

The Value of Money in Eighteenth-Century England: Incomes, Prices, Buying Power—and Some Problems in Cultural Economics

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ABSTRACT Robert D. Hume offers an empirical investigation of incomes, cost, artist remuneration, and buying power in the realm of long eighteenth-century cultural production and purchase. What was earned by writers, actors, singers, musicians, and painters? Who could afford to buy a book? Attend a play or opera? Acquire a painting? Only 6 percent of families had £100 per annum income, and only about 3 percent had £200. What is the “buying power” magnitude of such sums? No single multiplier yields a legitimate present-day equivalent, but a range of 200–300 gives a rough sense of magnitude for most of this period. Novels are now thought of as a bourgeois phenomenon, but they cost 3s. per volume. A family with a £200 annual income would have to spend nearly a full day’s income to buy a four-volume novel, but only 12 percent for a play. The market for plays was naturally much larger, which explains high copyright payments to playwrights and very low payments for most novels—hence the large number of novels by women, who had few ways to earn money. From this investigation we learn two broad facts. First, that the earnings of most writers, actors, musicians, and singers were generally scanty but went disproportionately to a few stars, and second, that most of the culture we now study is inarguably elite: it was mostly consumed by the top 1 percent or 0.5 percent of the English population. **KEYWORDS:** monetary value in eighteenth-century England; incomes of eighteenth-century writers, actors, playwrights, musicians, and artists; publication of eighteenth-century plays; money issues in *Robinson Crusoe*; money issues in *Pride and Prejudice*

❧ **MY SUBJECT IS PARTICULAR SUMS** of money and what they mean in various eighteenth-century contexts with reference to the production and purchase of culture in the form of books, theater, concerts, opera, and painting. What I am *not* talking about is the sort of symbolic and metaphoric expressions of “value” that are addressed from various perspectives in studies that belong to what has been called (misleadingly, in my opinion) the “New Economic Criticism.” Some of those books strike me as smart

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and provocative and some as fairly daft, but I am not doing what they are doing.¹ This is an empirical rather than a symbolic investigation of value, and specifically of monetary value.

The production and consumption of culture is a huge subject. What I have to offer here is a brief synoptic overview of their financial basis, drawing on my own past and present work (and that of others) over roughly the last thirty years. In short compass, I shall take up five distinct but interconnected topics. The first is income levels. How many families commanded how much money early and late in our period? The object, obviously, is to inquire who could readily afford to purchase (say) a book costing 3s., or an opera ticket at 10/6, or a painting at 30 guineas. Second, to investigate the buying power of such sums in their original context. Published plays generally cost 1s. or 1/6: is that trivial or costly? Third, to establish some price ranges—for books; theater, concert, and opera attendance; and paintings. Fourth, to inquire into what could be earned by authors, actors, musicians, singers, and painters. Could one, for example, make a living as a playwright after 1710? (The answer, contrary to popular belief, is basically *no*.) Fifth and finally, I shall briefly offer some examples of the utility of understanding the buying power of particular sums named by such authors as Defoe, Fielding, and Austen.

Before plunging into the thickets of these particulars, let me offer a teaser—a single example of why I think we need to be clear on the buying power of money when trying to make sense of the history of culture in the long eighteenth century. Consider the case of the dissemination of Shakespeare. Few of his plays were available as singletons as of 1709, and many of the singletons were in fact adaptations, some as radical as the Tate *Lear*. To acquire much Shakespeare, one had to buy a folio. The price varied (with binding, in part), but all four folios seem to have had a retail price around £1.² Received wisdom established by the 1930s was that Tonson's 1709 "Rowe" edition in six octavo volumes made Shakespeare "widely available," and the 1714 duodecimo reprint made him "cheap" (sufficiently so that copies could be bought for "the housekeeper's room").³ No one seems to have worried about lack of recorded impact. Shakespeare's presence in the theater repertory was demonstrably unaffected by these editions, and precious little commentary appeared in print. Why not? Well, the price of the 1709 edition was 30s. and the 1714 edition was 27s.—roughly a 50 percent *increase* over the cost of the Fourth Folio. How expensive was this? By the multipliers that I will explain shortly, the present-day magnitude would fall somewhere between £300 and £450. How many people buy books that expensive, then or now? Surprisingly, the 1709 edition sold well enough that Tonson did an unpublicized reprint to meet demand—testimony to exceptional interest in a *very* costly set. Pope's subscription edition of 1725

1. For positive exemplars of such criticism, see James Thompson, *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century Political Economy and the Novel* (Durham, N.C., 1996); and Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 2008).

2. See Anthony James West, *The Shakespeare First Folio: The History of the Book*, vol. 1, *An Account of the First Folio Based on its Sales and Prices, 1623–2000* (Oxford, 2001), 1–13.

3. On the false perception of cheapness and wide availability, see Don-John Dugas and Robert D. Hume, "The Dissemination of Shakespeare's Plays Circa 1714," *Studies in Bibliography* 56 (2003–4): 261–79.

carried a price of 5 guineas (105s.)—in present-day buying power, somewhere between £1,000 and £1,500. The retail price was 6 guineas: small wonder that edition did nothing to extend the dissemination of Shakespeare. Why did Shakespeare abruptly start to morph into the “Shakespeare” we know in the 1730s? After Tonson’s copyright ran out, Robert Walker began to issue singleton titles for 4d. each (nearly an 80 percent discount on the standard 1/6 price for a new mainpiece).⁴ Tonson replied by printing singletons at 3d.; cut his wholesale price as low as 1d. at the height of the price war; and printed as many as 10,000 copies at a time.⁵ Tonson withdrew his cheap copies from sale once he had chased Walker out of the market—but a vast number of buyers had been able to acquire only the titles they wanted and to do so at a fabulous discount. Price has a huge impact on dissemination.

Income Levels and Their Implications

Who could afford to buy books—let alone opera tickets or paintings? Half a century ago Richard Altick concluded bluntly that purchase of new literary material tended to be “prohibitive . . . to all but the rich.”⁶ Reinvestigation of the subject on the basis of more recent scholarship in economic history demonstrates that Altick got this exactly right. What we discover is that, beyond the level of chapbooks and almanacs, the number of families that could afford more than occasional book purchases cannot have been more than about 10,000 or 15,000 at any time in our period. Most book buying has to have been done by the top 1 percent of families, and extensive book buying by the top 0.5 percent. What these figures tell us is that we are dealing with an elite, not with what we would now think of as a “middle-class,” phenomenon.

Where do these figures come from? Documentation is far from satisfactory, but we do have some. The three crucial items (luckily, well spaced out in time) are Gregory King’s “Natural and Political Observations and Conclusions upon the State and Condition of England” (pertaining to 1688),⁷ Joseph Massie’s *A Computation of the Money that Hath Been Exorbitantly Raised upon the People of Great Britain by the Sugar-Planters, in One Year, from January 1759 to January 1760* (1760), and Patrick Colquhoun’s *A Treatise on Indigence* (1806), pertaining to 1803. *Faute de mieux*, they have been used by scholars, albeit with many doubts and lamentations.⁸ A generation ago, however, Lindert and Williamson checked them against surviving primary sources and published an important set of corrections and improvements of these figures.⁹

4. At 30s. for forty-three plays (including the apocrypha), Tonson’s 1709 edition cost a bit more than 8d. per play. Walker was not only cutting that price in half, but also, in offering single titles, he was allowing customers to cherry-pick the plays they wanted and to spread out the payments over time.

5. On this trade war, see Don-John Dugas, *Marketing the Bard: Shakespeare in Performance and Print 1660–1740* (Columbia, Mo., 2006), chap. 4.

6. Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (1957; 2nd ed., Columbus, Ohio, 1998), 52.

7. Published in *Two Tracts by Gregory King*, ed. George E. Barnett (Baltimore, 1936).

8. See particularly Geoffrey Holmes’s salutary critique, “Gregory King and the Social Structure of Pre-industrial England,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 27 (1977): 41–68.

9. Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson, “Revising England’s Social Tables 1688–1812,” *Explorations in Economic History* 19, no. 4 (1982): 385–408.

To imagine much precision even in the corrected versions would be folly: King and his successors had to work from woefully inadequate sources, though Colquhoun at least had the advantage of starting from England's first real attempt at a census in 1801. Granting the crudity of the corrected figures, they do supply a better basis for analysis than the three original, unmodified treatises.

The categories in King, Massie, and Colquhoun are far from congruent, but (with the numbers emended) they give us a pretty clear picture. King's corrected figures translate into roughly 1,390,000 families with an average annual income of about £39;¹⁰ Massie's figures, as rejigged, total about 1,539,000 and an average of £46;¹¹ Colquhoun reckons about 2,193,000 families with an average income of some £91.¹² To address an obvious question: what about inflation? Between 1660 and 1760 the figures jump around erratically, but according to MeasuringWorth.com, the overall annualized inflation rate for these hundred years is actually *negative*: -0.1 percent. Given this fact, one need not be surprised that the prices of items like theater tickets and play books change almost not at all, even over so long a timespan. Between 1760 and 1790 the annualized rate of inflation is 0.79 percent, which starts to add up to something considerable. During the Napoleonic era, raging inflation was a huge problem. The rate for the 1790s is 4.53 percent annualized, a figure that masks acute financial instability: inflation decreased 5.06 percent in 1797 and increased 21.69 percent in 1800, but fell 14.68 percent in 1802 (an effect of the peace of Amiens).¹³ Very different multipliers are needed to obtain approximate modern buying power after 1790, and year-to-year variation is chaotic.

The gist of what we learn from King's figures for 1688 is that more than 80 percent of families had no more than £50 per annum. To put this figure in context, I point out that Peter Earle's calculations suggest that a "middling" family with two servants

10. King's figure for total population stands, but his calculation of average family annual income was about £31.

11. Massie's original figures were about 1,475,000 and £41.

12. Colquhoun's totals stand, but Lindert and Williamson emend some of the constituent figures.

13. By way of a *caveat lector* I feel obliged to underline an unpalatable fact: inflation rates (not to mention evaluation of buying power) vary wildly with the source one chooses to use. One might, for example, turn to the House of Commons Library, Research Paper 99/20: "Inflation: The Value of the Pound 1750–1998," available at <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/rp99/rp99-020.pdf>. Its figures for 1750–1850 are derived from an "index of consumables' prices" for the period 1264 to 1954: E. H. Phelps-Brown and S. Hopkins, "Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables Compared with Builders' Wage-Rates," *Economica*, November 1956, 296–314. For the years 1797 to 1802, here are the percentage changes in consumer prices per year as reported by MeasuringWorth and Paper 99/20, respectively:

Year	MeasuringWorth	Paper 99/20
1797	-5.06	-10.0
1798	-1.62	-2.2
1799	+7.14	+12.3
1800	+21.69	+36.5
1801	+5.98	+11.7
1802	-14.68	-23.0

Any index heavily dependent on agricultural prices (which are among the fullest and best-recorded figures) is liable to over-magnify fluctuations largely dependent on weather.

Table 1. Percentage of families in England and Wales with incomes of £100 and £200 per annum

Income	(King) 1688	(Massie) 1760	(Colquhoun) 1801	(Colquhoun) 1801, in 1760 pounds ^a
≥ £100	6	6	21	7
≥ £200	2.9	2.5	7	3.1

a. Any adjustment for inflation is definitely a judgment call. MeasuringWorth.com calculates £100 in 1801 as anywhere from £32 6s. 5d. to £62 1s. 5d. back in 1760. Rounding to pounds, the website regards £100 in 1760 as £198 in terms of simple purchasing power (Retail Price Index) in 1801; as £161 in terms of “labor value”; as £221 if treated as “income value”; and as much as £309 if computed as “economic power value.” Income value seems to me the most relevant in the present case, and I have obtained my 1760 equivalencies by applying it.

and a total income of £200 probably had something like £16 of discretionary spending power for the year.¹⁴ Working from King’s emended figures, one might say that 52 percent of families had income under £25 per annum; 83 percent had income under £50; 94 percent had income under £100. Earle believes that “the middling sort” begins at about £200, a figure enjoyed by about 3 percent of the population. Massie’s figures for 1760 are a bit lower, whereas Colquhoun’s appear to be substantially higher—until one adjusts them for inflation.

Adjusting Colquhoun for inflation to get 1760 buying power brings his figures into line with those of King and Massie; if we adjusted for 1710 instead (the halfway point between 1660 and 1760), they would be lower. Precision is impossible, but it is not the point. What we learn here is that pretty consistently between 1688 and 1801, no more than about 3 percent of the families in England and Wales had sufficient income to purchase more than a bare minimum of “cultural” products. No doubt some lower-income individuals or families splurged—or scrimped and saved—to buy books or attend the theater, but many of those with more money probably spent little on such fripperies. Writing in 1734, Jacob Vanderlint says that to live as a “gentleman” requires £500 per annum.¹⁵ For King, this would amount to about 11,000 families (0.8 percent of the total); for Massie, only about 8,500 families (0.5 percent); Colquhoun’s raw score would be about 56,000 families (2.5 percent), but when adjusted for inflation, the total falls to about 17,900 families (0.8 percent). The clear implication is that significant discretionary purchasing power was the prerogative of only a small number of families throughout this period.¹⁶

14. Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society, and Family Life in London, 1660–1730* (London, 1989), chap. 10. What I deduce about families outside London from H. R. French’s *The Middle Sort of People in Provincial England 1600–1750* (Oxford, 2007) is that middling-sort families in the provinces had even less discretionary spending power than their cousins in London.

15. See Jacob Vanderlint, *Money Answers All Things* (London, 1734), 22, 141–42, 145.

16. A good source of information on a wide array of professions and trades and what could be earned from them is R. Campbell, *The London Tradesman. Being an Historical Account of All the Trades, Professions, Arts, both Liberal and Mechanic, now practised in the Cities of London and Westminster. Calculated for the Instruction of Youth in their Choice of Business*, 3rd ed. (London, 1757).

The tiny percentage of families that could spend more than a few pounds per annum on “cultural” products is the repeated refrain of this essay, and it is simply a fact. Indeed, precious few families could spend more than a few shillings a month, if that. I need, however, to draw an important distinction between “the number of people who could afford to buy a book” and “the number of people who read it” (that is, *purchase vs. potential total readership*). Few people could afford to spend 18s. for *Tom Jones* or even 12s. for a later reprint, but someone who did buy it could loan the novel, or allow friends and poorer relations to read it in his or her personal library. The average readership of lending library copies is unknown, but probably not negligible, since libraries would not buy books if the organizers thought usage would not cover the cost. We have no way of calculating the average number of readers of books, popular or otherwise. The possibility of borrowing a book from a bookseller for a fee goes back at least as far as 1669, when Francis Kirkman appended a notice to his edition of *Psittacorum regio* to the effect that a list of books may be had at his shop, “newly Printed, and to be sold as aforesaid; where you may be furnished with all the Plays that were ever yet Printed, and all sorts of Histories and Romances, which you may buy or have lent you to read on reasonable Considerations.”¹⁷ I take this to imply that plays and fiction (but not necessarily all sorts of books) were available for rental. How common this practice was at any date I have no idea.

A third concept we need to take on board is *access*. Books might be borrowed (at least by some members of the middling sort and higher classes), but the Italian opera was out of bounds for someone who could not spare the 5s. price of admission to the second gallery. Even at the level of periodicals, we are pretty much in the dark. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price’s father borrows a neighbor’s newspaper (vol. 3, chap. 7): such sharing must have been common. Papers were available in coffeehouses, but we have no way to estimate how many coffeehouses took any particular paper, or how many readers that paper attracted each day.¹⁸ Two points need to be stressed. First, access to print material (both costly and cheap) was an entirely different proposition from entry to theater, concerts, oratorios, or opera. And second, readership of books and periodicals must have been on average quite a lot greater than the number of peo-

Journeyman bookbinders, for example, “make but a mean Living; they seldom earn more than Ten Shillings a Week when employed, and are out of Business often Half the Year” (135).

