# "As Fully Incomprehensible as the Northern Lights": Literary Identities in *The Adventures of an Author*

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**Abstract:** This essay considers an anonymously-written and understudied novel, *The Adventures of an Author* (1767), as self-consciously reflecting the complexities and multiplicities of professional authorship in the mid-eighteenth century. Containing a vividly-realized fictive print society, this two-volume work revolves around the exploits of a writer-protagonist named Jack Atall who confusedly constructs his own literary autobiography. Investigating *The Adventures of an Author* as a comic negotiation of developing conceptions of authorship and the book trade, the novel is read as ironically underlining how discussions like Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* and Ralph's *Case of Authors* fall short in defining and defending the professional author. It can be argued that *Adventures* represents the period's conceptions of authorship as unstable, depicting the chaotic inclusivity of the Republic of Letters and the inability of authorial polemics to contain and control the operations of the literary marketplace.

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*The Adventures of an Author* (1767), an anonymously-written novel in two volumes, follows the fictive career of a peripatetic writer-hero who styles himself *John Atall, Esquire*. Though purportedly giving readers an original glimpse into the inner workings of the print marketplace as well as the creative process, *Adventures* was critiqued as formulaic, a contributor to the *Critical Review* detecting a stale note in this freshly-published novel. This reviewer observes the widespread stereotyping of literary professionals in "performances of this kind" (216). According to the critic, these metafictional productions are predictable insofar as:

> They generally couple an author and a bookseller together, like a quack-doctor and a merry-andrew; the former giving the word of command, and the other going through all his exercises of buffoonery to please the gaping crowd, and to fill his master's pockets. How far this is a just representation of authorship, we shall leave the fraternity to judge, for our readers cannot. (216)[1]

This review likens the novel to street performance, the interactions of writer-characters and bookseller-characters in *The Adventures of an Author* equated to the

[1] The novel was also reviewed by the *Monthly Review* and the *Gentleman's Magazine*, both considering the novel flawed yet amusing. A pithy evaluation of *The Adventures of an Author* appeared in the latter periodical, the reviewer pronouncing: "This is full of faults and inaccuracies as a piece of writing, but is very sprightly and entertaining" (258).

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rehearsed antics of a mountebank and his clown, low entertainment built around stock characters.[2] Indeed, the *literary* literary professionals in this anonymous work are repeatedly featured in spectacles dependent on a power hierarchy as well as an element of collusion. Nonetheless, this summation of the author-bookseller rapport only illuminates one piece of the jigsaw-puzzle of literary relations and authorial identities within *Adventures*, an undervalued, understudied novel that I examine as reflecting the complexities and multiplicities of eighteenth-century authorship and authorial polemics.[3]

Published the same year as the last volume of Laurence Sterne's bestseller *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767), *The Adventures of an Author* is likewise narrated by an author-protagonist and can also be deemed a "parody of novel writing" (Marshall 283), obsessively referring to its own constructedness. While Christopher Flint views *Adventures* as "exploiting the popularity of Sterne" (38), the self-conscious and obviously biased narrator-character also resembles "the Hack," (as modern scholars call him) who narrates Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* (1704), ironically disclaiming against "the Grub Street brotherhood" (Swift 26) while engaging in its practices. Though the actual author of this hackneyed novel might very well be a hack, readers can assume that (s)he—like Richard Savage in *An Author to be Lett* (1729)—speaks ironically through a persona. A likely descendent of Savage's Iscariot Hackney, he narrator of *Adventures* fixates on the idea and the practice of professional writing, parodically deploying the rhetoric of authorial genius, and, taking aim at the book trade, presenting scenes between literary professionals that ostensibly forward his borrowed arguments about the victimization of authors and the neglect of merit.[4]

