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# Introduction: European Enlightenment as the Era of Both Male and Female Protagonists of Production (1700–1800)

## 1. Why talk about “Protagonists of Production”?

On the literary stage, business owners are primarily shown in a negative light. They seldom appear as protagonists but make particularly common antagonists. Recurrent topoi of this biased literary portrayal are the themes of entrepreneur “in a tight spot”<sup>1</sup> and that of the “exploitative capitalist.”<sup>2</sup> From a historical perspective, the widespread belief “of the crookedness of bosses, industrialists and business owners”<sup>3</sup> is primarily a consequence of the onset of the industrial revolution in the 19th century and of the political ideologies reacting to this development. But what form did the literary picture of business owners take before it became the subject of primarily negative assessments in the epoch of industrialization?

The present volume focuses on this question, which has, up to now, rarely been asked, by concentrating on systematic, diachronic, and comparative research into literary portrayals of business owners and other representatives of the production industry in the literature, press, and economic tracts of Spain, England, France, Italy, and Germany written in the 18th century. In this context, the term “entrepreneur,” which at this time remained semantically unstable, is also to be examined and given greater conceptual clarity. Thus, the present volume intends to offer an interdisciplinary, both literary and economic perspective on pre- and early industrial conditions in 18th-century Europe.

As will be shown, in this heroic and experimental epoch of production, such portrayals of people involved in economic and production processes were not limited to the exploiter-exploited dichotomy but encompassed a much wider

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- 1 Cf. von Matt 2009, 99: “Wo immer der Unternehmer in der Literatur auftaucht, muss er in die Klemme geraten” (“Wherever the entrepreneur appears in literature, he has to get into a tight spot.” Our trans.).
  - 2 Cf. Rust 2013, blurb: “der ausbeuterische Unternehmer-Kapitalist.” Our trans.
  - 3 Rust 2013, blurb: “der Verworfenheit der Bosse, der Unternehmer und der Fabrikanten.” Our trans.

field, including not only industrialists and the workers they employed, but also craftspeople, the self-employed, farmers and agricultural workers. Before the “specter of capital”<sup>4</sup> began to dominate in the literature of the 19th century and beyond, representatives of professions in the field of production became significant social role models during the epoch of the Enlightenment. Business owners, workers, craftspeople and farmers all turned into “economic heroes,” characters who were designed to be looked up to, creating a situation unique in the history of literature. Furthermore, as the gender hierarchy started to change in the 18th century, attention was paid for the first time to female protagonists in their roles as professionals in the field of production.

The eighteen contributions collected in this volume go back to the interdisciplinary conference “Protagonists of Production. Staging male and female entrepreneurs, craftspeople and workers in preindustrial Spanish and European economic tracts, literature and press (1700–1800),” which took place from November 6–9, 2019, at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster (Germany) and brought together numerous literary scholars, economic historians and economists from Austria, France, Germany, Spain, and the USA, researchers who all share the research field of economics and literature.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the conference set out to examine the following leading questions:

1. What caused the discursive upgrading of the production sector in the preindustrial period?
2. Which relationships exist between ideas to be found in economic theory, as seen in 18th-century economic tracts, and the portrayals of protagonists of production in the press and in entertainment media of the Enlightenment such as theatre and the novel?
3. How are the male and, especially, female protagonists of production portrayed in the press, theatre and novels of the 18th century?
4. In what way are the press, theatre and novels used for propaganda purposes by the new political economy of the Enlightenment and to what extent do they resist or question the main discourses of political power?

In order to tap the full inter- and transcultural potential of these questions, they were primarily intended to be examined from a European perspective,

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4 Cf. Vogl 2014.

5 Thankfully, the conference was financially supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

with a focus on the literary and discursive exchange between Spain and France, England and Italy.

## **2. Why Spain and Europe? A short note on existing research and the necessity to fill some gaps**

In the 1970s, literary portrayals of merchants, business owners, industrialists and workers from the 19th century onwards became the focus of literary analysis,<sup>6</sup> most studies tying into Marxist perspectives.<sup>7</sup> However, from the mid-1980s, this perspective lost importance in literary studies.<sup>8</sup> Instead, an area of research developed that was oriented towards the theory of discourse and included economic history in its considerations.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, economic theory and economic history in turn undertook a re-evaluation of literary texts,<sup>10</sup> sometimes by introducing a feminist perspective.<sup>11</sup>