17. This notice appears at the end (opposite page 156) in one EEBO copy but not the other.

18. The famous case is *The Spectator*. In no. 10 (March 12, 1711), Addison claimed that 3,000 copies of each issue were being distributed (reduced to 1,600 or 1,700 after August 1712, when a halfpenny stamp tax was added to the price of each 1d. paper). Addison claimed a huge readership: “if I allow Twenty Readers to every Paper, which I look upon as a modest Computation, I may reckon about Three-score thousand Disciples in *London* and *Westminster*.” Sixty-thousand readers per issue seems a large number—roughly 10 percent of the population of London (and perhaps 20 percent of the literate population). Six readers per hour for eight hours in a coffee house would be roughly fifty for the day. If, plucking numbers out of thin air, we say that 100 coffee houses took two copies perused by a total of 100 readers, then that would total some 10,000 readers. If the other 2,800 copies had ten readers each (probably an overgenerous estimate), then that would add 28,000, for a total of perhaps 38,000 or 40,000. Whatever the actual numbers—London itself had some 650 coffeehouses by 1714—circulation was sharply reduced by the 50 percent increase in price in August 1712.

ple able to afford to purchase such materials. Unfortunately, there is no way even to make an educated guess at the ratio of buyers to readers.

We do need to be very clear that *purchase* and *access* are very different things where printed material is concerned. Chapbook as well as less drastic condensations made popular books like *Moll Flanders* and *Gulliver's Travels* available—sometimes severely mangled, but cheap.¹⁹ Single poems and collections of poetry tended to be quite expensive, considering what you got for your money, but from early in the eighteenth century, quite a lot of poetry gets published, even in rather improbable newspapers and magazines, much of it reprinted. A good late-century example is Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Only 500 copies were printed of a small and expensive book (5s. unbound), but seventeen of the twenty-three poems got reprinted (sometimes shortened) a total of forty-one times in twenty-three magazines and newspapers (and one book) between the appearance of the first and second editions.²⁰ Some of the periodicals had quite large circulation (5,000 in the case of the *Monthly Review* and the *Morning Post*). Libraries were of course some help in broadening dissemination, and so were personal networks.²¹

Buying Power Then and Now

Is 5s. a little or a lot? To make sense of the prices and incomes we encounter in eighteenth-century contexts, most scholars (not to mention students) want at least a rough measure of equivalency in present-day purchasing power. For a number of reasons, determining a conversion multiplier is problematical. First, the “basket of goods and services” so confidently cited by government economists today consists of such different things in 1714 and 2014 that equivalency is poor. In the realm of cultural production, paper was vastly more expensive then than now, but computers and printers are costlier than quill pens—and computer prices differ greatly and have fallen considerably over the last thirty years. Second, different items have risen in price at radically different rates. In the eighteenth century, housing was cheap but food quite expensive. The multipliers that translate them into twenty-first-century prices are very different, even supposing that one can allow for hovel versus penthouse and McDonald's versus Gordon Ramsey. Third, present-day inflation varies but is often high enough to throw

19. *Moll* (438 pages in octavo in 1722) appeared in 1723 as a 190-page duodecimo for 1s. or 1/6 bound (published by T. Read) and around 1723–25 as a twenty-four-page chapbook (published by Edw. Midwinter). *Gulliver* (706 pages in two octavo volumes) was published in October 1726. Curll brought out *Lemuel Gulliver's Travels* almost immediately in 1726 as a 128-page octavo for 2s. 6d. as a kind of synopsis (and also issued the four parts separately); in 1727 Stone and King brought out a fuller condensation of 348 pages in duodecimo (covering all four parts) for 3s. Around 1750 someone issued a twenty-four-page summary of the first voyage under the title *The Travels and Adventures of Capt. Lemuel Gulliver* in duodecimo. As late as 1773 the full, official text was listed as costing 6s. See [William Bent], *The London Catalogue of Books . . . Since the Year MDCC* (London, 1773), 46.

20. See Patricia Gael, “*Lyrical Ballads* in British Periodicals, 1798–1800,” *Wordsworth Circle* 44, no. 1 (2013): 61–67.

21. For the best general account of “the mechanisms by which borrowed books increasingly circulated amongst contemporary readers,” the reader should turn to David Allan's *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (London, 2008), ix.

comparative figures out of whack very quickly. Fourth, and most problematic, one can (quite legitimately) calculate comparative value in radically different ways. One must allow for both the cost of things and for the money available to purchase them. Using the “Retail Price Index” tells us that £100 in 1700 is worth £13,100 in 2013 (a multiplier of 131), but employing “Labour Value” generates a modern figure of about £199,500 (a multiplier of 1,995 and a difference of a factor of more than *fifteen*).²² The crux for our purposes is that, while prices have risen quite a lot, the proportion of the population that enjoys a substantial income has risen far more. Other complications must be factored in. For our cultural concerns, “middling sort” incomes (and higher) are what is relevant, and today there are a lot more of them (many of them comprising two substantial incomes for one household). The tax structure was entirely different; allowances for bartering and for low-paid clergymen doing some teaching and farming are essentially incalculable; the cost difference between living in London and living in the country is huge.²³ Single multipliers simply do not work, but fortunately they are really not needed. What we do need is a crude measure of “economic power” that will let us judge affordability.

Comparing incomes and prices for a wide variety of trades and goods, I have found that, in a high proportion of cases, the multiplier falls anywhere between one hundred and seven hundred (though some items run as high as a thousand or even more). Overall, my findings suggest that for the period 1660 to 1760, a multiplier between two hundred and three hundred tends to give a rough but suggestive present-day equivalency in buying power.²⁴ For the Napoleonic period (1795–1815), the multiplier needs to be more like 100 to 150. Another way of looking at the issue is to say that experimentation in particular cases suggests that, for the first half of our period (1660–1730), a figure roughly double the Retail Price Index tends to yield a reasonable approximation of minimum present-day buying power, while something like a quarter to a third of the Average Income figure supplies a plausible maximum.

22. Figures are from the MeasuringWorth.com website calculator. For post-1830 dates, this site also offers calculators for “Gross Domestic Product Deflator,” “Per Capita Gross Domestic Product,” and “Relative Share of Gross Domestic Product.” For different questions, each possesses a measure of validity, but the difference between RPI and Relative Share of GDP runs to a factor of more than forty-two between 1830 and 2011.

23. Adam Smith notes that the “common price of labour in London” is 18d. per day; a few miles away it falls to 14d. or 15d. In Edinburgh it is 10d., but a few miles away just 8d. See Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, textual editor W. B. Todd, 2 vols. (1976; reprint, Indianapolis, Ind., 1981), 1:92.

24. Some explanation of the multipliers I have used to obtain approximate equivalents in magnitude between eighteenth-century and present-day costs and buying power is in order. I first offered the 200 to 300 multiplier for the period circa 1660–1740 in “The Economics of Culture in London, 1660–1740,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2006): 487–533. I emended those figures to 100 to 150 for the Napoleonic era in “Money in Jane Austen,” *Review of English Studies*, n.s., 64, no. 2 (2013): 289–310 at 302–5. Some further elaboration and explanations may be found in Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *The Publication of Plays in England, 1660–1800: Playwrights, Publishers, and the Market* (forthcoming), chap. 3. I have used a wide variety of sources to supply data on both incomes and prices. For general averages and income levels, I have relied principally on Lindert and Williamson’s reworking of figures originally supplied by King, Massie, and Colquhoun. I systematically obtained figures on actors’ and playwrights’ theatrical incomes from the numerous surviving account books for

Two principles seem evident here. First, the cultural historian must point-blank refuse to supply any single multiplier that purportedly converts seventeenth- and eighteenth-century figures into present-day sums. Second, for the Jane Austen era (roughly 1790–1815), severe inflation and deflation make value equivalency radically unstable, but distinctly lower multipliers are in order. The advantages of spread-figure multipliers are that they convey an appropriately approximate impression of value and that they are not immediately outdated. They will date, but not nearly so fast as a single figure.

Returning to the question (is 5s. a lot or a little?), if we use the 200 to 300 multiplier to obtain an approximate measure of present-day buying power, we learn that 5s. equates to something like £50–£75.²⁵ Consider the following scale of relative value, early eighteenth century versus early twenty-first century (rounding a bit for tidiness).

<i>1660–1760 sum</i>	<i>Approximate buying power today</i>
1d.	£0.85 (85 d.)–£1.25
2d.	£1.70–£2.50
6d.	£5–£7.50
1s.	£10–£15
3s.	£30–£45
5s.	£50–£75
£1 (20s.)	£200–£300

Two elementary points need to be underlined. A penny or sixpence or a shilling all seem trivial to us, but they are utterly different sums. A one-penny broadside costs one-twelfth what a few pages of folio poem costs at a shilling. A £1 item costs 240 times a penny item. Second point: a 5s. item is a casual purchase for some people and unaffordable for others—but in 2014 a *much* higher percentage of the population of Britain or the United States can afford such an item than was true in 1714. The implications for print run size and dissemination need to be remembered. Quite a lot of

Covent Garden and Drury Lane. For writers, musicians, and painters, I pulled figures from wherever I could find them in the sorts of books and manuscripts cited throughout this essay. For prices, I started with James E. Thorold Rogers, whose ancient but invaluable *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England* (7 vols., 1866–1902) remains a rich source. I combed diaries for specific sums. Pepys supplies a huge number of specific sums, but many diaries and correspondences are worth mining. A good example is Mary Delany's *Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs. Delany* (6 vols., 1861–62). Wonderful material is still coming to light. I would point particularly to *Secret Comment: The Diaries of Gertrude Savile 1721–1757* (Nottingham, U.K., 1997). Annotated auction catalogues are a considerable help with paintings, as are sites like *The Art World in Britain 1660 to 1735* at the University of York (<http://http://artworld.york.ac.uk/>), but the work of Pears and Mannings (cited below) is a godsend. Comparing some dozens of exemplars of the cost of food, housing, drink, clothes, and theater and opera admission, and incomes from a wide variety of jobs and professions, I arrived at my 200 to 300 multiplier for most of this period. I claim no exactitude whatever for it. In its defense, I will say only that it often seems to yield a plausible approximation that helps us gauge equivalent magnitude of incomes and prices. Obviously, it is deliberately skewed toward the top 5 percent or 10 percent incomes and the cost of purchasing cultural products.

25. 5s. × 200 = 1000s., divided by 20 [shillings per pound] yields £50.

people could afford a 2d. chapbook, or even a 6d. one, but mighty few could easily purchase a multivolume novel at 3s. per volume. The two volumes of *Joseph Andrews* published in 1742 at 3s. each come to twelve times the price of a 6d. chapbook. One sees why chapbook condensations of popular novels flourished.²⁶

~ The Cost of Culture

What did an eighteenth-century Londoner have to pay to attend the theater or a concert, buy various sorts of books, splurge on opera-going, or purchase an original painting? A short review of typical prices and price ranges is sobering.

Admission to the patent theaters between 1660 and the 1740s was normally 4s. for a place in a box, 2/6 for the pit, 1/6 for the first gallery, and 1s. for the second gallery. Around the middle of the eighteenth century, prices slid up a shilling at the top price and 6d. at the second and third levels. By my multipliers, this works out to the approximations shown in table 2.

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, prices were sometimes doubled for first nights, and “advanced” prices were charged during first runs (5s., 3s., 2s., 1s.). In the 1790s, financially stressed managements succeeded in raising the standard prices to 6s., 3s. 6d., 2s., and 1s., though not without meeting fierce resistance. In September 1792 the rebuilt Covent Garden reopened with this price structure, though lacking a 1s. gallery—a combination that produced riots. Management hastily promised the restoration of the second gallery at the old price and begged acceptance of the raised prices on the ground that, “without absolute Ruin to the Property, this Theatre cannot be opened at lower Prices of Admission.”²⁷ Drury Lane naturally adopted the same price scale.

The price differential from bottom to top was a factor of four (rising to five and eventually six). The occupants of the second gallery were mostly hoi polloi and footmen, though anyone could buy a place there. Consider Peter Earle’s family of four with a £200 annual income and about 27s. per month (£16 for the year) available for discretionary spending. If they walked to the theater, took second-gallery places, and enjoyed no refreshment, the bill would be 4s. Box seats, coach fare, and oranges all around would come to about 20s.—and if they dined in a tavern, that would probably wipe out their 27s. for the month. A bachelor with £200 per annum was distinctly better off: two visits to the theater per month sitting in the pit would amount to £2 10s. for the theatrical season (around ten months)—which is, coincidentally, exactly what

26. Contrary to logic and reason, any publisher could freely produce an abridgment or a chapbook condensation without violating the copyright of the publisher of the original—so Lord Chancellor Hardwicke held in *Gyles v. Wilcox* (1740). See Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 51. For a bitter complaint about this state of affairs (which continued to be true even after the 1775 copyright act), see William Kenrick, *An Address to the Artists and Manufacturers of Great Britain; Respecting an Application to Parliament for the farther Encouragement of New Discoveries and Inventions in the Useful Arts* (London, 1774), appendix, 45–48.

27. *The London Stage, 1660–1800*, Part 5, “1776–1800,” ed. Charles Beecher Hogan, 3 vols. (Carbondale, Ill., 1968), 3:1487 (September 17 and 19, 1792).

Table 2. Standard theater admission prices, 1600–1792, and their buying power today

Seating area	1600–ca. 1740	Present-day equivalent	ca. 1740–92	Present-day equivalent
Box	4s.	£40–£60	5s.	£50–£75
Pit	2s. 6d.	£25–£37.50	3s.	£30–£45
First gallery	1s. 6d.	£15–£22.50	2s.	£20–£30
Second gallery	1s.	£10–£15	1s.	£10–£15

Samuel Pepys budgeted for theatrical attendance over a year.²⁸ His job paid £300 per annum, and his actual income was upward of £1,000. Sitting in a box seat once a week would come to about £8. The second-gallery price is relatively modest, but only in comparison with pit and box prices. The theaters of the 1660s were small (probably no more than 400 to 500 capacity), and they charged accordingly. Shakespeare's Globe is thought to have held as many as 3,000, and admission to the pit was apparently only a penny—one-twelfth of the post-1660 minimum admission charge (ignoring inflation). The patent theaters of the 1790s held, respectively, 3,000 and 3,600. They were immense commercial operations, but they were not looking to attract a lower-end clientele. They were often half empty or more, but they did not reduce admission charges to pull in more customers.

What of concerts? The boom in music meetings in the 1690s presaged a century rich in concerts of many kinds, ranging from dance music supplied by taverns for a shilling to exceedingly posh entertainments at premium rates. Even as early as the first decade of the eighteenth century, a great many concerts charged a stiff 5s.—more than the normal top-price box seat in the London theaters, and with no cheap seats.²⁹ We know little of the capacity of the venues, the size of the orchestras, or the rates of pay to the musicians, but evidently a lot of people were able and willing to come up with 5s. for admission, and the frequency of advertised concerts is impressive. Even more surprising is the admission rate for oratorios when that boom developed in the 1730s. The customary charge was a dizzying 10s. 6d.—half a guinea. This had become the standard price for a single admission to the Italian opera when the Royal Academy of Music was founded in 1720—in present-day buying power something between £100 and £150. The oratorio season was basically Lent, so it was short in comparison with an opera season that varied but often ran six or seven months (usually with two performances a week). Contrary to longstanding scholarly myth, oratorios were *not* a bourgeois entertainment.

28. *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews, 11 vols. (London, 1970–83), 5:2–3 (January 2, 1664).

29. For a still-useful catalogue of early concerts, see Michael Tilmouth, *A Calendar of References to Music in Newspapers published in London and the Provinces (1660–1719)*, RMA Research Chronicle, no. 1 (Birmingham, 1961).

By the 1780s, concerts had become a big business and were expanding into expensive series. In the mid-1790s, the King's Theatre, Haymarket, was running a nine-concert series extending over more than three months and featuring opera stars and an opera orchestra in its new 800-seat concert room. The price for the series was 4 guineas, and "No Tickets for one night only will be issued."³⁰ Tickets were "transferable—Ladies' to Ladies, and Gentlemen's to Gentlemen." The price was an 11 percent discount on the standard 10/6 ticket, but eight tickets had to be purchased. That same spring, a "Vocal Concert" series was offered at Willis's Rooms: ten concerts for 4 guineas (tickets likewise transferable), and Barthelemon offered an eight-night series at Hanover-Square, charging 3 guineas to gentlemen, 2 to ladies, though in this instance, single admission at 10/6 and "Half Subscriptions" were permitted.³¹ In sum, on a per-performance basis, oratorios and concerts late in the century were every bit as expensive as the Italian opera. Their profit margins appear to have been mostly thin, but unlike the ever-wobbly Italian opera company, they do not seem to have been perpetually on the verge of bankruptcy.