Though he indulges in excesses like digression—including a "dissertation upon authors" (1:221)—and self-reflective narration, *Adventures* is no flimsy knock-off of its antecedents, but its own involved foray into the marketplace of letters and comic contribution to an ongoing dialogue about authorship and print culture. Like the hero of Henry Fielding's *The Author's Farce* (1730) and Samuel Foote's *The Author* (1757), the protagonist of *Adventures* is referred to by his profession ("an author") rather than by his name in the work's title. His writing defines his identity within a story that insistently returns to the physical locales of print culture in the metropolis. Yet "author" is no fixed term in the novel: the hero's literary identity is unmistakably in flux as Jack Atall adapts to seek his fame and fortune and to escape poverty. Though the novel's title suggests a single author-subject, a number of other writer-characters enter and exit the narrative, including the hack Mr. Hyper, whose path crosses with the hero's several

[2] Since the sixteenth century, hacks and quacks were linked in the English cultural imagination; Hugh Ormsby-Lennon observes in *Hey Presto! Swift and the Quacks*: "Like other booksellers, [John] Dunton supplemented his income from writing, commissioning printing, and selling books by advertising and selling nostrums" (89).

[3] There is no modern edition of *The Adventures of an Author* and scholars have not yet discovered, or even speculated on, the novel's historical author.

[4] Brean Hammond notes that "by the 1730s there was a strong desire to legitimize the professional author-function and even to address the degree of economic exploitation by the publishing trade" (39). *Adventures* can be read as spoofing efforts to do so, of which there was a surplus by mid-century.

times as Atall "climbs every rung on the professional writer's ladder and down again" (Lupton 59). *Adventures* contains a fictional print society that is arguably more fully realized in the two volumes of this work than in any other eighteenth-century imaginative text since Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad* (1728-1743).

Since its cool initial reception, *The Adventures of an Author*—vastly oversimplified in *The New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature: 1660-1800* as the "education of a young man in the ways and wiles of society" (1001)—has generally been forgotten by both readers and critics. Scholarly treatments of *Adventures* have been brief, and it has been less critiqued than mined for topical references, as it provides a wealth of allusions to particularities of eighteenth-century history and culture.[5] More pertinent to my own scholarly interest in the novel, Christopher Flint and Christina Lupton have recently considered *The Adventures of an Author* in relation to aspects of the eighteenth-century literary marketplace, namely its fictional representations of print materiality and the novel's connection to the mid-century subgenre of the "it narrative."

This essay investigates this little-studied novel as a comic negotiation of developing conceptions of professional authorship in the era of Samuel Johnson, James Ralph, Edward Young, and Oliver Goldsmith. I argue that *Adventures* represents the period's conceptions of authorship as unstable, depicting what I will term the *chaotic inclusivity* of the Republic of Letters and the inability of authorial polemics to contain and control the operations of the literary marketplace.[6] Though the increasingly print-steeped eighteenth century, as Clifford Siskin argues, was invested in the organization of knowledge and the classification and hierarchization of writing, *Adventures* represents authorial identity as amorphous, characterized by the unknowability of multiplicity.

I begin by discussing the novel as an ironic literary (auto)biography that reflects a spectrum of eighteenth-century images and ideas of the modern writer. From there, I discuss *Adventures* as participating—for both comic and satiric ends—in a specious defense of authors, the narrator appropriating, for example, the idea of individual genius articulated in Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759).[7] Next, I read *Adventures* as it engages with James Ralph's *The Case of Authors, By Professions or Trade, Stated with Regard to Booksellers, the Stage, and the Public No Matter by Whom* (1758), a trenchant polemic on commercial letters that is directly quoted, and, at some points loosely dramatized in the pages of this novel. I examine how Atall echoes Ralph, aiming to define the professional author *vis-à-vis* the bookseller and claim agents of the book trade as the drivers of authorial adaptation. I offer a reading of a scene between

[5] For example, the hero's purchase of a prostitute is mentioned in Linda Evi Merians' *The Secret Malady*, a monograph on venereal disease in eighteenth-century Britain and France.

[6] Examining changing conceptions of the republic of letters in the long eighteenth century, Dustin Griffin concludes that this phrase "came to denote not an interactive community of scholars but the unruly crowd of authors who thronged the literary marketplace" (141).

