What is the Historiography of Books? Recent Studies in Authorship, Publishing, and Reading in Modern Britain and North America

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WHAT IS THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF BOOKS? RECENT STUDIES IN AUTHORSHIP, PUBLISHING, AND READING IN MODERN BRITAIN AND NORTH AMERICA

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ABSTRACT. *Historical and literary studies of the history of the book and of reading habits in modern Anglo-American history tend to approach their subject either from the perspective of readers and publishers or from that of authors. The former works constitute a nascent historiography, addressing the problem of how the material book was used to create and replicate culture; the latter studies are more concerned with how literary authors used texts to influence and negotiate culture. This article critically reviews the two bodies of scholarship and identifies the importance of copyright and reprinting; it comments on the value of trans-national or other broad studies as opposed to specific investigations of a particular canonical text or local publishing/reading community.*

In an influential 1982 essay in the humanities journal *Daedalus*, Robert Darnton asked 'What is the history of books?'. The answer was multifaceted and problematic but the enthusiasm was contagious, perhaps because both academic and popular cultures were becoming preoccupied with predictions of the imminent demise of books. Scholars of history, literature, bibliography, cultural studies, and communication engaged with questions about books that ranged from their trade to their textuality, and from ancient to postmodern readers and readings.[1] Some scholars began to address the methodological infrastructure, while others simply plunged in to examine authorship, reading, or publishing in one context or another.[2] But book history (the terminology is convenient, though problematic shorthand) is only beginning to yield a discernable historiography.

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[1] Robert Darnton, 'What is the history of books?', *Dædalus* III (1982), pp. 65–83; reprinted with minor revisions in Darnton, *The kiss of Lamourette: reflections in cultural history* (New York, NY, 1990), pp. 107–35. For fuller discussions of various disciplinary approaches to the book in history see Leslie Howsam, *Old books & new histories: an orientation to studies in book and print culture* (Toronto, 2006); and 'Book history unbound: transactions of the written word made public', *Canadian Journal of History*, 38 (Apr. 2003), pp. 69–81.

[2] For invaluable studies of the methodological infrastructure and an analysis of sources including the *Nineteenth-century short title catalogue* (NSTC) see Simon Eliot, *Some patterns and trends in British publishing 1800–1919: occasional papers of the Bibliographical Society, 8* (London, 1994), and 'Patterns and trends and the NSTC: some initial observations', *Publishing History*, 42 (1997), pp. 79–104, and 43 (1998), pp. 71–112. See also Alexis Weedon, *Victorian publishing: the economics of book production for a mass market, 1836–1916* (Aldershot, 2003). For the diversity of studies see *SHARP-News and Book History* the quarterly newsletter and the annual journal of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing.

Itself a literary culture, one that is mostly academic but not entirely so, the study of the history of the book is a curious academic hybrid – resolutely cross-disciplinary as well as pan-period. Its practitioners are united by two related concepts, the cultural malleability of written texts and their material stability. Despite the surface conflict between them, these two ideas are densely intertwined in the scholarship called book history. All copies of every edition of a modern book are, roughly speaking, the same, which makes it possible to generalize; but no two editions are identical, and each reveals the fingerprint of its manufacturers and its consumers; this means we can be specific. The evidentiary value of this combination of characteristics is profound. Few other categories of artefacts surviving from the past offer the richness that books do.

Book historians have inverted the literary convention of authorial intention, which privileged the integrity of an author's genius apart from the corruption committed by publishers, editors, and critics. They insist that it is readers, not writers, who 'make meaning', and that readers work not only with the disembodied text but also with the embodied (and inevitably corrupted) words on a printed page, and with the knowledge that those words have been extensively reproduced and are simultaneously available to a whole community of readers.[3] Readers' interpretations are formed partly by the text, but also partly by the elements imposed on a book by its design and by the conventions of genre, and partly too by the vagaries of individual and collective consciousness. Each edition, each unique setting or resetting of the type exists (or at least begins) as a set of identical copies, and yet each varies from every other edition.[4] And diverse scholars find diverging meanings, too, according to the questions and preconceptions with which they approach the book. Even authors return to the stage, when critical readings find them using their texts to critique their contemporary material and print culture. Sometimes what matters is the book as an object; in other cases it is the literary text which the object supports that is crucial; and for some scholars, both text and object combine as hard evidence of ephemeral cultural change. Some scholars apply these concepts to novels and other literary texts, others to journalism or politics, or to works of science, history, or philosophy.