Turning to the buying of books, we find a vastly broader range of prices. At the lower end there was quite a lot on offer, though most book historians have paid little attention to the world of pamphlets and broadsides.³² A good exemplar of a skilled practitioner at this end of the trade in the early 1660s is Charles Tias, who specialized in two- and three-penny pamphlets of many kinds, including fiction. He hardly ever priced anything over 6d., but most of his books cost no more than 4d., and fully a third of his list consists of titles selling for 2d. or 2 1/2 d. At these prices, he had to sell large numbers with a tiny margin of profit. Even a short piece could, if it had some sales appeal, be priced as high as 3d., which was the price charged for the eleven pages of *A True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs Veal* (perhaps by Defoe) in 1706.³³

Beyond the level of chapbooks, there is a clear price structure. 1s. and 1/6 were extremely common prices. What they brought the buyer of fiction was a little book of 100 pages, or sometimes as many as 200, usually rather crudely printed. Because paper was expensive (it is often said to represent half the price of manufacture), length and price are closely correlated, at least for fiction. The top of the "normal" price of a volume of fiction was 3s. A substantial novel would be issued in two or three volumes, either octavo or duodecimo. At the high end, big books and sets could be quite expensive. The first part of *Robinson Crusoe* (1719; 372 pages in octavo) was a stiff 5s.³⁴ When *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World* (that is, *Gulliver's Travels*) was pub-

30. Advertisement in the *Morning Chronicle*, January 1, 1795.

31. *Morning Chronicle*, January 19, 1795, and *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, March 2, 1795.

32. I am much indebted to Margaret Spufford, whose pioneering account of chapbooks opened up a territory that had remained largely unexplored; Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and Its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 1981).

33. Price from *The Term Catalogues*, ed. Edward Arber, 3 vols. (London, 1903–6), 3:525.

34. See Henry Clinton Hutchins, *Robinson Crusoe and its Printing 1719–1731: A Bibliographical Study* (New York, 1925), 64, 68, and frontispiece. Keith Maslen estimates that the first six editions probably totaled around 6,000 copies and that the publisher might have netted £500. What he paid Defoe for copy is unknown. See "Edition Quantities for *Robinson Crusoe*, 1719," *The Library*, 5th ser., 24, no. 2 (1969): 145–50.

lished anonymously in London in 1726, it came out in two volumes in octavo at 700 pages and cost an astonishing 8s. 6d.³⁵ Both were among the bestsellers of their time, and given their prices (£50–£75 and £85–£125 in modern terms), this is testimony to their extraordinary appeal. Tias's 2d. and 3d. pamphlets cost somewhere between £1.60 and £3.75 in present-day buying power, and when Margaret Spufford says that they "were priced within the reach of the agricultural labourer if he could read," she is right.³⁶ For someone making 12d. a day, they would be an occasional extravagance, but not a ruinous one. An item costing 1s. would represent a whole day's wages.

Scanning William Bent's *London Catalogue of Books* as it was first published in 1773, one quickly gets a sense of both norms and departure from those norms in the pricing of fiction. The custom was duodecimo volumes at 3s. each. Thus Sarah Fielding's *David Simple* is five duodecimo volumes for a total of 15s.; her brother's *Joseph Andrews* is two volumes for 6s., and *Tom Jones* is four for 12s. A short novel like Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* is just one volume for 3s. A few novels are made available in more than one format. *Clarissa* could be bought in seven octavo volumes for 35s. (a premium price) or alternatively in eight duodecimo volumes for 24s. (that is, at the standard 3s. per-volume price). *Pamela* might be had in four octavo volumes (with illustrative cuts) for 24s. or at the standard per-volume rate in four duodecimos at 12s. *Don Quixote* was on offer in six versions of three translations. Both the Smollett and Jarvis translations were available in two luxurious quarto volumes at a staggering 50s. but also in four duodecimo volumes at 12s. The old Motteux translation was offered in duodecimo at the same price, but also in sixteenmo for a mere 8s.—a bargain, but no pleasure to read. Occasionally one does see a bit of a price break. The long-popular *Robinson Crusoe* is listed as two duodecimo volumes for 5s., and "abridged" in the same format for 3s. Four volumes of "Haywood's Novels" in duodecimo are listed for 10s. (or 2/6 each—a one-sixth discount), but we must remember that in our own price context, we are looking at a cost between £100 and £150, a price few people would pay today, and even fewer *could* have paid in 1773. These are, of course, list prices. Books could be bought secondhand and at auction.³⁷ Someone eager to obtain a costly item could offer other books in trade, as Pepys did when he swapped "two books that I had and 6s. 6d. to boot" for Playford's "great book of songs, which he sells always for 14s." (February 13, 1660). Such expedients notwithstanding, there is no way around the brute fact that long novels required a lot of paper and were consequently quite pricey, even in so economical a format as duodecimo.

35. Advertised without price in the newspapers, but listed with price in John Wilford's *Monthly Catalogue*, no. 42 (October 1726), 111.

36. Spufford, *Small Books*, 48.

37. For a valuable discussion of book availability below list price, see J. E. Elliott, "The Cost of Reading in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Auction Sale Catalogues and the Cheap Literature Hypothesis," *ELH* 77 (2010): 353–84. For a description from the perspective of an impecunious but book-hungry young buyer, see James Lackington's account of how he and his friends "all worked very hard . . . in order to get money to purchase books; and for some months every shilling we could spare was laid out at old book-shops, stalls, &c. insomuch that in a short time we had what we called a very good library" (which he describes at length); *Memoirs of the First Forty-Five Years of the Life of James Lackington*, A New Edition (London, 1794), 163–65.

Bent lists almost no single play titles in the two pages he devotes to “Dramatic Works.”³⁸ I offer the hypothesis that he must have seen no point in repeating what buyers of books well understood: at that date, new singleton plays cost 1s. 6d. unless they were short, in which case the price was 1s. In the late seventeenth century, new plays were published in quarto, usually for 1s. (and plays were reprinted at the same price). 1s. 6d. became commoner after 1700, and became standard after the rapid transition to octavo format that occurred between 1714 and 1718. Most single-author collection reprints appeared in duodecimo at 2s. 6d. or 3s. per volume. Occasionally something fancier was tried, as for example Massinger’s *Dramatic Works* in four octavo volumes at 24s. (1759)—a very early scholarly edition, “Revised, Corrected, and all the Various Editions Collated, By Mr. Coxeter. With Notes Critical and Explanatory.”

Comparing fiction and drama, one realizes that at the lowest (2d. or 3d.) tranche, a lot of people could afford a bit of chapbook fiction for whom a 1s. or 1/6 singleton play was a stretch. Contrariwise, plenty of buyers who might manage to acquire the occasional singleton play must have found the 6s. or 9s. or 12s. (or more) price of a substantial novel a significant barrier to acquisition. As we will discover shortly, these facts have important implications for what a publisher could afford to pay an author for copyright. A further comparison with poetry is interesting here. In the late 1730s and 1740s, for example, with most plays reaching print and the production of novels soaring (partly, I presume, a result of the impact of the Theatre Licensing Act of 1737), we find a strikingly different pattern of format, length, and price for poetry. Quite a lot of the new single poems published in 1739, for example, are issued in folio at sixteen to twenty pages and priced at a shilling. This is a stiff price for a small number of pages in an elegant format. One quarto of the same page length was priced at 1s.; other quartos were offered at 6d., as were a couple of octavos ranging in length from eight to twenty-four pages. I deduce that buyers of single poems were well-heeled enough to be able to pay a surprisingly steep price for relatively few pages containing no great amount of poetry. Translating into present-day values, we may say that many people are resigned to paying £10–£15 for a paperback book, but most of us would probably blench at the thought of paying that price for a sixteen- to twenty-page pamphlet containing a poem.

Expensive sets can only have been aimed at an extremely elite audience. Shakespeare is the conspicuous example, as shown in table 3.³⁹ These are hugely expensive sets. In the early eighteenth century, 80 percent of the population made no more than £50 per annum, or no more than about £1 per week. For someone who did have £50 per

38. The exceptions are fancy quarto editions (a format almost unknown for plays after about 1718) of Kelly’s *Word to the Wise* and Mrs. Griffith’s *Wife in the Right* for a completely startling 5s. (both “sewed”).

39. The editions referenced in table 3 are: 1709: *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear . . . Adorn’d with Cuts*, 6 vols., ed. Nicholas Rowe (London: Tonson); 1714: *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear . . . Adorn’d with Cuts*, 8 vols. Revised and Corrected, ed. Nicholas Rowe (London: Tonson); 1725: *The Works of Shakespear*, 6 vols., ed. Alexander Pope (London: Tonson); 1733: *The Works of Shakespear*, 7 vols., ed. Lewis Theobald (London: Tonson, et al.); 1743–44: *The Works of Shakespear*, 6 vols., ed. Thomas Hanmer (Oxford: Oxford University Press); 1765: *The Plays of William Shakespear*, 8 vols., ed. Samuel Johnson (London: J. and R. Tonson, et al.); 1773: *The Plays of William Shakespear*, 10 vols., ed. Samuel Johnson with revisions by George Steevens (London: C. Bathurst, et al.); 1790: *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespear*, 10 vols., ed. Edmond Malone (London: J. Rivington and Sons, et al.).

Table 3. Major editions of Shakespeare, 1709–1790

Date	Publisher	Format	Volumes	Retail price Subscriber price	Special paper or binding
1709	Tonson	octavo	6	30s. ^a	
1714 [rpt. of 1709]	Tonson	duodecimo	8	27s. ^b	
1725	Tonson	quarto	6	5–6 guineas (105s.–126s.) 5 guineas ^c	
1733	Tonson	octavo	7	2 guineas (42s.) ^d	fine paper: 3 guineas (63s.) ^d
1743–44	Oxford UP	quarto	6	3 guineas (63s.) ^e	
1765	Tonson et al.	octavo	8	? ^f 2 guineas (42s.)	delivered “in sheets.”
1773	Bathurst et al.	octavo	10	£3	“neatly bound” ^g
1790	Rivington et al.	octavo	10 in 11	£3 17s. (77s.)	in boards ^h

a. Advertised in the *Daily Courant*, June 6, 1709.

b. The 1714 price is reported by H. L. Ford, *Shakespeare 1700–1740: A Collation of the Editions and Separate Plays* (Oxford, 1935), 15: “It is interesting to note that Curll was advertising the 9-volume edition at £1 7s. 6d. in 1715 and Bettesworth similarly at £1 7s.” Most annoyingly, Ford failed to cite the locations of these advertisements, which I have been unable to identify.

c. Advertised in the *Whitehall Evening Post*, January 21–23, 1725. Not in digital Burney. Reproduced in facsimile in David Foxon, *Pope and the Early Eighteenth-Century Book Trade*, rev. and ed. James McLaverty (Oxford, 1991), 95.

d. The terms can be deduced from letters published in appendix C of Richard Foster Jones, *Lewis Theobald: His Contribution to English Scholarship with Some Unpublished Letters* (New York, 1919), 277–78, 293, 321–22, 327, 345. For his editorial work Theobald received “400 copies, compleat in Sheets . . . free from all Expence whatever; & 100 copies more on Fine Royal Paper, I only paying for the paper . . . the small paper will bring me in 800 guineas; & the Books in Royal 300 more.” As of January 5, 1734, only fourteen royal paper copies and “about Twenty of Demy . . . remain unsubscribd for” (*Daily Journal*). Theobald apparently did obtain takers for all of them, and Lord Orrery gave him 100 guineas for the dedication.

e. The press made a profit of approximately £550. See Harry Carter, *A History of the Oxford University Press, Volume I: To the Year 1780* (Oxford, 1975), 301–5, for a list of costs and receipts. The subscription price can be deduced from the 575 copies sold and the total receipts. The edition was not advertised and was not sold through booksellers: all copies were distributed by subscription.

f. The retail price in 1765 is not known to me. Murphy quotes Edward Cave’s 1745 *Proposals for Printing a New Edition of the Plays of William Shakespear*, to be edited by Johnson: “The Price to Subscribers will be one Pound five Shillings in Sheets, of which half a Guinea is to be paid at the Time of Subscribing.” This was an abortive venture that came to naught. For Johnson’s *Proposals for Printing, by Subscription, the Dramatick Works of William Shakespeare* (1756), see *Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Sherbo, 2 vols. (New Haven, Conn., 1968), 1:50–58, which states the price to subscribers as two guineas, one at the time of subscribing, the second on delivery of the book in sheets. The first advertisement I have found that states a retail price was for a reprint announced in the *Public Advertiser* of September 1, 1669: “Price £2 10s. bound.” Johnson probably gained about 1,000 guineas from the subscription. A letter by Thomas Birch of October 5, 1765, says that the subscribers “are about seven hundred & fifty” (British Library, Add. MS 35400, fol. 316v). Johnson’s agreement with Tonson called for him to receive 250 sets of sheets “free of all costs” and, if there were more subscribers, allowed him to buy “any additional number” for one guinea each; *Boswell’s Life of Johnson*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, rev. and enl. by L. F. Powell, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1934–50), 1:545 (appendix G).

g. Advertised in the *General Evening Post*, September 28–30, 1773.

h. Advertised in *The World*, November 30, 1790.

annum, the 1709 Tonson edition would have cost about ten days' total income. This does not seem a likely purchase for anyone save a childless hermit. The edition generally regarded as popularizing Shakespeare is Bell's nine-volume illustrated set (dedicated to Garrick), which went to a twenty-three-page list of subscribers starting in December 1773. It appeared in two installments (of five and then four volumes) priced at a total of 38s. on royal paper, sewed, or retail at 27s. demy, also sewed.⁴⁰

At the other end of the spectrum, some reprint series offered plays at a substantial discount. Thomas Johnson, the formidable pirate working out of the Hague, published forty English plays (including seven of Shakespeare's) at 6d. and 8d. per title between 1710 and 1712. They were notably well done and were clearly designed to be smuggled into England for sale there.⁴¹ From the 1720s on, relatively cheap Irish reprints of plays (which were legal, as the 1709 Act did not apply to Ireland) were systematically exported to England for sale (which was not legal). British specialty collections (for example, Dodsley's *Select Collection of Old Plays* of 1744—ten duodecimo volumes) tended to conform to customary prices, in this case 25s. to subscribers, 30s. to others—that is, 3s. per volume. The big reprint series that culminate in Bell's *British Theatre* are a different kind of enterprise (see table 4).⁴² With one exception, such series offered a substantial per-play discount, and in four of the six series, the plays were sold as singletons, so buyers had the option of selecting only the titles they wanted and could buy them individually over time. Earlier singleton editions of most of the plays did of course remain available.

What we see in play publication are four distinct markets: a premium market for fancy editions (especially of Shakespeare); mildly expensive (usually 3s. per volume) reprints of three or four plays together; an utterly standardized market for new singletons (mostly at 1/6 after 1700) and octavo reprints at the same price of the successful titles; and finally, significantly discounted reprints, usually in duodecimo, both singletons and small collections.

Turning from cheap play reprints to opera takes us into a different universe. In the late seventeenth century, "opera" meant English "semi-opera." Lavish staging cost huge sums: production costs for single shows are anecdotally reported from £800 to £4,000 at a period when the annual gross receipts were only around £10,000.⁴³ Admission prices were apparently doubled for the initial run (that is, 8s. for box seats, 5s. for pit, gallery prices unknown), and "raised" prices (presumably with a 5s. top for boxes)

40. Bell did later offer the advantage of serial publication and purchase in his 1775–76 illustrated singleton series (6d. each).

41. For an authoritative account of this profoundly influential pirate, see B. J. McMullin, "T. Johnson, Bookseller in the Hague," *An Index of Civilisation: Studies of Printing and Publishing History in honour of Keith Maslen*, ed. R. Harvey, W. Kirsop, and B. J. McMullin (Melbourne, 1993), 99–112.

42. The series referenced in table 4 are: 1710–30: *A Collection of the Best English Plays*, 12 vols. (The Hague: Thomas Johnson); 1731–33: *The English Theatre*, 26 vols. (London: W. Feales); 1733: *The Life of the Stage*, 8 vols. (London: Richard Wellington); 1736: *The British Theatre*, 10 vols. (London: W. Feales); 1760–65: *The English Theatre*, 8 vols. (London: T. Lowndes); 1776–78: *Bell's British Theatre*, 20 vols. (London: John Bell). Bell had issued a complete Shakespeare as singletons in 1775–76.