[7] In the latter half of the eighteenth century, a number of writers, some in conversation with Young, published treatises on the topic of genius. This body of theoretical literature includes William Sharpe's *A Dissertation on Genius* (1755), William Duff's *An Essay on Original Genius* (1767), and Alexander Gerard's *An Essay on Genius* (1774).

Atall and Mr—, a bookseller who owns and operates a review journal and who contemplates eventually replacing his staff with a horse-powered machine. *Adventures* points towards the amorphousness of authorial identity as not only the product of the mushrooming opportunities and exigencies of eighteenth-century print culture but of the limitations of theories, stereotypes, and other modes of understanding authorship in a period of cultural democratization.

The narrator of *The Adventures of an Author*, admittedly infected with "*cacoëthes scribendi*" (1:2),[8] conveys to readers an uneven defense of authorship, beginning the novel with abstract reflections on writing before he enters into the particulars of his subject's literary career. After (partially) switching to the third person, he punctuates the narrative with desultory reflections on its composition and makes further points about modern authorship, as both an observer and a practitioner. The narrator-character of *Adventures*, echoing Johnson's claim in the *Adventurer* No. 115, calls his time one "when every man was an author by profession" but on the same page writes admiringly of a hack who "had the faculty of producing fresh pamphlets as diurnally as bakers do hot rolls" (1:62). Young begins *Conjectures on Original Composition* by acknowledging contemporary views on the expansion of the print industry, noting, "some are of opinion, that its growth, at present, is too luxuriant; and that the press is overcharged" (78).[9] His treatise aims at identifying authorial genius, and differentiating it from hackwork, the creating of "duplicates", rather than the "originals", which do something more than "increasing the mere drug of books" (81).[10] Yet Young's distinctions between the "invaders of the press, how voluminous and learned soever" (100) and authors of innate genius are too abstract to be useful. Young deploys a constellation of astronomical images to convey the idea of transcendent genius, pronouncing its appearance "a lucid meteor in the night" (108).[11] He also uses religious and occult terminology ("Heaven"; "mysteries"; "the divine"; "reverence"; "magician"; the "god within") to discuss the source and practice of genius. Such rarefied language veils the professional writer's rather more temporal orbit around London's hubs of publishing activity.

When rhetorically convenient, the narrator of *The Adventures of an Author* likewise conceals the commercial impetus to authorship. In a literary fragment which

[8] This Latin phrase, meaning an insatiable desire to write, comes from Juvenal's *Satires* and figures the inclination to authorship as a kind of disease or physical symptom like an itch. Samuel Johnson deploys this rhetoric in *Adventurer* No. 115, referring to the "epidemical conspiracy for the destruction of paper" (458) and the present zeal for scribbling as an "intellectual malady" (459) for which a "cure" must be discovered (459).

[9] James Raven has charted this print growth, reporting that "publication rates of individual titles mushroomed between the late 1740s and the end of the century" and ultimately, "before 1700 up to about 1,800 different printed items were produced annually, and by 1800, over 6,000" (130-131).

[10] Martha Woodmansee in "The Genius and the Copyright" connects Young's *Conjectures* (1759) to the evolution of copyright law in the period, tracking fundamental ideological changes to considerations of writers and their creative products in both eighteenth-century Germany and England. Genius is bound up in legal definitions of originality because "to ground the author's claim to ownership of his work, then, it would first be necessary to show that this work transcends its physical foundation" (50).

