



The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning

Deidre Shauna Lynch

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At the start of the eighteenth century, talk of literary "characters" referred as much to letters and typefaces as it did to persons in books. Yet by the nineteenth century, characters had become the equals of their readers, friends with whom readers might spend time and empathize.

Although the story of this shift is usually told in terms of the "rise of the individual," Deidre Shauna Lynch proposes an ingenious alternative interpretation. Elaborating a "pragmatics of character," Lynch shows how readers used transactions with characters to accommodate themselves to newly commercialized social relations. Searching for the inner meanings of characters allowed readers both to plumb their own inwardness and to distinguish themselves from others. In a culture of mass consumption, argues Lynch, possessing a belief in the inexpressible interior life of a character rendered one's property truly private.

Ranging from Defoe and Smollett to Burney and Austen, Lynch's account will interest students of the novel, literary historians, and anyone concerned with the inner workings of consumer culture and the history of emotions.

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