43. See Judith Milhous, "The Multimedia Spectacular on the Restoration Stage," in *British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660–1800*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Washington, D.C., 1984), 41–66.

Table 4. Comparison of major series of plays, from T. Johnson (1710) to Bell (1776)

Date	Publisher	Volumes	Number of plays	Price for set	Price per play
1710–30	T. Johnson	12+	61 ^a	[about £1 15s.? ^b]	6d. <i>or</i> 8d.
1731–33	Feales	26	104 ^a	£3 7s. 6d.	ca. 7.8d.
1733	Wellington	8	32	£1 7s. 6d.	10.3d.
1736	Feales	10	40 ^a	£1 5s.	7.5d.
1760	Lowndes	8	40	£1 4s.	7.2d.
1776–78	Bell	20	100 ^a	[6d. each]	6d. <i>or</i> 1s. ^c

a. Plays in the series were available as singletons.

b. Lacking information on the price of all titles, I have estimated two-thirds at 6d. and one-third at 8d.

c. Fine paper copies were double the ordinary price.

were charged at revivals. The Royal Academy of Music was founded in 1720 as a for-profit joint stock Italian opera company (with upward of £20,000 capital pledged by stockholders), and it received a £1,000 per-annum subsidy from George I. Heavily capitalized though it was, the company set box and pit prices at half a guinea (10s. 6d.) per night and still managed to go broke in eight years. The problem was threefold: not enough subscribers; too few walk-in buyers of places in the pit and boxes; and out-of-control costs, particularly for star singers who had to be lured from abroad by bloated salaries—in the case of Senesino (the *primo uomo* castrato) and the leading soprano, £1,500 apiece for the season. For the first full season, seven secondary singers received between £300 and £1,100.⁴⁴ The directors set the price of a season subscription at 20 guineas (£21), a figure that remained constant for most of the century. For a season of forty or fifty nights (which was about as many as the company could usually manage), this was a modest discount on the 10/6 single ticket price. By my multipliers, 20 guineas has a modern buying power somewhere between £4,200 and £6,300, which is an awful lot of money to pay for the right to see about forty performances of seven or eight different operas.

Quite aside from the steepness of the price, there was the issue of ability to pay. In an important article published at the beginning of the present century, David Hunter (working from King and Massie) estimated that only about 1,300 families in England and Wales could have afforded *one* season subscription to the Royal Academy

44. Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, “New Light on Handel and The Royal Academy of Music in 1720,” *Theatre Journal* 35, no. 2 (1983): 149–67.

opera, noting that only about 150 seem actually to have done so.⁴⁵ He calculated that such a family would have needed to be willing to spend 1 percent of its annual income on a single opera subscription. No doubt some of the nobility and gentry had the resources to afford entry for both husband and wife, but rather a lot seem not to have done so. “On this basis,” says Hunter, “about 12 per cent (150 of 1,280) of those who could afford to subscribe did so, which, even when discounting those families who did not move to London for the season, seems a relatively low level of market penetration.” One might quibble with his assumptions, but his conclusion holds: *very* few families could afford regular attendance at the opera, let alone even one annual subscription. Through many travails and disasters in its various iterations, the Italian opera company never did achieve financial stability in eighteenth-century London—nor, indeed, in the early nineteenth. The company often brought in huge sums, but its outgo was larger still, and the number of potential subscribers was simply too small to sustain the venture.

Moving on to painting, we make another quantum leap in magnitude of expense. Early in our period the prices can be shocking; by the later eighteenth century they boggle the mind.⁴⁶ By the 1670s, Lely was charging £60 for a portrait—or in modern buying power terms, something like £12,000–£18,000. During the eighteenth century, top prices rose to stratospheric levels, more than doubling by the 1760s (see table 5). By the 1790s, Reynolds could get 200 guineas for a whole-length, and he wanted 300 for a whole-length with two children. History paintings could be a great deal more costly: Reynolds is said to have received 1,500 guineas for *The Infant Hercules* (bought by the Empress of Russia) and 1,200 for a New College window *Nativity*, paid for by the Duke of Rutland. This is the upper end with a vengeance. A hundred guineas approximates now to something on the order of £21,000 to £31,500. Fifteen hundred guineas is certainly equivalent to something north of £300,000, even late in the century—and perhaps substantially more.

Moving down into mid-range prices, we might note Dahl getting £21 10s. for a half-length in 1711. As of 1719, Richardson was asking 20 guineas for a three-quarter and 10 for a bust; a decade later, he wanted 70 guineas for a whole-length, 40 for a three-quarter, and 20 for a bust. In 1741 Joseph Highmore says his rates for heads, half-lengths, and whole-lengths have been 10, 20, and 40 guineas for the last eighteen years. He adds that a copy is half the price of an original.⁴⁷ An atypical but interesting case is that of Joseph Goupy (1689–1769), who worked principally as an upper-end copyist but enjoyed significant patronage from George I in the 1720s and from the Prince of Wales from the 1730s until his death in 1751. Goupy was getting sums like £25 and 30

45. David Hunter, “Patronizing Handel, Inventing Audiences: The Intersections of Class, Money, Music and History,” *Early Music* 28, no. 1 (2000): 32–49 at 36.

46. Prices are taken from data reported by David Mannings, “Notes on Some Eighteenth-Century Portrait Prices in Britain,” *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 6, no. 2 (1983): 185–96; and Iain Pears, *The Discovery of Painting: The Growth of Interest in the Arts in England, 1660–1768* (New Haven, Conn., 1988).

47. Joseph Highmore to James Harris, March 23, 1741, Malmesbury Collection (9M73), Hampshire Record Office. I owe this reference to Prof. Donald Burrows.

Table 5. Prices for eighteenth-century painted portraits

Date	Painter	Type	Price at date	Later price (date)
1703	Kneller	whole-length	£50	£60 (1706)
		three-quarter length	£30	£30 (1706)
		kit-cat	—	£20 (1706)
		bust	£15	£15 (1706)
1731–33	Reynolds	whole-length	100 guineas	150 guineas (1764)
		three-quarter length	50 guineas	70 guineas (1764)
		kit-cat	—	30 guineas (1764)
		bust	20 guineas	50 guineas (1764)
1733	Gainsborough	whole-length	160 guineas	—
		three-quarter length	80 guineas	—
		head	40 guineas	—

Sources: Prices are from Mannings, “Notes on Some Eighteenth-Century Portrait Prices in Britain,” 185–96; and Pears, *The Discovery of Painting*.

guineas for originals; he was paid £200 by the king for repairs to Mantegna’s *Triumphs of Caesar* in 1726; and he got £220 for copies of Raphael’s cartoons. He also earned money for teaching Prince Frederick’s family and for purchasing foreign pictures as an agent for the prince. In the 1720s he claimed to be earning £600 per annum “with the greatest of Ease.”⁴⁸

At the lower end, Pears reports that one Brook (working in Bury) received £8 12s. for three portraits in 1716, and a Mrs. Brown got £8 12s. for a three-quarter and two half-lengths as of 1717. Even these comparatively modest sums were hard to afford: £8 is worth somewhere between £1,600 and £2,400 today. How many painters could command even those prices is anyone’s guess. How often they actually did is yet another unanswerable question. Lower-end prices are in annoyingly short supply.⁴⁹ An interesting source is a hand-priced *Catalogue of a Collection of Pictures, Painted by Mr. Worlidge of Covent-Garden* for an auction held April 5, 1754. Sixty-four paintings by Samuel Worlidge (1700–1766) totaled £147 19s. 6d., with individual prices ranging from a high of £5 5s. down to 15s. The average was about £2 6s. Eleven of his drawings fetched from 3s. 6d. to £2 3s. and averaged about 16s. 7d. Tellingly, three pictures from the Continent auctioned off at the same sale (by Guido, Old Patel, and Jordaens of Antwerp) sold for a total of £52 10s., with prices ranging from £12 12s. to £26 5s.⁵⁰

Potential customers with enough money could spend it if they chose to do so. An example is Pepys, who could be indignant at having to pay a cook £4 per annum

48. For these figures, see Ellen T. Harris, “Joseph Goupy and George Frideric Handel: From Professional Triumphs to Personal Estrangement,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2008): 397–452. This splendidly researched and impressively documented article is a veritable treasure house of information, financial and biographical.

49. The situation is improving. Known sales of pictures are being systematically recorded in *The Art World in Britain 1660 to 1735*, occasionally with prices.

50. Auction conducted by “Mr. Langford, At his House in the *Great Piazza, Covent Garden*.”

(instead of £3), but who would take vast trouble over portraits of his wife and himself.⁵¹ He had her painted in 1661, painter and price not recorded in the *Diary*. In June 1662 he paid a Mr. Savill £3 for his own portrait, and probably the same sum for his wife's. In 1666 John Hays painted them both: the price for each was evidently £14 plus 25s. for the frame. In 1668 he had Samuel Cooper do a miniature of Elizabeth: he paid £30 for the painting plus £8 3s. 4d. for the necessary case (done in crystal and gold)—a sum Pepys “sent him this night” on the day of receipt. Though Pepys reveled in his growing prosperity, he did not think of himself as a rich man in the later 1660s—but in terms of income he definitely was. In modern buying power, that £38 has a value somewhere between £7,500 and £11,500.

Until relatively late in the century, most Londoners would have had little or no opportunity to see paintings. Ronald Paulson makes this point concerning midcentury, commenting that if someone did, “it would have been in only a few places, such as St. Paul’s, Greenwich Hospital, St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, and the Foundling.”⁵² This may help account for some of the popularity of Hogarth’s engravings—affordable, says Paulson, by masters but not by apprentices. I will offer two relatively late-century instances that evidence public hunger for access to art. The first is the Royal Academy exhibition of May 1780 when they opened their new quarters in Somerset House. Newspapers report that the “collection” at the door “amounted to £3908 10s. a sum greater by £1,000 than ever was collected at an exhibition since the first establishment of the polite arts in this country.”⁵³ The fee for entrance (including the catalogue) was 1s., which implies attendance of more than 78,000 people in the course of the month (with the exhibition closed on Sundays). The *Morning Post* of May 2 states that “It is computed that the door-keepers did not take less than £500 yesterday [the public opening] for the admission of the numerous visitants of all ranks.” A shilling was the price of a seat in the second gallery at the theater: clearly a lot of people were eager to partake of the treat at that rate.⁵⁴ My second (very different) example of hunger for art is John Boydell’s famous Shakespeare Gallery in Pall Mall, which opened in 1789. Boydell issued his edition of prints over more than a decade, each installment of four or five pictures costing 3 guineas (plus 2 guineas more if one wanted some smaller, supplementary pictures). The subscription price of the original plan was a staggering 36 guineas, but the subscription list ran to 1,384 names, headed by the king, the queen, and the Prince of Wales.⁵⁵ There was clearly a market for some special projects that lay somewhere between Hogarth’s engravings and Reynolds’s paintings.

51. *Diary*, ed. Latham and Matthews, 2:241, 3:106, 7:73–74, 9:277.

52. Ronald Paulson, *Popular and Polite Art in the Age of Hogarth and Fielding* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1979), 31.

53. *Gazetteer*, October 24, 1780 (and verbatim in other papers).

54. For rich and valuable commentary on the early exhibitions and their contexts, see *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House 1780–1836*, ed. David H. Solkin (New Haven, Conn., 2001). In 1780, 489 paintings were exhibited (23). For discussion of acute crowding in a rather small space, see chap. 3.

55. On this astonishing enterprise, see James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade 1450–1850* (New Haven, Conn., 2007), 253–56.

☞ Earning a Living as Writer, Actor, Singer, Musician, or Painter

How good a living could one earn from writing, performance, or painting? Perhaps as important, one must ask how *reliable* a living one could earn. Owning the means of production was sometimes a good thing, but by no means always. Italian opera companies often grossed large sums but went broke with monotonous regularity. Concert series (at least late in the century, when we have records of costs and receipts) rarely appear to have been more than marginally profitable.⁵⁶ Some publishers flourished, but Maxted's decade-by-decade figures on print trade bankruptcies in London total 405 over seventy-five years.⁵⁷ Competent long-term owner-managers of patent theaters, in sharp contradistinction, not only enjoyed large salaries and fat profits but also amassed fortunes from capital appreciation of their theaters, which were eventually sold for tens of thousands of pounds.⁵⁸ The financial prosperity and security of writers, performers, and painters, unsurprisingly, varies vastly from category to category and individual to individual.⁵⁹

For context on the profits of authorship, we can turn to three important sources that report the sums paid for copyright by publishers to writers. In 1814 John Nichols published a list of 205 copyright purchases made by Bernard Lintott between 1701 and 1731 (twenty-five of them from Pope).⁶⁰ Lintott's figures show £3,026 paid to other authors for 149 books. This amounts to about £20 per book (large, small, and translated). If we exclude nine books for which he paid exceptionally large sums (for example, £252 for Fiddes's *Body of Divinity*), we find that Lintott bought 140 books for about £2,030, or about £14 10s. each. In thirty-one cases, the price was below £5; in fifty-seven it was between £5 and £10 15s. Trying to live by writing books must have been an uphill proposition.

A second, much more diverse, source is the Upcott collection of copyright sale agreements (British Library, Add. MSS 38728–30), which give us figures on some 219 books between 1703 and 1800 (and a few later), bringing their authors a total of £9,426,

56. See Simon McVeigh, *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn* (Cambridge, 1993), chap. 10.

57. Ian Maxted, *The British Book Trades 1731–1806: A Checklist of Bankrupts* (Exeter, U.K., 1985).

58. John Rich's wealth at the time of his death is not known, but when Covent Garden was sold in 1767, the £60,000 price was divided among his wife and daughters. On Rich's considerable prosperity, see Robert D. Hume, "John Rich as Manager and Entrepreneur," in *"The Stage's Glory": John Rich, 1692–1761*, ed. Berta Joncus and Jeremy Barlow (Newark, Del., 2011), 29–60. The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* estimates David Garrick's wealth at the time of his death in 1779 at £100,000. He had sold his half-interest in Drury Lane three years earlier for £35,000.

59. Handel, for example, had his ups and downs but became decidedly rich. He benefitted from receiving some £600 per annum from the royal family between the mid-1720s and his death in 1759. He died worth some £20,000. See Ellen T. Harris, "Handel the Investor," *Music & Letters* 85, no. 4 (2004): 521–75, and "Courting Gentility: Handel at the Bank of England," *Music & Letters* 91, no. 3 (2010): 357–75. Harris demonstrates that Handel quite consciously lived as a gentleman and mixed with the gentry and nobility as such. Nonetheless, Handel did more teaching than almost anyone has realized, and not just to sprigs of the nobility. He is known to have taught some twenty students at dates ranging from 1703–5 to the 1750s. For a list and details, see David Hunter, "Handel's Students, Two Lovers and a Shipwreck," *Early Music* 39, no. 2 (2011): 157–64.

60. John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, 9 vols. (London, 1812–15), 8:293–304.

or on average about £43 each. This composite figure is rather misleading, however, and needs some unpacking. Most of the Upcott contracts are from just a few publishers. John Watt (who did a lot of plays) is conspicuous in the first half of the century, and John Nourse (who did not publish literature) dominates in the second half, which makes the figures essentially incommensurable for my purposes here. For the years 1703 to 1750, ninety-two manuscripts brought £3,219, on average around £35. But if we exclude the top six (for example, a history manuscript for £370), the average falls to just £24 16s. Thirty-three plays brought £1,253 (£38 each), but separating mainpieces and afterpieces shows twenty-seven of the former (averaging £45) and six of the latter (averaging just £4 each). Only seven pieces of fiction appear, totaling £74, or about £10 each (though £51 was paid for just two items). Seven poetry items total £92 (averaging £13), but this is misleading: copy prices for five of them range from 1 to 5 guineas. Five law books average £105 (inflated by £275 and £126 items). Fifteen translations average £13 10s. each. I note, however, that £52 1s. was paid for just one medical book, and that eight of the translations ranged from 3 to 10 guineas.