[11] He also declares that "originals shine, like comets" (108) and pronounces that "a Star of the first magnitude among the Moderns was Shakespeare" (89).

the narrator finds in a coffee-house and inserts directly into his *Adventures*, an anonymous writer pontificates on his kind: "in a word … we resemble an aurora borealis, yet we really look upon ourselves as fully incomprehensible as the northern lights, and as yet equally misrepresented as the milky way" (1:222).[12] The self-conscious narrator of Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742) makes a similar boast that "There are certain Mysteries or Secrets in all Trades from the highest to the lowest, from that of Prime-Ministering to this of Authoring, which are seldom discovered, unless to Members of the same Calling" (70). Evident in his claim that "a good physiognomist will always discover a man of real genius, *that is an author*" (1: 4; italics in original) is the idea that writers are a race apart, special in ways that laypeople cannot ascertain. Thus, there are two warring compulsions within the anonymous metaliterary narrative of *Adventures*: the desire to obscure the dirty realities of authorship—the inky hands and inky profits—by placing it above the commercial and material realities of the print market, and the compulsion to highlight the mistreatment of the author by that very system, as I explore below.[13] Avoiding the qualities of the literary product that Young would suggest distinguish a "genius" from an "imitator," the author of *Adventures* extends the sheltering concept of genius over *all* authors, including hacks like himself, ironically highlighting the impossibility of literary exclusivity, necessary for the social ascent of writing from a trade to a profession, within this cultural context.

The narrator, invested in both raising the status of the author and claiming authorial victimization, is irregular in his treatment of the material conditions of commercial authorship, which are alternately mystified and underscored. For example, the narrator objects to the ubiquitous image of "The Distrest Poet," visually rendered by Hogarth in the 1730s.[14] "I would not have it be believed," he asserts, "that every man who may accidentally be seen writing in public, in a shabby coat, a dirty shirt, and a fluxed periwig, is absolutely and bona fide an author by profession" (1: 3). Continuing to define professional authorship without referring to specific mental qualities, he declares that those of his kind are spotted by "the absence of our look—the carelessness of our attitudes—the nonchalance of our behavior—and, above all, the pedantry of our conversation" (1: 5). Essentially, the narrator-character, lazy and imprecise, not to say plagiaristic in his theorizing, does not conceive of the literary profession meaningfully, even when he tries to imbue his occupation with a sense of mystery, glamourizing his trade by obfuscation. "In a word," he vaguely declares, "an author is a perfect phœnomenon [sic], in many respects incomprehensible and unaccountable" (1:5).

[12] The editor-narrator does this at several points in this novel, one chapter consisting of an excerpt from the diary of a fashionable gentleman, thus creating a "bricolage," a textual patchwork involving different authorial identities.

[13] The fictive author of *Adventures*, though transparently ridiculous, can also be compared to Pope, who actually succeeded in rhetorically raising himself above the marketplace of letters, while actually orchestrating his own commercial success behind the scenes. Scott Hess argues that Pope's claim to be a gentleman-poet "mystifies his dependence on these print culture conditions" (2).

[14] This culturally ubiquitous image of the impoverished garret-bound professional writer is perfectly realized in Goldsmith's poem about down-at-heels scribbler Scroggen, who is imagined in sordid detail in "Description of an Author's Bed-Chamber" (published in the *Public Ledger* on 2 May 1760).

Of a piece with the fictive narrator's contradictory definitions of "an author" is the confusion regarding who exactly is at the helm of this metaliterary ship. Like a number of mid-to-late eighteenth-century novels, *The Adventures of an Author* was published anonymously; book production in the period was often a "collaborative, collective, frequently anonymous project" (Greene 101).[15] The novel's supposed attribution hints at collaboration, and there is confusion about who is telling the story in the diegetic world of the narrator-character. The speaker does not name himself until chapter four, and even then only gives us a pen name, one of a jumble of pseudonyms that have overwritten his identity.[16] The splintering of the writer-figure is persistently highlighted in *Adventures* as haphazard and contingent, the author admitting: "I have, in the commerce of this world, been obliged so often to change my name, as well as appearance, that it requires a greater memory than wits are generally endowed with, to remember my primitive appellation" (1:26-27). Though he strangely cannot recall his real name, he lists his pen names, starting with "Hercules Vinegar" and ending with "Pro bono Publico," these appellations suggesting a number of possible authors, but getting us no closer to the truth.[17]

