textual surroundings, and it succeeds most when it offers illuminating examples of where in the intellectual-historical canon Shakespeare might have found some inspiration. Although at times the reader might feel that Lewis' attack on Hamlet is also an attack on *Hamlet*, the exact opposite is in fact true: Hamlet, Lewis wants to suggest, is *designedly* mediocre, because Shakespeare's target is "not just Hamlet," but also Cicero, Boethius, and "the conventions of humanism in the philosophical and religious round" (302–3). One might ask Lewis what happens to those audiences of *Hamlet* who do not share in Shakespeare's supposed learning, but it is a question, like others that might arise, that is ultimately eclipsed by Lewis's compelling vision of the play's dark world.

Joe Jarrett
University of Cambridge
jj340@cam.ac.uk

Paula McDowell. *The Invention of the Oral: Print Commerce and Fugitive Voices in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pp. 368. $45 (cloth).
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In *The Invention of the Oral*, Paula McDowell performs close reading of literary works (both well-known and obscure) from the long eighteenth century, searching for the genesis of the modern understanding of "oral culture" (3). The historic English understanding of oral tradition had been that it was unreliable, uninformed, and likely dangerous. McDowell explains that it was understood in large part as a Roman Catholic religious discourse. By the late seventeenth century in the Protestant kingdom of England, Catholicism was associated with tyranny, savagery, and ignorance. Oral tradition was additionally coupled with so-called othered primitive societies: as McDowell writes, "without letters" (some ancient, others recently discovered), as well as other uncontrollable sectors of humanity, most notoriously "transgressively" oral women (33, 194). Information that originated and circulated orally was no more reliable than the old wives' tales propagated by women. In a society with not only a religious confession but also a legal system based on the oral as much as on the written, the uncharted media shift in which it found itself during the time period McDowell considers fostered fear and anxiety. McDowell daylights these tensions, brilliantly revealing their synergy.

McDowell analyzes print through both text and images. She opens the book with a nuanced dissection of William Hogarth's 1751 engraving, *Beer Street*, prominently featuring Billingsgate fishwives, avatars of oral culture, reading and singing a printed ballad about the source of their wares. In the background, a butcher reads a newspaper. For McDowell, this mundane scene is actually extraordinary. Hogarth depicted the very conjunction of modern print and oral tradition where the genteel intellectual culture based on books intersected the most common, vulgar, ignorant speech. An unintended consequence of this satirical image is a portrayal of the very nexus of print's transforming power in understanding, indeed inventing, oral culture. As the engraving shows, members of the common laboring class interacted not only via the oral, but also through print. Just as the fishwives occupied a liminal space both inside and outside the fishing industry, necessary yet despised, so too they inhabited a congruent space in popular culture, pervasive yet denigrated, spanning modes of both commerce and dissemination.

McDowell traces this transformation of the negative oral stereotype into a productive oral discourse through the agency of printed works debating and challenging orality. She unpacks the works of numerous authors (among them John Milton, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, John Henley, and Samuel Johnson); genres (such as poetry, novels, satire, news, and folklore);

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and practices (such as preaching, elocution, hawking, oral history research, and educational travel), deeply and widely mining the contemporary literature. Indeed, her mastery of the literary sources of the period, as well as those stretching from antiquity to postmodernity, is vital to understanding the often-convoluted media shift she chronicles. Like literary texts, printed images depicting the cries of London—orally selling wares or services or entertainment in the streets—presented stereotypical representations of lower-class laborers. But according to McDowell, these powerful graphic images destabilized rather than reinforced the negative understanding of oral tradition. These images allowed for "imaginary" if not actual contact with communities and practices that, although imagined as fearful, were in reality anodyne (5). All of this printed presentation of oral tradition was transformative, bringing about what McDowell calls "epochal change" (4).

McDowell quite originally investigates the voluminous layered binaries in the history and transition she presents: print was accurate, stable, productive, respectable, authoritative, and masculine, while oral tradition was suspect, uncontrollable, vulgar, idle, ephemeral, and feminine. She also scrutinizes the equally threatening inverse paradigm whereby print was effeminizing while bold public speech like that of fishwives was masculinizing. All of the historic cultural assumptions about the female body resulted in negative stereotyping and fear that extended to female speech. One of McDowell's examples, the printed official London Bills of Mortality, depended on the oral eyewitness reports of females who searched for the dead. How then could these printed documents be accurate and official? Women could be counted on only to spread dangerous gossip and rumor from one woman to another, but here women simultaneously provided the basis for reliable authorized printed information disseminated through a technologized industry. This authoritative female oral culture was the very antithesis of specious oral tradition; and it had a positive, utilitarian role in society. This paradox had its corollary in imaginative literature and images, which also showed that fishwives, for example, could be simultaneously vulgar and eloquent, disruptive and productive. Like print, shifting understanding of the female body in the long eighteenth century from essentially mythological to scientific explanation, pointed toward rationality, stability, and modernity. The speech of women, and any other speech for that matter, like printed texts and images, had limits, but both came to be understood as playing a vital interdependent role in English culture over the long eighteenth century.

McDowell's print commerce, forward-looking print media dominance, was just as threatening to contemporaries as the oral tradition of the past, in which, somewhat counterintuitively, they sought comfort. But as McDowell demonstrates, this media shift to the dominance of utilitarian print also brought respectability to unruly orality. It was only when oral tradition was presented and analyzed—even satirized—in print that it became comprehensible, civilized, and acceptable. Over the long eighteenth century, McDowell argues, oral culture ultimately came to be understood as "a category of the literate" (26). Her study reiterates that media shifts do not entail the progressive obsolescence of one medium in favor of another. Media are coextensive, and, in fact, symbiotic. When print became as ubiquitous as the oral, the oral was legitimized through the agency of print.

The book ends a bit abruptly, leaving an unsatisfied desire for more resolution in the relationship between two media, although that story may be as yet unfinished. The book also does not include a bibliography (the University of Chicago Press's apparent preference), which would have been very useful in following McDowell's journey through an expansive body of sources. But these are small considerations in the face of Paula McDowell's major contribution to print culture studies with this book.

Sabrina Baron
University of Maryland
sbaron@umd.edu

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