In the Upcott contracts from 1751 to 1800, 127 cases yield £6,201, or an average of about £49. Removing three instances where £400 or more was paid reduces the average to about £40. Nine pieces of fiction average £11. Two mainpiece plays went for 50 guineas and £126. Three afterpieces averaged £10 each. Big sums for anything related to literary culture are largely lacking, 300 guineas to Samuel Johnson for *The Lives of the Poets* being a prominent exception. Unfortunately, Nourse dominates the Upcott collection for more than thirty years. Of 149 items between 1740 and 1774, 110 are agreements made by Nourse with authors (plus 5 in which he was a partner). He featured medicine, law, science/mathematics, and grammar/language books (including foreign-language dictionaries).⁶¹ Post-1750 Upcott is less useful for culture than one would wish.⁶²

The third major source of copyright prices is at least a bit of help for the later period. The Robinson archive in the Manchester Public Library contains documents as early as 1713 and as late as 1820 but tells us most about the second half of the eighteenth century.⁶³ Payments for five mainpiece plays successfully staged at a patent theater ranged from £84 to £105 and total £489 (an average of £98). Nine afterpieces ranged from 5 to 60 guineas, averaging £42. Nineteen novels averaged about £28.⁶⁴

61. Nourse's payments make an interesting comparison to those for literary work. He paid £903 for fourteen medical books (£64 average), £792 for seven law books (£113 average), £1,232 for thirty-four science/math books (£36 average), and £809 for nine language/grammar books (about £400 of which was for a single Portuguese dictionary).

62. For complete chronological listings and the prices of all copy sales (not just those for plays) reported in the Lintott list and the Upcott collection, see Milhous and Hume, *The Publication of Plays in London, 1660–1800*, appendixes 3 and 4.

63. For an extremely valuable summary and analysis, see G. E. Bentley Jr., "Copyright Documents in the George Robinson Archive: William Godwin and Others 1713–1820," *Studies in Bibliography* 35 (1982): 67–110.

64. I have excluded from this calculation a five-part payment of £135 5s. made over five months to Charlotte Smith, evidently for *Desmond* and other work (unspecified).

Writers of Poetry, Plays, and Novels

The sale of poetry to or through booksellers does not appear to have been very remunerative. Lintott's payments to Pope probably represent the highest prices for poetry. Pope got £3 16s. 6d. for three short poems in 1712; £7 for the first edition of *The Rape of the Lock*; £15 for his *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day*; £15 for additions to *The Rape of the Lock*; £32 5s. for *The Temple of Fame*; and £15 for *An Essay on Criticism*. Significant sums could be made from poetry, but only by subscription.⁶⁵ Pope gained something like £10,000 from his *Homer*,⁶⁶ Prior's 1718 subscription folio is said to have grossed 4,000 guineas, though what he netted cannot be reliably calculated.⁶⁷ Prior dedicated the volume to the Earl of Dorset and Middlesex in lavish terms. In this case (like most others), what the dedicatee paid the poet remains unknown.

Plays are a completely different proposition. A playwright collected the profits of the third performance of a new play. By 1690 he or she also received those from the sixth night, and after about 1710, those from the ninth. After 1714, enough theater account books and lists of nightly receipts exist that we can calculate the exact author benefit net for 246 mainpieces. The writer of a new afterpiece was given a single benefit (commonly after six nights) or a flat fee; we have figures on 120 cases. Playwrights were entitled to sell publication rights (almost always for a flat copyright fee), though in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, they sometimes sold copyright to the theater if the managers wanted to delay or prevent publication. We have copyright sale agreements (for example, from Lintott, Upcott, and Robinson) and other kinds of reports of what booksellers and theater managers paid in the case of 134 mainpieces and 37 afterpieces. Table 6 summarizes surviving evidence concerning playwrights' remuneration in six periods.

Studying these figures, one realizes that the average income from performance and publication does not convey the actuality of particular outcomes: the writer of a mainpiece might get *nothing* or might be the beneficiary of a marvelous windfall

65. For an important contribution to our understanding of subscription publication, the impact of piracy between 1695 and 1710, the likelihood that many poets had to publish at their own risk (rather than sell copyright prior to publication), and for evidence that contributors to miscellanies were not paid, see J. A. Downie, "Paying for Poetry at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century, with Particular Reference to Dryden, Pope, and Defoe," *Digital Defoe: Studies in Defoe & His Contemporaries* 6, no. 1 (2014): 1–18. Downie offers a needed warning that "we would be wise to exercise a little caution before assuming that . . . authors made 'great Sums of Money' from writing poetry at the turn of the eighteenth century," the examples of Dryden and Pope notwithstanding.

66. On Pope's gains, see David Foxon, *Pope and the Eighteenth-Century Book Trade*, rev. and ed. James McLaverty (Oxford, 1991), chap. 2.

67. A total of 1,445 subscribers signed up for 1,786 copies. Samuel Johnson reports the price as 2 guineas and the "whole collection" as "four thousand." Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets; with Critical Observations on their Works*, ed. Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols. (Oxford, 2006), 3:54 and 300–301n41. If we assume a print run of 2,000 and postulate that the remaining 214 copies duly sold to nonsubscribers, then the gross before the costs of manufacture, distribution, and commission to Tonson and Barber (the publishers) would come to precisely £4,200 (or 4,000 guineas). Johnson adds that "lord Harley, the son of the earl of Oxford, to whom he had invariably adhered, added an equal sum for the purchase of Down-hall, which Prior was to enjoy during life, and Harley after his decease."

Table 6. Average playwright income from theater benefits and publication

Years	Average m/p ^a benefits (range)	Average m/p ^a publication (range)	Average a/p ^a benefits/fee (range)	Average a/p ^a publication (range)
Pre-1714	—	£25 (£3 10s.–£107 10s.)	—	—
1714–37	£97 (£0–£494)	£52 (£5 5s.–£150)	£58 ^b (£16–£115)	£7 5s. ^b (£2 2s.–£16 2s. 6d.)
1737–60	£245 (£0–£401)	£91 ^b (£12 12s.–£105)	£116 (£0–£142)	£31 ^b (£5–£52)
1760–76	£271 (£0–£504)	£102 ^b (£52 10s.–£150)	£98 (£1–£170)	£27 10s. ^b (£10 10s.–£42)
1776–94	£195 (£0–£601) ^c	£130 (£50–£210)	£83 (£0–£320)	£32 ^b (£18–£63)
1794–1800	£267 (£33–£626) ^d	£134 (£50–£150)	£114 ^b (£21–£210)	—

Sources: I have compiled this table from updated datasets that served as the basis of Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, “Playwrights’ Remuneration in Eighteenth-Century London,” *Harvard Library Bulletin*, n.s., 10, nos. 2–3 (1999): 3–90.

a. “m/p” means “mainpiece” (usually five acts); “a/p” means “afterpiece” (usually one or two acts).

b. Calculated from statistically inadequate evidence.

c. Of the 86 mainpieces with known receipts staged 1776–94, 13 yielded *nothing* to the playwright from performance.

d. Author benefits were terminated in 1794 and replaced by a flat payment of £33 6s. 8d. per night for the first nine performances (if the play lasted that long). Note that the potentially high performance returns for afterpieces after the 1720s derive largely from hugely popular pantomimes, not straight plays.

amounting to £400, £500, or even £600. After about 1750, the average mainpiece benefits were always close to £200, and usually close to £250 or more. And after 1750, almost all known copyright payments for mainpieces performed at Covent Garden and Drury Lane were at least £100. Performance and publication of afterpieces were much less remunerative, but nothing to sneeze at.

Novels were a different proposition. Everyone remembers that Fielding got a fabulous £600 for *Tom Jones*, and that Andrew Millar unwisely paid him £800 for *Amelia* and was stuck with a lot of unsold copies for many years.⁶⁸ Sterne made quite a bit of money from *Tristram Shandy* in the 1760s but was forever borrowing money he had a terrible time repaying, and he left his widow and daughter impoverished.⁶⁹

68. The manuscript publication agreement for *Tom Jones* is in the Pierpont Morgan Library, MS MA 0789. On Fielding’s take from these novels, see Martin C. Battestin with Ruthe R. Battestin, *Henry Fielding: A Life* (London, 1989), 452, 532. Battestin and Battestin report Horace Walpole’s claim in a letter to Sir Horace Mann that “Millar gave Fielding another £100 after he found the book ‘sell so greatly’” (440).

69. By my reckoning, Sterne apparently earned something like £3,500 in the last decade of his life from his church stipends and publication of fiction and sermons, but on a per-annum basis, this was not enough to live as a gentleman. On his income, see W. G. Day, “Sterne and 1759,” *The Shandean* 20 (2009): 22–28. For his perpetual borrowing and struggles, see Ian Campbell Ross, *Laurence Sterne: A Life* (Oxford, 2001), chaps. 11 and 12. For even more details on Sterne’s earnings, expenditure, and inability to live within his income, see Arthur H. Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Early & Middle Years* (London, 1975) and *Laurence Sterne: The Later Years* (London, 1986).

Frances Burney got £250 for *Cecilia*.⁷⁰ Reality in the form of normal prices, however, was fairly dismal. Richardson sold two-thirds of the rights to *Pamela* for 20 guineas before publication.⁷¹ The Upcott average for sixteen pieces of fiction between 1716 and 1797 is just £9 14s. per title. The nineteen Robinson contracts for novels (1783–1812) run from a low of £5 5s. to a high of £57 15s., most of them three- and even four-volume novels. Per title, the copy price was £28, but the per-volume rate was just £11. These prices do not seem out of line with commentary from the time or with what modern scholars have been able to discover. Dorothy Blakey reviewed the evidence and concluded that “the price for the average novel ranged from five to twenty pounds.”⁷² In the 1790s, the publisher Lackington reported that he had heard that booksellers “frequently offer as low as half a guinea per volume for novels in manuscript,” adding that “many have actually been published, that were not worth the expence of paper and printing.”⁷³ Readers may recall that as late as 1803, Jane Austen received £10 for *Northanger Abbey* from Benjamin Crosby (who then did not bother to publish it). Back in 1757, the *Critical Review* claimed that the Noble brothers (who published a lot of novels) “never paid to any author for his labour a sum equal to the wages of a journeyman taylor.”⁷⁴ Smollett tells us that “little Tim Cropdale” in *Humphry Clinker* had “made shift to live many years by writing novels, at the rate of five pounds a volume,”⁷⁵ and two decades later, Robert Bage has a character in *Man as He Is* (1792) receive £6 for a two-volume novel (vol. 2, p. 207).

Surveying what was known around 1930, J. M. S. Tompkins notes the payment of £30 by Thomas Lowndes to Bage for *Mount Henneth*, his first novel (1782), and she mentions the £84 William Godwin got for *Caleb Williams*. She reports high prices paid to Ann Radcliffe (who received £500 for *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and £800 for *The Italian*) and Elizabeth Inchbald (who got £200 for *A Simple Story* and £150 for *Nature and Art*).⁷⁶ (Radcliffe and Inchbald were probably about as representative as Stephen King and J. K. Rowling.) Burney got only £20 for *Evelina*, but its success brought her a £250 price for *Cecilia* four years later, as mentioned above.⁷⁷ Tompkins concludes that “The usual payment for a library novel seems to have been between five and ten guineas. . . . Sometimes the bookseller gave as much as twenty guineas.” Her belief that “the profit could be doubled by a judicious dedication”⁷⁸ must be viewed with skepticism.

70. J. M. S. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770–1800* (1932; reprint, Lincoln, Neb., 1961), 9.

71. Richardson to Johannes Stinstra, June 2, 1753, *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford, 1964), 232.

72. Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press 1790–1820* (London, 1939), 72–74.

73. Lackington, *Memoirs*, 385.

74. *Critical Review*, April 1757, 384.

75. Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, ed. Thomas R. Preston and O M Brack Jr. (Athens, Ga., 1990), 126.

76. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England*, 8–10. The source is James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, 2 vols. (London, 1833), 1:273 and 2:3. The terms clearly did not stipulate permanent transfer of copyright: Boaden notes that “In the year 1810 she again sold her copy-right” in the two novels (2:164). Longman was the purchaser, but Boaden does not report the price.

77. Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England*, 8–10.

78. *Ibid.*, 9.

A high proportion of novels appeared anonymously; by no means all signed novels have dedications; many writers of novels were obscure and ill-connected nobodies; and not all dedicatees necessarily coughed up. In general, however, her summation is sound: “Prices were low, but climbed slowly towards the end of the century.”⁷⁹

Returning to the issue of copyright payments for late eighteenth-century novels, one starts from volume 1 of the enormously useful Garside-Raven-Schöwerling *Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction*.⁸⁰ Copyright sale information survives for 51 of 1,421 novels published in England between 1770 and 1799, helpfully tabulated in Raven’s table 7. The sums range from 3 guineas to £800. The total for 51 titles is £4,045, which is an average of about £79. If we eliminate the top 7 (for which £2,375 was paid—an average of £339), then some £1,670 was paid for the other 44 (an average of £38). Dropping both the top 7 and the bottom 7 (for which about £46 was paid), the average for the 37 middle cases would rise to about £44.

One thing that Raven’s detailed and judicious introduction does not do, however, is take length into account. Most of these novels comprise two, three, or four volumes, but five novels have only one volume and two run to five volumes. The fifty-one titles (including five translations) total 139 volumes, for an average of about £29 per volume taken all in all. But this is misleading. If we remove two Radcliffe novels (£1,300 for seven volumes), then the £2,745 paid for the remaining 132 volumes yields an average of about £20 18s. per volume. Removing the eleven cases where more than £100 was paid for copyright (a total of £2,960) leaves £1,085 paid for 97 volumes (an average of about £11 per volume). Removing the seven cases where less than £10 was paid does not significantly change that figure. My best guess is that £11 a volume was what an unknown or little-known writer of fiction could reasonably hope to get—though he or she might do a bit better or a bit worse.

Raven comments (accurately in my opinion) that the “51 survivals listed in Table 7 . . . are unlikely to be fully representative of the payments to all the authors and translators of the 1,421 novels” listed in the bibliography. As we have just seen, the extraordinary sums paid to Radcliffe “heavily skew the total average.”⁸¹ He also notes that this table “relies heavily” on agreements with such publishers as Longman (in the 1790s, when prices were rising a bit) and the Robinsons (also mostly in the 1790s and “known for their relative generosity”). The sleazy Noble brothers and the pinchpenny Minerva operation almost undoubtedly paid quite a lot less. By way of comparison, we may usefully turn our attention to Richard Sher’s “Table of British, Irish, and American First Editions of Scottish Enlightenment Books, 1746–1800.”⁸² He lists 360 books of various types, reporting copyright prices on ninety-three titles. Forty-seven of them

79. *Ibid.*, 8.

80. *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, ed. Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2000). Vol. 1 edited by James Raven and Antonia Forster with the assistance of Stephen Bending.

81. *Ibid.*, 1:51.

82. See Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment & the Book: Scottish Authors & Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, & America* (Chicago, 2006), table 2 (pp. 620–87) and analysis in chap. 3 (particularly pp. 257–58).

brought the author at least £450, and in twenty-seven instances (involving twenty-two different authors), the remuneration was £1,000 or more. Plays and novels (never mind poetry) were on average remunerated on a very different scale.

The Garside-Raven-Schöwerling figures are, of course, all from the last three decades of the century. Copyright prices seem likely to have been, on average, significantly lower in the first half of the century. Marjorie Plant, still an authority worth consulting, long ago concluded that, in the first third of the eighteenth century, “£4 or £5 would often buy the copyright of an author’s work.”⁸³ Extraordinary cases aside (meaning Fielding and Radcliffe), my best guess is that early and late, the norm for novels was a pittance. This is, no doubt, why so many eighteenth-century novels are by women. Raven counts 1,013 of 1,421 published anonymously (71 percent), of which 438 remain unattributed: how many of them were by women, we can only guess. But of the 983 to which we can ascribe an author, 423 were by men and 560 by women—about 57 percent (see Raven’s table 6). The ugly truth is that most women, lacking other ways of earning money, had little choice but to accept what publishers chose to pay.

Actors

Salaries and benefits to actors are maddeningly complex, ever-changing, and less fully and precisely documented than one would wish. Nonetheless, some snapshots at different dates throughout the period should give a clear idea of range and magnitude.

