The literary coterie in the eighteenth-century media landscape

> Different versions and styles of media history do make a difference . . .
> Should we be looking for a sequence of separate "ages" with ruptures,
> revolutions, or paradigm shifts in between, or should we be seeing
> more of an evolution? A progress? Different answers to questions like
> these suggest different intellectual projects, and they have practical
> ramifications for the ways that media history gets researched and
> written. (Gitelman, 2006)[1]

This book began with an intent to study networking and innovation
within the world of London print professionals of the mid-eighteenth
century. In the decades of the 1740s and 1750s, the world of letters
functioned through a complex interweaving of traditional patronage and
the commercial print trade, nurtured by the geographical and social over-
lap of London's public and private worlds of politics, business, and friend-
ship. Within this larger system, professional authors, printers, and
booksellers from about 1750 increasingly took on roles as patrons (or
patronage brokers) themselves. This mutuality is neatly articulated by
Samuel Johnson's famous statement that he "supported" the performance
of bookseller Robert Dodsley's tragedy *Cleone* "as well as I might; for
Doddy is my patron, you know, and I would not desert him." Even
industry outsiders like the salon hostess and author Elizabeth Montagu
could observe that in furthering the career of her protégé James Beattie,
"our little Dilly" (bookseller Edward Dilly) "has a Soul as great as ye hugest
& tallest of Booksellers" – and greater than those of the ministers and
bishops who had to date been ineffective in gaining Beattie a royal
pension.[2] Beattie was to obtain that pension soon after, but for aspiring
writers such as Charlotte Lennox, it was as important to win the support of
the printer and novelist Samuel Richardson in order to convince Andrew
Millar to publish her breakthrough novel *The Female Quixote* as it was to
gain the protection of the powerful Duke and Duchess of Newcastle.
Media innovations like the general-interest magazine, the epistolary

novel written "to the moment," the anthology as modern classic, and the niche market children's book, developed by Edward Cave, Richardson, Dodsley, and John Newbery, respectively, were rewarded not only with prosperity but also with social recognition.[3]

Yet as I examined the correspondences of figures such as Richardson and Dodsley, I was struck by the fact that for these successful professionals, one of their principal investments of time and social capital, and seemingly one of their sources of greatest pride, was in their active membership in a *literary coterie* – that is, a select group of individuals linked by ties of friendship founded upon, or deepened by, mutual encouragement to original composition; the production and exchange of manuscript materials to celebrate the group and further its members' interests; and the criticism of one another's work and of shared reading materials. Somehow, the horizon of literary aspiration for these individuals was different from what I had expected of a system structured entirely according to the norms and values of the medium of print – perhaps, like several of the coterie members discussed in this study, I too had my presuppositions about the narrowly commercial focus of a denizen of the trade. At any rate, the more I looked, the more I saw significant areas of literary production organized as much around scribal coteries as around the printing press. It became clear that one critic's pronouncement about eighteenth-century British literary culture – "Gone was the intimacy which manuscript seemed to offer. Gone too was the authenticity which manuscript seemed to guarantee" – was an overstatement.[4] Scribal culture, with its appeals of intimacy and authenticity, was not in fact gone; a more accurate description, from the perspective of the mid-eighteenth-century person of letters, would have been that this was a culture in which the media of script and print, with their distinctive practices and priorities, were nevertheless in close conversation, sometimes interdependent, sometimes mutually antagonistic, but between them offering a rich array of options for literary expression, exchange, and preservation. To echo Lisa Gitelman's terms from the epigraph above, as the media history I was conceptualizing changed, so did my intellectual project, and this in turn had practical ramifications for the book I was researching and writing. My original plan, then, was reconceived as an attempt to immerse myself in a foreign, hybrid media environment – one just familiar enough, at the start of print's overwhelming dominance of forms of large-scale communication, to be deceptively transparent at first glance, and yet just alien enough to pose puzzles and offer up local variations – in many ways, the

kind of environment with which we have again become acquainted as inhabitants of a swiftly reorganizing media landscape of our own.

Literary Coteries and the Making of Modern Print Culture, 1740–1790 offers the first broad examination of the workings of manuscript-exchanging coteries as an integral and influential element of literary culture in eighteenth-century Britain.[5] Such a study is needed to reorient literary history of the mid- to late eighteenth century from a narrow focus on the history of print productions to a more inclusive and accurate history of writing in this era of print trade consolidation and expansion. My book's primary aim is to demonstrate the pervasiveness of social networks actively composing and exchanging letters, poetry, and literary prose pieces; the functions of key individuals as nodes and as bridges within these networks; and the esthetic and social work performed by their production, exchange, and dissemination of materials. While a coterie's first allegiance is internal, the eighteenth-century coterie undeniably existed in conjunction with print, and thus the second overarching goal of this book is to explore points of intersection between coteries and the print trade to demonstrate how scribal modes of literary production shaped the marketing and conventions of print in ways that were not simply nostalgic but in fact associated with modernity. These intermediation points include individuals who served as bridges between these cultures; publishing events in which the two cultures collaborated or came into conflict; and forms (both genres and conventions of presentation) adapted from manuscript practice to serve the ends of the print medium.

Literary histories and a theory of media succession

In recent decades, influential studies of the history of print and its culture in Britain and the Atlantic world have rightly fine-tuned our account of the centuries-long process whereby this technology penetrated the habits of thought, the understanding and management of knowledge, and even the structures of social life to the point of becoming the dominant medium of communication. For historians of the book and book culture such as Adrian Johns and David McKitterick, this point of print's saturation of British society, if not of all corners of its nascent empire, was the mid- to late eighteenth century. In separate arguments, Johns and McKitterick assert that this moment could not occur until the productions of the press took on the perceived qualities of trustworthiness, permanence, and stability – and therefore, authority – in place of the untrustworthiness and ephemerality associated with print in previous centuries.[6] Johns and

