



The Afterlife of Character, 1726-1825 (Material Texts)

David A. Brewer

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The Afterlife of Character, 1726-1825 reconstructs how eighteenth-century British readers invented further adventures for beloved characters, including Gulliver, Falstaff, Pamela, and Tristram Shandy. Far from being close-ended and self-contained, the novels and plays in which these characters first appeared were treated by many as merely a starting point, a collective reference perpetually inviting augmentation through an astonishing wealth of unauthorized sequels. Characters became an inexhaustible form of common property, despite their patent authorship. Readers endowed them with value, knowing all the while that others were doing the same and so were collectively forging a new mode of virtual community.

By tracing these practices, David A. Brewer shows how the literary canon emerged as much "from below" as out of any of the institutions that have been credited with their invention. Indeed, he reveals the astonishing degree to which authors had to cajole readers into granting them authority over their own creations, authority that seems self-evident to a modern audience.

In its innovative methodology and its unprecedented attention to the productive interplay between the audience, the book as a material artifact, and the text as an immaterial entity, *The Afterlife of Character, 1726-1825* offers a compelling new approach to eighteenth-century studies, the history of the book, and the very idea of character itself.

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