The original King’s and Duke’s Companies consisted of “sharers” (senior men) and “hirelings” who were paid a salary (lesser men and women). Figures are almost entirely lacking. As of autumn 1694, the United Company had a pay scale for principals that ascended from £1 10s. per week (a rate of 5s. per diem) to Thomas Betterton’s £5 (or 16s. 8d. per diem). The season was about thirty weeks or a bit longer, estimated totals for which ran from £45 to £150 and up for principal actors. Lesser actors were paid as little as 10s. per week (a rate of 1s. 8d. per diem), which projects to a total of no more than £15 to £20 for the season.⁸⁴ Considered against Gregory King’s income figures (£39 per annum was the average income), these are painfully low salaries. Then again, the top rate was only twenty times the rock-bottom rate and only double what solid performers like Mrs. Verbruggen and William Bowen were making. A summer season (if offered) generally involved lesser actors, and some joined troupes of strollers. Work at May Fair and Bartholomew Fair proved astonishingly profitable for some of the low comedians.⁸⁵

Failure to pay salaries in full during the stormy competition that followed the reestablishment of a second company in 1695 led to the institution of a system of

83. Marjorie Plant, *The English Book Trade: An Economic History of the Making and Sale of Books* (1939; 2nd ed., London, 1965), 76.

84. For these figures, see Judith Milhous, “United Company Finances, 1682–1692,” *Theatre Research International* 7, no. 1 (1981–82): 37–53.

85. The prompter John Downes says of the low comedian William Pinkethman that “He’s the darling of *Fortunatus*, he has gain’d more in Theatres and Fairs in Twelve Years, than those that have Tugg’d at the Oar of Acting these 50”; see *Roscius Anglicanus*, ed. Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume (London, 1987), 108.

compensatory personal benefits—solo for principal actors, often shared for lesser ones (if they were allowed any benefit at all).⁸⁶ The salaries proposed by Vanbrugh in 1703 for a new United Company (which did not intend to grant benefits) run from six principals at £150, plus four at £100, another five at £80 and on down to six at £40 and two at £30. The difference between top and bottom salaries is only a factor of five.⁸⁷

For the shortened season of 1708–9, we have actual figures for the salaries (£4 and £5 per week) and benefit income of six principals, plus the treasurer's estimate of the value of gifts at the benefits.⁸⁸ The benefit income ran from about £51 to £90, the gifts from £20 to £450 (the latter admittedly extraordinary). Total compensation was reckoned to be between £190 and £638.

A fairly complete set of records for Covent Garden in 1735–36 shows that per-diem pay for performers ran from 25s. all the way down to 1s. 8d.⁸⁹ For 172 performances, those sums work out to £215 at the top and to about £14 per annum at the bottom. Of some fifty-seven active performers, twenty-two made more than the 5s. 6d. earned by the company prompter; thirty-five made less. Of some forty house servants, no one made more than the company treasurer, Ford, who got 6s. 8d. Only four of the servants made more than 4s. 6d. Most of the performers enjoyed a benefit or part of a shared benefit—which in some cases brought them more money than their regular salary. A few performers enjoyed season contracts. Mrs. Horton was owed £250, which works out to 29s. per diem; Stephens was owed £200 (or about 23s. per diem). With a rather scanty benefit, Mrs. Horton actually took home about £318. With a distinctly lush benefit, Mrs. Porter, who had a season salary of £100, carried away £358. At least ten performers definitely enjoyed total income in excess of £200 (and probably at least four more whose salaries are not specified), but no one save John Rich hits Vanderlint's £500 per-annum minimum to live as a "gentleman."

In the 1740s, the advent of the young David Garrick definitely goosed salaries.⁹⁰ At Covent Garden in 1746–47, Garrick and James Quin earned £700 each in salary and received a free benefit that brought them to £975 and £925 respectively for the season.⁹¹ Mrs. Cibber got a £525 salary and a free benefit that boosted her income to £792. Lacy Ryan had a £300 salary and a total income of £556. Mrs. Pritchard got £113s. 4d. per diem, and totaled £368 in salary, which plus benefit at £60 charges brought her £511. The company employed thirty-eight men and thirty women as performers. The salary structure (including benefit proceeds) looked like this:

86. See Robert D. Hume, "The Origins of the Actor Benefit in London," *Theatre Research International* 9 (1984): 99–111.

87. See The National Archives, LC 7/3, fols. 161–62.

88. See Zachary Baggs, *Advertisement Concerning the Poor Actors, who under Pretence of hard Usage from the Patentees, are about to desert their Service* ([London], 1709).

89. This ignores the £3 6s. 8d. per diem that the performer-proprietor-manager John Rich paid himself—some £573 (in addition, of course, to three-quarters of the annual profit made by the company). For details of what can be reconstructed from damaged sources, see Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, "John Rich's Covent Garden Account Books for 1735–36," *Theatre Survey* 31 (1990): 200–41.

90. See Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, "David Garrick and Box-Office Receipts at Drury Lane in 1742–43," *Philological Quarterly* 67 (1988): 323–44.

91. Most actors had to pay "house charges" (£40 early in the century; by 1800, £160 at Covent Garden and £200 at Drury Lane), but favored stars could negotiate a "free benefit" at which management's

<i>Salary</i>	<i>Performers</i>
£900+	2 (2 men, 0 women: Garrick and Quin)
£500–£800	3 (1 man, 2 women: Mrs. Cibber, Lacy Ryan, Mrs. Pritchard)
£200–£300	4 (3 men, 1 woman)
£100–£200	10 (8 men, 2 women)
£50–£100	16 (9 men, 7 women)
£6–£50	35 (17 men, 18 women)

Garrick, Quin, and Mrs. Cibber earned £1,925, or 32 percent of the entire performer salary budget (£6,049). Add Ryan and Mrs. Pritchard, and those figures become £2,593 and 43 percent. Just about exactly half the company earned less than £50 for the season. Collectively, the bottom half earned £1,067, or about 17.5 percent of the performer budget. By Vanderlint's £500 minimum income required to live as a gentleman, only five of the performers qualified—and no one else came within £200 of doing so.

Jumping ahead to Covent Garden in 1773–74, we find a company with a narrower salary range.⁹² The highest salary was £508 15s. for Woodward, who was employed principally as a concoctor of pantomimes. Fourteen men and six women made a pound or more in salary per diem. Sixty-five of the ninety-eight performers made no more than 8s. 4d. per diem (a sum that amounted to £2 10s. per week, or about £77 for the season). At the bottom of the scale, men made 15s. per week (about £23 for the season), and women got £1 per week (or about £31 for the season). Table 7 displays the overall pattern of salaries and total compensation with profits from benefits. Of the fifty-nine performers whose total compensation for the season was under £101, twenty-one (twelve men and nine women) had income above £50 and thirty-eight had less than £50. For a company with ninety-eight performers, this means that fully three-fifths were under £100, and more than a third were under £50.

To underline the point: the multipliers that separate bottom salaries from top-star salaries escalate quite dramatically in the course of the eighteenth century. The bottom-to-top salary ratio in Vanbrugh's hypothetical plan for a united company in which no benefits would be offered was a mere 1:5 (£30 versus £150 for the season). A decade earlier, the actual ratio for the United Company (likewise with no benefits) was 1:10. At Covent Garden in 1735–36, it had risen to 1:15. At Covent Garden in 1746–47 it was 1:34 (salary alone) and 1:48 (with benefit income in the calculation).⁹³ A better-balanced company at Covent Garden in 1773–74 had a bottom-to-top salary ratio of just 1:16 and a total compensation ratio of 1:22.

Comparison with companies of the 1790s is rendered tricky by inflation and incomplete figures, but the basic picture is clear. Consider Drury Lane in 1798–99.⁹⁴

costs were not deducted from the gross. Figures from the 1746–47 account book, British Library, Egerton MS 2268.

92. Figures from the Covent Garden account book, British Library, Egerton MS 2278.

93. This is, however, an abnormal company. Ignoring the £700 salaries to Garrick and Quin (and their £275 and £225 benefits) would cut the salary ratio to 1:25, the total compensation ratio to 1:39. If we also exclude Mrs. Cibber (who had a £525 salary and a £267 benefit free of charges), those figures would drop to 1:16 and 1:27.

94. Figures from Folger Shakespeare Library, MS W.b. 301.

Table 7. Performers' salaries and total compensation at Covent Garden, 1773–74

Salary	Men	Women	Salary + Benefit Profits	Men	Women
£601–£700	0	0	£601–£700	1	0
£501–£600	1	0	£501–£600	3	0
£401–£500	1	0	£401–£500	1	2
£301–£400	1	0	£301–£400	9	3
£201–£300	4	4	£201–£300	3	5
£101–£200	11	7	£101–£200	6	5
<£101	35	35	<£101	29	31

Source: Covent Garden account book, British Library, Egerton MS 2278.

Lower-end salaries for the full season were mostly about £50, but salaries soared at the upper end. The male principals got a mere £500–£860 (a 1:17 ratio), but a couple of women received stratospheric salaries. Dorothy Jordan got £960, and Mrs. Siddons a lofty £1,620 (1:32). Driven by huge new theaters with a capacity of 3,000 and more, free benefits for stars generated astonishing sums. Mrs. Jordan's total compensation was £1,670 (1:33) and Mrs. Siddons's was £2,060 (1:41). The companies got much bigger: 136 at Drury Lane and 167 at Covent Garden (counting singers and dancers).⁹⁵ In terms of buying power, however, only the top salaries kept up with inflation.

The multipliers that separate top- from bottom-level salaries are a vivid indicator of the changing nature of the London patent companies. A troupe whose highest-paid performer makes five times the lowest-paid is not the same kind of enterprise as one where the differential is a factor of fifteen, let alone thirty or more. Disparities in what was earned tend to be masked by inflation and gaps in the records for benefit receipts. Such difficulties notwithstanding, the increasingly commercial nature of ever-larger theaters and the huge sums paid to a few stars is glaringly obvious.

Opera Singers and Concert Musicians

Opera companies are quite different from patent theaters in terms of the number of performers required, the number of performances given (around 30–60 as opposed to around 180–200), and the price of admission. Records are, unfortunately, quite sketchy and to a significant extent derive from anecdote or (often-inflated) newspaper reports. Nonetheless, there are some clear and interesting patterns (see table 8).⁹⁶ We can see several things of interest here. From the foundation of the Royal Academy of Music in 1720 until the mid-1790s (a time of acute inflation), the salary scale (like admission

95. This count is from the *London Stage* rosters. We also know the names of forty-four musicians at Covent Garden.

96. For summary and analysis of known figures, see Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, "Opera Salaries in Eighteenth-Century London," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 46, no. 1 (1993): 26–83, which is the source for this discussion.

Table 8. Opera performers' salaries

Season	Budget for principal singers	Top salary	Top salary as percentage of principal singer budget	Bottom salary	Bottom salary as percentage of top salary
Spring 1708	£2,357	£430	18.2	£50	11.6
1720–21 ^a	£6,400	1,500 guineas	23.4	£300(?)	20
1788–89 ^b	£5,607	£1,500	26.7	£150	10
1790–91 ^c	£5,790	£1,200	20.7	£100	8.3
1796–97 ^d	£5,800	£1,400	24.1	£200	14.3
1805–6	£8,415	£2,625	31.2	£100	3.8
1807–8	£8,000	£5,250	65.6	£100	1.9

Note: The late-century companies normally gave top principal singers a benefit in addition to salary.

a. First full season of the Royal Academy of Music. Second preliminary estimates, not final figures (which do not survive).

b. Last season of the old King's Theatre, Haymarket, which burned that year.

c. First season of the new Pantheon Opera house.

d. At the much larger new King's Theatre, Haymarket (opened for opera in 1792–93).

prices) remained virtually constant. The castrato, whether Senesino in 1720 or Pacchierotti in 1790, received about £1,500. The prima donna might get that or a bit less (say, £1,200). The lowest salary for named singers was generally £100 for the season. A limiting factor was the size of the old King's Theatre, not much expanded until the 1780s. Subscriptions had to be raised during the Napoleonic era, when they jumped from 20 guineas (standard from the mid-1720s until the early 1790s) to 25 guineas, then to 30 in 1798, 40 in 1807, and 50 in 1811. The £2,625 top salary in 1805–6 went to Mrs. Billington and can be viewed as essentially a reflection of inflation. The £5,250 paid to Madame Catalani in 1807–8, however, shows an abrupt and radical change in salary distribution. The bottom of the scale remains constant at a nominal £100 (worth far less by then), and a mid-level performer like Rovedino received the same £500 salary from 1796 to 1808. The gap between top and bottom salaries for named singers fluctuated a bit, but generally remained in the vicinity of a 15:1 ratio. The proportion of the singer budget devoted to the *primo uomo* (or occasionally the prima donna) was usually on the order of 20 or 25 percent, but rose above 30 percent for Billington and leapt to a mind-boggling 65.6 percent for Catalani. Billington took the top-to-bottom salary ratio to about 26:1; Catalani escalated it to 52:1. Furthermore, three or four principal singers generally got a benefit (paying house charges), but Catalani apparently received *two free* benefits in 1807–8. The parallel to the strategy being followed by the patent theaters is clear. By my multipliers for this period, Catalani's salary alone was worth somewhere between £525,000 and £800,000. The two free benefits plus the

customary gifts were probably worth at least £2,000 more, which would bring her total earnings to as much as £1,100,000 in today's terms.⁹⁷ Substantial gifts could have sent the total considerably higher.

Orchestral musicians take us to a less heady level. Surviving evidence provides a pretty clear picture, though it is spotty and frustrating.⁹⁸ Inevitably, it also gives us a radically incomplete sense of what orchestral players actually earned. As McVeigh comments, "No musician working in London for any length of time made his entire living from concert work, and the career of most musicians was an ever-varying cocktail of different enterprises."⁹⁹ Even someone with regular theater or concert employment did not enjoy a year-round income: the theater season generally ran September to June (sometimes with a summer season); the concert season was concentrated in the period from January or February into May. In the late eighteenth-century theater, orchestra players generally made 5s. per night, which, over 180 nights, amounts to £45 for quite a lot of time and effort. Opera orchestra personnel usually got at least the base rate of 15s. per night, but the opera did not always manage forty performances and almost never more than eighty, which implies that a year's take was somewhere between £30 and £60. Figures on pay for early eighteenth-century concerts are just about nonexistent, but in the booming concert environment of the 1780s and 1790s, orchestral players usually received from half a guinea to a guinea per concert; the "leader" usually got five guineas. Given that a lot of concert series comprised twelve performances, participation did not go far toward feeding oneself (let alone a family).

McVeigh rightly observes that there is "no way of assessing accurately the financial circumstances of any one musician, let alone the proportion of earnings contributed by concerts."¹⁰⁰ To survive, musicians had to find supplementary sources of income. Teaching and private concerts were the obvious ones, but details on both are scanty.¹⁰¹ We know, for example, that Pepys paid a music master 10s. per song to teach his wife, which seems steep.¹⁰² We have some sense of Dr. Burney's hectic schedule and income as a music teacher. McVeigh notes that by 1780 (at the age of fifty-four),

97. William C. Smith, *The Italian Opera and Contemporary Ballet in London, 1789–1820* (London, 1955), 83–84, estimates that two benefits in 1806–7 (paying charges that season) plus gifts brought Catalani "at least" £3,000, and reports (quoting the *Monthly Mirror*) that one of the benefits in 1807–8 was "insured to produce a thousand" pounds.

98. For four important sources, see *Vice Chamberlain Coke's Theatrical Papers, 1706–1715*, ed. Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume (Carbondale, Ill., 1982); Simon McVeigh, "The Professional Concert and Rival Subscription Series in London, 1783–1793," *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 22 (1989): 1–135; McVeigh, *Concert Life*; and Deborah Rohr, *The Careers of British Musicians, 1750–1850: A Profession of Artisans* (Cambridge, 2001).

99. McVeigh, *Concert Life*, 196.

100. *Ibid.*, 197.

101. Taking an apprentice was one form of getting income from teaching. McVeigh reports that, "For a premium, which might exceed £100, a master would undertake to house and train an apprentice for a period of seven years" (*Concert Life*, 183–84). Feeding and housing the apprentice would have been pretty cheap, though the training would be a time-consuming nuisance. Apprentices could, of course, be set to such tasks as music copying.

102. *Diary*, ed. Latham and Matthews, 8:411 (August 31, 1667).

Burney was charging four guineas for “entrance” and half a guinea per lesson and was eventually able to retire from performance. In the 1790s, so did the piano virtuoso Clementi, who demanded and got a guinea per lesson.¹⁰³ These prices must be anything but typical.