McKitterick agree further in pointing to the self-consciousness of print as an industry – as evidenced by the appearance of a self-reflexive, trade-oriented discourse of the history of printing which was absorbed in the latter decades of the century into progressivist histories of Europe and England – as the mark of a medium come of age. Alvin Kernan's 1987 study of *Printing Technology, Letters, and Samuel Johnson* traced in detail the influence of these changes in the significance and perception of the trade on the emergence of modern models of authorship and reading. While footnoting the "continuing vitality of manuscript culture in the period," Michael Suarez summarizes "the main story" of the book in eighteenth-century Britain as "the efflorescence of a comprehensive 'print culture' . . . a phenomenon that had profound effects on 'the forging of the nation' – on politics and commerce, on literature and cultural identity, on education and the dissemination of knowledge, and on the conduct of everyday life."[7]

Nor have leading historians of scribal culture quarreled, in the main, with these generalizations. Arthur Marotti, Peter Beal, Harold Love, and Margaret Ezell have argued powerfully for the central significance of manuscript systems to the social and literary culture of the Renaissance and the seventeenth century, despite earlier generalizations about cultural shifts dating from the arrival of the printing press. Observing that "by denying the significance of script authorship, manuscript circles, and social texts, we have in the name of democracy [associated with print] apparently disenfranchised the participation of the majority of the literate population of the period," Ezell insists that an "older notion of the text as a dynamic and collaborative process . . . coexisted [with a proprietary view of author-ship based in print technology] well into the mid-eighteenth century."[8] As Ezell's conclusion suggests, however, one implication of these studies is that print has overwhelmingly "arrived" by the middle decades of the eighteenth century, with the ultimate shift in allegiance of the literary author from script to print represented by the high-profile career of Alexander Pope. Love sees manuscript circulation as increasingly devalued from the reign of George I onward, and as "aberrant" from at least 1800, because of an increasing association of print publication with a required standard of quality; "What was kept in manuscript was increasingly what lacked the quality required for print publication." Beal admits that "people continued to keep commonplace books of various kinds throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," but generalizes that they tend to be less interesting to scholars today than those of an earlier period, "perhaps . . . because they belong less to a flourishing manuscript culture and because most of what they contain is trivial and ephemeral material

copied largely from contemporary printed sources."[9] Along these lines, accounts of the scribal practices of individual authors such as Frances Burney in the latter decades of the century have implied both that these authors were exceptional in the extent and significance of their manuscript production and that this production was subordinate and preliminary to their production of material for the stage or press. Thus, where it is acknowledged that manuscript production and circulation persisted in its own right in this period, and not merely as a preliminary step toward print publication, the tendency has been to treat such practices as anachronistic, aberrant, or simply not worth attending to.[10]

A few media historians, however, have challenged these attempts to identify a definitive moment of succession, tracing rather the changing meanings of manuscript in coexistence with print. In a provocative essay entitled "In Praise of Manuscripts," Nicholas Barker has argued that manuscript culture itself did not exist until it became an alternative to participation in print exchange during the sixteenth century; it then took shape as "a new kind of communication, linking writers with readers through a system of diffusion, that all its participants cultivated to serve complex and sometimes conflicting ends." McKitterick's study of *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450–1830* dedicates its first chapter to correcting the misunderstandings that have resulted from an artificial separation, in histories of print technology, between script and print. In this spirit, Donald Reiman earlier devoted an entire study to what he designates "modern manuscripts" – those originating in the period of print dominance, between the advent of print in the late fifteenth century and the shift to electronic modes of text transmission in the later twentieth century. Reiman classifies such manuscripts as private, confidential, or public, according to the intention of their author that the audience be restricted to a specific person or persons, to a group sharing values with the author, or to a multiple and unknown audience, respectively.[11]

Scholars have been furthering our understanding of scribal activity in the eighteenth century through the examination of particular cases. Ezell discusses Pope's early career as an example of a media ecology wherein manuscript and print cultures "existed simultaneously (and . . . competitively and companionably)." Kathryn King's analysis of Elizabeth Singer Rowe's "tactical" deployment of the two media systems suggests a historical moment wherein more than one medium might present itself as a viable and effective means of communication, a claim she has elaborated in a 2010 overview of "Scribal and Print Publication" for women writers of the early eighteenth century. Sarah Prescott has similarly argued

that women's literary history up to 1740, at least, should be understood as adhering to a "pluralist" model of complementary manuscript and print cultures. The mixed-gender 1720s urban coterie of Aaron Hill features centrally in Prescott's discussion; its social dynamics and poetic production as discussed by Christine Gerrard in her biography of Hill strongly support the designation of this group as a literary coterie. Similarly, Stephen Karian's book-length study of *Jonathan Swift in Print and Manuscript* not only details Swift's increasing and various use of the manuscript medium as a means of preserving and circulating his work but also presents this author's practice as symptomatic of a state of media "interactivity and fluidity," in which "authors, readers, and the texts themselves modulate and adapt to the differing media." The Reiman study referred to above links the latter half of the eighteenth century with the Romantic era's increasing fetishization of the autograph as a manifestation of the growing "cult of the personal" – what others have described as the growing "aura" of the manuscript in the age of print. In her examination of John Trusler's 1769 production of mechanically reproduced "handwritten" sermons for Anglican clergymen, for example, Christina Lupton demonstrates how the aura of sincerity and guaranteed meaning could be exploited by a remediation of print as script in a phenomenon unique to this historical moment.[12]

Indeed, script has never disappeared from the picture, despite current alarms about the lost art of handwriting. But the challenge is to historically nuance its cultural contribution, rather than simply to carry forward – or backward – an array of meanings from another era. My discussion of manuscript travel writing in Chapter 6 of this study will illustrate how the "repurposing" of scribal practices and forms, in this case as marking the authority of the gentleman and the poetic genius, carries them forward through the final decades of the century. Primarily, however, this book aims to put the spotlight on an element of eighteenth-century literary culture whose prestige, appeal, and practical function were related to its operation in a medium to which little attention has been paid by literary historians. If it is to contemporary coteries that much of eighteenth-century literary print culture looked for its values, its formal models, and its source material, then an awareness of these groups and the mechanisms of their influence is necessary to an understanding of the history of print publication. Moreover, the close interdependence of several key coteries and the London print trade in the middle decades of the century, in part due to the attitudes and relationships of figures such as Thomas Birch,

Samuel Richardson, and Robert Dodsley, creates a unique intermedial moment that is worthy of closer attention.