In its examination of working people and those active in production, recent research prioritizes anthropological aspects over social ones, shifting the focus away from the significance of belonging to a specific social class and towards typologies of people working and active in the field of production, which emerged in European literature from 1800 onwards.<sup>12</sup> In comparison to the 19th century, little attention has been paid to the representation of economic aspects in 18th-century literature. A few exceptions do exist: for example, the long-overlooked Spanish Enlightenment and its sketches of working people in economic theory<sup>13</sup> and literature<sup>14</sup> have recently attracted greater interest within the individual disciplines of economic history, economic theory and literary studies. However, there is as yet no systematic, international and interdisciplinary investigation into the concepts of protagonists of production in economic theory and literature prior to industrialization. There are, for example, no studies focusing on the discursive interferences between economic tracts and works of literature, which

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6 Cf., e.g., Nuth 1991; Bly 1992.

7 Cf., among others, Belda Planes 1976; McTague 1976; Rodríguez 1985.

8 Cf. Andioc 1987.

9 Cf. García Garrosa 1990, 1996; Volkmann 2003; Hontanilla 2008; Witthaus 2012; Pignol / Akdere 2016.

10 Cf. Rommel 2006; McCloskey 2007, 2016.

11 Cf. McCloskey 1993, 2001; Ferber 2003.

12 Cf. Díez Rodríguez 2015; Gies 2015, 2016; Bauer 2016.

13 Cf. Díez Rodríguez 2014; Ocampo Suárez-Valdés 2015.

14 Cf. Schuchardt 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2022; Witthaus 2017.

cross from England over to France and towards Spain and the parts of Italy ruled by Spain. This is a research gap the present volume intends to fill by exploring the nature of these discursive interferences.

Another factor, that is of similar importance both for literary studies and for economic history, has also not been given adequate attention: around 1750, a change takes place in economic tracts, as well as in the literary forms of drama and the novel. For the first time, female characters begin to appear alongside male protagonists of production. The fields of activity of these women are no longer limited to the family housekeeping; they are actively involved in processes of production as agricultural workers and craftspeople.<sup>15</sup> Although the concept of the *femina oeconomica* has, over the last few years, increasingly become the focus of both economic<sup>16</sup> and literary studies,<sup>17</sup> on the one hand, no one has tried to define what differentiates her from her male counterpart. On the other hand, the working and producing woman, the *femina fabra*, still fails to be represented in academia.<sup>18</sup> Our conference volume sees this circumstance as an opportunity to discuss the striking gender reprogramming of economic behavior in the 18th century, taking into account the discursive interdependency between demands for economic reform in Spain, Italy, England and France as well as international gender concepts of the Enlightenment.<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Historical, political, and economic contexts and text-corpuses

Prior to 1700, individuals involved in production processes seldom appear in tracts of economic theory and are only occasionally seen in literature and theatre, where they primarily take on the role of ridiculous figures such as the “simple-minded peasant.” However, this changes in the course of the 18th century, reflecting the emergence of Political Economy as a discipline with its enlightened proposals for reform aiming to improve the respective national economy. Characters from the field of production, who had up until then rarely been given sufficient attention, gain in prominence. This increase in status migrates from

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15 Cf. Gies 1996; Schuchardt 2015, 2022; Méndez Vázquez 2016.

16 Cf. Ferber / Nelson 1994, 2001; Fabel 2002.

17 Cf. Habermann 2008; Tschiltschke 2014, 2018; Schößler 2017.

18 On this lack of definition of the *femina oeconomica*, cf. Schuchardt 2022, 222–231. For a definition of the *femina oeconomica* and *femina fabra* for the context of 18th-century Spain, cf. Schuchardt 2022, 569–578.

19 Cf. Gronemann 2013.

economic tracts to media primarily popular with a proto-middle class audience: the press, theatre and novels. The impressive panorama of working people and professions shaped by both production and craftsmanship, which is particularly conspicuous in Spanish and French literature, certainly deserves to be given systematic attention due to its social and artistic significance.

Here, an important role is played by international processes of reception and discursive interferences between the European centers of economic development and their peripheries. Such processes can, firstly, be found in the influence of English (Hume; Mandeville; Smith), French (Quesnay; Say; Voltaire) and Italian (Genovesi; Struzzi) tract literature on the economic reform discourse on the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, these processes can be seen in the manifestations of an Enlightenment movement in the press with a reforming and middle class focus, found primarily in the journalistic form of the *Spectators*, which extends from England across the whole of Europe.<sup>21</sup> Thirdly, they are expressed in the English sentimental novel, which first influenced English theatre, then taking on form in the “sentimental comedy” that in turn spread from England to France and then Spain.<sup>22</sup>

