Introduction
Lane's Press

In 1798, at the height of his success, William Lane famously identified ten of the Minerva Press's "particular and favourite" authors, all women: Anna Maria Bennett, Regina Maria Roche, Mary Meeke [*sic*], Agnes Musgrave, Ann Howell, Mary Charlton, Isabella Kelly, Eliza Parsons, Elizabeth Bonhote and Anna Maria Mackenzie.[1] Lane had good reason to boast of these exceptionally popular and prolific women novelists, some of whom he had been cultivating since the mid-1780s. For by pursuing their professional careers at the Minerva Press under Lane's guidance, these women authors had not only achieved celebrity and influence with a broad readership for themselves; they had also enabled Lane to grow his business from a corner of his father's Whitechapel poultry shop into the landmark complex of busy printing house and voluminous lending library at Leadenhall Street. The Minerva Press carried these women's novels across England, Scotland and Ireland to the United States through the network of circulating libraries and business franchises that Lane's genius built, and to continental Europe via translations; but they and their female cohort – which included Susannah Rowson, Elizabeth Helme, Elizabeth Fenwick and Jane West – were responsible for the irresistible appeal of Minerva Press fiction, for the ascendancy of its several characteristic novel genres and for the Press's widespread, unflagging, transnational readership. Lane made efforts to diversify – his list also contained some novels by male authors such as Robert Bage, Henry Pye, William Godwin and Charles Brockden Brown; a few reprints of popular works that had earlier appeared under other imprints, such as an abridged *Robinson Crusoe* and Longueville's *The Hermit*; some translations from the German or the French by Sophia Lee, Elizabeth Griffith and Charlotte Lennox; and the odd conduct book, cookbook, long poem or topical pamphlet. But the public's favorite women authors stamped Lane's press indelibly with their mark. When nineteenth-century critics sought to denigrate the

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Minerva Press, it was by the supposedly "trashy" productions of its popular women authors that they characterized it.

Their glib dismissal has obscured the presence of two very different periods in the Press's history. The second began in 1802, when Lane made his erstwhile apprentice, Anthony King Newton, his partner. Newton began to change the Minerva Press's character even before he took over sole management in 1809 and reduced it in short order to a remaindering operation.[2] Under Newton, there were new women authors, a couple of whom had published a first novel under Lane: Sarah Green, Medora Gordon Byron, Barbara Hofland, Mrs. Forster, Louise Stanhope, Catherine Ward. But now they were increasingly overshadowed by prolific male novelists such as Francis Lathom, Anthony Frederick Holstein and Thomas Pike; by proliferating translations from the German or the French of male authors such as August Heinrich Julius Lafontaine (fifteen novels), Francois Ducray-Duminil (six novels) and Guillaume Pigault-Lebrun (nine novels); and by Newton's copious posthumous reprinting of authors from the previous century, such as Daniel Defoe, John Gay, Robert Dodsley, Lord Chesterfield, William Coombe and William Dodd. It was also on Newton's watch that the Minerva Press became an object of contempt. After faithfully commenting on each of Lane's published fictions, *The Critical Review* and *The Monthly Review* showed their opinion of Newton's list by largely ignoring it unless a favorite author from the Lane years reappeared.[3] Elsewhere, the founding of *The Edinburgh Review* in 1802 heralded an era of concerted assault. Tarred in retrospect with the same demeaning brush in reviews, quarterlies and monthlies, Lane's "particular and favourite" women authors had belied Francis Jeffrey's observation that "present popularity . . . is, after all, the only safe passage to future glory" before he made it.[4] By 1819, Lane's powerful and innovative press had been sunk into irrelevance, and they into contempt.

This book is about the glory-years of the Minerva Press under William Lane and the female fiction writers he nurtured, some of whom continued to be productive into the 1800s. The Lane years were when the Minerva Press developed and brought into vogue several new genres of fiction besides what we call Gothic, most of which continued to flourish in Victorian Britain. These included the Historical Novel, the Tale of the Times, the Provincial Novel, the Regional Novel or Proto-National Tale, the Fairy Tale, the Adultery Novel, the Mystery Story and that peculiarly British form of *Bildungsroman*, the Two Sisters Novel. This is also when Lane made his circulating library a vehicle for transmission to nineteenth-century readers of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century fictions, many

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by women, and turned both these and his own publications into resources upon which nineteenth-century male as well as female novelists would draw. In both regards, the Minerva Press's key role as a bridge between eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fiction has largely been ignored, as has the Press's transnational influence. This can be measured not only by Lane's sales and wide system of circulating libraries but also by translation into French or German, and by Irish or American piracies, of around a third of his fiction list (see Appendix B).

Lane published both conservative and radical authors. He also allowed and seemingly encouraged Minerva women writers to use their fictions to address the serious and controversial social and political issues of the day, including those bearing directly on women's lives. Minerva women novelists were contentious and polemical during contentious and polemical decades. At a time when women had no standing either in the public sphere or in law, the Minerva Press gave them a public forum where they could address, and seek to amend, the shortcomings of governing elites, and women's vulnerabilities inside and outside the household-family due to subordination and dependence, familial and/or financial dispossession, sexual assault, domestic violence, forced and loveless marriages, adultery, abuses of power, poverty, and the paucity of available work for genteelly bred women. Minerva women authors showed how negatively women were affected by the proliferating "crim con" (adultery) trials, by new laws of bastardy and inheritance, by the triumph in a flourishing commercial empire of wealth over birth and by the demands of virtue itself. But they also illustrated the important and courageous roles women had played in British history and in the formation of the British nation. They used their "parallel Histories" to address such pressing contemporary issues as dynastic succession, government instability and masculine idealization of chivalry and war. They deployed their "Tales of the Times" to comment on the French Revolution and to ridicule and correct the nationally destabilizing follies of the British aristocracy, while their domestic fiction displayed the evils of upper-class culture and promoted proto-Victorian upper-middle-class values. Lane, who recruited an exceptionally large number of women writers hailing from the English, Scottish, Irish, Welsh and American provinces, also countenanced debate between pro-Union and nationalist fictional representations of relations among the culturally diverse nations newly contained within Britain and the Empire. He was not afraid to publish national tales which – unlike their nineteenth-century successors – puffed the superiority of the Celtic fringe over the corrupt and villainous English, and celebrated the happiness obtained by retreat from England to

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harmonious local community in one's native Welsh, Irish or Scottish country. It was not happenstance that, with few notable exceptions, eighteenth-century reviewers avoided intellectual and political engagement with Minerva's woman-centered fiction by dismissing their representations of female difficulties as "improbable" or by ignoring the ideas and arguments they conveyed, to concentrate instead on uncontentious issues of grammar, style and artistic representation. Nineteenth-century critics just pretended that Minerva Press fiction lacked content and ideas.

Despite a great deal of very useful bibliographical work and some studies of individual authors or individual works, our focus has been unrelentingly on "Gothic." We have no picture yet of Minerva Press publications under Lane – no informed sense of the multiple and hybrid genres he promoted, of the place of "Gothic" within them, of how they were constructed and asking to be read, and of what he and his popular female authors were using their often-innovative genres to do. The principal goal of this book is to begin to supply these lacks.

That there was more than one genre in play at the Press is clear from Lane's list, which he organized generically, using his titles and subtitles to specify which of several kinds of story a reader was picking up or picking out. This has escaped us largely, it seems, because disparaging nineteenth-century critics characterized all Minerva Press fictions as "Gothic." There is already some suspicion that equating the Minerva Press with this single genre is misleading – recent critics have confirmed Deborah McLeod's finding that Lane really published very little that was wholly "Gothic." Scholars have also maintained that "Gothic" is an "indeterminate," "heterogeneous," "internally conflicted," "ambiguous and shifting term" and notably not used by Lane.[5] Working with the terms that Lane *did* use in this study will confirm David Duff's observations that "generic terminology played a key role both in the marketing process and the broader organization of knowledge," that "genres have commercial and organizational power" and that "titles and subtitles are especially indicative, as places where generic affiliations and aspirations are directly revealed or strategically concealed."[6]

This study follows the generic leads provided by Lane's titles. It reproduces the organizational taxonomy that Lane used in his own promotional materials to explore the form and content of the genres he specified through his titles and the volumes that constructed them.

Chapter 1 lays the foundation. It explains why it made good commercial sense in the latter part of the eighteenth century to make titles and subtitles load-bearing generic signifiers. It analyzes Lane's clever use of

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combinations of geographical, temporal and formal markers to allow borrowers and buyers to see from a volume's title and subtitle what kind of story it contained. This chapter also describes the construction and range of Lane's principal genres and identifies some of the once ubiquitous methods of imitation that Minerva's women authors used to engender the Press's hybrid, innovative and debating texts. Like nesting Russian dolls, then, the organization of this study embraces and repeats Lane's own organization of the Press's fictions as indicated in his titles, while the genres thus indicated embrace fictions engendered by contemporary techniques of imitation and innovation, which made repetition with difference a primary mode of communication and debate. The advantage of this method is that it works with the selections, identifications and groupings of fiction made at the Minerva Press to discover from these how each genre was conceived there, and which were the concerns and topics of its principal debating texts.

Chapters 2–7 of this study are devoted to Lane's principal genres. Each chapter begins by identifying the relevant titular signifiers and by introducing the features common to most instances of the Minerva genre or genres it tackles. The body of each chapter is then devoted to detailed analyses of multiple texts that collaborated to construct the genre in question, with a view to bringing out the issues that Minerva's woman-authored and woman-centered texts were addressing by its means, and some of the differences and debates among them. These six chapters cover nine major genres: Historical Fiction, Terror and Mystery Fiction ("Gothic"), Fairy Tales, Tales of the Times, National Tales, Wanderers' Tales, Novels of Education, Female Biography and Domestic Fiction centered on marital issues (compatibility, adultery, divorce, widowhood, remarriage). There are surprises in each generic category. For instance, contrary to what nineteenth-century reviewers and critics have led us to expect, Minerva's women authors did not champion Walpolean Gothic; and contrary to what some modern critics have argued, they did distinguish quite clearly between "Gothic" and Historical Fiction. As we will see, in addition to describing the differences between these genres in some prefaces, Minerva's women authors produced quantities of fact-based alternative histories of England from the Norman Conquest to the seventeenth century while offering their readers sophisticated theoretical defenses of fictional histories and arguments about how "true history" should work. One could reasonably argue that the Historical Novel, and indeed the National Tale and the Mystery Story, had their inception in the Minerva Press, rather than in the later writings of a Walter Scott, a Sydney Owenson or a Wilkie Collins.

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Surprisingly, too, most of Minerva's Tales of the Times, Novels of Education and Domestic Fiction promoted values that we associate with the Victorians rather than with Georgian Britain during the 1790s. But then, as we will see, the Press's woman-authored and woman-centered fictions often proposed solutions to the political, social and cultural evils they critiqued. These are collected and discussed in the study's Conclusion.

Since Lane was already experimenting with novel genres of story to see what would "take" before he named his press Minerva in 1790, the analyses in these chapters often go back to the 1780s, when Lane was assembling his first regular women authors and laying the foundation for the several kinds of fiction he would continue to develop throughout his publishing career. Each chapter addresses the majority of fictions Lane published in each genre for the twenty-year period before A. K. Newton's ascension without claiming to be exhaustive (for the novels discussed, see Appendix A), but notice is taken when an unusually large number of works in a particular genre has disappeared, whether because they were read until they fell apart or because they were lost or thrown away. Generically, the Oriental Tale has been omitted in favor of the Fairy Tale because Lane's contributions here have been overlooked by the scholarship, and because Minerva Faerie seems to have had an interesting and unexpected impact on the development of the realist novel. Generically, too, in contradistinction to his Regional Fiction with its National Welsh, Irish, Scottish or American Tales, Lane's Domestic Fiction is overwhelmingly set in the English provinces. It thus literally embodied the double meaning of the word "domestic" – "Belonging to the home, house or household" and "The internal or 'home' affairs of a country or state" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Because the cohabitation of these two senses in this one word does not leap to mind when we speak of domestic fiction now, and because the older meaning of "province" ("one's homeland, native land or the particular district to which one belongs," *Oxford English Dictionary*) seems to have been lost too, I have doubled up on the terms – domestic-provincial, in relation to the material in Chapter 7.

Recognizing the importance of reintegrating Minerva fiction within the larger literary marketplace, while concentrating principally on Gothic, Elizabeth Neiman, Hannah Doherty Hudson and Yael Shapira have begun to study exchanges between Minerva Press and non-Minerva Press fictions and/or authors to show that "the Minerva Press and other popular publishers exert[ed] a powerful force on other literary works of the age."[7] Valuable and necessary as that unquestionably is, it is not my goal here. Given the hundreds of volumes Lane published, the number of genres with

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which they experimented and our unfamiliarity with most of this material, it is hard enough to be clear and cogent about the Press's offerings without attempting simultaneously to do justice to the many interrelations and interactions between Minerva Press and non-Minerva Press fictions. This study therefore focuses on Lane's publications and mostly remains within the boundaries of the Press. Each chapter can be read independently or in the larger context of the Press's generic offerings. I hope that analyses delimited in this way will prove as useful to scholars engaged in the essential work of putting Minerva Press fiction back in the contemporary market for fiction and to scholars engaged in the equally important work of revisioning literary history as to those interested in particular authors, in the Press and/or in the history of the book. A study delimited in this way also invites further scholarly work.

That said, this study does occasionally rapidly situate novels or genres in relation to what came before or after. These are gestures designed to recall not only that Minerva Press fiction needs to be reinserted into literary history more fully than I can do here but also that the Press's principal and most effective women writers knew themselves to be part of an ongoing tradition. Eliza Parsons, for instance, described herself as coming "after a BURNEY, a SMITH, a REEVE, and a BENNETT" and "other excellent female novelists" and measured herself against them accordingly; it can be no accident, either, that the novelists she named were all associated with circulating libraries.[8] Occasional gestures beyond the Press are also designed to remind us that the links between texts were fashioned by imitative practices everywhere still in use, which Plutarch had been teaching writers and readers for centuries. Thanks to techniques for borrowing and altering models taken from the works of others (plots, scenes, characters, themes, issues) which enabled fiction to change with the times by changing and adapting what was borrowed, imitative iterations connected fictions every which way across time and space. They enabled earlier fictions (Barthes's "already read" or, if one prefers, "a Burney, a Smith, a Reeve" and "other excellent writers") to echo through Minerva's woman-authored fictions, and Minerva's genres, issues and authors to replay in nineteenth-century novels. The family resemblances created by connective lines of imitation which crossed through Lane's publications as well as through previous, contemporary and subsequent fictions invite modern scholars to reconceive the history of fiction from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century as a rich, but as yet unexplored, history of imitation-borne conversations among books. The same family resemblances invite readers of this study to enjoy one of the great

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contemporary pleasures of reading fictions (or here, accounts of fictions) as imitative writing: that of recognizing resonances, allusions, reuses and alterations of other texts for oneself.

Questions of Value

The legacy of derogatory, misogynistic nineteenth-century critics has made issues of evaluation inseparable from any study of the Minerva Press, not least because their negative judgments are still shaping our scholarly studies of the Press.

A good start has been made in combating such judgments by discovering how they came about. Thanks to the scholarship of the last three decades, we now know what eventually happened to put the Minerva Press beyond the pale for readers of discernment and taste. Ina Ferris's groundbreaking research showed how the nineteenth-century male literary establishment used its critical authority to marginalize the many women authors who had developed the novel in England and dominated the genre from its inception to give male authors charge of domestic fiction and dignify them as sole purveyors of the novel as an important and respected "literary" genre. Romantic critics rewrote history to erase the novel's eighteenth-century female founders and supply their place with an inevitably short line of eighteenth-century male predecessors – Fielding, Richardson, Smollett and Sterne – for the nineteenth-century male-authored novels whose literariness they acclaimed.[9] Since Ferris, scholars have demonstrated in some detail how male reviewers, critics and novelists – Scott primary among them – used hierarchical characterizations of gender, genres and taste to distinguish men's supposedly superior novels from women's not dissimilar works, and to elevate critics' own supposedly just judgments above popularity with an allegedly vulgar, unlearned and undiscriminating public.[10] Recent study of efforts to sink novels under the weight of their supposed excess by attacking their overproduction, self-replication and commodification continues to attest to Romantic criticism's own self-replicating excess.[11]

Modern scholarship has also shown that Lane was resented and reviled by the bookselling establishment for making his fortune by flouting the London book trade's traditional pursuit of "high profit by low-volume trading."[12] Lane's effective and highly profitable commercial tactics threatened to make traditional methods of bookselling obsolete – especially during the first decade of the nineteenth century when steep rises in the cost of paper, which put book purchase beyond most people's means and

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produced a spate of bankruptcies in the trade, favored circulating libraries and dramatically expanded the footprint of the Minerva Press, which published a third of all new novels that decade.[13] The importance of circulating libraries both as publishers of novels and as destinations for new fiction had been growing exponentially since the 1760s and 1770s, with the result, troubling to many, that "independent, demand-led publishing 'under general patronage'" of the borrowing public increasingly shaped the market for fiction and the fictions authors wrote.[14] One might add a personal factor: Lane's enormous market success may have appeared particularly galling because, unlike other contemporary publisher-proprietors of circulating libraries such as Thomas Hookham, Thomas Lowndes and the Noble brothers, Lane was not a team player. Where they participated in congers to share the risks and profits of publication or appeared on imprints as vendors of other booksellers' books, Lane generally worked alone. This may not have been entirely his choice: he does not appear to have served an apprenticeship with an established London printer or bookseller as was the norm and may have been treated as an interloper as a result.

During the early nineteenth century, then, what Emma Clery calls "the self-appointed cultural elite" masked print culture's rivalries and factional politics in supposedly authoritative and disinterested literary evaluations.[15] They weaponized these to make it appear that the most successful and influential players in the literary marketplace were its greatest failures. They made no secret of this. In 1809, for instance, an anonymous article designed to quash the "literary pretentions" of three bestselling women novelists – Ann Radcliffe, Anna Maria Bennett and Charlotte Smith – brazenly asserted that Minerva Press author Anna Maria Bennett "was a fashionable writer, and as such holds but a very precarious claim on the approbation of posterity."[16] Nineteenth-century critics and reviewers had to denigrate popularity into mere "fashion," and dismiss its importance as a criterion of value, to counteract Mrs. Bennett's and Lane's huge and indubitable success. But their ingenious blanket argument stuck – that their very *popularity* proved that Minerva's woman-authored novels were all equally bad; and that, while these novels might entertain flighty young girls and idle women, they did not have anything to say that serious people needed to hear. As an anonymous reviewer put it in 1820, the Minerva Press published "sentimental trash"; all the novels issuing from it "consequently . . . share in the general contempt *attached* to those poor productions which, like the redundant and needy members of a great house, have nothing but sounding titles to sustain them"[17] (my italics). His passive turn of phrase leaves

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"attached" without a subject, giving his readers to understand that the contempt "attached" by critics like himself to Minerva Press novels was that of all right-thinking people and thus, by implication, that any reader who thought otherwise should be ashamed of the wretchedly common and effeminate taste they betrayed. Despite our efforts to expand the canon, traces of this romantic idea that popular fiction is formulaic, qualitatively inferior, empty of serious content and fit only for the uncritical masses lives on, especially in what concerns the Minerva Press. We pretend that the eighteenth-century writers we canonize, like Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, Clara Reeve and Charlotte Smith, did not write "trade books" for circulating libraries and popular audiences just as Anna Maria Bennett or Anna Maria Mackenzie did; and we canonize male novelists such as Robert Bage, Charles Brockden Brown and William Godwin by playing down or resolutely ignoring the fact that some or all of their novels were published by Lane.

Negative association of popular with formulaic fiction is puzzling not only given our diametrically opposite treatment of Shakespeare's or Dickens's popularity with the public but also in the wake of recent scholarly work on "discourse genres." This has shown that *all* communication – quotidian as well as literary, oral as well as written, informal as well as formal – depends on the constant reuse and reinvention of generic formulae. We now realize that to write or speak is not "the random product of a free subject operating 'outside' or 'above' the language system," as the Romantics and post-Romantics pretended, but "the production of . . . semantic, structural and contextual meanings in accordance with generic norms." In everyday oral and written communications of all kinds – in greetings, jokes, news stories, sports commentary, ordinary conversation, invective, sermons or whatever – as well as in literary works, generic norms determine what language and meanings are appropriate to the situation and context, what may or may not be said by whom, what actions may or must transpire as a result, how new or altered meanings or structures of discourse are generated – and thus how the real is constructed, perceived and acted upon.[18] As Anis Bawerski puts it, to speak or write is always "to position oneself within genres." However, this does not confine us to a Fredric Jameson-style prison-house of language because genres "both sort and generate" and because "social and rhetorical conditions are constantly being reproduced and transformed as speakers and writers act within them."[19] Writing is never merely empty, dead and formulaic because, in John Frow's words, "texts do not simply have uses which are mapped out in advance by the genre; they are themselves uses of genre, performances of or allusions to the norms and conventions which form them

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and which they may in turn transform." Since "new genres emerge out of contact with those already in use and evolve as they reflect changing values and assumptions," and since each text participates in several genres (as novels did *par excellence*), texts demonstrate – against purist neo-classicists and Romantic genre-theory – "the impossibility of *not* mixing genres."[20] As we will see in Chapter 1, all this was once part of what eighteenth-century writers and readers in general, and Minerva Press writers and readers in particular, knew and practiced as "Imitation."

In addition to Ina Ferris's demonstration of the bias of Romantic critics, recent historians of the book and of reading have begun to dismantle the nexus of presuppositions supporting negative judgments of the Minerva Press by uncovering Romantic falsifications of the facts. To put popular circulating library fiction beyond the pale, critics presented circulating libraries as repositories of trivial fiction, the pastime of idle women, flighty maidservants and foolish girls. But we now know that most circulating libraries contained more nonfiction than fiction, that many served as elegant meeting places for the genteel and that several also supplied spaces where leisured patrons could sit, read and chat about the journals provided. Scholars have also discovered that circulating libraries like Lane's were not only, or even primarily, patronized by women and girls, and that romances, novels and chapbooks were not popular only with women, the unlearned or the "vulgar" lower orders. Jan Fergus's landmark study of borrowers found that even in the provinces, "all classes of men except laborers consumed novels – clergymen, medical men, schoolmasters, country gentlemen, tradesmen and servants – but as a rule, professional men predominated."[21] Other historians of reading have found that the gentry regularly read the chapbooks we once considered lower-class fiction; that children read what we consider adult books and adults what we consider children's books; that more ladies than we had supposed mastered the classical tongues and the classical learning supposedly reserved for gentlemen; and that people born in the lower ranks regularly bettered themselves by reading and study.[22] Historians of reading have further shown that solitary, silent reading was not yet the norm – novels were regularly read aloud even in the middling and lower ranks, to families in households, as entertainment for visitors, or as accompaniment to sewing bees and routine artisanal labor, to give those who were perpetually surrounded by the same people and engaged in the same routine tasks, something novel to think and talk about.[23] The readership for fiction was thus far broader, the occasions for reading more various and conversations about stories more

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frequent than nineteenth-century critics pretended. One might say that by making fiction affordable and readily available for domestic, sociable and work-a-day purposes to borrowers at most ranks, circulating libraries in general, and the many circulating libraries throughout the British Isles and the Americas instituted, supported and supplied by Lane in particular, played an invaluable social role.

Contrary to what nineteenth-century Romantic critics pretended, too, there is little evidence that the Minerva Press was dismissed as "a common reservoir of sentimental trash" during the 1780s and 1790s when Lane's novels first appeared, or that the fiction published by Lane was evaluated differently from other fiction either by reviewers or by readers during these decades.[24] Moralists and conduct-book writers certainly opposed novel-reading throughout the eighteenth century. And since most reviewers were needy, classically trained men trading their learning for bread, and the novel was considered a "low" rather than a learned genre, reviewers liked to indicate that they considered novels as a genre less worthy of their time and attention than historical scholarship, learned treatises, works of theology and factual travel literature. They condescended even to fictions they approved, for instance by deeming them "better than the general run of such productions." But during the Lane years, reviewers in *The Critical*, *English* and *Monthly Reviews* and in *Town and Country* distinguished among novels, including among those published by the Minerva Press. Some Minerva publications were certainly denigrated: one critic, for instance, called *The Follies of St. James Street* (1789) "trifling and insipid"; another declared that "the plan of execution" in *Abstract: A Character from Life* (1797) "does not discover talents that are in any respect superior to the generality of novel writers"; a third complained that *Cordelia or a Romance of Real Life by Sophia King* (1799) is "a gloomy tale, not very probable in its incidents, and not very interesting in its progress."[25] But many Minerva Press fictions were admired – for instance, critics praised *Celeste, A Novel by Mrs. Johnston* (1790) as "one of the best works he has encountered"; "wished our circulating libraries were always so well supplied" as by *The History of Miss Meredith, A Novel by Mrs Parsons* (1790); argued that *Secresy or the Ruin on the Rock by a Woman* (1795) [Eliza Fenwick] "deserves a place of some distinction in the first of interesting novels"; and judged that *Antoinette, A Novel* (1796) had "considerable merit."[26] Reviewers during the 1780s and 1790s usually said something positive about novels they disliked and something critical about works they admired, so it is perfectly possible to compile lists of negative observations.[27] But there was enough solid praise for Lane's fictions for him to reprint long positive extracts from

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reviews in *The Critical* and *Monthly* under each of the novels he advertised at the end of other novels as "Just Published at the Minerva Press."

For the most part, then, critics and reviewers do not yet appear to have prejudged novels *en bloc* by their publisher or by their association with circulating libraries, and only occasionally mentioned these.[28] Thomas Wilson even observed in 1797 that "Many of the best works of fancy published of late years, are the production of female pens, which it is possible might never have appeared, nor their labours been rewarded, but for Circulating Libraries."[29] When he issued *Literary Memoirs of Living Authors of Great Britain* in 1798, David Rivers too largely ignored publishers in his evaluations, noting only whether novels had appeared in duodecimo or octavo to make them easier to locate on circulating library shelves.[30] Rivers judged Frances Burney d'Arblay and Charlotte Smith to be the "first Novel Writers of the day," but found Minerva Press authors Anna Maria Bennett, Elizabeth Helme, Anna Maria Mackenzie and Eliza Parsons sufficiently praiseworthy to include – alongside Charlotte Lennox, Hester Chapone, Elizabeth Montagu, Mary Hays, Mary Shelley, Hannah More, Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Clara Reeve – among only twenty-seven entries for women writers in all genres. He also admitted entries for Harriet Lee, Mrs. Gunning and Maria Regina Dalton (Roche) on the strength of Minerva Press novels that he attributed to them. Publishing with the Minerva Press was not yet critically disabling in 1798. As Emma Clery observed, "the summary dispatch of Minerva as mere 'bad' writing, entertainment designed specifically for the undiscriminating masses, does not take place until after 1800."[31]

One way in which ordinary readers expressed their positive and negative judgments, of course, was through what they chose to buy and borrow. James Raven found that readers' judgments ensured that the most frequently read and reprinted novels and novelists of the 1780s and 1790s included a disproportionately large number of Minerva Press novels and novelists alongside novels that modern scholars have canonized.[32] Authors we now consider canonical likewise not only read the novels Lane published but also identified Minerva Press fictions they admired. Coleridge, for instance, described Anna Maria Bennett's *The Beggar Girl and Her Benefactors* (1797) as "the best novel *me judice* since Fielding."[33] He was not alone in "ranking" Mrs. Bennett highly for, as *The Lady's Monthly Museum* tells us, Mrs. Bennett's novels were "estimated among the first productions of their kind."[34] Thomas Babington Macauley had reread Mrs. Meeke's novels so often as a youth that he knew them by heart. Although otherwise hostile to eighteenth-century authors, he continued to reread her novels

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after being told that it was "vulgar" to like them, and even in 1819 spoke of their "blessed effects."[35] That Jane Austen was able to laugh at conventional characterizations of novel heroines and select as many as six named "horrid" Minerva Press novels to satirize in *Northanger Abbey* indicates her familiarity with Minerva Press fiction and the irreverent wit with which she entertained her family – not, as she stressed, that she was condoning "Reviewers' . . . abuse of such effusions of fancy" or seeking to "degrade" them by "contemptuous censure" herself.[36] Indeed, her satire of "Gothic" fiction in *Northanger Abbey* accorded perfectly with the practice of women writers at the Minerva Press. Austen, who did not publish with Minerva, also addressed issues raised in non-"Gothic" Minerva Press fictions in her other novels and borrowed many of her characters' names from them. These were not the only nineteenth-century authors to imbibe circulating library fiction in their formative years, to remember their borrowings fondly and/or to incorporate them in their writings. The short list includes Wordsworth, Scott, Cowper, Burns, Keats, Shelley, John Clare, Southey, Thomas Cooper, George Crabbe, Leigh Hunt, all the Austens and all the Burneys. Circulating library fiction, in general, and Minerva Press fiction in particular, played a larger and more significant role in the transmission of eighteenth- and development of nineteenth-century prose fiction than Romantic and post-Romantic critics permitted us to suspect.

Negative judgments of the Press are perhaps inevitable nevertheless as long as we remain within the straightjacket of the Aesthetics of Originality that we inherit from the Romantics, despite postmodernity's efforts to free us from them.[37] Elizabeth Wanning Harries rightly maintains that to appreciate the aesthetics and distinctive modus operandi of woman-authored fairy tales after nineteenth-century critics denigrated and erased them to puff Perrault and Grimm, it is essential to "reconsider the evaluative terms that have been part of the aura surrounding the canonical [tales]" for "canons tend to be self-validating; that is, the qualities they possess become the qualities that we look for in our reading and praise all over again where we find them."[38] The same holds for the other woman-authored and woman-centered genres published and promoted by William Lane at the Minerva Press.

The alternative, once commonplace, *non*-Romantic approach to literary history and literary evaluation invoked and imitated in this study was grounded in imitation. As noted above, imitation still dominated writerly practice during the 1780s and 1790s – even the male Romantic poets canonized by the New Critics for their "originality" regularly imitated (i.e., cited, creatively reworked and adapted) ancient myths and

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longstanding poetic forms. Consequently, as Hannah Doherty Hudson contends, we need a "broader and more nuanced understanding of imitation" than Romantic critics have left us to properly appreciate "Romantic-era popular (or not so popular) fiction."[39] Clara Reeve's critical work, *The Progress of Romance* (1785), which was contemporary with the earliest of Lane's novels, is particularly useful here. Attacking proto-Romantic critics like Thomas Warton, Thomas Percy and James Beattie, Reeve represented herself in traditional terms as "an industrious bee" who had "cull'd from various flowers [her] share of Honey" and "methodiz'd" what she had culled. Rightly so, for she drew on methods of imitation and on an interactive Aesthetics of Reuse that had been taught and practiced by writers – learned and popular, literary and not – and assumed by readers since the Renaissance, and that continued to be taught even by late eighteenth-century belletrists like Hugh Blair.[40]

Reeve's traditional, generic- and imitation-based approach to literary history and literary evaluation offers a particularly useful version of each because she made it clear that she was responding to problems posed for critics and for the manners and morals of society by a wildly proliferating market for fiction that had been dominated by circulating libraries since the 1760s. This had not only produced a sharp increase in the number of fictions published each decade; it had also multiplied the number of non-elite readers by facilitating access to books. That mattered not only because fictions were thought to transmit ideas, values, and morals but also because they were thought capable of inspiring imitation and belief "even without the intervention of the will," as Samuel Johnson famously put it in *Rambler* #4. Jacobins and anti-Jacobins fought one another in and through their fictions during the bellicose 1790s because both sides believed this to be true. What is interesting about Reeve in this regard is that while sharing contemporary recognition of fiction's power to shape conduct and belief, she rejected the authority claimed by learned critics to judge for others. Dismissing masculine critical efforts to control women's reading as ineffective and impractical, she urged female borrowers – especially those charged with the education of the young, as by the 1780s women increasingly were – to take it upon themselves to sort through "the Chaos of the Circulating Library," where the formally feeble and formally excellent, the morally sound and morally specious, the safely conservative and dangerously radical were intermingled on the same shelves, by using the two-pronged method of literary criticism she modeled to judge for themselves which works had "merit" and deserved to be read. As we will see in the last section of Chapter 1, Reeve pitted traditional imitation-based literary

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history and literary evaluation against new, nationalizing antiquarians and extractive proto-Romantic literary historians such as Percy, Warton and Beattie who "except a very few works of capital merit . . . consign all the rest to oblivion."[41] She used the methods and assumptions of the traditional Aesthetics of Reuse to contest those of the Romantic Aesthetic of Originality. The methods and assumptions of the Aesthetics of Reuse are also what will be used in the Conclusion to this study to evaluate Lane's fictions.

Reeve makes it possible both to appreciate "the almost infinite variety [fiction] affords" and to recognize again that the stories which antiquarians and Romantic critics dismissed blanket-fashion are "equally entitled to our attention and respect as any other works of genius and literature."[42] That also seems a worthwhile ambition for this book.

Lane's "Lady-Authors"

Between 70 and 80 percent of all fiction was published anonymously during the eighteenth century. This practice has been attributed to convention, to female modesty, to fear of losing caste and to shame at earning one's bread by writing novels. Anonymity may also just have been prudent in the often-viperous critical climate. As an author told his bookseller in a partly fictional dialogue: "I would be rather pleas'd to own / Myself unknowing and unknown . . . He who madly prints his name / Invites his Foe to take sure Aim."[43] It was mad to expose oneself needlessly to attack, personal abuse and public humiliation.[44] As a result, the practice – especially among women fiction-writers who published with publisher-proprietors of circulating libraries – as, among others, Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe, Mary Robinson and Anne Plumptre initially did – was to publish anonymously unless or until one of their works achieved sufficient admiration and celebrity for its authorship to be publicly acknowledged. That so many of Lane's women novelists reached this point is remarkable in itself: naming ten women fiction-writers who signed their works on his 1798 list of favorites was testimony to their exceptional success as well as to the desirability of Minerva's offerings. But most fiction-writers obviously never reached that point; some authors, such as Jane West, Robert Bage, Sarah Scott and Frances Jacson, were never willing to sign their work regardless of its success; and some, like Amelia Anderson Opie, whom we know only from signed novels, may have preferred not to acknowledge any earlier unsigned efforts.[45]

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Consequently, as Elizabeth Neiman observes, the problem for anyone working on Minerva's women authors is that despite massive efforts since the 1930s to identify the authors of this predominantly anonymous fiction, "attributions are not always trustworthy" even now.[46] Pseudonymous and cross-dressing signatures contributed to making this what one eighteenth-century reviewer characterized as an "age of literary imposition."[47] Female names could conceal male bodies and male names, female bodies. Author-identifications were further complicated by naming conventions. Women's names changed upon marriage and again upon remarriage. Married women often appeared only as Mrs. X on title pages; but single women of a certain age were also given the honorific title of "Mrs." and might likewise appear as Mrs. X on title pages. Some authors, like "Mrs. Meeke" (aka "Gabrielli") or Anna Maria Mackenzie (aka Mrs. Johnstone, aka Anna Maria Cox, aka "Ellen of Exeter"), also appear to have written under several names, some of which do not sound pseudonymous. Simon Macdonald demonstrated how deceptive real-sounding names can prove when he discovered that Mary Meeke was "really" Elizabeth Allen, a relation of the Burneys' whose married name abroad was Meeke but who, having returned to England and divorced her husband, now went by the name of "Mrs. Bruce" in Britain. This made the signature "Mrs. Meeke" on her novels both witty ("That was in another country, and besides the wench is dead") and, in England where almost everyone knew her as Mrs. Bruce, effectively pseudonymous.[48] We should therefore be cautious in trusting the authenticity even of genuine-sounding names like Mrs. Johnstone or Mary Charlton, and question the gender indicated by the name when we know nothing about the writer beyond a name.

Publishers too generated "literary impositions" that impede reliable bibliographical work: There were willfully misleading retrospective misattributions of works for marketing purposes on title pages or in catalogs; there were well-intentioned but false attributions based on rumor or guesswork; and there were reissues of old novels under new names. Contemporary attributions were therefore not necessarily correct even when made by publishers. Melvin Palmer has shown, for instance, that several works attributed on eighteenth-century title pages to Mme D'Aulnoy were by Mme du Murat, whose opus continued to be culled for new collections of "D'Aulnoy's" fairy tales throughout the eighteenth century.[49] Modern attributions can be equally problematical. Joan Percy argued that popular, unsigned Minerva Press novels *Plain Sense* (1795) and *Disobedience* (1797) were misattributed by modern critic, Robert Heilman,

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who ascribed them to Alathea Lewis in 1937 "without giving any reason." Percy based her reattribution of the novels to Frances Jacson on her discovery of a claim to that effect in the revised "Family Memorials" of a great-nephew of Jacson's. It seems, however, that this great-nephew was basing his much later a posteriori claim on family legend. Neither he nor Percy found any mention of novel-writing in Frances Jacson's extensive diaries or any legal or commercial document connecting her to novel-writing among her papers, though both kinds of evidence were found for her sister's authorship of botany books.[50] In short, it can be difficult to be sure that we have the right author on the basis of attributions, whether these were made in the eighteenth or twentieth century.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find disagreements about the attribution of anonymous Minerva Press fictions among distinguished modern bibliographers. Early author-attributions of Minerva Press fictions by Dorothy Blakey, Montagu Summers and the Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) were supplemented by Debra McLeod on the basis of internal evidence and of physical examination of books in the Covey collection; but Peter Garside, James Raven and Reiner Schoewerling's more recent, magisterial *The English Novel, 1770–1799* (2000) slashed McLeod's list of Minerva Press fiction and dismissed many of her attributions, while making "many attributions . . . for the first time" themselves. Most Minerva Press novels in *The English Novel* now have author-attributions, usually, it seems, by adding names "supplied only by outside evidence."[51] This outside evidence is rarely presented, specified or explained. But one principal source on which both Blakey and *The English Novel* rely – Newton's 1814 Minerva Press catalog – seems distinctly problematical, including to Garside, Raven and Schoewerling themselves.[52] For Newton compiled his 1814 catalog twenty to thirty years after publication of many of the fictions whose authors it names for the first time. Many of these volumes were published before Newton's apprenticeship with Lane began and were attached in the 1814 catalog to authors who could not object because they were dead. JoEllen DeLucia has shown that false "backward projections" of novels onto authors who had not written them was characteristic of Newton, who also attached false new titles pages to old, remaindered books.[53]

Where the underlying data is problematical in these ways, the results of any Franco Moretti-style big-data numerical analyses of authorship based upon it are likely to be problematical too. The following brief analysis of the Press's women writers during the Lane years therefore takes to heart James Raven's caution "that no one should over-interpret figures derived

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from problematical materials."[54] It supplements and interprets only those results of big-data analyses of Minerva Press authors which can be confirmed in other ways, and does so by means of information that three generations of feminist scholars have managed to unearth about the lives and identities of the Press's signing women authors.[55] It is important to note, however, that this now conventional, originally Romantic, organization of fiction around authors' names is eschewed in the rest of this study in favor of an approach outlined in Chapter 1 which is more capable of absorbing uncertainty about authorial identities and of giving anonymity and pseudonymity their full weight.[56]

The first thing to be said of Lane's women authors is that his multigeneric practice appears to have rewarded those who were generically versatile. By 1790, when Lane articulated his press's singular character by naming it Minerva, he had not only recognized the size and value of the female readership that was being targeted by successful new magazines such as *The Lady's*, which had displayed the goddess Minerva on its frontispieces since 1770.[57] He had also realized that variety in his novel offerings would be more likely to attract the range of readers he was already seeking by 1787 – "all Classes of People" and, within them, everyone from the "Gay and Volatile" to the "Sedate" and the historically minded.[58] Offering a wide variety of primarily but not exclusively woman-authored and/or woman-centered novel genres under the sign of Minerva would also reflect the female talent he had begun to gather around him during the 1780s, and flatteringly acknowledge women's preeminence in prose fiction in an era when male novelists found it advantageous to sign themselves "By a Lady." Signing Minerva Press stalwarts such as Anna Maria Bennett, Anna Maria Mackenzie and Elizabeth Bonhote, who joined Lane during the 1780s and had long associations with him, did not therefore write in the same genre throughout their careers. They genre-switched. Mrs. Meeke claimed that this had the same advantage for writers as for readers "having recourse to a Circulating Library" like Lane's. The fact that a reader could "select either the marvelous romance or the satirical adventures of a political Quixote . . . or else the more simple narratives founded upon events within the bounds of probability" or "pages of history" enabled an author to "give the reign to her imagination" in different directions.[59] Lane's most successful long-term regulars, who appear to have been women, often wrote fiction in multiple genres over the course of their careers, sometimes under different names; it could be argued that their generic versatility also facilitated their production of the Press's characteristically hybrid, miscellaneous, fictions.

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It is significant for the Minerva Press "brand" and for the development of its novel-genres that Lane inspired unusual long-term loyalty among so many women authors. Edward Jacobs has observed that circulating library publishers "often lost the new talent they developed just when that talent became most lucrative."[60] This was certainly true of Lane's great circulating library rival during the late 1780s and much of the 1790s, Thomas Hookham, who seems to have offered authors less guidance than Lane and inferior terms. Hookham often made novice novelists assume the financial risks of publication by paying for their novels to be "printed for the author" while he took charge only of sales. He was not alone in this practice either in England or in Ireland, and several women novelists who joined Lane had had to publish a first novel "printed for the author" elsewhere.[61] Lane acquired many of his best and most faithful women authors from other publishers – Regina Maria Roche, Eliza Parsons, Isabella Kelly, Anna Maria Mackenzie, Susanna Rowson, Jane West, Elizabeth Helme, Anna Maria Bennett and Elizabeth Bonhote, for instance. Although he published many first-time authors too, he was not one to start with new, untried and unlucrative talent if he could avoid it, and sometimes also took over novels that prized authors had first published elsewhere.

Women novelists like Eliza Parsons and Elizabeth Helme supplemented their income by publishing an occasional novel with another publisher during the years when they worked principally with Lane; and Jennie Batchelor has shown that some Minerva authors also contributed fiction to *The Lady's Magazine*.[62] It would be interesting to know if they changed what and how they wrote according to their publishing outlet. But for our purposes here, what is important is that most of Lane's successful and versatile signing women writers stayed with him nevertheless, publishing with him prolifically for at least a decade and often for longer. Eliza Parsons had published more than ten novels with Lane by the time she joined Jane West – together with Clara Reeve and Mary Robinson from Hookham's – at Longman's in 1797. Longman was just beginning to create a profile for itself as a publisher of novels at the turn of the nineteenth century, and perhaps these experienced professional authors saw the writing on the wall when Newton came on board. For Elizabeth Neiman found that "between 1803 and 1811" – that is, just after Newton became Lane's partner – "Minerva novelists are more apt than in previous periods to publish elsewhere, most notably with Longman's."[63] Before Newman, however, women writers who published steadily and prolifically with Lane for ten or fifteen of the twenty years between 1782 and 1802 contributed significantly to shaping his chosen genres and the character of his press. It therefore

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makes sense to view these genres largely but not exclusively through what his versatile, talented, professional and successful signing female regulars made of them.

Judging by signing authors whom we know something about, the Press's women authors had quite a lot in common, which distinguished them from other contemporary women fiction-writers. Cheryl Turner's sociological study of sixty-five eighteenth-century women novelists, which included a small handful of Minerva Press authors, placed them all in the "middle or middling class." But comparing Minerva Press authors to other women writing during the second half of the eighteenth century indicates a marked difference in rank and experience between the two groups. Most of the now canonized women novelists who were Reeve's contemporaries or who figured in *The Progress of Romance* by name on Reeve's list of eminent novelists post-1750 issued from the propertied mercantile or landed classes or from the ranks of well-connected professionals, including those in Dissenter circles. These were segments of society that socialized with one another especially in the provinces, and that recent historians characterize as a new and rising, interconnected, and intermarrying provincial elite.[64] Novelists issuing from these circles included Sarah Scott, Sarah Fielding, Frances Sheridan, Frances Brooke, Frances Burney, Charlotte Smith, Ann Radcliffe, Maria Edgeworth, Anne Plumptre, Hannah More and Anna Laetitia Barbauld. Some were descended from lesser branches of noble or gentry families; many remained single or married very late; and almost all still had entrée into "good" society. There were exceptions, of course, such as Charlotte Lennox or Elizabeth Inchbald; but by and large, these were what Reeve called "lady-authors." They marketed themselves as virtuous ladies and Turner found that they had usually turned to writing in the wake of a "downturn in their fortunes" due to the death or remarriage of a parent or to a husband's improvidence with inherited wealth.[65]

Minerva Press women authors generally belonged to an entirely different stratum of society – indeed, Lane seems to have gathered around him women from backgrounds like his own. They qualified as "lady-novelists" only as literate men in the lower orders had once qualified as "gentlemen" in courts of law due to their "literature." In other words, they were not, strictly speaking, ladies at all.[66] Those we know something about issued from the ranks of shopkeepers or from the lesser reaches of the professions – non-commissioned officers, the inferior clergy, country medical or legal men.[67] Elizabeth Bonhote, Anna Maria Bennett, Anna Maria Mackenzie and Eliza Parsons were shopkeepers' daughters – two grocers, a vintner and

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a purveyor of coal. Army captains or navy lieutenants fathered Isabella Kelly, Susannah Rowson and Regina Maria Dalton/Roche. Frances Jacson and Alathea Lewis were born in country rectories and Elizabeth Fenwick's father was an itinerant preacher. Elizabeth Helme, Mary Pilkington and Eleanor Sleath were born to provincial professionals – a Durham headmaster, a country physician and a country attorney, respectively. Almost all Lane's signing regulars were or had been married or married during their association with his press. They usually married into the rank into which they were born, but some sank further down – Sleath married a spendthrift apothecary-surgeon attached to the East India Company, Fenwick married the ne'er-do-well son of another itinerant preacher and Rowson married a trumpeter in the Royal Guard who devolved into a sometime actor.

Bennett, Meeke, Mary Anne Radcliffe, Elizabeth Hervey and Elizabeth Villa-Real Gooch turned to professional writing to support themselves and their children at the termination of scandalous unions; others, like Anna Maria Mackenzie, Eleanor Sleath, Isabelle Kelly, Eliza Parsons, Sophia King, Anne Burke, and Mrs. Patrick, did so because they were left without means upon a husband's death or at the dissolution of their marriage.[68] Eliza Parsons explained that she began writing after "a combination of unfortunate events and disappointments, occasioned a cruel reverse of fortune, when her husband, unable to sustain the severity of his fate . . . sunk under his misfortunes," leaving her with "eight dear fatherless children" who were "unprovided for."[69] Other Minerva Press "lady-authors," whose husbands had unreliable or low-paying jobs, supplemented the family income by writing – Elizabeth Helme's husband was a rural schoolmaster, Jane West's a small farmer and Mary Anne Radcliffe's a drunk whose earning schemes came to naught. There may have been some, like "Helen of Hertfordshire," who could afford to say: "Though I should be but little read, and less admired, the amusement my labors have afforded me, in the hours of gloom and solitude, will fully repay me" because "the invention of fictitious scenes soothed my bosom into a happy forgetfulness of real sorrow."[70] But Anna Maria Bennett surely struck a more realistic note when she wrote that *Ellen, Countess of Castle Howel* was composed "at a period when the Writer was . . . involved in the greatest Distress, both of Mind and Circumstances .. her little Fortune sinking" as "an alleviation of Grief and Misfortune" and that she had "sought in the airy Regions of Fancy, any subject which, by diverting thought from 'Self,' might sometimes afford a temporary oblivion of Sorrow."[71]

Some Minerva "lady-authors" were outsiders by virtue of their religion – their Roman Catholicism or, like Elizabeth Villa-Real Gooch and Sophie

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King, their Jewish heritage. Others were marginalized by their place of origin. Some of Lane's women authors lived in the English provinces – Jane West, Eleanor Sleath and Elizabeth Bonhote among them. But many others originated outside England and found themselves, like Anna Maria Bennett, "Four Hundred Miles distant from Home, Family and Friends, a Stranger in a country where she was literally *taken in.*"[72] The largest contingent here were Irish émigrées like Regina Maria Roche, Sara Green, Catherine Selden, Ann Milliken, Mrs. F. C. Patrick, Anne Burke and possibly Mrs. Meeke.[73] Scotland was represented by Helen Craik, Isabella Kelly, Anna Maria Mackenzie, whose Scottish parents had moved the family to Essex, and Anna Maria Bennett, who was said to have been born in Wales like the heroine of her first novel but who was in fact born and raised in Scotland which, according to contemporary newspapers, she and her daughter visited every year. Helen Craik and Mary Anne Radcliffe moved back and forth between London and Edinburgh, while Alathea Lewis and her husband lived for some years in America; Eliza Fenwick spent some years in the Caribbean and died a teacher in New York; while Susanah Rowson, who grew up in America, continued to publish with Lane after she and her husband returned there.[74]

As Jennie Batchelor discovered, many Minerva Press women authors, including among those named above, ended their lives as suppliants of the Literary Fund.[75] But at the height of their careers, their prolific repeated publication and enduring popularity with the public gave these provincial, non- elite, non-English, non-Church of England and even non-Protestant women authors an immense and universally acknowledged form of power – overt social and political power such as women could boast in no other domain of British culture at the time. Anna Laetitia Barbauld was alluding to this power and to the belief on which it rested – that works of fiction play a fundamental role in fashioning the manners, morals, ideas and ideals of a people – when she gleefully wrote: "Let me make the novels of a country and let who will make the systems!" As we will see, Minerva Press authors had a great deal to say about the manners, morals and ideals of the people. Desire to deny women this acknowledged form of power inevitably played a role in male nineteenth-century critics' excision of woman-authored fiction from their canon, as well as in Romantic critics' virulent and repeated efforts to trash the Minerva Press. After all, the Press had only compounded the immense and universally acknowledged power of successful women novelists by gathering so many of them together in one place and giving them a visible, recognizable and easily accessible platform for their ideas. As Lane had signaled by his choice of name, the

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Minerva Press was as close to an empowering, reforming, woman-centered press as it was possible for the eighteenth century to get. Minerva, after all, was not only patroness of the arts and handicrafts; she was also the goddess of wisdom and of prowess in war. And if Anthony Mandal is right about Thomas Malton the Younger's painting (see this book's cover) and about its date (1799), Lane had installed his press not in Grub Street but diagonally across from the majestic pillars of East India House on Leadenhall Street, in the elegant and affluent heart of Britain's commercial empire.[76]

Lane had placed a target on the Press's back by calling it Minerva and by inserting it at the hub of the British Empire to dispatch volumes and franchises across Europe and the Americas, so it is perhaps hardly surprising that nineteenth-century critics should have singled it out for special ire and ignominy.[77] This is less surprising still because Lane had compounded these first enormities by cultivating and collecting about him a group of women authors that appears to have been composed primarily of lowborn provincials, many of whom hailed from the Celtic fringe, from the North of England, or from the colonies rather than from London or the Home Counties. In this intensely rank-conscious *ancien régime* society (which, according to G. E. Mingay, boasted over sixty finely graded ranks), the popularity and writerly power of Minerva's cohort of irreverent, low-born, provincial female authors must have seemed particularly threatening to the status quo and peculiarly galling to the capital's masculine cultural elite.[78] Considered collectively during the Napoleonic wars, Minerva's acolytes represented precisely the kind of unruly and demotic, unconventional, not to say Pagan, force that Britain was fighting to return to its proper subordinate place, both on the fields of Europe and in the British Isles.

Notes

1. *Proposal* (1798) in Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press, 1790–1820* (Oxford University Press, 1935): 311–314. I am aware that Mary Meeke was "really" Elizabeth Meeke/Allen and address that issue later in this chapter.
2. There are differences about dates; I am using those in Ann W. Engar, "The Minerva Press, 1790–1820," *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (www.gale.com/product-catalog/databases/gale-literature/dictionary-of-literary-biography).
3. See Deborah Anne McLeod, "The Minerva Press" (PhD dissertation, University of Alberta, 1997): 174–446. Megan Peiser says otherwise, but her statistics are not organized by decade. See "Review Periodicals and the Visibility of William Lane's Minerva Press," *The Research Society for Victorian Periodicals* (2016): online rs4vp.org.

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4. *The Edinburgh Review* 31 (1819): 466–467 (466).
5. Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing 1750–1820: A Genealogy* (Routledge, 1993): 4; Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (Routledge, 1995): 6.
6. David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (Oxford University Press, 2009): 7, 8, 12.
7. Elizabeth Neiman, *Minerva's Gothics: The Politics and Poetics of Romantic Exchange 1780–1820* (University of Wales Press, 2019); Yael Shapira, "Isabella Kelly and the Minerva Gothic Challenge," *Romantic Textualities* 23 (2020): 168–184 and Yael Shapira, *Inventing the Gothic Corpse* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Hannah Doherty Hudson, *Romantic Fiction and Literary Excess in the Minerva Press Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2023): 13.
8. Mrs. Parsons, *The History of Miss Meredith* (Printed for the Author and Sold by T. Hookham, 1790): preface, a3.
9. Ina Ferris, "Re-positioning the Novel: *Waverley* and the Gender of Fiction," *Studies in Romanticism* 28:2 (Summer 1989): 291–301; and Ina Ferris, *The Achievement of Literary Authority: Gender, History and the Waverley Novels* (Cornell University Press, 1991).
10. For Scott, see Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. chapter 5 and Ferris, *Achievement of Literary Authority.* For the artificial creation of generic hierarchies and the authority and professionalization of male writers, see Emma J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Frank Donoghue, *The Fame Machine* (Stanford University Press, 1996); Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Sonia Hofkosh, *Sexual Politics and the Romantic Author* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).
11. Hudson, *Literary Excess*, Introduction.
12. Edward H. Jacobs, *Accidental Migrations* (Bucknell University Press, 2000): 169. Also David Saunders, *Authorship and Copyright* (Routledge, 1992): 134; Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, 135–138.
13. Lee Ericson, "The Romantic Era Book Trade," in Jon Klancher (ed.), *A Concise Companion to the Romantic Age* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009): 212–231.
14. Clery, *Supernatural Fiction*, 137. See also Franz Potter, *A History of Gothic Publishing 1800–1835* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): chapter 2; David Allan, *A Nation of Readers: The Lending Library in Georgian England* (British Library, 2008); Mark Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and Their Readers in Provincial Scotland* (Brill, 2010); Christopher Skelton-Foord, "To Buy or to Borrow? Circulating Libraries and Novel Reading in Britain 1778–1828," *Library Review* 48 (1998): 348–354.
15. Emma J. Clery, Caroline Franklin and Peter Garside (eds.), *Authorship, Commerce and the Public: Scenes of Writing, 1750–1850* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002): 12.
16. "The Literary Pretensions of Mrs. Bennett, Anne Radcliffe and Charlotte Smith," *Universal Magazine* 11: 16 (May 1808): 394–397 (394).

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17. *The New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register* 14: 83 (December 1820): 609.
18. John Frow, "Discourse Genres," *Journal of Literary Semantics* 9:2 (1980): 73–79 (78).
19. Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language* (Princeton University Press, 1974); Anis Bawerski, *Genre and the Invention of the Writer* (Utah State University Press, 2003): 14, 8, 9, 10.
20. John Frow, *Genre* (Routledge, 2006): 25; Bawerski, *Genre*, 10.
21. Jan Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 2007): 51.
22. William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge University Press, 2004): Matthew O. Grenby, *The Child Reader, 1700–1840* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Michelle Levy, "The Radical Education of Evenings at Home," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 19:1 (2006): 123–150.
23. Naomi Tadmore, "In the Even My Wife Read to Me," in James Raven et al. (eds.), *The Practice and Representation of Reading* (Cambridge University Press, 1996): 162–174; Stephen Colclough, *Consuming Texts: Readers and Reading Communities 1695–1870* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (Yale University Press, 2017); and Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (eds.), *Romantic Sociability 1770–1840* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).
24. *The New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register* 14: 83 (December 1820): 609.
25. *Town and Country* 21 (August 1789): 358; *Monthly Review* 22 (January 1797): 91; *Critical Review* 28 (February 1800): 235.
26. *Critical Review* 68: 327 (October 1789); *Critical Review* 70: 21 (August 1790); *Monthly Review* n.s. 18: 110 (September 1795); *English Review of Literature* 28 (October 1796): 382; *Critical Review* n.s. 16: 221 (February 1796).
27. See, for instance, Megan Peiser, "William Lane and the Minerva Press in the Review Periodicals 1790–1820," *Romantic Textualities* 23 (Summer 2020): open access online, n.p., and Hudson, *Literary Excess*, chapter 1.
28. The Press was mentioned in 2 percent of 309 reviews of Minerva Press novels between 1790 and 1820 according to Megan Peiser, "William Lane and the Minerva Press in the Review Periodical, 1790–1820." The conclusions drawn from this do not seem to be warranted by this number, which in any case conflates the Press's years under Newton and Lane.
29. Thomas Wilson, *The Use of Circulating Libraries Considered* (1791): 8–9.
30. Circulating libraries organized books on their shelves by size, descending from large folio volumes on top shelves, with the smaller octavo and smallest duodecimo sizes in which novels and romances were printed within reach of the borrower's hand. See Edward Jacobs, *Accidental Migrations* (Bucknell University Press, 2000): 181ff.
31. Clery, *Supernatural Fiction*, 138.
32. James Raven, "Historical Introduction," in James Raven and Antonia Forster with Stephen Bending (eds.), *The English Novel 1770–1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 2000): 15–122.

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33. Quoted in Dorothy Blakey, *The Minerva Press, 1790–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1995): 138.
34. *The Lady's Monthly Museum* 13 (July 1804): 5; *Universal Magazine* 9: 51 (February 1808): 176.
35. Quoted in Anthony Mandal, "Mrs Meeke and Minerva: The Mystery of the Marketplace," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 42:2 (April 2018): 131–151 (144).
36. Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (Wordsworth Classics, 1993): 29. For the meaning of "horrid," see Chapter 3.
37. On efforts to dislodge Romantic valorization of originality, see Benjamin Colbert, "Popular Romanticism? Publishing, Readership and the Making of Literary History," in Clery et al. (eds.), *Authorship*: 153–167 and Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford University Press, 2000).
38. Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *Twice upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* (Princeton University Press, 2001): 45.
39. Hannah Doherty Hudson, "Imitation, Intertextuality and the Minerva Press Novel," *Romantic Textualities* 23 (Summer 2020): romtext.org.uk/articles/rt23_n.09, n.p.
40. Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance through Times, Countries and Manners* (1785): 2: 98; 1: v.
41. Reeve, *Progress*, 1: 8; 2: 77.
42. Reeve, *Progress*, 1: v, xvi.
43. Anonymous, "The Puff: A Dialogue between the Bookseller and Author," in *Works of the English Poets, with Prefaces, Biographical and Critical by Samuel Johnson* (75 vols, 1790), vol. 68: 148.
44. Laura Runge, *Gender and Language in British Literary Criticism 1660–1790* (Cambridge University Press, 1997); Pam Perkins, "Reviewing Femininity," in Jennie Batchelor and Menushag Powell (eds.), *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain 1690–1820s* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018): 250–262; and Peiser, "William Lane and the Minerva Press in the Review Periodicals 1790–1820."
45. Robert Griffin (ed.), *The Faces of Anonymity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); John Mullan, *Anonymity: A Secret History* (Princeton University Press, 2008); Mark Vareschi, *Everywhere and Nowhere: Anonymity and Mediation in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Peter Garside, James Raven and Reiner Schowerling, "Introduction," in Raven et al. (eds.), *The English Novel 1770–1829*: 1–14; and Edward Jacobs, "Anonymous Signatures," *ELH* 62 (1995): 603–629.
46. Neiman, *Minerva Gothics*, 6ff.
47. *Critical Review* 59 (May 1785): 395.
48. Simon Macdonald, "Identifying Mrs. Meeke; Another Burney Family Novelist," *Review of English Studies* 64: 265 (June 2013): 367–385. If calling herself Mrs. Bruce connected her to her aunt, *Mary* Bruce Strange, as Macdonald argues, this might also explain the *Mary* Meeke. I am treating

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Mary Meeke as her *nom de plume*, as Lane did in 1798, rather than correcting that to Elizabeth Meeke or Elizabeth Allen as some critics now do.

49. Melvin Palmer, "Mme D'Aulnoy in England," *Comparative Literature* 27:3 (Summer 1975): 237–253.
50. Joan Percy, "An Unrecognized Novelist; Frances Jacson (1754–1842)," *British Library Journal* 23:1 (1997): 81–97 (95).
51. These are marked [] in the bibliography of *The English Novel*; the vast majority of names before unsigned novels have this sign. The quotation is at p. 8.
52. Garside et al. accept these attributions in the main entry and distance themselves from them by inserting notes attributing them to Blakey.
53. JoEllen DeLucia, "Radcliffe Incorporated: Ann Radcliffe, Mary Ann Radcliffe and the Minerva Author," *Romantic Textualities* 23 (Summer 2020): n.p.
54. Raven, "Historical Introduction," 45.
55. See big-data analyses in Neiman, *Minerva's Gothics*, introduction and chapter 1. The information here about Minerva's women authors' lives is indebted to Susan Brown, Patricia Clements and Isabel Grundy (eds.), *The Orlando Project* (Cambridge University Press, online, 2006–2019); also to Janet Todd (ed.), *A Dictionary of British Women Writers 1660–1800* (Rowman & Allenfeld, 1985), Pamela Clemens et al. (eds.), *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English* (Yale University Press, 1990), *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (www.gale.com/product-catalog/databases/gale-literature/dictionary-of-literary-biography) and *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (www.oxforddnb.com).
56. For broader analyses of women in the profession, see Jennie Batchelor, *Women's Work: Labour, Gender, Authorship, 1750–1830* (Manchester University Press, 2010) and Betty Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Woman Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).
57. Jennie Batchelor, "The Minerva Press and *The Lady's Magazine*, 1770–1820," *Romantic Textualities* 23 (Summer 2020): n.p. http://doi.org/10.18573/romtext.73.
58. Advertisement, *Leeds Intelligencer*, May 1, 1787.
59. Mary Meeke, *Midnight Weddings* (Minerva Press, 1802): 2–3.
60. Edward Jacobs, "Anonymous Signatures: Circulating Libraries, Conventionality and the Production of Gothic Romances," *ELH* 62:3 (October 1995): 603–629 (621).
61. Lane apparently only did this for *Belmont Lodge* by Harriet Jones of Maidstone in 1799.
62. Batchelor, "The Minerva Press and *The Lady's Magazine*," n.p.
63. Neiman, *Minerva's Gothics*, 10.
64. See Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class 1660–1730* (University of California Press, 1989); Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort*

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(ACLS Humanities Online, 1996); Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter* (Yale University Press, 1998).

65. Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen* (Routledge, 1992): 61ff.
66. See Edward Copeland, *Women Writing about Money* (Cambridge University Press, 1995): 40–46; Elizabeth Neiman, "The Female Authors of the Minerva Press and "Copper Currency" in Michael Rotenberg-Schwartz with Tara Czechowski (eds.), *Global Economies, Cultural Currencies of the Eighteenth Century* (AMS Press, 2012): 275–294.
67. We know nothing or almost nothing about Agnes Musgrave, Ann Howell, Mary Charlton, Mary Ann Hanway and Maria Hunter. Perhaps some of these were pseudonyms.
68. Once separated or widowed, Bennett worked in a chandler's shop and then as mistress and housekeeper to Admiral Sir Thomas Pye before turning to writing when he died. If "Mrs. Meeke" is Frances Burney's scandalous stepsister, Elizabeth Allen, she had eloped with an elderly ne'er-do-well in Paris aged fifteen and lived abroad with him until 1794 when they separated. See Macdonald, "Identifying Mrs. Meeke." Others who eloped with unsuitable men as teens and/or had to leave their husbands: Mary Ann Radcliffe, Eliza Fenwick and Anna Maria Bennett. There was also scandal about Sleath's long-term relationship to a married man whom she ultimately married after his wife's death – see Rebecca Czlapinski and Eric Wheeler, "The Real Eleanor Sleath," *Studies in Gothic Fiction* 2: 1 (2011): 5–12.
69. Parsons, *History of Miss Meredith*, preface, 4; Eliza Parsons, *The Errors of Education* (Minerva Press, 1791): ii.
70. *Deloraine, a Domestic Tale* (1798): preface signed Helen of Hertfordshire. See also Harriet Jones's introduction to *Belmont Lodge.*
71. *Ellen, Countess of Castle Howel, a Novel in 4 Vols by Mrs. Bennett* (1794): "Apology" (n.p.).
72. Ibid.
73. For Lane's many Irish émigrée women authors, see Christine Morin, "At a Distance from My Country: Henrietta Rouviere Mosse, the Minerva Press and the Negotiation of Irishness in the Romantic Literary Marketplace," *European Romantic Review* 28:4 (2017): 447–460. Meeke has been regarded as an Irish writer but see Macdonald, "Identifying Mrs Meeke."
74. See A. F. Wedd (ed.), *The Fate of the Fenwicks: Letters of Mary Hays (1798–1828)* (1927; open access in HathiTrust Digital Library) and Fenwick's letters at www.maryhayslifewritingscorrespondence.com.
75. For the fate of Minerva Press women writers at the Literary Fund, see Jennie Bachelor, *Women's Work: Labour, Gender, Authorship 1750–1830* (Manchester University Press, 2010): chapter 4.
76. Anthony Mandal, "The Offices of the Minerva Press, Leadenhall Street," *European Romanticism in Association*, February 8, 2021. www.euromanticism.org/the-offices-of-the-minerva-press-leadenhall-street.
77. For relations to America, see Eve Tavor Bannet, "Charles Brockden Brown and England: Genres, the Minerva Press and the American Print Trade," in

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Julia Wright and Kevin Hutchings (eds.), *Transatlantic Literary Exchanges 1780–1870* (Ashgate, 2011): 133–152; Eve Tavor Bannet, "Adulterous Sentiments in Transatlantic Domestic Fiction c1770–1805," in Toni Bowers and Tita Chica (eds.), *Atlantic Worlds in the Long Eighteenth Century: Seduction and Sentiment* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 17–32; Eve Tavor Bannet, "Immigrant Fictions: Mathew Carey, Susanna Rowson and *Charlotte Temple* in Philadelphia," *The Age of Johnson* 19 (2009): 239–272; and Eve Tavor Bannet, "Shifting Cultures and Transatlantic Imitations: The Case of Burney, Bennett and Read," in Lesley Eckel and Clare Elliott (eds.), *The Edinburgh Companion to Atlantic Literary Studies* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016): 75–87.

78. Gordon E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).

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