Such historical reconsiderations corroborate recent theoretical critiques of a simplistic succession model of media history. Logically speaking, it is problematic to extrapolate from the reality of print's expansion the conclusion that scribal production was a thing of the past. Theorists of media historiography, especially of so-called media shifts, have noted that no medium is pure or static but is rather, in the words of David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins, "touched by and in turn touches its neighbors and rivals"; "to comprehend the aesthetics of transition, we must resist notions of media purity." Thorburn and Jenkins posit several modes of interaction: that "established and infant systems may co-exist for an extended period," "older media may develop new functions and find new audiences," "competing media may strengthen or reinforce one another," or "significant hybrid or collaborative forms . . . [may] emerge." In his turn, Charles Acland has lamented the "paucity of research [that] has concentrated on the tenacity of existing technologies or on their related materials and practices that do not magically vanish with the appearance of each successive technology." These scholars are responding to Raymond Williams' foundational definition of the "residual" as that which "has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present."[13] It is as just such a residual medium, formed in the past but functioning as an effective element of the cultural process in the present, that this study considers the medium of the handwritten manuscript. This is not to deny the well-established fact of the ever-expanding demographic, geographical, and conceptual reach of print. Rather, I examine the particular equilibrium in existence between manuscript and print systems in the middle and later decades of the eighteenth century. In fact, I will suggest that even over these few decades, it is a question of multiple and shifting equilibria, as scribally oriented coteries adapt their practice to the increasing availability of print, and as the print trade devises new ways to interact with, and exploit, the possibilities of manuscript production. It is precisely this unique set of circumstances which makes manuscript activity of the eighteenth century, not trivial and uninteresting, *pace* Beal, but rather, an object demanding critical attention.

The eighteenth-century literary coterie

The extent of active practices of manuscript production and circulation in eighteenth-century Britain has been obscured in part because of our

reliance as literary historians on the print record. However, one need only consider the "hypermediacy" exhibited by so many influential mid-century print publications, offering themselves as a letter to a patron, or a collection of epistles between friends, or a manuscript found "in an old buroe," for an indication that the norms of sociable manuscript exchange continued to wield some kind of influence not only over its most dedicated adherents but also over the wider reading public.[14] In a sense, the evidence is hiding in plain sight, and we may begin simply by considering such apparently awkward and transparently false devices, not as symptoms of nostalgia or a naive understanding of fictional truth, but rather as gestures toward familiar and authoritative modes of exchange. Moyra Haslett's 2003 *Pope to Burney, 1714–1779: Scriblerians to Bluestockings* has provided a detailed examination of the wide array of generic forms common to eighteenth-century print, particularly the epistolary novel, the verse epistle, the dialog, and the periodical, which invoke the media of conversation and script. Haslett's useful study, however, illustrates the limitations of an exclusively print-oriented approach to the evidence of manuscript exchange in the period. As noted at the start of my introduction, while recognizing the characteristic sociability of eighteenth-century print-based authors and their productions, she associates this sociability with an attempt to recuperate a literary culture that was irrevocably "gone." As a result the social circles she selects for discussion – primarily the Scriblerians and the Bluestockings of her subtitle – are examined in terms of the materials they generated for print, and the book's focus is on the forms of sociability enacted in printed works and encouraged in their readers: forms of sociability that are imagined or virtual in some way.[15] Believing that "different versions and styles of media history do make a difference," my study sets out to examine persistent coterie activity in the period, not simply as a source of copy for the printing press – although it certainly was that – or as a compensatory measure, but as a living phenomenon in its own right, evolving and adapting not only to new pressures such as the increasing association of print publication with fame but also to new opportunities like the massive expansion and improvement of postal service in the period.

Thus, I aim in this study to illuminate the workings of coteries in a period in which media networks were increasingly complex, far-flung, and commercialized. I will do so by examining several key groups that were highly visible to their contemporaries and that touched many lives through the models of cultivation and the possibility of participation in up-to-the-minute literary culture that they offered. One irony of the general lack of attention paid to this eighteenth-century phenomenon is the fact that this

is the period in which the term "coterie" enters the English lexicon. Bearing with it from France the negative association of an organized cabal, the label "cotterie" is first offered in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a 1760s synonym for "club." Catherine Talbot and Elizabeth Montagu are thus right on time and on tone when the former teases Montagu in 1761 about her and Carter being subservient members of the aging, card-playing "Lady Ab:s [Abercorn's] Tunbridge Cotterie" and the latter writes in mock anger in 1771 from the same fashionable watering-hole to her close friend George, Lord Lyttelton, "PS We are all in a violent rage that your Lordship calls our Sober Society by ye name, the horrid name of *Coterie*." Yet just a year later in each case, these women invoke the notion more positively, Talbot reporting that she "battled stoutly for the *cotterie of Beaux esprits*" (presumably the Montagu circle) against an individual who thought him- or herself too "critically wise" for the group, and Montagu writing about a visiting French marquis who writes elegant verses that "I wish he may spend this winter in London he will certainly be an agreable addition to our Cotterie."[16]

Where the term "coterie" is invoked in scholarly discussions of the period's literary production and authorship, it is employed in effect as a loose synonym for "circle" or "network." The most regular invocation I have found is in Haslett's study of literary sociability; although not explicitly defined, coteries in her most specific usage appear to be more or less equivalent to "clubs," "cabals," or "special interest groups," as in the dictionary examples just noted, and at their broadest, represent just one phenomenon of the period's characteristic "public sphere conversations," parallel to print trade congers, anthologies, and circulating library user groups.[17] While Haslett's discussion thus identifies an important and widespread print phenomenon of the time, one that is a starting point of my investigation, I define a literary coterie more precisely as a physically realized entity, a relatively cohesive social group whose membership may undergo shifts over time, but which is held together as a continuous identifiable whole by some combination of kinship, friendship, clientage, and at least occasional geographical proximity. Most importantly, a literary coterie's cohesiveness is based on, and is maintained to a significant degree by, strong shared literary interests, expressed in the scribal exchange of original compositions, reading materials, and critical views.[18] The specificity of this definition must be underscored. A couple of the individuals central to my study – Samuel Richardson and Elizabeth Montagu – are well known to have been surrounded by extensive networks of readers and fellow-authors,

in Richardson's case, and by cultural leaders, including the most prominent intellectual women of the day, in the case of Montagu's "Bluestocking" assemblies. The coteries I am looking at are more restricted clusters within these large networks; while their boundaries cannot be defined absolutely, there is an intensity and reciprocity of their scribal literary relationships that makes them stand apart from the looser arrangements in which their members are involved. Although I will draw on terms such as "circle," "group," or "network" as stylistic variations of this key term, then, the social formation with which this book is consistently concerned is the literary coterie.