The ideas of Robert Darnton, D. F. McKenzie, and Roger Chartier have been central to the new book history. Darnton sketched out a 'communication circuit' to show the influence of printers and publishers, bookbinders and booksellers, perhaps of smugglers or the purveyors of parchment, and certainly of readers, on the books that both shaped and were shaped by the culture of their time.[5] McKenzie was concerned with what he called

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[3] D. F. McKenzie, *Making meaning: 'Printers of the mind' and other essays*, ed. Peter D. McDonald and Michael F. Suarez, SJ (Amherst, MA, 2002). The full quotation is from McKenzie's *Bibliography and the sociology of texts* (London, 1986; repr. 1999), p. 29: 'By dealing with the facts of transmission and the material evidence of reception, [historical bibliography] can make discoveries as distinct from inventing meanings. In focussing on the primary object, the text as a recorded form, it defines our common point of departure for any historical or critical enterprise. By abandoning the notion of degressive bibliography [that is, of finding an abstract ideal version of a literary text] and recording all subsequent versions, bibliography, simply by its own comprehensive logic, its indiscriminate inclusiveness, testifies to the fact that new readers of course make new texts, and that their new meanings are a function of their new forms.'

[4] For a brilliant exposition of what the author calls 'literary replication', in variant editions and multiple readings see James A. Secord, *Victorian sensation: the extraordinary publication, reception and secret authorship of 'Vestiges of the natural history of creation'* (Chicago, IL, 2000), p. 126.

[5] Darnton, 'What is the history of books?' See also his 'Histoire du livre geschichte des buchwesens: an agenda for comparative history', *Publishing History*, 22 (1987), pp. 33–41.

the 'sociology' of a text, its ubiquity in various material and cultural contexts. Addressed to his colleagues in bibliography, where they remain in debate, McKenzie's ideas have been endorsed by historians, literary scholars, and practitioners of cultural studies.[6] Chartier identified what he called 'the dialectic between imposition and appropriation' (that is, between the constraints imposed by publishers and the state on the one hand, and the freedom of readers to subvert expectations and work around limitations on the other). He also spoke of 'the space between text and object' (or between the abstract written work and the material artefact that supports it).[7]

Three more scholars have exerted an indirect intellectual influence, although none of Michel Foucault, Gerard Genette or Benedict Anderson is an active practitioner of the history of the book. Foucault's 1969 essay 'What is an author?' presented the notion of an 'author function' whereby 'the author' is not an artist or genius, but rather an 'ideological product' a social function that allows critics and readers to make categorical sense of literary production. Historians of the book have used Foucault's ideas to deflect attention from authorial genius, although most scholars prefer to locate the construction of authority in the actions of publishers and, where documentation exists, readers, rather than depend on a purely theoretical concept of textuality.[8] Genette introduced the relationship between text and what he called the 'paratext' – 'those liminal devices and conventions, both within the book (peritext) and outside it (epitext) that mediate the book to the reader'. Such 'framing elements' included everything from titles to forewords and dedications, to bindings and publishers' advertisements, booksellers' displays and series format.[9] Again a theoretical concept has been put to use by scholars interested in a material object. And finally Anderson's concept of nations as 'imagined communities' has found purchase among book historians, because Anderson identified the connective tissue of those communities in terms of reading, especially the communal experience of reading novels and of newspapers. He also introduced the potent intellectual construct of 'print-capitalism', whereby the circulation of texts in unified vernacular languages, fixed in a stable material format, can be seen to reinforce the power of both capitalism and the state.[10]

That these scholars' ideas have been influential can be seen in a variety of ways in which book history has been formalized in publishing programmes and pedagogy as well as scholarship. Histories of the book in Britain, the United States, Canada, and other nation-states are either complete or in progress.[11] Books entitled Companion – to the book

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[6] D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the sociology of texts: the Panizzi Lectures, 1985* (London, 1986). Reprinted in D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the sociology of texts* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 9–76. For a criticism of McKenzie's approach see G. T. Tanselle, 'The work of D. F. McKenzie', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 98 (2004), pp. 511–21.

