerware and buttons on fashionable families.

By the early Romantic age, advertising in Britain was also rapidly professionalizing (detailed in [Chapter 3](#)). For the first time, a wide range of merchants and manufacturers abandoned traditional practices of generic and local retailing and began marketing their goods as national brands. Entrepreneurs in numerous product lines developed elaborate marketing strategies to generate nationwide demand for their mass-produced pottery, shoe blacking, and razor strops. With the emergence of the first advertising agents in the 1790s and early 1800s, Georgian Britain was well on its way to creating a prototype for Madison Avenue culture. As T. R. Nevett and others have shown, the old myth that the advertising agent was a Victorian invention is belied by the careers of William Tayler, James White, Charles Barker, and other early-nineteenth-century professionals who specialized in managing the advertising campaigns of clients. While their primary role was to coordinate the placement of advertisements in hundreds of newspapers across the country, they also

had a hand in the creative side of advertising, helping clients design the most effective advertisements for their target audience (Nevett, “London’s Early Advertising Agents”; Dunbar; and St. Clair, *The Reading Nation*, 186). Robert Southey attests to the existence of these early advertising agents in his *Letters from England* (1807), where he relates how a successful author friend of his had recently been besieged by ad-men promising to boost his sales dramatically and ensure his works were properly circulating among “people of fashion” (343–44). The Romantic-era ad-man also makes a conspicuous appearance in W. T. Moncrieff’s 1819 play *Wanted a Wife*, which opens in the advertising office of the conniving Irishman Barney McShift.

All told, then, while there’s no question that advertising continued to expand and professionalize rapidly over the course of the Victorian period, it is time to definitively lay to rest the old notion that advertising remained mired in a sort of prehistory prior to the Great Exhibition of 1851. As a host of economists, philosophers, and cultural critics have theorized over the past half-century, advertising is at the heart of modern consumerism, buoying up the demand side of capitalist economies through the perpetual creation of new wants and desires. Extending the logic of these claims back a few centuries, it becomes clear that, without advertising, the new consumerism of the late eighteenth century would merely have been a passing fad, not, as it has turned out, the dominant mode of economic consciousness of the modern industrialized world.

As for the other large-scale historical premise of this book—that, like advertising, literature as we know it is fundamentally a creation of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—forty decades of scholarship have essentially left this a settled point. In fact, it has become somewhat axiomatic among British literary historians to speak of the “Romantic invention of literature.”⁸ The basic argument holds that, as a byproduct of the print revolution and the Enlightenment-era reclassification of knowledge, the category of “literature” narrowed from including all worthwhile books to just the best writing in imaginative genres (i.e., fiction, poetry, and drama). Undergirding these categorical shifts were the concomitant emergence and naturalization of such core institutions of modern literature as periodical criticism, copyright legislation, national literary canons, and the authorial function.⁹ On the heels of multiple generations of historicist scholarship on the “invention” of literature, the general narrative is now largely understood. What has yet to be fully appreciated, though, is what the chapters that follow aim to prove—namely, that a remarkable number of these core developments in the literary field were deeply dependent on simultaneous developments in advertising. Writers and booksellers had a curious tendency to be on the scene at crucial moments in advertising history; but, by the same token, without the landmark advancements in advertising that took place over the course of the Romantic Century, we might all be steeped in tales of the “Victorian invention of literature.”

The Progress of Puffery

While, for all intents and purposes, the story of the twin rises of modern advertising and literature begins in eighteenth-century Britain, the prologue is actually set several centuries earlier in the workshop of William Caxton. Just one year after Caxton made history by introducing the printing press to England, he earned a second claim to fame by recognizing that his press had the capacity not only to mass-produce books but also to publicize those same books widely and inexpensively. Beginning in 1477, Caxton effectively became England's first mass advertiser when he printed and circulated a handbill for *The Pyses of Salisbury*, a book he had published and sold in his shop. The significance of this early conjunction of England's literary and advertising systems has not been lost on scholars. The marketing researcher Stephen Brown, for instance, has dubbed Caxton "one of the first modern marketing men" and suggested that the "marketing orientation" of England's earliest bookmakers "predates the emergence of the modern marketing concept" ("Rattles," 9–10; see also Eisenstein, 60). Similarly, the book historian John Feather has noted that "printed books were the first products to be manufactured in large quantities for sale. The makers and sellers of printed books were therefore the first producers to be confronted with modern problems of marketing and advertising" (*English Book Prospectuses*, 22). And the linguist Michael Baird Saenger has posited that early modern book announcements like Caxton's "constitute something like the birth of modern advertising" (197).

For the first century and a half after Caxton, English book advertisements tended to come in two forms: title pages posted in public places and catalogs shipped to booksellers and collectors.¹ The arrival of the first English newspapers in the early seventeenth century offered a third method of marketing new titles, and, not surprisingly, printers and booksellers were again quick to recognize the promotional potential of this new medium. In fact, the first wave of English newspaper advertisements (ca. 1621–25) was devoted almost exclusively to books and other printed goods (Clarke, 140).