Neither King nor Massie gives a figure for annual income for musicians: by implication, they would be classified as “Persons in sciences and liberal arts” who averaged £60 per annum. Colquhoun states £200 for “Persons employed in theatrical pursuits, and attached to theaters and concerts, as musicians, &c.,” but with no explanation of the parameters of this category or the income range it comprises.¹⁰⁴ The inclusion of the likes of Madame Mara and Mrs. Billington (at £1,000 and more some years) would have dismal implications for the other end of the spectrum. And of course £150 in 1806 had nowhere near the buying power that it had fifty or a hundred years earlier.

In 1708 the Haymarket opera orchestra consisted of twenty-seven players. Four principal players were paid a guinea for each performance; others received between 8s. and 15s.¹⁰⁵ The venture went broke after just twenty-nine performances. The principal singers were owed £400 and lesser singers £200 on season contracts—luckily for them. The next season, new management brought in the castrato Nicolini for 800 guineas a season, a sum he is said to have doubled at a benefit.¹⁰⁶ Senesino received 1,500 guineas in 1720, which established both a top and the spread for most of the rest of the century. McVeigh’s table 9 reports fees for various kinds of events and series for the period 1754–99 that are very much in line with the norms half a century earlier.¹⁰⁷ Occasionally there is a startling exception: Viotti was paid 550 guineas as a violin soloist for twelve Salomon concerts in 1793. In the 1780s and 1790s, a soloist at a single concert might hope for 5 guineas (soloists from within the orchestra generally got 3).¹⁰⁸ Even at half a guinea for admission, the profit margin was thin at best: the Hanover Square concert hall could hold only 500 with any comfort, and McVeigh calculates that 500 subscribers at 5 guineas for twelve concerts would yield no more than about £155 profit on a gross of £2,625.¹⁰⁹ Clearly, however, the lion’s share of what loot there was went to a few stars.

Both some particular cases and anecdotal testimony suggest that surviving as an instrumentalist was a struggle. Frederick James Messing (by no means unknown or a beginner) reported annual earnings of £65 13s. 6d. for 1770, £79 14s. for 1780, and £123 16s. 7d. for 1781. Rohr comments that this was “derived partly from performing on the violin, viola, cello, and guitar, but mainly from his work as a teacher and a music copyist.”¹¹⁰ In 1781 John Francis Wood, applying to the Royal Society of Musicians,

103. McVeigh, *Concert Life*, 197.

104. Colquhoun, *Treatise on Indigence*, 23–24 (table). Rohr reports Colquhoun’s figure as £150 (*Careers of British Musicians*, 155).

105. *Coke Papers*, nos. 44, 49, and 73.

106. *Ibid.*, no. 74 and p. 116.

107. McVeigh, *Concert Life*, table 9 (pp. 191–93).

108. McVeigh, “Professional Concert,” 7.

109. McVeigh, *Concert Life*, 151.

110. Rohr, *Careers of British Musicians*, 156.

reported “that his professional engagements consisted of ‘Three Schools and private teaching bringing him in upwards of One Hundred and Fifty Pounds per Annum.’”¹¹¹ Rohr’s bottom line is grim: “a long-term view of musicians’ earnings makes it clear that their chances of avoiding destitution were very slim.” She adds: “*even the most successful musicians* could and frequently did find themselves completely destitute at some point, usually at the end of their careers.” As with authors, actors, and opera singers, a few stars earned fabulous sums, but a large majority barely scraped by—if indeed they managed even that well. And in the case of opera singers and instrumental musicians, most of the success went to the foreign born, not to native Englishmen and women.

Painting

We know a modest amount about prices of paintings, but much less about incomes of painters.¹¹² Two general points should be made at the outset. First, until the middle of the eighteenth century, upper-end painting was heavily dominated by foreign immigrants, and a great many paintings were imported from Italy, France, Holland, Flanders, Germany, Spain, Portugal, and some other places.¹¹³ Second, in the course of nearly a century, painting in England evolved from an essentially artisanal enterprise into a profession whose emergence was signaled by the formation of the Royal Academy in 1768. Probably because painters were employed and patronized by the rich and mighty, they became socially more respectable than (for example) actors. Six painters had been knighted by 1770 (van Dyck, Lely, Medina, Kneller, Thornhill, and Reynolds); by contrast, the first actor to be knighted was Henry Irving in 1895. Unsurprisingly, prices of paintings rose quite a lot at the upper end in the course of the eighteenth century.

Anyone who could regularly get the prices demanded by Lely, Kneller, Gainsborough, and Reynolds was going to make a more than decent living. The *ODNB* reports that Lely died leaving debts and legacies of £9,000 that necessitated selling his collection of pictures; of Kneller, it says merely that he died “wealthy”; of Reynolds, that his net worth at death was approximately £100,000. Lesser painters were a different proposition. Joseph Highmore left £550; Michael Dahl’s daughters sold his picture collection for £700.

One really well-documented case of a lesser painter is probably atypical, but unquestionably of interest. Arthur Pond (1701–1758) left meticulously detailed accounts of income and outgo, admirably edited and analyzed by Louise Lippincott.¹¹⁴

111. *Ibid.*, 157.

112. For a brief survey of expensive, moderate, and (relatively) cheap paintings done in England in this period, see pp. 390–92 above.

113. Pears, *Discovery of Painting*, table 1 (pp. 207–9) shows a total of 30,560 imported paintings from 1722 through 1774 (figures from CUST 3 records in The National Archives).

114. For the figures, see Lippincott, “Arthur Pond’s Journal of Receipts and Expenses, 1734–1750,” *Walpole Society*, vol. 54 for 1988 (1991): 220–333 (a transcript of British Library, Add. MS 23724). For her biographical account of Pond and analysis of his income and socioeconomic context, see *Selling Art in Georgian London: The Rise of Arthur Pond* (New Haven, Conn., 1983).

As of 1734, Pond was charging six guineas for a head in oil, but by 1748 he was charging eight; his price for a full-length climbed from sixteen guineas to thirty-five (77, table 4). His profits from painting fluctuated quite drastically but were often close to £300 and got as high as £410 (82, table 6). His total annual income twice reached the dizzying total of a thousand pounds, but to cover his expenses, he had to rely significantly on activities other than painting: he doubled as agent, dealer, restorer, collector, and printseller.

At a guess, journeymen English painters struggled to make ends meet. An affluent snob might commission a portrait of self or spouse or bambini, but he was probably likelier to pick up a picture by a European painter at one of the numerous auctions that could be attended in England. Pears lists “Paintings Fetching More Than £40 at Auction, 1711–1759”—some 547 paintings by 120 different painters.¹¹⁵ The highest price noted was £703 for a Raphael, though this was highly unusual: only 108 pictures fetched more than £100 (about 20 percent), and only eleven fetched £200 or more. Of the pictures covered in Pears’s analysis of auction results, exactly *one* picture had been painted by an Englishman—a piece by Pepys’s miniaturist Samuel Cooper that sold for £66 3s. in the first third of the eighteenth century.¹¹⁶

Let me emphasize three points concerning painting and painters. First, buying or commissioning paintings is definitely the territory of elite culture: only the decidedly rich could have afforded to do so. The relatively modest £3 portraits that Pepys had done of himself and his wife take us into the region of £600–£900 (doubled for the two of them). His £14 portraits of each of them would be £2,800–£4,200 in present-day buying power, with the total outlay double that. The £40 threshold Pears uses to divide ordinary from costly runs £8,000–£12,000. Second, until the mid-eighteenth century, upper-end painting was almost totally dominated by foreign-born painters—and most of the expensive pictures were painted abroad and imported into England. Third, we have little way of knowing how many paintings a particular painter could complete in a year, and even less way of knowing how many he or she could get commissioned or sell in a year. The probability seems to be that it was a tough way to make a living, if a living could be made at all. At a guess, such English painters as there were survived by giving lessons, doing “decorative” work in posh houses and stately homes, and—until the 1768 Act of Parliament virtually terminated the practice—sign painting.¹¹⁷

115. Pears, *Discovery of Painting*, appendix to chap. 6, table 1 (pp. 216–23).

116. *Ibid.*, 225. Pears did not include Hogarth’s 1745 auction of his paintings. A few brought good sums: *Harlot* brought £88 4s.; *Four Times of Day*, £127 1s.; *Rake*, £184 16s. But *Strolling Actresses* fetched only 26 guineas, and the total proceeds were under £500, far less than Hogarth had hoped. See Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth*, rev. ed., 3 vols. (New Brunswick, N.J., 1991–92), 2:229–38. Hogarth did vastly better out of his engravings. Paulson calculates that his 1745 Lovat engraving sold upwards of 10,000 impressions at 1s. and earned him something like £300 within weeks after costs and dealer discounts were deducted from the approximately £500 gross (2:276).

117. On the 1768 Act and its devastating effect on sign painting, see Pears, *Discovery of Painting*, chap. 4. He comments that “Probably no other act of government has ever had such a dramatic effect on English art as a whole” (115). The Act was for paving streets and removing signs as obstructions to traffic flow.

Application to Textual Interpretation

I have devoted most of my time and attention here to the real-life historical contexts in which culture was produced and consumed—much of it decidedly elite culture. Before turning to some overall conclusions, I would like to offer specific examples to demonstrate why textual interpretation can sometimes benefit greatly from the critic's understanding of the meaning of particular sums named by an author.

Consider the presentation of money issues in *Robinson Crusoe*.¹¹⁸ Money counts for nothing while he is marooned, but all the while the trustees managing his plantation are faithfully keeping track of what is owed to him. Upon his return he is given the accrued income—some 5,287 *moedas*—which Crusoe says is worth more than £5,000 (though the correct calculation seems to be closer to £7,200). Even at the lower sum, the modern value would be somewhere between £1 million and £1.5 million. When he sells the plantation, he receives (according to the first six editions) 328,000 pieces of eight.¹¹⁹ This may be a misprint: the seventh edition removes the final zero, reducing the price to 32,800 pieces of eight. If we accept the larger sum, the modern value is roughly between £14 million and £21 million. If we take the lesser sum, the value is somewhere in the ballpark of £1,440,000 and £2,160,000.

Why does any of this matter? A lot of intelligent and respected twentieth-century Defovians proclaimed Defoe a “realist.” James Sutherland has said that “*Robinson Crusoe* shares with most of Defoe’s later fiction a firm basis in actuality.”¹²⁰ Ian Watt had proclaimed Defoe the pioneer in formal realism. Max Novak is unquestionably the foremost Defovian of the last half-century, and he has systematically insisted on Defoe’s “realism.” *Crusoe*, he says, “is a realist text”; it is “England’s first sustained work of realistic fiction”; it is “anchored in historic and economic reality.” Novak tells us that, for Defoe, “Economic realities are never far away from his fictions. He preferred to treat characters among the middle or lower ranks of society.” He also says point-blank that, at the end of the novel, Crusoe “emerges from his experience moderately wealthy, but not rich.”¹²¹ This is a debatable point. Crusoe says that he “was now Master . . . of above £5,000 *Sterling* in Money, and had an Estate . . . of above a thousand Pounds a Year.”¹²² This would put him in the top one-tenth of one percent (0.10 percent) of English incomes of the time. This income seems implausible but would definitely make him “rich.” Crusoe, however, sells out, but whether for £7,000 or £70,000 depends on whether we accept the seventh-edition emendation or the original sale price. If the latter, then at 3 percent interest on capital, Crusoe would be raking in upwards of £2,100 per annum, making him quite wealthy. If the smaller figure is

118. The following discussion draws freely on David Wallace Spielman, “The Value of Money in *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, and *Roxana*,” *Modern Language Review* 107 (2012): 65–87.

119. [Daniel Defoe], *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (London, 1719), 338 (first edition).

120. James Sutherland, *Daniel Defoe: A Critical Study* (Boston, 1971), 123.

121. Maximillian E. Novak, *Realism, Myth, and History in Defoe’s Fiction* (Lincoln, Neb., 1983), 8, 123; Novak, “The Cave and the Grotto: Realist Form and Robinson Crusoe’s Imagined Interiors,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 20 (2008): 445–68 at 445, 446; Novak, *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe* (Berkeley, Calif., 1962), 163n29.

122. [Defoe], *Robinson Crusoe*, 338.

accepted, then Crusoe has about £12,000 of capital (rather than £75,000) and a relatively modest income, say £360 per annum at 3 percent. If that is the case, then one wonders why he did not milk his cash cow for a few years—but we will probably never know for sure what Defoe thought he was saying. The extremity of Crusoe's reaction to his learning of his capital and the income (he “turned pale, and grew sick” and almost “dy'd upon the Spot”)¹²³ does not suggest that the upshot will be a modest income. Whether one could purchase an estate yielding more than £1,000 per annum for roughly £7,000 seems very questionable—that would be a 14 percent rate of return. Events reported in the closing pages of the novel—buying a ship for a nephew, breeding up another as a gentleman, going to the East Indies as a “private Trader,” and supplying his “new Collony” with “all necessary things”¹²⁴—strongly imply that Defoe was thinking in terms of the larger sum. Defoe certainly did like to think big. David Spielman points out that Roxana and her husband amass £100,000, which is one-twelfth of the initial capitalization of the Bank of England in 1694.¹²⁵ My point is simple: to make any judgment on economic realism, we need to understand the magnitude of the sums involved.

Consider now a radically different kind of case—Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813).¹²⁶ Austen lived her adult life in acutely straitened financial circumstances. Combing her letters for references to money, one finds abundant proof of this. She could get extremely upset about having to pay an extra 2d. when receiving a letter; she refrains from indenting paragraphs to save on paper; and she meticulously repays the 18d. she owes her mother. *Pride and Prejudice* is generally read as a delightful fairy tale: Elizabeth and Jane catch their wealthy husbands (whose incomes are £10,000 and £4,000 or £5,000 per annum, respectively). This is a jolly good thing, because Mr. Bennet has saved *nothing*, and his daughters have no portions worth mentioning. Owing to the entail, when he dies, his widow and daughters will be thrown out of Longbourn and forced to live on less than one-eighth of the income to which they are accustomed. If Elizabeth married the odious Mr. Collins, he would presumably have to take in her mother and unmarried sisters. When Elizabeth refuses him, her mother is appalled, and her father says, “An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents.—Your mother will never see you again if you do *not* marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you *do*” (vol. 1, chap. 20).

What are we to make of this situation? Elizabeth and Jane love their father, and most readers like him. He berates himself for letting Lydia go to Brighton, and a variety of critics have seconded his self-condemnation for sloth and irresponsibility. Almost none of them have mentioned the subject of money, which seems strange. The Bennets have been married for twenty-three years and had five daughters in the first eight of them. Why has Mr. Bennet not saved *any* money? Perhaps readers assume that his £2,000 income is simply too inadequate, but this is a false assumption. As Alan

123. *Ibid.*

124. *Ibid.*, 362–63.

125. Spielman, “The Value of Money,” 66.

126. What follows here is a condensed summation of one section of Hume, “Money in Jane Austen.”

Downie points out in an important article, there is textual evidence to prove that the Bennets have both a butler and a housekeeper and at least two maids reporting to the housekeeper, plus a footman.¹²⁷ We must presume at least half a dozen servants, plus kitchen staff (Mrs. Bennet is offended when asked by Mr. Collins which of her daughters is responsible for a delicious dinner), plus someone who can at least double as coachman. Even more invisible are the gardeners and farm workers. Mr. Bennet has a baronet's income and has avoided ever going into debt. Even at the lower multipliers appropriate for the Napoleonic era, Mr. Bennet's £2,000 should be worth at least £200,000 in modern buying power, and since the family lives in the country, £300,000 is a reasonable estimate.

Mr. Bennet has entirely failed to make any provision for his wife and daughters, which suggests that Austen is implicitly inviting us to despise him. I am not merely imposing a present-day perspective on a text now two hundred years old. Domestic economy writers from Vanderlint to Trusler insist loudly and in detail on the obligation to make such provision. Writing in the 1790s, Trusler says flatly that "every man . . . should at least lay by two fifths of his annual gains, that is, one fifth for contingencies, and one for his family, viz. £200 out of every £500."¹²⁸ Since Mr. Bennet is not obliged to guard against business mishaps, this implies that he ought to be setting 30 percent or even 40 percent aside. But if Mr. Bennet had saved just 20 percent for twenty years (£400 per annum), each of his five daughters would have £1,600 in capital, which, at the 4–5 percent interest possible from government bonds during wartime, would have given them £65–£80 per annum. When their mother died, each would get another £1,000. With £2,500 in capital, a woman could live at the rate of £100 per annum. This would put her in the condition of Mrs. Bates in *Emma*, which is still a lot better than the £40 per annum that each of the Bennet daughters can look forward to after their mother's death. Mr. Bennet has been appallingly and callously irresponsible. Elizabeth does not seem to recognize this, but Austen must have understood it all too well, even if she regarded the situation as natural. Her own father had behaved in much the same way, and until she made some money from novels in the last years of her life, she had no income other than charity from her brothers.