[7] Roger Chartier, *The order of books: readers, authors, and libraries in Europe between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge and Stanford, CA, 1994), pp. viii, 10. Originally published 1992 as *L'ordre des livres*.

[8] Michel Foucault, 'What is an author?', in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault reader* (London, 1986), pp. 107, 118–19.

[9] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: thresholds of interpretation*, trans Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge, 1997), p. xviii.

[10] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (revised edn, London, 1991), pp. 24–36, 44–6.

[11] John Barnard and D. F. McKenzie, with the assistance of Maureen Bell, eds., *The Cambridge history of the book in Britain*, IV: *1557–1695* (Cambridge, 2002). The general editors of the Cambridge History of the Book in Britain are D. F. McKenzie, D. J. McKitterick, and I. R. Willison. Hugh Amory and David Hall, eds., *The history of the book in America*, I: *The colonial book in the Atlantic world* (New York, NY, 2000). The History of the Book in America is sponsored by the American Antiquarian Society. Patricia

and to the history of the book – are being sponsored by major publishers.[12] Textbooks and selections of key works have been conveniently packaged for the use of students.[13] Monographs flourish, less endangered in this sub-discipline than in many, and book historians presenting their work at conferences attract flattering attention from commissioning editors as well as from journal editors and the general editors of publishers' series. Small and medium-sized conferences are devoted to various aspects of the history of books, as are sessions at larger conferences.[14] Sometimes these conferences and sessions make their way into print as volumes of essays or proceedings.[15]

What follows is an assessment of some recent work on the history of the book and on reading habits in modern Britain and North America. Even with these chronological and geographical limits, the scholarship varies widely, not to say wildly, in approach and methodology. Darnton's comments on the frustration of 'interdisciplinarity run riot' remain relevant.[16] Historians of the Enlightenment, anxious to learn about a new study of authorship, publishing, and bookselling in that period, may find little interest in one about how Dickens was read on either side of the Atlantic, or another concerning aspects of the Gothic in obscure periodicals.[17] The works considered here fall into two broad groupings. The books discussed in the first section are concerned with how publishers and readers, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, used the book to create and replicate culture. The focus is on the circulation of ideas in literary communities, and the book is defined in both textual and material terms. In the second section the focus is on how writers used the texts they created to influence and negotiate culture. In most cases the authors in question were novelists and their works were novels, and the focus is on the

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L. Fleming and Yvan Lamonde, eds. *A History of the book in Canada* (3 vols., Toronto, 2004–7). For a valuable critical commentary on this collective enterprise, see Michael F. Suarez, SJ, 'Historiographical problems and possibilities in book history and national histories of the book', *Studies in Bibliography*, 56 (2003–4), pp. 141–70.

[12] An *Oxford companion to the book*, ed. Michael F. Suarez, SJ, and Henry Woodhuysen is forthcoming from Oxford University Press in 2008. *A companion to the history of the book*, ed. Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose, was published by Blackwell in 2007.

[13] David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, *The book history reader* (2nd edn, London, 2006), and *An introduction to book history* (London, 2005). See also Ann Hawkins, ed., *Teaching bibliography, textual criticism and book history* (London, 2006).

[14] In Britain, the annual Book Trade History Conferences are published by Oak Knoll in the Publishing Pathways series. See also the 'material cultures' conferences sponsored by the Centre for the History of the Book in the University of Edinburgh. The international Society for the History of Authorship Reading and Publishing meets annually and also sponsors sessions at the Modern Languages Association and American Historical Association meetings among others.

[15] A particularly successful example is James Raven, ed. *Lost libraries: the destruction of great book collections since antiquity* (London, 2004). Fifteen essays address the destruction of libraries in the ancient world, early modern and modern Europe, Tibet, and China as well as a comment on Truffault's film version of Ray Bradbury's *Farenheit 451*. The original conference was one of an occasional series sponsored by the Cambridge Project for the Book Trust. Another frequently cited CPBT volume is *The practice and representation of reading in England*, ed. J. Raven, Helen Small, and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge, 1996).   [16] Darnton, 'What is the history of books?', p. 110.