The four coteries whose character and influence are featured in this book, while certainly not the only ones active during this period in Britain (provincial and Scottish literary circles, for example, have begun to invite similar examination[19]), have been selected because of their high visibility in their time and their interconnections with each other, whether synchronous or sequential. These groups are the Yorke–Grey coterie of the 1740s and 1750s, the Highmore−Edwards−Mulso coterie centered around Samuel Richardson in the early 1750s, the coterie surrounding Elizabeth Montagu and George, Lord Lyttelton from about 1758 to 1773, and that formed by William Shenstone of the Leasowes, near Birmingham (at times referred to as the Warwickshire coterie), in the 1740s and 1750s. While each existed for its own purposes and exhibited its own distinctive character, all were engaged in some way with the London-based print trade. This engagement continued beyond the most active life of the coterie into ensuing decades, in some cases characterized by hostility, but most often by cooperation. Either way, these groups influenced what emerged in the eighteenth century as literary culture – writing, reading, and critical discussion of works of imagination. While some of their members have retained a place in literary histories of the time, others virtually disappeared as the groups they were part of faded from view. Chapter 7 of the book explores obscurity even further: it is devoted to a handful of unknown coteries that have left their traces in personal manuscript miscellanies without being fully identifiable either as a collective or in terms of their individual members. A number of figures who played key cross-coterie roles in relation to the four groups featured appear and reappear at multiple points in this study; these are Catherine Talbot, Thomas Edwards, Hester Mulso Chapone, Elizabeth Carter, and George Lyttelton. Another, Samuel Johnson, functions as a kind of counter-coterie force in a number of key instances.

Media choice and methodology

As already noted, the eighteenth century in Britain was a period of self-consciousness and innovation in the London-based print trade. Accompanying these innovations, Samuel Johnson's periodical writings of the 1750s addressed head-on such concerns as the ephemerality of pamphlet publications and the perceived flood of derivative writing by underqualified hacks that dogged representations of the print trade, arguing that the book, as a repository of a civilization's accumulated knowledge, was the form ideally qualified to respond to these concerns.[20] McKitterick has noted that proof-reading by authors or even by editors hired by booksellers became the norm in response to the demands of knowledgeable readers for accuracy and higher production values, as part of a new "notion of quality control in manufacturing of all kinds."[21] Hence, the stabilization of the print medium's cultural function: with an increased perception of printed materials as fixed and reliable, the potential of print technology for social uses such as permanent information storage and dissemination across geographical and class barriers came into focus.

But the long-established media alternatives of oral communication and scribal culture were also flourishing – the oral as a rapidly urbanizing middling and gentry social stratum organized itself around coffee-house conversation, clubs, and salons, and the scribal as the developing communications networks of a united Britain and its growing commercial empire, taking advantage of improvements in the post and in transportation networks, fostered a sophisticated culture of letter-writing. Eve Tavor Bannet has linked the rapid increase in production of letter-writing manuals in the eighteenth century to the need to organize the empire and to enable an expanding range of social groups to improve their socioeconomic status through the manuscript letter as vehicle. From the perspective of the colonies, Matt Cohen, in his recent work on communications in early New England, replaces a simplistic model of literate settler versus oral native cultures with the synchronous trope of a "networked wilderness," which he conceives of as a "multimedia, continuous topography of communication techniques." Even beyond, Adriana Craciun has traced the inscription of what she calls "site-specific" media such as ice and rocks in the history of Arctic exploration. Susan E. Whyman's *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660–1800* makes in some ways the most sweeping and provocative claims for the importance of script in this century, arguing through detailed analysis of the archives of middling-sort and worker family correspondences that the widespread development and practice of

"epistolary literacy" offered these groups a means of maintaining and improving their socioeconomic positions, concomitantly serving as their primary mode of engagement with the literary culture of the day.[22]

In the case of the four coteries comprising the principal part of this study, extensive surviving correspondences offer a rich record of an active culture of literary production, circulation, and criticism, guided by self-consciously articulated values and rules of exchange. When portions of some of these correspondences were published in the early nineteenth century, they tended to be stripped of greetings, messages to be conveyed to other members of the circle, and mentions of poems enclosed or books borrowed – in short, of the day-to-day work involved in keeping a script-based literary coterie functioning. Often focusing on such "noise," this study is founded on analysis of the manuscript correspondence between members of the Yorke–Grey, Richardson, and Montagu coteries, as well as on nineteenth-century and more recent scholarly editions of Richardson, Bluestocking, Shenstone, and Dodsley correspondence. Supplementing this evidence are findings from archival work on manuscript poetry collections compiled by members of the gentry and middle classes and more large-scale analyses of patterns of reception revealed in newspapers and periodicals of the day. In the latter respect, I have seen myself as working in the spirit of Franco Moretti in his argument for "distant reading," that is, for the necessity of considering quantitative evidence in the construction of literary history, as a means of "widen[ing] the domain of the literary historian, and enrich[ing] its internal problematic." While my study of William Shenstone's afterlife in the magazines has benefitted from such an approach, I have found it necessary nevertheless to examine the findings of broad-based searches individually to determine their meaning.[23]