He tells his readers to call him "Jack Atall, a name which I believe is spick and span new, and therefore, upon that account, not devoid of merit" (1:27). In fact, the name Atall is not "spick and span new," but lifted from Colley Cibber's comedy *The Double Gallant* (1707). The author's lie must be taken as ironic and even considered evidence that the novel is *deliberately hackneyed* so as to highlight the inadequacies of the period's stock ways of conceptualizing authorship. Atall is the name of Cibber's title character, a "resourceful" rake, "keenly aware of the advantages of duplicity in a changing social world" (Appleton 148).[18] The unacknowledged "borrowing" of this name suggests the stereotypical eighteenth-century hack's preoccupation with novelty (or at least the appearance of it) and his ease with deceptions like plagiarism and pseudonymity. The novel's title page includes the attribution *Written by Himself and a Friend,* indicating that the adventuring "author" of the title is also supposedly the co-author of the work at hand, or the sole author if "a friend" is euphemistically referring to the editor-character that Jack Atall creates to replace "himself."

Adhering to various conventions of autobiography, the hero-writer begins telling his life story in the first person, briefly outlining his family background and relating

[15] Intriguingly, Janine Barchas posits that "the novel's adherence to conventions of anonymity slowed the professionalization of the novel writer" (70), a mid-century development in commercial authorship evident in the trend towards including the novelist's name on the title page.

[16] Unstated as reasons for hiding behind an assumed name: the author-character wants to elude legal prosecution or escape his debts, or a bad public reputation. See Adam Rounce's *Fame and Failure, 1730-1800: The Unfulfilled Literary Life,* particularly his chapter on Richard Savage, who "became the type of eighteenth-century literary failure writ large" (29).

[17] Captain Hercules Vinegar, is for example, a pen name used by Henry Fielding when he wrote for the *Champion: or British Mercury*, a newspaper described by one scholar as "a fine mesh of the political, the literary, and the journalistic" (Goldgar 113).

[18] The Cibber connection also highlights the extent to which Atall's early identity as an author is wrapped up in, and sometimes at odds with, his identity as a man of fashion orchestrating his own rise in the *beau monde*, for, up until the century's end, "an older model of authorship—the gentleman author who wrote for pleasure or fame—continued to shape the way authors thought of themselves" (Griffin 183).

incidents from his early life, such as an episode of roguery from his schoolboy days and another from his time as a "spouting" lawyer's clerk. But at the end of the fourth chapter, the narrator makes a show of abandoning the "I," proclaiming, "As I have an utter detestation of egotism, I began already to be disgusted at this performance" (1:28), while only superficially deviating from narcissistic Shandean navel-gazing. Thereafter, he tells his own story in the third person as an ostensibly heterodiegetic narrator, posing as an "editor," but continually disrupting this fiction. *Written by Himself and A Friend* thus suggests the unstable bifurcation of the novel's subject into two characters: the writer-hero Atall and the narrative persona, who I argue is the "friend" in the attribution.[19] This confusion regarding the novel's authorship exhibits, in miniature, the chaotic inclusion of an overpopulated literary marketplace.

Writer-hero Jack Atall symbolises the eighteenth-century "Age of Authors" as he enacts multiple literary identities within the pages of these two eventful volumes, serving as a kind of prism to refract the different spectral colours of authorship. Writing is presented as the hero's destiny, for, in the early chapters—when "an author" speaks in the first person—the hero casts himself as a prodigy, while revealing details that in fact implicate him as a born hack, precociously scribbling from a place of ignorance regardless of his material circumstances. The narrator ignores Young's discussion of "fancied genius" (95), while taking up *Conjectures*' insistence on valuing genius above learning. Taking "second place" to genius, learning, argues Young, is inessential. Furthermore, "to neglect of learning, genius sometimes owes its greatest glory" (89). Young's fervent musings beg to be repurposed as a hack's self-congratulatory excuse for idleness. Atall's own scholarly deficiencies go back to his youth and continue into adulthood. As a youngster, the hero "made Latin verses long before [he] learnt whether Great Britain was an island" (1:9) and "was a correspondent to the printer of the York Courant ere [he] was fourteen" (1:10). When he settles on becoming a gentleman-author—one of the authorial types he embodies within the course of the narrative—Atall courts an heiress by writing her poems and letters that are shared among her friends, a coterie of dullards.[20] This bid for Miss L—'s hand and fortune prefigures his mercenary pursuit of financial success in the literary marketplace and suggests the flimsiness of his talents, as the hero's love notes "might be reckoned amongst the number of unmeaning epistles, containing words, phrases, lines, and sentences, which might serve upon that occasion as well as any other, or any other as well as that" (1:99). These letters are what Young would deem "imitations … a sort of manufacture wrought up by those mechanics, art and labour, out of pre-existent materials not their own" rather than "originals," which arise from inventive powers (82).