[17] For Dickens in the United States see McGill below. Franz J. Potter, *The history of gothic publishing, 1800–1835: exhuming the trade* (London, 2005). Potter's work 'focuses on the explicit conflict between the Gothic canon and the trade, in order to understand the changing form of the Gothic in the early nineteenth century' (p. xi) After a bibliographical analysis of the 'trade context' four case studies are presented, works by William Child Green, Sarah Wilkinson, Francis Lathom, and Mary Shelley.

literary text and not on the material book. In a sense, both groups of scholars are asking the same question – what is the effect of books on cultural change?

I

Until the late 1990s the historiography of the book in modern Britain and North America looked rather sparse, at least in contrast to that of continental Europe and of the pre-modern period. Richard Altick's 1957 book, *The English common reader: a social history of the mass reading public, 1800–1900*, still in print and widely cited, began to appear dated as it approached its fiftieth anniversary.[18] Specialist works on printing and the book trade abounded, as did studies of literary authors and their readers and celebrations of publishing-house anniversaries. But these works could not compare to the rigour of the *histoire du livre* approach emerging from the Annales tradition in France that culminated in Lucien Febvre's and H. J. Martin's *L'apparation du livre* (1958, published in English as *The coming of the book* in 1994). Nor did scholarship on modern Britain and North America make the same impact as Elizabeth Eisenstein's controversial but influential 1979 book, made widely available in a 1984 abridgement. *The printing press as an agent of change* claimed, for the technology of printing with moveable type and its capacity to capture a written text with a fixity impossible for manuscript, the power of cultural change that had driven forward no less significant events than the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the Scientific Revolution.[19] And despite the establishment of a projected Cambridge history of the book in Britain (to match *L'histoire de l'édition française*)[20] few of Britain's social historians working in the period from 1750 to 1950 expressed interest in 'the book', either as an agent of change or a way of understanding the questions of social class and gender with which they were preoccupied. In British historiography until the end of the twentieth century, print was ubiquitous as a source, but it remained unproblematized as a force.

The indicator of a more rigorous approach for pre-modern Britain (although really only for England) was Adrian Johns's *The nature of the book: print and knowledge in the making* (1998). Here Johns challenged Eisenstein's thesis as technologically determinist, and countered her argument that print had acted to 'fix', or stabilize, the important texts of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century religion, politics, and (especially) science, thus enhancing their power. On the contrary, he said: people, not printing, had created change, and they had done it through a struggle over the nature of the book and its credibility. Charges of piracy or plagiarism, for example, threatened to undermine either the author's or the publisher's credibility. Eisenstein's and other scholars' stress on fixity had, in Johns's words,

tended to draw attention away from, rather than towards, the labour exerted by actors to keep their products stable across space and time. The effect has been still to privilege the work of certain

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[18] Richard Altick, *The English common reader: a social history of the mass reading public, 1800–1900* (London 1957). The unrevised new edition (Columbus, OH, 1998) has a preface by Jonathan Rose.

[19] Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The printing press as an agent of change: communications and cultural transformations in early modern Europe* (2 vols., New York, NY, 1979). Abridged without documentation as *The printing revolution in early modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1984). See also Sabrina A. Baron et al., eds., *Agent of change: print culture studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein.* (Amherst, MA, 2007).

[20] See n. 11 above. *Histoire de l'édition française*, ed. H. J. Martin et al. (4 vols., Paris, 1982–6).

individuals and institutions over others. A better way to proceed is to focus on just that very labour which such a treatment underplays.[21]

At the end of his long work, Johns speculates that the moment of fixity and credibility may simply have arrived later – in the nineteenth century – with steam printing and other new technologies, as well as the invention of authorial copyright. But having floated these arguments, Johns returns to the realm of culture. If the Victorians trusted their books in a way that early modern readers did not, Johns anticipates finding the answer to why this might be so in the experience of readers, rather than in the technology of printing machines and metal plates.