Overall, I have laid particular emphasis on epistolary evidence of the self-conscious choice to carry out a literary action in one medium – whether print or script – and its forms rather than another, as offering insight into their respective cultural meanings. By seeking out such moments of choice, I am myself choosing an analytical scale much more focused than that of Clifford Siskin and William Warner, who have recently claimed that the essence of the period in Western history often called "the Enlightenment," coinciding roughly with the time frame of this study, consists in the creation, proliferation, and saturation of mediation in every aspect of human experience; in short, Enlightenment is an event in the history of mediation.[24] While many of Siskin and Warner's claims are compatible with those of this project, I am interested in the experience of media self-consciousness at the

local and individual level, where an unusual richness of possibility and a new pressure to make one's mark were often the manifestations of the media moment. At the same time, in speaking of choice I do not wish to imply a naively over-simplified model of individualistic trajectories that would in reality have been strongly influenced by an actor's status, kinship relations, education, economic means, religious persuasion, gender, and geographical location. It is simply impossible to understand fully the motivations that led Catherine Talbot to eschew the circulation of her work despite the encouragement of both her scribal and more print-oriented networks – or, conversely, that prompted her more obscure contemporary Thomas Phillibrown to carefully copy two sonnets in imitation of John Donne produced as a poetic contest between his friends Foster Webb and John Hawkins, along with the letter of adjudication by a third member of his circle, Moses Browne. I am also not suggesting that any of these choices is in itself unique or culturally transformative but rather that it offers insight into a rich and transforming media landscape. In this respect, such moments are representative, but they are also constitutive, bringing into focus the principle articulated by Williams with respect to broadcasting – that the familiar forms of media, as social institutions, are not predestined by the technology itself, but rather the effects of "a set of particular social decisions, in particular circumstances, which were then so widely if imperfectly ratified that it is now difficult to see them as decisions rather than as (retrospectively) inevitable results."[25]

Cohen's notion of a continuous multimedia topography of communication techniques is useful for the time and subject of my study: if participants in England's literary culture of the eighteenth century were neither pilgrims in an alien land nor Native Americans coping with uninvited guests, they were nevertheless feeling their way through a fluid landscape of interpenetrating media offering competing possibilities for inscription. In the case of the Yorke–Grey coterie, for example, print is used in highly controlled and restricted ways, whereas for the Montagu–Lyttelton coterie it offers a means to do good across a wide social sphere. On the other hand, the successful novelist Samuel Richardson invites correspondents to take his novel *Sir Charles Grandison* "off-line," so to speak, by taking on the voices of individual characters and producing a collaborative continuation. It was the flourishing state of each of these modes of communication in the mid-eighteenth century, I would argue, that created a sense of media choice and a self-consciousness about such choice that we might recognize today as we decide whether a printed book,

a website, a blog, a tweet, a phone call, or a meeting at the local coffee shop is the best mode for our next act of communication.

At stake in the choice of medium is social power or agency. As Cohen puts it for the various communications systems of early New England, these systems "were both occasions for and sites of contest for control over social and economic power because they offered individuals alternative and little-understood ways to gain agency across cultural and linguistic divides."[26] For women and men of letters in England, there certainly were significant barriers between differing status, gender, and education levels. One of the most revealing discoveries of the research for this book has been the degree to which eighteenth-century coteries, while undoubtedly associated with social prestige, became the means by which middling men and women were enabled to cross class barriers through the personal connections forged by correspondence and literary exchange. In this respect my understanding of the function of mid-eighteenth-century coterie membership differs slightly, but I think significantly, from that of Deborah Heller and Stephen Heller in their recent analysis of what they term, after Georg Simmel, the "crosscutting" quality of the period's literary networks; while for Heller and Heller the social force of these groups derives from their privileging of chosen friendship above traditional affiliations such as kinship or clientage, it is my view that the cultural power of various literary coteries arises out of some combination of the two that lends a unique character to each.[27] Although it may seem paradoxical, I will argue that a persistent association with social elites enabled the continuing prestige of coterie literary production in eighteenth-century culture generally, and in print specifically, while the tendency of the eighteenth-century coterie to function as a meritocracy was one of its distinctive characteristics.

For women in particular, the pursuit of coterie membership, especially membership in a mixed-gender coterie, could be a conduit to fame or print publication or both, but more fundamentally, it inspired composition and innovation, instilled confidence, and ultimately, created authorial identities with a status and respectability difficult to achieve by an unknown author moving directly into print. Elizabeth Rowe's somewhat earlier career is an illustrative precursor. Prescott has argued for the importance of a status doubleness in the function of the Longleat and Hertford coteries for Rowe: these at once refigured the patronage–client relationship as "one of friendly intimacy" and "added to the popularity and marketability of her work."[28] The principle applies to the likes of Thomas Edwards, Elizabeth Carter, Hester Mulso Chapone, and William Shenstone as well. The kind of agency derived from – indeed, actively fostered by – the

eighteenth-century coterie conferred a degree of social and cultural power, whether on an author or a genre or an esthetic. This book, then, will tell a number of stories of how systems of scribal exchange were used to construct and underwrite cultural power and how that power was used, often to enhance print productions.

In analyzing evidence from manuscript correspondences and the apparatus of print – advertisements, paratexts, reviews, periodical essays, and the like – I have benefitted greatly from the work of those literary historians already cited who have established ground rules for talking about the persistence of scribal culture in the centuries immediately following the advent of print technology. Margaret Ezell has modeled how to make the invisible visible, with respect to the scribal modes of women's writing prior to the mid-eighteenth century and to "social authorship" of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries more generally. In so doing, she has identified some of the conventions of manuscript production and exchange as they appear in such unexpected places as the early career of Alexander Pope and the 1692–94 *Gentleman's Journal*.[29] Love, in offering an account of the political importance of scribal culture to post-interregnum English history, has argued convincingly for detaching the notion of publication from a particular medium, defining it rather as movement from the private realm of what he calls "creativity" to the public realm of consumption, marked by the moment "at which the initiating agent (who will not necessarily be the author or even acting with the approval of the author) knowingly relinquishes control over the future social use of that text."[30] Together with Reiman, these writers have stressed that scribal circulation tends to occur within spaces that blur rigid public–private distinctions – in communities whose boundaries are defined by social groupings such as kinship, common beliefs or interests, shared membership in institutions such as the church or the military, or geographical proximity[31] – hence their terminology of "social authorship," "reserved publication," or "confidential publication."[32]