Mr. Bennet is coolly indifferent to the future welfare of his wife and daughters. Perhaps he assumes that the Gardiners will take them in as poor relations. More broadly, he is brutally selfish. Consider the arrangement of Lydia's marriage to Wickham. Darcy pays Wickham's gambling losses and debts to tradesmen, stated to be "considerably more than a thousand pounds." Darcy gives Wickham a thousand pounds (in addition to the thousand Mr. Bennet settles on Lydia from his wife's

127. J. A. Downie, "Who Says She's a Bourgeois Writer? Reconsidering the Social and Political Contexts of Jane Austen's Novels," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 40 (2006): 69–84. Alan Downie informs me in personal correspondence that he now calculates that, "At a conservative estimate . . . there would have been at least nine or ten indoor servants at Longbourn, including a butler and one or two footmen, a housekeeper and two housemaids, a cook and two or three assistants." A footman is mentioned (vol. 1, chap. 7); Mrs. Bennet presumably has a maid; and Darcy says to Elizabeth, "Let me call your maid" during the visit to Pemberley (vol. 3, chap. 4), which may imply that the girls share one or more maids.

128. See the Rev. Dr. [John] Trusler, *The Way to be Rich and Respectable*, 7th ed. (London, 1796), 24.

money) *and* buys his commission—which might cost anywhere from £400 to £1,000 at this time.¹²⁹ In short, Darcy spends a minimum of £2,500 of his own money to bring about this marriage—fully a quarter of his own annual income. Mr. Bennet is nothing but thrilled. What he has to say when Elizabeth informs him of this state of affairs is: “So much the better. It will save me a world of trouble and economy. Had it been your uncle’s doing, I must and *would* have paid him; but these violent young lovers carry every thing their own way. I shall offer to pay him to-morrow; he will rant and storm about his love for you, and there will be an end of the matter” (vol. 3, chap. 17). Exactly *how* would he have repaid his brother-in-law? This passage receives no annotation in either the recent Cambridge edition or the new Harvard edition, yet the sum is huge (at least a quarter of a million pounds in modern terms), and the degree of self-centered complacency is both disconcerting and offensive.¹³⁰

Yes, one can read *Pride and Prejudice* as a delightful romance in which wit and beauty are duly rewarded with an entirely implausible Cinderella ending. We are free to ignore the fact that, in reality, Elizabeth would be a fool not to marry Mr. Collins—as her egregious mother rightly says. Happy fantasy aside, what the novel gives us is a harsh reminder of the helplessness of women who have no means of supporting themselves and no realistic hope of making an economically advantageous marriage. Elizabeth can be allowed to ignore these ugly facts of life, but Austen knew better—and so should we.

~ The Lessons of Value

What do we learn from this survey? I would say, quite simply, that if we do not scrounge up hard figures on the cost of cultural products, the rewards for producing them, and the capacity to purchase them, then we are going to misunderstand a lot of things very badly indeed. Among them are individuals (Pepys), books (*Pride and Prejudice*), professions (playwright, novelist), and radius of dissemination (who could afford an opera ticket or a cheap painting)—what we now call “market penetration.” Even where figures have been readily available, surprisingly little use has been made of them. The Upcott papers have been well known for a century and a half but have been only casually mined. The figures that would allow us to calculate playwrights’ income from theater benefits were published in *The London Stage* in the 1960s, but no attempt to analyze them was made for more than thirty years.

Anecdote and cliché have long ruled. In the 1960s I was taught that the rise of the novel was a phenomenon driven by the rise of the middle class—and I still meet a large number of students who are being told the same thing today.¹³¹ Saunders states in his long-standard account of professional writing that “hacks . . . might earn . . . as much as a thousand pounds for a play, exclusive of the additional two hundred earned

129. See Anthony Bruce, *The Purchase System in the British Army, 1660–1871* (London, 1980).

130. *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Pat Rogers (Cambridge, 2006), 418–19; *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Patricia Meyer Spacks (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), 419.

131. Watt was not the *fons et origo* of this delusion, but he lustily promulgated it to ill effect. See Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley, Calif., 1957), chap. 2. Watt says specifically that the success of Defoe and Richardson reflects “the great power and self-confidence of the middle class as a whole” (59).

from publishing it.”¹³² Account books tell us, however, that there is no record of any play making that sum for its author in the theater.¹³³ And the only three known sale of copyright payments that exceed £150 (a rarity itself) are 200 guineas to Cobb for *The Haunted Tower*, *The Siege of Belgrade*, and *The Pirates* (1789–92). Brean Hammond’s *Professional Imaginative Writing* is an immense improvement on Saunders, but it covers a limited time span and depends largely on published sources for its facts.¹³⁴ We need more hard numbers. Without them, we are playing mind games.

Some readers of my drafts have objected to my free use of spread multipliers (principally 200 to 300) to obtain present-day buying power equivalencies. I agree that this is a debatable tactic, but on balance I think its use can be justified. I would argue that even a scholar deeply immersed in eighteenth-century context and cost of living can have difficulty thinking in “their” terms. “Sixpence” sounds like nothing, but it is half a day’s wages *or more* for almost half the families of England (by King’s figures, about 45 percent), and so it is a significant sum of money in that context. The eighteenth-century sums sound so small that we have trouble adjusting to that scale of magnitude. If so learned a scholar as John Brewer can speak of “a mere eight guineas,” then we need a means of reminding ourselves of the buying power of this sum—which by my Austen-era multipliers, would today be somewhere between £840 and £1,260.¹³⁵ That magnitude is “mere” for few people now, and for a far smaller percentage of the population then.

Let me conclude with a few comments on the issues I have been addressing. “Cultural” purchases turn out to be quite costly. This is no surprise in the realms of painting and opera, but the degree to which a great many books were punitively expensive is still not sufficiently acknowledged by scholars today. Big novels were direly expensive for at least 98 percent of the population. Lower-end chapbooks were probably affordable for most of the literate public. Plays at a shilling or 1s. 6d. had to represent something of a splurge for more than half the population—if they were affordable at all. For a family at £50 per annum, 1s. 6d. represents *half* a day’s income.

Why were novel writers mostly so badly paid? Very simply, because the paper they required was expensive, and so most readers could not afford their books. A great many eighteenth-century editions of books had small print runs. Those reported in William Strahan’s ledgers show 41 percent at 500 copies or fewer; 56 percent at 750 copies or fewer; and 83 percent at 1,000 copies or fewer.¹³⁶ St. Clair’s appendix 1 lists

132. J. W. Saunders, *The Profession of English Letters* (London, 1964), 110.

133. The highest sums recorded are £648 for Sheridan’s *School for Scandal* in 1777; £601 each for Inchbald’s *Such Things Are* in 1787 and *Every One Has His Fault* in 1793; and £626 for Morton’s *Speed the Plough* in 1800. The largest take prior to 1777 was £494 to Gay for *The Beggar’s Opera* in 1728, £504 to Goldsmith for *She Stoops to Conquer* in 1773, and £563 to Murphy for *The Grecian Daughter* in 1772.

134. Brean S. Hammond, *Professional Imaginative Writing in England, 1670–1740: ‘Hackney for Bread’* (Oxford, 1997).

135. John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1997), 486. He is referring to the price of Bell’s 109-volume edition of English poets (unbound). The price is indeed a bargain, but “mere” is extremely misleading.

136. Figures from Patricia Hernlund, “William Strahan’s Ledgers: Standard Charges for Printing, 1738–1785,” *Studies in Bibliography* 20 (1967): 89–111 at 104.

fourteen print runs for novels between 1761 and 1777: two at 500, eight at 750; one at 800; two at 1,000, and one at 2,000.¹³⁷ A large majority of novels were either three or four volumes, and at 3s. per volume, the price put them out of reach of all but the truly wealthy, except as an occasional extravagance. Multivolume novels were mostly published to be sold to circulating libraries, which made them available to a modestly affluent class of readers unable or unwilling to buy them. St. Clair observes, however, that although circulating libraries “maintained a nationwide network, they never reached more than about 1 per cent of the population.”¹³⁸

The bottom line here is interesting and has not, I think, been well understood. Why were playwrights being paid 100 guineas for copyright to a mainpiece when novelists were being paid on average £11 per volume for a longer piece of work? The answer is clear enough if we factor in cost of manufacture, price, and income levels. The price of a three-volume novel at 9s. was six times as much as a mainpiece play at 1s. 6d. A four-volume novel was eight times as much. The novel cost its publisher more in paper and typesetting. Considering the price of purchase as a percentage of average daily income, one realizes that a great many more people could easily buy the play if they wanted to. Playwrights were paid much higher copy fees (on average) because (a) their published product got a lot of free publicity from performance, and (b) it was readily affordable for a much larger market tranche than existed for novels.

In the eighteenth century, painting and opera were basically unavailable to almost everyone. So were books over about 15s., and the market for books has several quite distinct tranches, or so we may deduce from the price structure. Under 6d., quite a lot of people could fairly readily buy a product. Between a shilling and a half-crown (2/6), the market is a whole lot smaller. From 6 to 12 shillings, the potential market was perhaps one-eighth that of the level beneath it. Above about 15 shillings, we are definitely dealing with the top half of 1 percent, and probably not with all of them. St. Clair points out that Wordsworth’s son claimed that his father wrote “of, & for, the poor,” but that Wordsworth’s income from writing was below £5 a week for most of his life, “and he could not easily have afforded to buy his own books.”¹³⁹ *The Excursion* was published in 1814: 500 copies of a quarto at 2 guineas (42s. unbound). It failed to sell out, and thirty-six copies were remaindered after twenty years.¹⁴⁰

137. William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, 2004), 474. These figures may be high. Charlotte Ann Burney was told by Thomas Lowndes (her sister’s publisher) that “five hundred was the common number for a novel.” See *The Early Diary of Frances Burney, 1768–1778*, ed. Annie Raine Ellis, 2 vols. (London, 1907), 2:307.

138. St. Clair, *Reading Nation*, 241. Prices varied. David Allan lists the “Entry fee” and annual subscription for various subscription libraries: *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England*, 92 and 148. The Norwich Public Library had no entry fee and charged only 6s. annually in 1784; the Leeds Library charged 21s. entry in 1768, 63s. in 1786, and 420s. (£21) in 1822—but charged no annual fee. Various proprietorial libraries in the provinces charged 8s. to 21s. annually but often offered quarterly or even monthly terms. Earle’s library in London circa 1799 charged 63s. (for use of 12–24 volumes annually), 42s. (for 8–16 volumes), and 21s. for “small texts.” Bell’s “Circulating Library” in London offered “full services” for a guinea a year; reduced privileges for 12s. per annum or 4s. per quarter (advertised in the *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* of November 19, 1774).

139. St. Clair, *Reading Nation*, 201–2.

140. *Ibid.*, appendix 9, 661.

Could a living be earned from elite cultural production? If one is thinking of Handel, Garrick, and Reynolds, the answer is “Yes, indeed, and a very fine one.” For most writers, actors, and musicians, however, it was a hardscrabble existence at best. The difficulty of earning a living by writing fiction has long been recognized, though sums such as Millar paid for *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* or Mrs. Radcliffe’s rich rewards have tended to obscure the wretched remuneration received by almost everyone else. Playwriting is not as different a story as has generally been supposed. Precious few new mainpieces were staged for twenty years after the Licensing Act. Even after 1760, the two patent theaters simply did not mount enough new plays to permit professional writers to support themselves by playwriting. Between 1730 and the 1780s, the only two playwrights who made enough to live off the trade for upward of a decade or a little longer were Fielding in the 1730s and Bickerstaff in the 1760s and early 1770s. A particular play might make its author quite a bit of money, but earning one’s living by writing plays was basically just not possible. Near the end of the century, Elizabeth Inchbald and Frederick Reynolds did manage to support themselves comfortably as playwrights, but they were highly unusual in doing so.

Poetry definitely did not pay well, except by subscription or patronage. Eleven pounds a volume on average for fiction is a pretty dismal figure. Plays were definitely a writer’s best bet (except for the two decades after the Licensing Act), but they were an erratic and unreliable source of income. Were there any alternatives? Brean Hammond reports and seems to accept Walter Graham’s claim that writing for periodicals “became one of the most significant aspects of authorial income in the eighteenth century.” This assertion has recently been sharply challenged by Alan Downie, who reviews evidence of pay and profitability (not proffered by Graham), and I am inclined to agree that the claim is overstated and probably just untrue.¹⁴¹

Some readers of my draft have asked whether I could supply a table showing where the average incomes of writers, actors, musicians, and painters fall in relation to national averages and the thresholds of “middling sort” and a “gentleman’s” income. Unfortunately, this is impossible: we lack the necessary data. Almost all playwrights and novelists had (of necessity) other sources of income. We have no way to calculate the value of patronage, either in cash or in sinecures or employment. Musicians and painters could teach, but we cannot estimate their earnings from that activity. Some actors worked at fairs and joined strolling companies in the summer. Excluding extraordinary cases (Handel, Garrick, Reynolds, Mrs. Radcliffe), we may fairly say that the figures surveyed in this essay demonstrate that most writers, actors, musicians, and painters had total annual incomes from those sources under £200 (that is, not in the top 3 percent). As we have seen, around midcentury fully half of the Covent Garden actors earned less than £50 for a season; in 1773–74 only four of ninety-eight performers earned more than the minimum income required to live as a “gentleman.” A huge

141. See Hammond, *Professional Imaginative Writing*, 73; Walter Graham, *English Literary Periodicals* (New York, 1930), 20; J. A. Downie, “Periodicals, the Book Trade and the ‘Bourgeois Public Sphere,’” *Media History* 14, no. 3 (2008): 261–74.

majority of participants in the production of “culture” of these various sorts had incomes at or below the lower end of the middling sort. A substantial number would have fallen into the realm of the laboring poor.



I have tried to demonstrate that if we do not understand the economic realities of cultural production—grubby issues of cost, price, reward, and ability to buy—then we have no real comprehension of how books, performances of plays and musical entertainments, and paintings were brought into existence, or by whom they were purchased and enjoyed. To a degree that few twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics realize or want to admit, much of the culture we study was aimed at and principally consumed by the top 1 percent or 0.5 percent of the English population, a high proportion of it in London. This is elite culture with a vengeance. Once one gets beyond chapbooks and the cheap seats in the patent theaters, there are few cultural products that could be afforded by people with income under £200 per annum, except as rare treats. Even the patent theaters, gigantic as they became by the 1790s, were little concerned with the customers who occupied the cheap seats, except insofar as the managers wanted not to provoke riots.¹⁴²

We tend to think of the eighteenth century as a time when “bourgeois” influence was on the rise, culturally speaking. There is a degree of truth in this: never again was there a “court circle” as influential as that of Charles II, and numerically there were a growing number of people who were not of the nobility or landed gentry who could pay for and enjoy “culture.” But in terms of percentages, the world of Colquhoun is not significantly different from that of Gregory King a century earlier. Like the fact or not, the eighteenth-century “culture” we study is inarguably an elite culture. And the rewards for producing it went disproportionately to a few stars—authors, actors, singers, instrumentalists, and painters alike. *Plus ça change*.

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142. The class weighting is evident from the number of places and their prices. According to the 1812 *Biographia Dramatica*, ed. Stephen Jones, 3 vols. in 4 (London, 1812), 1:xlix, the 1794 Drury Lane theater had 1,828 box seats at 6s.; about 800 places in the pit at 3/6; 675 first-gallery places at 2s.; and 308 second-gallery places at 1s. (total capacity 3,611). A sold-out theater would have generated a total of £771 6s.: £548 from the boxes; £140 from the pit; £67 10s. from the first gallery; and £15 8s. from the second gallery. In other words, 89 percent of the potential maximum income was from the boxes and pit; 71 percent was from the boxes alone. If the theater wanted to stay solvent, let alone flourish, those were the customers they needed to attract and please.

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