[19] The narrator also refers to the book as *The Adventures of an Author*. *Written by Himself*, the "and a Friend" is mysteriously dropped (1:137). Eleanor F. Shevlin, discussing titles as a kind of contract in the eighteenth-century and briefly addressing *Adventures,* points out that neither the full nor the partial title "necessarily settle the perplexity surrounding who is narrating" (n. 80).

[20] Atall engages in what Margaret Ezell terms "social authorship," writing for a circle of friends, developing and fortifying social bonds through the "interactive literary mode" of manuscript exchange (69).

Atall's courtship of Miss L—also produces an unpublished manual, as he turns his contested pursuit of the coquette into literary matter: "The Complete Gentleman: Or rules for behaving upon every critical occasion that can occur, wherein honour and punctilio are concerned" (1:134). The narrator puffs Atall's (really his own) treatise as being "of infinite service to young gentlemen upon their first setting out in life" (1:133). The narrator's praise of this work perverts discursive attempts, by Young and an army of other eighteenth-century cultural commentators, to elevate the author to an heroic status.[21] Early in *Conjectures on Original Composition,* Young endorses authors as contributors to "the public good," but with the qualification that their compositions must align with "the sacred interests of virtue," and be of "real service of mankind" (79). Atall's composition, *The Complete Gentleman,* of which we are given a detailed outline, is far from achieving these aims, as it directs its prospective consumers in uncivil and unprincipled behaviour like "debauching" and "ravishing," (1:135). As readers, we recognize—even if the narrator does not—that Atall's manual is not a conduct book, but a *misconduct* book, potentially pernicious in its encouragement of aristocratic vice. Poverty eventually forces Atall to quit the ranks of those "amphibious Things: half 'Squire, half Author," as Ralph terms gentlemen-writers (281). His first inheritance is consumed by his lavish lifestyle with his mistress and he is unable to recover it at the gaming table, his first "expedient to recruit his finances" (1:163). At times resembling the feckless subject of Johnson's *Life of Savage* (1744), Atall is forced by his own lapses in judgment and morality into a life of hack authorship.

Though Atall's narrative progresses chronologically, if episodically, the author-character gaining more knowledge of the book trade, as well as systems of collective and individual patronage, I am hesitant to align *Adventures* with the *künstlerroman* or any other variation on the novel of apprenticeship, understood as depicting "the *harmonious* cultivation of a multifarious identity" (Schweizer 243; my italics).[22] Atall's authorial identity multiplies and divides as he writes on countless topics in different forms and genres: "now poet, politician, biographer, essayist, and, by necessity, philosopher, all within the limits of a sixpenny monthly production" (1:169). The sheer variety that characterizes the writer-hero's career shows the protagonist embodying multiple literary identities, becoming a mascot for "The Age of Authors," (457) Samuel Johnson's famous phrase from *Adventurer* No. 115 (1753), an essay on the period's "universal eagerness of writing" (458). The narrator of *Adventures*, however, exaggerates the distorting effects of marketplace economics on his subject's success as a professional writer, and would maintain that Atall's lightweight, hastily-composed productions are the result of genius externally suppressed. After all, Atall's ill-conceived manual "The Complete Gentleman" as well as his insubstantial missives and verses come out of an earlier time as a "writer of taste" when he had the money and leisure to

[21] The cultural movement to embrace the author-as-hero reaches its zenith in the nineteenth century, discernible not simply in zealous Romantic polemics like Percy Bysshe Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry" (1840), but in the lionization of professional writers like Dickens in the Victorian period.