Looking more closely at the values and mechanisms of scribal culture and publication, Love and Ezell have noted a deep-rooted habit of transcription, a relative informality and frankness of style, a "delight in mixture," and a general unconcern to distinguish between individual authors contributing to a collection or to attribute works accurately.[33] Arthur Marotti, in *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (1995), has discussed in even greater detail the features of scribal authorship and the productions which distinguish it from the developing medium of print – features such as an open-ended, non-individualistic understanding

of the composition process; the socially embedded, or "occasional," nature of such compositions; a unity created by social context (for example, a place of origin like the Inns of Court) rather than by uniformity of style or skill; and the related prevalence of certain forms, such as answers, imitations, epitaphs, and epigrams, and of potentially offensive subject matter. Paul Trolander and Zeynep Tenger, in *Sociable Criticism in England, 1625–1725*, have turned their attention more specifically to the literary critical practices of coteries, characterized by a communal, "amendment" approach to the refinement of a work, whereby criticism is an expression of social obligations, and literary activity functions internally to "create and build social bonds," which in turn serve the group as a whole "by establishing its social, political, and cultural prestige."[34]

This invaluable historical work on the structures and practices of coteries has made it clear that a coterie is more than the sum of its individual parts: it is a set of relations. In this respect, a coterie is a form of network as defined by sociologists; I have also benefitted, therefore, from the contributions of social network analysis in generalizing the structures of networks and in defining terms for their description and study. While I have chosen not to attempt quantitative analyses of any of the groups I will be examining,[35] I will draw on several of these key concepts and terms in the chapters to follow – in particular, the notions of network density and multiplexity of ties between members; of the individual motivations that might influence the relative density or openness of a particular network; of the varying roles played by individuals or "nodes" in a network as a function of their relations with other members; and of the significance of members of networks who serve as "bridges" or "brokers" – individuals such as Thomas Birch and Elizabeth Carter, for example – in the communication of information, manuscript materials, and new ideas across "structural holes" between groups. Bruno Latour's insistence, in what he calls Actor Network Theory, that the social is continually created and recreated by the very transactions that forge it and that non-human agents are "actors" in such shifting constructions, has influenced my emphasis on the unique and continually reconfiguring characters of different coteries and on the function of places, genres, and tropes, as well as key human actors, in the story I am telling. In general, however, I will be assuming that social conditions external to any particular network – for example, stereotypes about country versus city life, codes invoked in communications between members of different status groups, or the rules known to govern manuscript exchange between members of any coterie – create

a climate of expectation within that network. What becomes interesting in this light is how an individual group might negotiate and refine those expectations, or reject them altogether.[36]

The plan of the book

This study focuses on the five decades of 1740–90, from the formation of the coterie centered at the estate of Wrest Park upon the marriage of Philip Yorke and Jemima Campbell in 1740, to the transmediation of coterie travel writing into the printed domestic tour guide in the 1780s (with a follow-through beyond 1790 in the case of the afterlife of William Shenstone). Its overall arc is thus roughly chronological, moving from the casual interpenetration of manuscript- and print-based cultures characteristic of the small, London-centered literary world of the 1740s to a more institutionalized, complex, and geographically extensive print system with which various elements of coterie practice coexisted in various states of equilibrium in the latter decades of the century. At first glance, this broad change might suggest that coterie culture moves from a position of superior cultural authority to a state of embattlement and decline. In the final dozen or so years covered by this book, coterie sociability and its practices make cameo appearances in print as reified objects of representation, often functioning paradoxically as ineffectual yet threatening phenomena to be distinguished from the media system of print, as in the case of Frances Burney's play *The Witlings*, composed in 1779, and Boswell's account of the quarrel over Samuel Johnson's "Life of Lyttelton." This sequestering of script, however, belies the intimacy of its ongoing relation to print as its media "other." Thus, we also see representations of the coterie as a rhetorical strategy authorizing some of print's most "upwardly mobile" forms, as in Thomas West's 1778 *A Guide to the Lakes: Dedicated to the Lovers of Landscape Studies, and to All Who have Visited, or Intend to Visit the Lakes in Cumberland, Westmorland, and Lancashire*, with its invocation of a tradition of leisured gentlemen exchanging epistolary travel accounts. And my final chapter will trace the consistent appeal of the literary coterie to relatively obscure compilers of poetry miscellanies from the 1740s right through to the 1790s, even as they increasingly engaged with materials from magazines and anthologies. The narrative I will present, then, is one not of decline but of constantly shifting local equilibria between the coterie and the commercial print trade. I will examine cases of collaboration, mutual exploitation, and the occasional heightened tension, analyzing what these

episodes reveal about eighteenth-century media ecology and the stakes involved in its shifts and adjustments.

Chapter 1 profiles two interpenetrating coteries. One, the Yorke–Grey coterie formed around the newly married Philip Yorke, eldest son of the Lord Chancellor and the future second Earl Hardwicke, and Jemima Campbell, Marchioness Grey, with its geographical center at Wrest, initially seems oriented toward the past, as Whig social elites and their clients exchange occasional poetry, play witty epistolary games, and carry out the work of patronage, influencing public opinion, and finding places or livings. The other, centered round Samuel Richardson, Susanna Highmore, Thomas Edwards, and Hester Mulso in the early 1750s, appears the opposite – fundamentally urban and arising out of the printer Richardson's publishing success as author of the novel *Clarissa*. Yet my analysis will show not only how each functioned according to the established rules of scribal exchange but also how each group's distinctive character grew out of its historical situation and broader social context.

Thus, the Yorke–Grey coterie of the 1740s, to its contemporaries, signified the potential of literary culture in several respects: in its precocious, morally serious talent, exemplified above all by its confidential publication *Athenian Letters* and the promise this held out for the nation's political and literary future; in the central participation of talented women such as the Marchioness Grey and Catherine Talbot; and in the cross-media alliance formed between Philip Yorke and Thomas Birch, who together played an important role in the development of national practices of manuscript preservation and access, especially through the founding of the British Museum. The Richardson coterie, while less prepossessing socially and politically, interfaced with the Yorke–Grey coterie not only in mutual awareness and respect but specifically in the persons of Talbot and Edwards, members of both. These intersections in themselves indicate the social and media fluidity of the 1740s and 1750s, when a self-made printer could aspire to the sociable pleasures of the coterie as he had represented them in his fictions, and the members of an elite coterie could seek out the acquaintance of a novelist whose social contribution through print they wished to endorse. Nevertheless, the inequalities of age and gender at the heart of the Richardson coterie, in particular between the author and the much younger Susanna Highmore and Hester Mulso, appear to have created an imbalance that led to its dissolution in the mid-1750s. The final portion of this chapter will present evidence for the surprising degree of fame achieved by the young poet and epistolary

polemicist Mulso through the cultural influence of this coterie, despite its short life.