Political programs for increasing profits in trade and industry existed in Spain, England, France and Italy. They were not only found in royal decrees, in economic tracts and in the press, but also in the theatre, a medium with a particularly broad impact on society. Especially in Spain and Italy, it acted as the “school of the people”<sup>23</sup> and as a vehicle of state-controlled economic discourses of reform.<sup>24</sup> For this reason, special attention should be paid to the theatre when aiming to investigate the discursive connections between economic theory and literature. The novel also proves to be a relevant literary form, and that not only because of its influence on sentimental theatre. As the example of Daniel Defoe shows, novelists interested in questions of economics (see *An Essay Upon Projects*, 1697) and journalists concerned with the industrial sector (see *The Weaver*, 1719 ff.) stand at the very beginning of a discursive exchange between economics and literature (see *Robinson Crusoe*, 1719; *Moll Flanders*, 1722). The same is true for one of the most prominent economists of Spanish Enlightenment, Gaspar

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20 Cf. Gittermann 2008; Ocampo Suárez-Valdés 2010; Díez Rodríguez 2015.

21 Cf. Ertler / Hobisch 2014a / b; 2012; Tschiltschke 2012.

22 Cf. García Garrosa 1990; Fuentes 1999.

23 Álvarez Barrientos 2005, 189: “escuela del pueblo.” Our trans.

24 Cf. Schuchardt 2015.

Melchor de Jovellanos, author of various economic tracts and of the sentimental drama *El delincuente honrado* (1774; “the honest criminal.” Our trans.).

#### 4. A very productive field: Literature and economy

A closer look on the relationship between literature and economy shows, however, that the difficulties already start with the notion of literature itself. As we all know, the word “literature” in a modern sense, which describes an aesthetically valued, mostly fictional kind of writing, is the result of the modern literary system that emerged in the 18th century as a relatively autonomous symbolic and social field.<sup>25</sup> Before that, the word “literature” was used to refer to any kind of knowledge fixed in a written form, whereas the realm of art was covered by the terms “theater,” “poetry” and “prose.” In Spain, for instance, the distinction between “literature” and “knowledge” only begins to appear at the very end of the 18th century.<sup>26</sup>

With regard to the relationship between literature and economy, we can differentiate in a very general sense between two different fields we might call “literature of economy” and “economy of literature.” The “literature of economy” embraces the representation of any aspect concerning the economic life: from matters of content – figures, themes, motifs and the economy as a reflexive or functional model for society – to the form and the very structure of literary works themselves. The “economy of literature” refers to the whole of the socio-economic conditions that influence and determine literature in its production, reception and distribution.

Among the methodological approaches that help us to understand the field of the “literature of economy,” traditional literary studies of influences, themes and motifs may still prevail. But this should not render the important impulses that came from the anthropology of literature, the systems theory or the theory of literature as an “interdiscourse” less visible.<sup>27</sup> Especially the systems theory and the theory of interdiscourse considerably contributed to increasing the awareness

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25 Cf. Schmidt 1989.

26 There is, by the way, an interesting attempt to rewrite the history of the Spanish literature of the 18th century with a view to a more traditional, broader perspective: the *Historia literaria de España en el siglo XVIII* (“*Literary History of Spain in the 18th century.*” Our trans.), edited in 1996 by Francisco Aguilar Piñal, also includes articles about themes such as religion, economy or musicology.

27 Cf. Vogl 2002, 2014 and Plumpe / Werber 1995. The term “interdiscourse” follows Link 1988.

that literature always picks up economic issues according to its own inherent laws, procedures, interests, traditions and conventions, instead of merely reflecting or propagating certain current discourses.

So, if we keep this in the back of our minds, when we take a glance at the trajectory of the present volume, we recognize that the panorama of themes and approaches it offers is quite complete: Literary texts in a broader sense like treatises and dictionaries are represented as well as literary texts in a narrower sense. Traditional genres like the theatre stand beside new genres like the novel or the press which first appeared in the 18th century. As to the literary examples, they come from various European countries: England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain.

## 5. Interdisciplinarity taken seriously

Nowadays, “interdisciplinarity” and “transdisciplinarity” are key concepts in the academic field. What some of us might have already experienced when we travel to conferences bearing the “interdisciplinarity quality stamp” is this: Everyone is talking about things from their own discipline’s perspective, which is good. But, at the latest when we begin to talk about concepts, we find that we have difficulties making ourselves understood – and understanding each other. As Claire Pignol and Çinla Akdere have observed, when it comes to interdisciplinary collaboration, economists tend to cooperate with scholars of related disciplines such as mathematicians rather than with researchers of the field of literary studies.<sup>28</sup> A similar phenomenon can be observed in literary studies, where investigators turn to colleagues from cultural or media studies rather than to the empirical facts-based physicists, mathematicians, or economists.<sup>29</sup> Of course, this depiction is quite schematic, and things already have changed for the better, since there *are* economists who consider literature to be a source of economic knowledge,<sup>30</sup>

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28 Cf. Pignol / Akdere 2016, 77.