Although the Victorian book still awaits its historian, the long eighteenth century has been well served in works appearing in the early years of the twenty-first.[22] William St Clair makes an argument based on an economic analysis of the book trade to draw conclusions about the very essence of culture and politics. The laws and practices governing the ownership of cultural property are central to *The reading nation in the romantic period* (2004). Tracking print runs and price points, St Clair does not engage with Johns's concerns about credibility and fixity, or indeed with any particular historian's thesis. His 'reading nation' is primarily Great Britain, although its denizens include American and colonial readers; and his 'romantic period' runs from about 1790 to 1830 with forays into both earlier and later decades. Historians of the period might have expected a title like 'The reading nation and the politics of industrialization' but a title alluding to social and political history would not address St Clair's focus upon the creation, management, and deployment of a literary canon during those turbulent decades. Here is the tightly wound argument:

> To help to understand and trace the possible effects of reading on mentalities, we need to trace historic reading. To trace readership, we need to trace access. To trace access, we need to trace price. To trace price, we need to trace intellectual property, and to trace intellectual property, we need to trace the changing relationship between the book industry and the state.[23]

The effect of reading on mentalities may have been profoundly conservative, St Clair believes, because what most people read was old stuff. It was all they could afford, since intellectual property was controlled by a monopoly.

Until the 1850s and 1860s, British publishers kept the price of new and current writers' books too high for working-class budgets by claiming perpetual copyright in the works they controlled. So in the romantic period the reading nation did not read the work of romantics and radicals, but rather much older and safer works. And what people read in the Victorian period was largely made up of 'obsolete'[24] books that had recently emerged from copyright – cheap editions of Scott, Byron, and Wordsworth that could be stereotyped and reprinted over and over again. During most of the time with which St Clair is concerned (and, not coincidentally in his view, at present) a handful of powerful firms controlled access to texts both old and new and those entrepreneurs were in a position to impose and

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[21] Adrian Johns, *The nature of the book: print and knowledge in the making* (Chicago, IL, 1998), p. 2. See also Johns's debate with Eisenstein, 'AHR forum: how revolutionary was the print revolution?', *American Historical Review*, 107 (Feb. 2002), pp. 84–125.

[22] Further important contributions are Kevin Sharpe, *Reading revolutions: the politics of reading in early modern England* (New Haven, CT, 2000) and arriving too late to be reviewed here James Raven, *The business of books: booksellers and the English book trade, 1450–1850* (New Haven, CT, 2007).

[23] William St Clair, *The reading nation in the romantic period* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 42.

[24] Ibid., p. 443.

re-impose a commercial value to overlay the literary one. It was the publisher's ownership of copyright, not the author's, that mattered, and until 1774, and again after 1842, they could keep the price of newly published books unnaturally high. Between 1774 and 1842 there was a brief 'copyright window' when the House of Lords prevented the monopolists from claiming perpetual copyright. Fresh editions of older works, as well as anthologies and collections, appeared at affordable prices. But with the Copyright Act of 1842 the 'old canon' of works that were then out of copyright was 'closed in', and the stereotyped editions poured forth to stultify the Victorian imagination.[25]

St Clair's book has been greeted by reviewers with cautious admiration,[26] but it remains to be seen whether it will meet with the wholehearted acceptance that would set to work a school of protégés and emulators. Indeed one of the first book-length works to comment on the St Clair approach has downplayed the importance of copyright and intellectual property. In *The Enlightenment & the book: Scottish authors & their publishers in eighteenth-century Britain, Ireland, & America*, Richard Sher makes intellectual heroes of St Clair's literary monopolists, the publishers. While celebrating Adam Smith, James Boswell, and David Hume, Sher shows how it was their publishers who disseminated the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment to the English-speaking world. The names of Edinburgh businessmen with contacts in London, men like Andrew Strahan, Thomas Cadell, and William Creech appear frequently in Sher's carefully constructed databases of 115 Scottish Enlightenment authors and 360 Scottish Enlightenment books.