My second chapter traces the progress of Elizabeth Carter and Elizabeth Robinson Montagu through the 1750s toward the formation of a new, mixed-gender coterie that coalesced around the central figures of Elizabeth Montagu and George, Lord Lyttelton in the late 1750s. Despite the waning of Montagu's connection to the Duchess of Portland's circle and the failure of Carter's attempted promotion of Samuel Johnson's *Rambler* periodical, I suggest that the decade involved for these two women a successful search for a circle combining sociability with influence and intellectual – specifically literary – stimulation. Montagu's program of self-improvement through friendship and Carter's admired and financially rewarding subscription publication of *All the Works of Epictetus* brought them together in 1758, a few years after Montagu had won the admiration of Lyttelton, and two years before her intense connection with William Pulteney, Lord Bath, completed the inner circle. I attend particularly to the two most productive periods of this coterie: the early years of 1758–62 and the later period of 1769–73, terminating in the death of Lyttelton.[37] After reviewing the modes of scribal authorship practiced by this coterie, particularly the familiar letter and occasional poem, this chapter details the group's strategic deployment of print for its own projects as well as those of protégés such as Hester Mulso Chapone. Thus, I return to the literary life of Chapone during her widowhood from 1761, elucidating the fine balance of superior wealth and social status versus moral monitorship that allowed Chapone to thrive under the auspices of this coterie and made Montagu uniquely suitable as patron and instigator of her client's successful move into print authorship. While the Montagu–Lyttelton coterie was highly effective as a platform from which to launch writings into print, Catherine Talbot, despite her close friendship with Carter and her own role as facilitator of print initiatives, kept her distance from this coterie. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Talbot's avoidance of full participation even in coterie literary exchange because of the excess of fame it might engender.

Addressing the interface of print and script media systems in the middle decades of the century from the perspective of the individual rather than the collective, Chapter 3 takes as its starting point a generalized social problem: the felt uselessness of the life of the unmarried, well-educated, genteel woman or man of limited means in the middle of the eighteenth century. While coterie life has with some reason been portrayed as the resort of a social elite content to preserve its cultural prestige through mutual reinforcement and restriction of

access, I show how Edwards, Talbot, Carter, and Chapone articulated strikingly similar existential crises. For such individuals, participation in coterie life could offer access to cultural influence, and hence to a sense of meaningful existence. In Carter's and Chapone's cases, this effect is realized most fully in the story of their print publications under the auspices of the Montagu–Lyttelton coterie. The focus of the chapter, however, is the career of the reclusive poet William Shenstone. Led, like Edwards, through complex circumstances to live a life of rural retirement, Shenstone established not only a literary coterie for the epistolary exchange of poetry but a multimedia artistic practice centered around the Leasowes, the farm he developed into a renowned "*ferme ornée*." A master of paradoxes, Shenstone articulated over time an esthetic of taste that transformed "indolence" and economic restriction into an influential, coterie-based value system of relationality, embodiment, modesty of scale, and simplicity. The paradox further plays itself out in the media history of Shenstone's reputation as coterie poet: while achieving considerable recognition with the circulation of leisured tourists through the Leasowes and with the manuscript circulation of his poems, he ultimately attained a wider and more democratically expansive fame through the assistance of the innovative bookseller Robert Dodsley, who constructed the fourth and fifth volumes of his famous *Collection of Poems by Several Hands* to a significant degree around poetry supplied by Shenstone from his own manuscripts and those of his coterie.

Indeed, the popularity of Shenstone's poetic persona and esthetic values extended for decades after his death in 1763, beginning with the publication by Dodsley of his two-volume *Works in Verse and Prose of William Shenstone, Esq.* in 1764, followed by a third volume of letters in 1769. The afterlife of William Shenstone – the multiple editions of his poems and essays, the retailing of anecdotes about his life and descriptions of his garden in popular magazines, the tribute poems and imitations, and the trade in images of him and of the Leasowes which continued well into the nineteenth century – is the subject of Chapter 4. But this afterlife was not an uncontested one. Dodsley's edition of the *Works* can be seen as giving rise to a bifurcated reception history, in fact. On the one hand, literary critical commentary on (or, more accurately, critical dismissal of) Shenstone tended for more than a century to follow the leads of Thomas Gray and above all Samuel Johnson in emphasizing the dissatisfactions and distresses mentioned in Dodsley's biographical preface, painting a condescending picture of a perpetually unhappy yet vainglorious recluse

whose dim reflections of the more artful poetry and showy landscape gardens of his day merited only a footnote in literary history.

A review of the publishing and periodical archives made available through recent database offerings, however, reveals a second, overshadowed reception tradition, in itself double-stranded. In one thread, we find Shenstone the coterie author whose loyal friends, especially Richard Graves, continued in numerous publications issued by the Dodsley firm to articulate their respect for his personal qualities as benevolent mentor as well as for his artistic achievements. These "high" literary productions – topographical and moral poems, thematic novels such as *The Spiritual Quixote*, and memoirs – were paralleled by the penetration of Shenstone and his reputation into all levels of periodical literature throughout the Atlantic world, often through the mediation of the Dodsley edition. That this last "Shenstone" was often not any more accurate to the facts than was Johnson's gardener pursued by duns is in itself worthy of attention. My reception study of William Shenstone suggests not only the increasing sway of the professional literary critic as an institution of print but also that Shenstone's modest coterie life as retailed in the magazines managed for many years to resist succumbing completely to that power – because it represented for his contemporaries and immediate successors an ideal to which they could aspire, a life given meaning and pleasure through the application of a democratized notion of taste to that life's most mundane aspects. In this way, the sociable literary coterie and its values were transmediated into a disembodied, virtual community of "Shenstonians."