29 As stated by Pignol / Akdere 2016, 77: “L’indifférence de nombreux littéraires à l’égard de l’économie résulte aussi de la volonté de scientificité des économistes, qui les a conduits à emprunter soit le langage mathématique, soit le langage d’expert, codifié et stéréotypé auquel précisément s’oppose la littérature” (“The indifference of many literary scholars towards economics also results from economists’ will to scientificity, which led them to borrow either the mathematical language, or the codified and stereotyped language of experts which literature specifically resists.” Our trans.).

30 The idea that literature contains economic knowledge was recently emphasized by Urban 2018.

and we do find researchers of literary studies cooperating with economists<sup>31</sup> and neuroscientists.

The present volume – like the conference held in November 2019 at the University of Münster – is an attempt to take interdisciplinarity between economists, historians and researchers in literary studies seriously, shedding light on the representation of protagonists of production in economic tracts, press and literary texts by considering economic history, economic theory and their being adapted to and reflected by different genres. The keynote lecture on “The Bourgeois Revaluation and the Rise of Liberalism, 1648–1848” was held by Deirdre McCloskey. As gender issues form a central aspect in many of the studies gathered here, the concept of “conjective economics” developed by her is very apt to describe to how this volume conceives interdisciplinarity. Originally, “conjective economics” meant that the discipline of economics, which was simply understood as dominated by male scholars back in the 1990s (and sometimes still *is*), needed to take into account a feminine academic perspective, accepting it as an intrinsic and necessary part of a discipline on the verge of change. As McCloskey put it in 1993: “It is neither the circle nor the square, neither objective nor subjective. It is what we know together, by virtue of a common life and language. It is what men and women know together in their conversations, together or apart.”<sup>32</sup> What McCloskey once postulated for conjective economics is a fruitful approach to the way we see interdisciplinarity here, that is, as a *common knowledge* of researchers from different fields. It is in this sense that in the following pages, we as scholars of literary studies, economists and economic historians share *what we know together* about protagonists of production invented and represented by different enlightened media and genres that reflect on economic questions, searching for a *common language of interdisciplinarity*. For our volume, this leads to the fact that economists analyze novels, and that scholars of literature consider the influence of economic tracts, while both relate to the latest insights into the economic history of the European Enlightenment.

## 6. The thematic spectrum of the contributions

The contributions to the present volume are arranged into six different topics. The first section is devoted to the historical and theoretical foundations of the research field in question. In their opening contribution, “From *otium* to

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31 Cf., e.g., the volume on *The Honorable Merchant* (2019) edited by business ethicist Christoph Lütge and Christoph Strosetzki from Romance Studies.

32 McCloskey 1993, 76.



*nec-otium*: Vile Trades, Dishonorable Entrepreneurs. The Case of Spain,” Joaquín Ocampo Suárez-Valdés and Patricia Suárez Cano analyze the so-called “cascade of contempt” which influenced the social and economic development particularly of the Mediterranean countries and, more specifically, Spain, discrediting manual labor for a long time. In his essay “Poverty Between Dignity and Criminalization in Early-Modern France and Spain: Attempts to Include and Exclude the Poor,” Manfred Tietz approaches the question of (lack of) productivity from the other side of the social spectrum, looking at how the problem of poverty and mendicancy was dealt with from the late Baroque to the final stages of the Enlightenment. Andreas Gelz, for his part, examines “The Nation as Economic Agent in Eighteenth-Century Spanish Apologetic Texts,” i.e. the collective dimension of entrepreneurship and the productivity of the nation, instead of addressing the topic “protagonists of production” from the perspective of the individual entrepreneurs, craftspeople and workers.