Sher engages with other historians, of the book, and of the Enlightenment. He observes that Adrian Johns adopted a local focus for his study of print and knowledge in the making, limiting his research to publishers of scientific works in London. Other centres, meanwhile, played host to rather different book cultures. Sher asks 'Has Johns given us the key to "the nature of the book" in general, or merely a rich history of the making of one genre of books in one particular time and place?' He notes approvingly Darnton's observation that 'the history of books must be international in scale' and remembers that Febvre and Martin, too, had approached 'le livre' in broad European and even (to some extent) North American context. Johns's contention that 'piracy and plagiarism occupied readers' minds just as prominently as fixity and enlightenment' may be true of scientific books in seventeenth-century London, but it is not necessarily true of books in philosophy, law, or fiction from that same time and place. Johns has, in Sher's estimation, failed in 'establishing the universal significance of his model for book history'.[27] Sher's own study recasts the Enlightenment as a community of readers, and stresses the centrality of Scottish publishing to that transatlantic community. Books published in Edinburgh were reprinted, and widely circulated, in Dublin and Philadelphia and 'in this process of diffusion, authors eventually dropped out of the picture, but commercial, technological, cultural, demographical, legal, ideological, and personal factors remained in play among those who elected to reprint Scottish Enlightenment books in Ireland and America'.[28] And despite his critique of Johns,

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[25] Ibid., pp. 120–1, 122–39, 525–50.

[26] H. J. Jackson, 'Sales figures', *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 July 2004, p. 3. Robert L. Patten called it 'the most important book about early nineteenth-century print culture published so far in this century' ('Matters of material interest', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 35 (2007), pp. 345–59, at p. 345). See also my own review of St Clair in *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 100 (Mar. 2006), pp. 152–4.

[27] Johns, *Nature of the book*, p. 30; Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment & the book: Scottish authors & their publishers in eighteenth-century Britain, Ireland, & America* (Chicago, IL, 2006), pp. 8, 10.

[28] Sher, *The Enlightenment & the book*, pp. 23–4.

Sher's declaration that his own brand of book history is 'first and foremost human history constructed on a material foundation' resonates with the other historian's insistence on human, not technological agency in the power of books and of texts.

Sher's scholarship engages positively with that of Foucault and Genette, and negatively with that of William St Clair. The authors who 'dropped out of the picture' are conceptualized with the help of Foucault's thoughts on the death of the author, and Genette's ideas are used to explain the way readers responded to the format of the books they were reading. Sher believes that St Clair has exaggerated the importance of the 1774 House of Lords copyright decision and put an 'ominous gloss' on the publishers' practice of reprinting expensive books in smaller and more affordable formats. 'Above all', he insists,

it is necessary to apply rigorous historical methods to the study of the book trade. Why suppose that soaring book production at the end of the eighteenth century was the result of the Lords' ruling in 1774 when the same phenomenon is evident in places not affected by that decision, such as Dublin and Philadelphia?[29]

On the other hand, Sher accepts St Clair's argument that reprinted late eighteenth-century works formed an 'old canon' that was widely read for a further hundred years, and adds that many of the authors in that canon were Scots.

The transatlantic element of Sher's work is of particular significance; it contributes not only to studies of the Enlightenment in early America as well as in Scotland and England, but also to the scholarly focus upon an Atlantic world associated with David Armitage and others.[30] Two other works use this approach to enrich their understanding of the place of the book in culture. James Raven came across the letter book of the Charleston Library Society in the course of his work on the book and print export trade from London to the American colonies. His book, *London booksellers and American customers: transatlantic literary community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748–1811*, is much more than an edition of those letters. Raven shows how members of the society went about ordering books so that they could participate in European literary culture, how important their orders were to the London booksellers, and how a particular Charleston flavour of sociability was nurtured during both the colonial and early national periods.[31] Anglo-American relations in a slightly later period are revisited by Meredith L. McGill, in *American literature and the culture of reprinting, 1834–1853*. As with both St Clair and Sher, McGill finds the reprinting of popular texts to be of central importance, far beyond the mere business of the publisher's profits. And like Raven, McGill finds that the nascent cultures of printing in antebellum Philadelphia, New York, and Boston did not prevent American readers from seeking British books and being open to the values they conveyed. There was 'a flourishing trade in cheap, reprinted British books, which, because unconstrained by copyright, achieved remarkable national distribution in the form of competing, regionally produced editions'. Copyright, again. Like St Clair, McGill finds its lack to be a liberating force, though her

[29] Ibid., p. 29.