[22] Flint links *Adventures* to the it-narrative and characterizes this novel as a künstlerroman in which the literary commodity obscures the writer himself, the writer divested of "authorial identity" as writing becomes "coterminous with the printing process" (38).

produce a work of note, but did not: he admits he has not "ever yet wrote an Æneid" (1:74). Yet his apparent persecution as a literary factotum is nevertheless used, or rather abused, to establish the author-hero's identity as beleaguered genius, the narrator periodically declaiming on the injustices of the book trade; he presents the culturally ubiquitous image of the author-as-victim and prefaces the story of his subject with remarks that "the brethren of the quill" (1:2) are subjected to "the tyranny of patentees and booksellers" and the neglect of readers, "the little attention of the town to works of genius, not to say merit" (1:2). When he digresses to relate an episode between the hack author Mr. Hyper and his bookseller Mr. Folio, the putative editor impresses to his reading audience that he is illustrating the harsh realities of authorship with the chapter heading: "*The hard fate of authors, exemplified in the case of Mr. Hyper, poet, politician, and critic*" (1:62). Amplifying claims made by writers like Goldsmith, *Adventures* positions the hero's descent into hack work as the subjugation of genius, the transformation from inspired author to poor, dumb animal, Atall described as "compelled to labour like a mill-horse for the scanty stipend of a guinea and a half a month" (1:170).[23] Thus, in this novel as in the "it-narratives" examined by Mark Blackwell, "hack writers are things, mere instruments of a culture that commodifies texts" (207), the mutable author metaphorically transformed.

Hack writing is envisioned in *Adventures* as well as other metaliterary texts as mental enslavement, an idea articulated by Atall in a conversation he has with a bookseller about James Ralph and the nature of authorship. Quoting Ralph extensively to this unnamed publisher, the author-character tells his interlocutor that: "there is no difference between the writer in his garret and the slave in the mines … both must drudge and starve, and neither can hope for deliverance" (1:210-211). In light of this direct ventriloquization of Ralph it is unsurprising that the narrator uses similar phrases as he reflects on his subject's circumstances: "Mr. Atall was compelled to lay aside the man of fashion, the writer of taste, fancy, and imagination, and commence the bookseller's galley-slave" (1:169).

*The Adventures of an Author* dramatizes stereotypical ways of decrying the book trade in dialogues such as Atall's conversation with Mr— , a bookseller who owns and runs a periodical magazine called the "— Review." The subject of Atall's employment serves as a springboard into more general territory: the commercial production of text. Troublingly, Mr— considers his writer-critics as fungible tools, expendable as soon as they can be rendered redundant by technological progress, for the bookseller discloses to Atall that he "had now the plan of a machine, which by the working of a single horse, would perform all the necessary operations for fabricating a dozen indexes at once" (1:177). The entrepreneur's scheme can be read as a comic representation of the "frenetic" pace of the eighteenth-century review journal, which "aimed to provide

[23] Goldsmith, viewing himself as a captive of the book industry, to publishers and readers, grumbled in the Editor's Preface to *The Citizen of the World*: "I resemble one of those solitary animals, that has been forced from its forest to gratify human curiosity. My earliest wish was to escape unheeded through life; but I have been set up, for halfpence, to fret and scamper at the end of my chain" (15).

prompt and universal coverage of *all* new publications" (327).[24] Conceiving literary criticism only in material and economic terms, Mr— imagines the professional critic and horse as one and the same, their manual labour powering the relentless machine of print.[25] Indeed, Mr— hopes to eventually replace all his hirelings with this contraption, which resembles the fictional bookmaking engine described in the third voyage of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Atall initially misinterprets this long-term plan to thus "supply all the departments of his Review" (1:177) as a "raillery" on the state of the literary marketplace; he thinks Mr— "meant nothing more than to signify that the present race of authors were little more than mere *automates*" (1:178), but realizes that the manager is speaking in earnest about a material change to business operations, a Swiftian literalization of Ralph's heated assertions.