This is in turn the focus of the second section, “Male Protagonists of Trade and Industry: Of Businessmen and Entrepreneurs.” Christoph Stroetzki opens this section with a study of the reception of French commercial law by a German philosopher and economist of the 18th century: “The *Dictionnaire universel de commerce* (1723) and Savary’s Mercantilism in the Writings of Carl Günther Ludovici.” Jan-Henrik Witthaus, on the other hand, in his contribution, “Doing Business in the Spanish *Antiguo Régimen*: The Case of Juan de Goyeneche y Gastón: Between Profit, Heroism and Political Commitment,” reconstructs an early and little-known example of entrepreneurship in the context of the first Bourbon reforms in Spain. With María Jesús García Garrosa’s reflections on “Business and Businessmen in Eighteenth-Century Spanish Drama,” the focus shifts to examining the fictional representations of economic agents and their didactic instrumentalization by the reformist economic thinking of the Spanish government. However, the political use of literature also brings resistance into focus, for example, in Claire Pignol’s discussion of “Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, Rousseau’s *Emile*, Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*: The Embarrassment of Choosing a Profession,” which addresses the rejection of entrepreneurial calculation in a comparative European perspective. Christian von Tschilchke concludes this section in his article, “Between State-Managed Reforms and Private Utopia: The Entrepreneurial Projects of Pablo de Olavide.” This contribution examines one of the most prominent figures of 18th-century Spain, whose reform activity and literary work is regarded as subject to a tension that is as fundamental as it is exemplary.

The third section opens the field of “Female Protagonists of Production.” As David T. Gies shows in “Two Women, Two Ways: Economy and Theater in

Enlightenment Spain,” there are some, albeit very few, instances in 18th-century Spanish theater in which women are credited with positive economic behavior beyond the realm of domestic economy traditionally reserved for them. In contrast, in her paper, “Maja’s Labors Lost in Ramón de la Cruz’s *sainetes*,” Ana Hontanilla analyzes the strategies for the prevailing devaluation of female labor inside and outside the home, as it is especially evident in popular Spanish theater. The spaces of economic action that are at the same time opened up to and reserved for women in the comedies of the Italian playwright Carlo Goldoni are the subject of Esther Schomacher’s essay “Work It, Baby! Economics and Emotions on the Marriage Market in Goldoni’s *La Locandiera* and *Trilogia della villeggiatura*.”

The fourth section consists of two contributions that deal explicitly with “Economic Protagonists of Both Sexes.” Thus, in her study “From Civilian Heroes to Protagonists of Production,” Beatrice Schuchardt identifies different male and female economic types staged by 18th-century Spanish theatre, stereotyped figures that relate to different economic theories of Spanish Enlightenment, e.g. the *femina fabra* representing Spanish industrialism and incarnating the Bourbon political-economic idea that integrating female producers increases the wealth of the nation. Klaus-Dieter Ertler’s essay, “‘Spectatorial’ Entrepreneurs in the Moral Essays of the 18th Century,” which examines the enormous influence of the new journalistic genre of the Spectator on economic discourse in Europe, also focuses on the topics of political economy in enlightened Europe, analyzing one British, one Danish, one French, and one Spanish example of the spectral press.

The central importance of Daniel Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and related texts is the subject of the fifth section, “Robinsonades.” It includes three contributions, each of which demonstrates in its own way that the island idyll can be understood as an ideal-typical laboratory of economic activity. While Nils Goldschmidt and Hermann Rauchenschwandtner reconstruct “Robinson Crusoe’s Economy” and trace its reverberations in economics up to the present with numerous examples, Urs Urban explores the German, Latin American and French pretexts of Robinson in “The Literary Genealogy of the Working Man: From Early Modern Castaways and Settlers to Robinson Crusoe.” Natalie Roxburgh, however, centers on the novel itself. In her article, “Defoe, Economically Constructed Property, and Reputational Credit,” she argues that while *Robinson Crusoe* echoes Locke’s property theory of value, in some respects it goes beyond it, thus paving the way for early liberalism.

The sixth and last section is reserved for an economic sector that received special attention during the period of the Enlightenment in many countries: the

“Protagonists of Agriculture and the Influence of Physiocracy.” Susanne Schlünder thematizes “Nature as a Protagonist of Production in Jovellanos’s *Informe sobre la Ley Agraria* and *Diario – A ‘Measurement of the Sublime’*” and elaborates on how a contemplative and a utilitarian attitude towards nature overlap in the writings of the Spanish poet and statesman Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos. Another tension-filled relationship to nature is discussed by Annika Nickenig, who, in her contribution, “Pastoral Economies. Natural vs. Human Productivity in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s *Paul et Virginie*” distinguishes different, even opposite ways by which man makes use of nature. In her article, “An Idealistic, but Failing Protagonist of Production: Claude-François-Adrien de Lezay-Marnésia and His Physiocratic Project in the New World,” Anna Isabell Wörsdörfer presents the case study of a French military officer, agriculturist and Encyclopedist, who emigrated to America, but had to experience the failure of his ambitious plans of reform.

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