Long before 1700, then, bookmaking and advertising had forged a special relationship in Britain. Over the course of the eighteenth century, these two modern systems became only more tightly intertwined, with each experiencing exponential growth and undergoing major structural shifts as the direct result of their kinship. As nearly every major cultural commentator of the time noted, eighteenth-century Britain was deluged with print in general and printed advertisements in particular. Perhaps most famously, Samuel Johnson lamented in 1759, "Advertisements are now so numerous that they are very negligently perused, and it is therefore become necessary to gain attention by the magnificence of promises, and by eloquence sometimes sublime and sometimes pathetic" (*The Idler*, 125).

This pressure to discover ever more original ways of capturing consumers' attention was felt most acutely in two trades, quack medicine and bookselling, both hyper-competitive industries selling nonessential goods, often on a national scale. To grasp the remarkable originality and moxie of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century quack medicine ads, one can turn to the work of Roy Porter and a train of scholars who have followed in his wake.² My particular focus in this chapter, however, is eighteenth-century British booksellers and authors, a group that may have enjoyed greater occupational prestige than contemporaneous dealers of nostrums, fever powders, and healing balms but was no less cunning in its harnessing and expansion of emergent advertising practices. In fact, several core promotional strategies that still form the backbone of modern advertising were first

developed in the publishing houses of eighteenth-century Britain. No less significantly, the advertising logic that took hold during the so-called “consumer revolution” had a revolutionary impact on eighteenth-century British literature, playing a crucial role in such landmark developments as the rise of the novel and the professionalization of literary criticism.

ADVERTISING PIONEERS IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BOOK TRADE

Unlike seventeenth-century journalism, which went through cycles of boom (e.g., the Civil War—era wars of words) and bust (e.g., the crackdown on the press during the Restoration), newspaper advertising developed slowly but unabatedly between its introduction in the 1620s and the century's end. By the mid-seventeenth century a number of newspapers were branching beyond general descriptions of items for sale to include personal ads for runaway servants, public notices for lost or stolen goods, and miscellaneous queries of the public. That this new mode of personal advertising carried with it not only few stigmas but, in fact, a certain cachet is evidenced by how many of the English elite were quick to place personal ads, especially when they happened to misplace a cherished possession. Even the royal family, as C. John Sommerville quips, was “always losing things” (70). In 1660, for example, the household of Charles II ran a series of notices in the *Mercurius Publicus* imploring the public to help the king recover a favorite dog that had been stolen from Whitehall (Elliott, 47). Even more remarkably, following the coronation of James II in 1685, the royal jewelers placed a lost-and-found ad for “the Button off His Majesties Scepter, set about with 24 small Diamonds, three rubies and three Emeralds: a Pendant Pearl from His Majesties Crown, about 9 Carats or 30 Common Grains, and about 16 Great Links of a Gold Chain” (qtd. in F. G. Price, 166). The latter half of the seventeenth century also saw the first English weekly given over wholly to advertisements (the *Publick Adviser*, est. 1657), the first English periodical dedicated to reviewing new books (the *Works of the Learned*, est. 1691), and the first wave of complaints about advertisements crowding news out of newspapers (Sommerville, 55, 100–113; Presbrey, 42). Even the word “advertisement” traces its earliest commercial usages to this period, first appearing, rather tellingly, in a bookseller's list of recently published titles (Presbrey, 46; Elliott, 50–51).

Yet, despite these advances, it would not be until the mid-eighteenth century, when the realization of print culture and the rise of the new consumerism radically transformed British society, that advertising would enter its modern era. In regards to the book trade, it bears remembering that at the turn of the eighteenth century Britain still had no daily newspapers, no literary magazines, no circulating libraries, and few coffeehouses. Authors were generally either independently wealthy or beholden to patrons, and their works rarely circulated beyond a small coterie of fellow writers and well-educated readers. While during the seventeenth century the nation's economy had clearly entered an early capitalist stage, most retailing remained highly localized and a Puritan ethic restrained middle-class spending on luxury goods. With markets essentially fixed, merchants and manufacturers tended to see little need to advertise either extensively or creatively. As C. Y. Ferdinand has suggested, the relatively small-scale and forthright nature of seventeenth-century advertising reflected the “limitations of a pre-consumer-society market: wages were lower than they would be in the eighteenth century; demand was relatively inflexible; luxury commodities went to a small, well-defined group; and other forms of advertising—handbills, word-of-mouth, town criers, shop signs—were evidently adequate to promote local goods and services” (394).

At the dawn of the eighteenth century, then, print advertisements remained relatively straightforward and unobtrusive. Most newspaper advertisements were as matter-of-fact as one from the 2 January 1705 issue of the *Daily Courant* that informed readers, “Coffee, Tea, and Chocolate, by Wholesale or Retail at the King's Arms next the King's Arms Tavern on Ludgate-hill near the

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