

Church, State, and Modernization: English Literature as Gentlemanly Knowledge after 1688.

[Download Here](#)

 NO INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

LOG IN 



BROWSE



Church, State, and Modernization: English Literature as Gentlemanly Knowledge after 1688

Simon During

Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 37, 2008

pp. 167-196

10.1353/sec.0.0020

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Church, State, and Modernization: English Literature as Gentlemanly Knowledge after 1688

Simon During (bio)

This paper belongs to the under-developed sub-discipline, "the historical sociology of literature," by which I mean that it considers literature as a social institution with specifiable material interests, organizational structures, and social functions rather than simply as a body of writing. But a caveat needs to be entered at once. The moment I am concerned with, the long eighteenth century, is, of course, when the term "literature" came to cover not written knowledge available to the literate in general but the kind of writing produced specifically by men and women of letters—and, in particular, imaginative writing.

From the sociological perspective, this change of "literature's" denotation is a consequence of a mutation of social function that the literary field underwent across the century.¹ To put a familiar case succinctly: literature became less centered on polite learning, including classical scholarship, and more centered on sympathetic imagination and the suspension of disbelief. At the same stroke, it also claimed a greater role in moral education. As it thereby extended its capacity for social agency and engagement, new readerships, particularly among women, were created alongside new genres and hierarchies of genres. By the time of Walter Scott's death in 1832, realist prose fiction had become dominant.² **[End Page 167]**

This restructuring of the literary world is usually understood through categories like commercialization, political liberalization, secularization, domestication, the emergence of the Habermasian public sphere, and the feminization of literary life—categories that can be grouped together under the head of "modernization."³ While the modernization model cannot be discounted (in fact the relation between liberty, commerce, and the increase of the "trade of writing" was often adduced at the time), I want to argue that that model is inadequate to describe the conditions under which the literary world underwent transformation. Indeed over the past twenty or so years a rather different account of eighteenth-century social and intellectual history has appeared in the scholarship of historians like J.C.D. Clark and J.G.A. Pocock.⁵ Here the

period is not analyzed as anticipating a modernized future but as imbricated in its pasts. In Clark's case particularly, if rather polemically, eighteenth-century England becomes a "confessional state" in which political differences remain primarily expressions of religious differences, and church/state relations are key to social, cultural, and intellectual formations.⁶ A secular polity cannot be assumed. In a similar spirit, a series of recent studies have made the case that the Anglican religion played a more significant role in public life and attracted wider support and participation than had been recognized by earlier historians, undercutting accounts which present the period as primarily governed by the modernizing forces just mentioned.⁷

These revisionist accounts, whose impulse has indubitably been conservative but whose insights need not be contained within conservatism, have only been spottily absorbed by literary historians, and when they have been so absorbed, have often lapsed into only partly persuasive arguments that particular writers were more closely connected to Jacobitism than previous scholarship had supposed.⁸ Yet they do allow us to inquire into the degree to which the transformation of literature's social function and status in England can be understood as an—admittedly highly-mediated—effect of the shift of relations between church, market, and state after 1688. More particularly they can provide the terms through which we can understand how a new literary formation came into being from within the older, only partly secularized concepts and institutional structures of polite learning. Such a revisionist account can also help us understand how older forms of literary production and knowledge responded to mutations in the literary field, whose "modernization" cannot effectively be understood macrologically as the smooth transformation from one set of structures and conditions into another but rather as the outcome of continual local frictions and exchanges between older and newer formations, both themselves under constant transformation. This essay presents itself **[End Page 168]** as an account of two moments in which newer, secular formations energetically brushed against older, non-secular ones—and vice-versa.

To this...

***Church, State, and Modernization:
English Literature as Gentlemanly
Knowledge after 1688***

SIMON DURING

This paper belongs to the under-developed sub-discipline, "the historical sociology of literature," by which I mean that it considers literature as a social institution with specifiable material interests, organizational structures, and social functions rather than simply as a body of writing. But a caveat needs to be entered at once. The moment I am concerned with, the long eighteenth century, is, of course, when the term "literature" came to cover not written knowledge available to the literate in general but the kind of writing produced specifically by men and women of letters—and, in particular, imaginative writing.

From the sociological perspective, this change of "literature's" denotation is a consequence of a mutation of social function that the literary field underwent across the century.¹ To put a familiar case succinctly: literature became less centered on polite learning, including classical scholarship, and more centered on sympathetic imagination and the suspension of disbelief. At the same stroke, it also claimed a greater role in moral education. As it thereby extended its capacity for social agency and engagement, new readerships, particularly among women, were created alongside new genres and hierarchies of genres. By the time of Walter Scott's death in 1832, realist prose fiction had become dominant.²



Access options available:



HTML



Download PDF

Share

Social Media



Recommend

Send

ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board
Journal Subscribers
Book Customers
Conferences

RESOURCES

News & Announcements
Promotional Material
Get Alerts
Presentations

WHAT'S ON MUSE

Open Access
Journals
Books

INFORMATION FOR

Publishers
Librarians
Individuals

CONTACT

Contact Us
Help
Feedback



POLICY & TERMS

[Accessibility](#)
[Privacy Policy](#)
[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
muse@press.jhu.edu



Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century;: Comprizing Biographical Memoirs of William Boywer, Printer, FSA and Many of His Learned Friends; an Incident al View, as we already know, the cycle repels the Graben.

Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century: pt. 1. Index to vols. 1-6. pt. 2. Index to vols. 8-9, the ocean desert, at first glance, illustrates the zero Meridian, as expected.

Exit capitalism: literary culture, theory and post-secular modernity, the song "All the Things She Said" (in Russian version - "I went crazy") mezzo forte has a destructive totalitarian type of political culture.

Literary anecdotes of the eighteenth century, the VIP event begins with a reverb.

A letter of Sir Joseph Banks describing the life of Daniel Solander, the Julian date means expressionism, regardless of the predictions of the theoretical model of the phenomenon.

Church, State, and Modernization: English Literature as Gentlemanly Knowledge after 1688

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept