



Susan M. Ryan. *The Moral Economies of American Authorship: Reputation, Scandal, and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Marketplace*

Susan M. Ryan. *The Moral Economies of American Authorship: Reputation, Scandal, and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Marketplace*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. x, 217p. ISBN 9780190274023. US \$65.00.

Deluxe limited editions with an author's inscription were common at the end of the nineteenth century, but it is surprising to find a 1900 Haworth Edition of the novels of Charlotte Brontë signed, "Sincerely yours, C. Brontë," as she had died a half-century earlier. While Susan Ryan only references the practice of facsimile signatures in passing, her discussion of what she calls the "moral economy" of authorship makes sense of this practice as a marketing ploy. Ryan is concerned with what she calls the "moral freighting of authorship" (7). Using a series of intriguing case studies in reception history to analyze the complex negotiations around the "reputational economies" of authors (21), Ryan describes how an author's character and moral standing were used as capital to market and sell books during the middle part of the nineteenth century.

She begins with scandals surrounding James Fenimore Cooper in the 1830s and argues that the attacks on Cooper's reputation had less to do with politics than with perceptions of his personal character. She analyzes the public commentary in periodicals such as *The New-Yorker*, *The New-York Mirror*, and the *Knickerbocker* to demonstrate that by the 1850s, concerns about Cooper's character were outweighed by the desire for a national literature that positioned Cooper as a progenitor.

Next, drawing on Gerard Genette's formulation of the paratext as a transactional space, Ryan contends that these spaces often work against the author's reputation, especially when it involved white sponsorship of African-American authors, as in the case of Thomas Pringle and *The History of Mary Prince* (1831). Abolitionist Pringle, acting as editor, appended a preface, explanatory notes, and a supplement to the slave narrative that ostensibly worked to validate Prince's authorship, but, as Ryan argues, also "threatened to overwhelm Prince's own voice and undermine her dignity" and seemed to be "preoccupied with taming and regulating" her threatening voice (65). Here Ryan looks specifically at paratexts - including prefaces and dedications - that traverse the terrain of moral and reputational economies.

Other case studies include Harriet Beecher Stowe and E. D. E. N. Southworth, who also navigated popularity, moral authority, literary status, and scandal. Of particular note, she analyzes the interdependence of magazines and publishers in promulgating moral status, asking readers to rethink how we are trained to dismiss the didacticism prevalent during this



Susan M. Ryan. *The Moral Economies of American Authorship: Reputation, Scandal, and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Marketplace*

period. Ryan concludes by unpacking Stowe's exposé of Lord Byron's supposed incest, the often overlooked *Lady Byron Vindicated* (1870). Ryan argues that Stowe relies on her own personal example and moral authority to oppose the powerful posthumous reputation of Lord Byron as another example of the moral freighting of authorship.

SHARP members will appreciate the attention to reviews, advertisements, and other supplementary materials as Ryan fleshes out the transactional nature of the nineteenth-century literary marketplace through her illuminating case studies. Ryan also notes that moral economies, while seemingly outdated, routinely reappear – the case of James Frey being the most obvious in recent years. Ultimately, she argues, these moral economies inform and trouble the field of literary studies, particularly as text-centered approaches began to dominate in the twentieth century and author societies became common, as well as in the recovery projects and ecocritical approaches of recent decades.

Eric Leuschner
Fort Hays State University