Though Atall is presented at the novel's end as an exception to the proverb "once an author always an author" (2:195)—a *deus ex machina* inheritance frees him from his Grub Street woes towards the end of the second and last volume—he embodies this idea throughout *The Adventures of an Author*. He finds multiple entryways into a labyrinthine print society that turns out to be considerably more difficult to exit, and even his extraliterary activities are couched as delays in his writing career or as fodder for future composition. When Atall leaves Britain—at one point he is confined in a Spanish prison and, after a thrilling escape, ends up aboard a ship of mutineers-turned-pirates—the instability of his fate arguably mirrors the unexpected revolutions of print culture. Atall's literary ventures are of a piece with the hero's other gambles, the figuratively cutthroat print market paralleling the literally cutthroat world of bloody naval battles and violent mutiny.[26]

Moreover, the sheer variety of picaresque experiences in *Adventures of an Author* reflects the chaotic inclusivity of eighteenth-century print society. Authorship, embedded in both the fashionable milieu and the commercial world of letters, is represented through a procession of putative literary professionals, scenes of authors and booksellers used by the narrator-character to fix the figure of the writer as victimized genius. Comically, even as the narrator tries to generate sympathy for his principal subject, he cannot obscure Atall's moral and intellectual failings with general assertions about dehumanizing commercial forces. The publish-or-perish pressures are not the bane of Atall's pursuit of literary excellence, for, when the writer-hero finds himself in a situation of financial stability, he suffers from writer's block. The pseudonymous Atall stands in for every author working in obscurity and no author at all, unable to conceive an original work and unwilling to address his authorial

[24] This episode of *The Adventures of an Author* reflects growing popularity and cultural relevance of review journalism, described by James Basker as "a vast laboratory of non-stop critical activity" (331).

[25] The multiple connotations of "hack"—an eighteenth-century term for hired writers, prostitutes, and horses—is a much referenced point in *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture*. "To be a hack," Pat Rogers explains, "was to traffic commercially in something fundamentally admirable, and thus sully it" (219).

[26] Here, Atall, a literary adventurer, brings to mind Roderick Random and Peregrine Pickle, Tobias Smollett's picaresque heroes, and bears an even stronger resemblance to the title character of *The Adventures of Dick Hazard* (1754), an anonymous novel that depicts the eventful life of an opportunistic Irish rogue-hero who is also held captive by pirates and who also turns to both gambling and professional writing after a stint of London profligacy.

inadequacies. He resorts to the rhetoric of inscrutability, jotting down in an otherwise blank notebook: "N.B. Genius is arbitrary—All attempts to force it ineffectual" (2:162). Trying to justify his personal failure, he adopts both the discursive pose of genius and of "Pater-Noster-Row" victimhood (2:163), the London street name a metonym for mercenary publishers in Atall's complaint.[27]

The writer-character's disingenuous comments evidence the period's need for expanding conceptions of the literary marketplace beyond the paradigm of oppressed author and oppressive bookseller; to define the professional author by this material relationship just evades the problem of authorial classification, devolving as it does aesthetic responsibility to the bookseller. Abstraction likewise clouds the issue, the novel ironically underlining how discussions like Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* and Ralph's *Case for Authors*—both at times highly subjective and imprecise—fall short in defining and defending the professional writer. Loosely borrowed by the novel's narrating hack, these sentiments prove comically vulnerable to appropriation, and thus enable rather than curtail the Republic of Letter's chaotic inclusivity, the central concern of so many eighteenth-century cultural commentators.

[27] Book historian James Raven identifies St. Paul's Churchyard, Paternoster Row as "the engine room of periodical and popular publishing in the late eighteenth century" (192).

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