

This thesis describes the changes in the English book trade in the late 18th century. The life of the second-hand bookseller James Lackington provides a time frame for the thesis. The work takes up the economic terminology and applies it to the publishing process of the literature. The starting point for this is the individual and the effects his entrepreneurship effort can have on the trade. The thesis delves into the four main topics: the circulating libraries, the readership and the analysis of the increasing literacy, the overall picture of the bookselling of the period and finally the bookselling career of James Lackington. The chapter discussing the circulating libraries lists various subcategories of public libraries in general, goes through the history of commercial book lending in England and presents the methods which the circulating libraries were using for lending books. The chapter about the readership uncovers the issues surrounding the literacy and solving some of the possible myths around it. This chapter shows the concentration of the improvement in the literacy was in the middle classes. In addition it presents the purchasing power of the readers which delineates the limits of the late eighteenth-century readership. It was still limited to the middle classes. The third topic deals with some other booksellers of the time and the more general issues of the era such as the copyright, the other roles the booksellers were assuming alongside the bookselling business, and the sweeping changes the book trade was undergoing. The thesis observes the pattern of the outsiders entering the trade and changing it drastically. The fourth topic involves Lackington himself. The chapter dealing with him leans on his literary output where he was describing (among many other things) his business practices and even his commentary on the book trade in general. The thesis observes the radical changes Lackington introduced in his business and the hostile reaction which he was getting. Lackington's extraordinary career proves the tremendous opportunities which were there in the period even for a man of very modest means.