Again from the starting point of competing media-based claims to authority in the latter decades of the century, I begin my fifth chapter with the fate of Elizabeth Montagu and her circle in the 1770s and into the 1780s, after the death of George Lyttelton and the demise of their intimate coterie. Reviewing the increasingly public representation of Montagu and her women friends as "Bluestockings," I argue that in acquiescing to a print-based fame that was divorced from the personal connections of coterie networks, Montagu made herself vulnerable to the kinds of attacks on coterie practices and characters that arose in some quarters at this time. A second precondition for such vulnerability was a developing discursive dichotomy between the professional, "masculine" author, on the one hand, and the feminized coterie amateur, on the other – a dichotomy implicitly represented by Johnson and Montagu as the former positioned himself in relation to the latter. With the increasing resistance of Montagu and allies such as Philip Yorke, now Lord Hardwicke, to printed "characters" of individuals who had been major influences in their lives – the first Earl of

Hardwicke, Lord Bath, and George, Lord Lyttelton – the stage was set for a conflict based on opposing media cultures and their respective views of publicity. By situating the quarrel between Johnson and Montagu over the former's 1781 "Life of Lyttelton" in these contexts, I show that this quarrel was not simply the "feeble shrill outcry" of an irrelevant clique against a manly Johnson, as Boswell framed it, but rather a standoff between those who claimed an author's character called for public critical examination along with his works, and those who felt a man's reputation was the property of his personal circle, to be defended honorably and kept out of the hands of profit-hungry booksellers. In this respect, Chapter 5 revisits and recontextualizes the gesture by which Shenstone's friend Richard Graves (encouraged by Montagu) pitted the authority of the coterie member's firsthand experience against the narrow views of the urban print author in his *Recollections of Shenstone*, discussed in Chapter 4.

If Chapter 5 tells a story of differentiation and discord, however, Chapter 6 challenges any generalization of this narrative by exploring an opposing scenario, one of symbiosis and mutual reinforcement that traverses the five decades covered by the preceding chapters. Setting the stage with a discussion of manuscript travel writing as practiced by Philip Yorke, Jemima Grey, Elizabeth Montagu, and George Lyttelton, I trace the development of the genre of the domestic travel narrative through a complex interplay between commercially oriented print, on the one hand, and manuscript accounts produced and circulated by gentlemen of leisure, on the other. Beginning with the 1742 third edition of Daniel Defoe's *Tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, this genre in printed form follows an upward trajectory toward increasing respectability through the century, as enterprising editors enlist the cachet of the travelling gentleman to lend authority to their increasingly appreciative accounts of the nation's farthest corners. This appreciation in itself becomes the hallmark of gentlemen of taste such as George Lyttelton and members of his circle, whose descriptions of country homes, cultivated landscapes, and picturesque wild scenes circulate as admired scribal productions. But it is imitated as well in fictionalized accounts of travel embedded in the novels of the likes of Samuel Richardson and Thomas Amory, which in turn stimulate the travels of a broader social range of men (and some women), giving rise to domestic tourism as a widely practiced leisure activity. Manuscript and print texts precede one another in a tangled skein of origin and authorization that demonstrates once again the interdependence of the two media in the literary culture of the period. When the tour of the Lake district, for example, emerges as an institutionalized and lucrative print

phenomenon in the late 1770s and 1780s, it is marketed as a literary tradition in its own right, founded upon a series of texts exchanged by a leisured elite, in a triumphant resurgence of the coterie over the more prosaic commercial pamphlets, guidebooks, and atlases that had in fact underpinned its own travel.

And how was the taste for a "coterie" esthetic, commodified by the print trade in such phenomena as the Dodsley firm's marketing of Shenstone's Warwickshire coterie, or the representation of domestic tour guides as authorized by gentlemen travelers, reflected in the practices of eighteenth-century readers? My final chapter situates itself among those readers, seeking to determine what literary sociability might look like in the traces left by individuals who never sought a place in the literary spotlight. Using manuscript personal miscellanies held in the Brotherton Collection of eighteenth-century commonplace books as well as in the Bodleian library, this chapter seeks to establish a methodology for identifying signs of coterie life in the selection, arrangement, and original composition of poetry found in these books. My sample size is too limited to support anything but cautious generalizations about coterie practices among readers and writers whose goals were presumably modest, beyond the reach of amply documented correspondence networks; nevertheless, a few observations suggest themselves. First, the appeal of the literary coterie is constant (though not universal), whether for aspiring urban professionals of the 1740s or extended families in country towns in the 1780s. As others have noted, the increasing accessibility of printed reference materials seems to have fostered a diminished use of script to create compendia of useful information, in favor of collections designed for personal entertainment and edification – and in the case of coterie activity, as a literary memorial of sociability. Thus, the genre of the occasional poem, whether commemorating a birthday, a ball, or an untimely death, dominates the original poetry found in these collections and can be used to construct a sketch of coteries as various as those found among more elite practitioners. The compilers of these miscellanies, in keeping with the ever-improving distribution of printed materials in the provinces, seem increasingly to identify themselves as consumers of periodical print; materials are copied wholesale from newspapers and magazines, with their sources carefully attributed. Yet the very existence of the personal miscellany, with its inherent requirement of selection and copying, argues for the active engagement of the periodical and anthology reader. Where that engagement includes the creation of poetry in dialog at once with print and with friends or family members, the transmediating coterie is no less vital than it ever was.

This study will conclude where it began – with the argument that the literary coterie in the midst of the eighteenth century's flowering of print was no single and fixed entity but an evolving and adapting formation based on a value for the production, circulation, and reception of literary writing in the context of social relations. If the media landscape of 1790 no longer offered the intimate interface of 1740, where a young aristocrat and his friends could print a handful of copies of a collaborative work, making it famous while maintaining complete control over access to it, the idea of the coterie continued to capture the attention of both the obscure provincial reader and the savvy London bookseller. It is my aim to bring renewed attention to that idea and its variable practice in eighteenth-century England.