[30] David Armitage, 'Three concepts of Atlantic history', in D. Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic world, 1500–1800* (Basingstoke, 1991), pp. 11–27. See also Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows, eds., *Press, politics and the public sphere in Europe and North America, 1760–1820* (Cambridge, 2002). Barker and Burrows and their contributors focus on the newspaper press, and draw, as the title suggests, on Habermas's concept of a public sphere. They look at the relationship between newspapers and social change, and especially at the part played by the press during periods of political upheaval.

[31] James Raven, *London booksellers and American customers: transatlantic literary community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748–1811* (Columbia, SC, 2002).

work appeared too late to be in a position to refer to his. Rather than ignore the books of Dickens and others because they were not written by Americans, she reflects that they were read by Americans, and argues that 'the proliferation of cheap, reprinted texts and the reliance of the book trade on periodical publishing realigned relations between author, publisher, editor, and reader, upended the hierarchy of genres, and troubled the boundaries of the text-as-object'.[32] McGill observes that 'the history of the culture of reprinting has consequences for the contemporary politics of copyright', and insists that 'Antebellum struggles over the right to reprint domestic and foreign texts demonstrate that literary property is never simply or only a matter of individual property rights, but rather of systems of circulation in which persons, corporate bodies, and the state have complicated and often conflicting interests.'[33]

I I

Several historians have commented on the unfortunate tendency of book history to focus on literary works, and to a lesser extent on science. Sher reiterates this concern and urges his fellow scholars to 'throw the genre net wider'.

Much of what passes for book history among literary critics maintains a literary and textual emphasis. Furthermore, the genres of fiction, poetry, drama, and literary criticism tend to be privileged over other kinds of writing. Too often, the canonical writers in London who wrote books in those genres are seen as the new cultural heroes of the age of print; the professional literary author is exalted as the paradigm of modernity; and figures in the book trade are rendered worthy – or not – on the basis of their contributions to those authors and their works…Throw the genre net wider, to include the writing of history, political economy, philosophy, medicine, and other forms of polite literature and learning, and the situation will look very different. It may even turn out that the paradigm of the 'modern' author is not independence in the sense of having no occupation other than writing for publication but rather interdependence in the sense of integration into appropriate professions and professional institutions.[34]

This argument, however, is unlikely to convince many of the scholars who are interested in the textuality and the materiality of novels and other creative works. Literary practitioners of book history are not often interested in non-literary genres, although some of them are deeply concerned with discovering little-known novels and poems to supplement and extend the well-worn canon. What they have done instead is to reinvent literary criticism to show how literature was embedded and enmeshed in contemporary culture.

Clare Pettit exemplifies this tradition; her *Patent inventions* is subtitled 'Intellectual property and the Victorian novel'. Unlike other works on copyright, which tend to focus on the legal complexities and on claims to ownership of literary property, Pettit identifies a relationship between patent law and copyright law, and she finds that connection within the literary text. Both inventors and authors in Victorian Britain were deeply concerned with protecting the property that lay in their intellectual achievements. The connections are to be found in the plots and characters of contemporary novels and indeed other scholars have limited their discussion of copyright law and the construction of the artist to literary criticism. Pettit, however, is anxious to restore it 'to the wider debate in the period

[32] Meredith L. McGill, *American literature and the culture of reprinting, 1834–1853* (Philadelphia, PA, 2003), pp. 1, 2.   [33] Ibid., p. 276.

[34] Sher, *The Enlightenment & the book*, pp. 10–11. He cites Leah Price, 'Introduction: reading matter', Proceedings of the Modern Languages Association, 121 (2006), pp. 9–16 at p. 12.

of labour and value'.[35] This debate in turn enriches our reading of the novels, and also of the culture out of which they emerged. The enduring value of mental labour, whether that of an industrial inventor or of an artist, was being reconceptualized during this time, and differentiated from the value of physical labour. Pettit begins in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when she finds both mechanical inventors and literary writers still working with and sharing the same ideas about intellectual property. But in the 1830s and 1840s debates about political and social reform happened at the same time as new technologies of reproduction, as well as the 1842 Copyright Act to which she ascribes much less importance than does St Clair. By the 1850s the two trends were ready to converge upon the novel. Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot all participated in debates about the value and ownership of labour, and in separate chapters Pettit teases the internal evidence out of their literary texts, along with the external evidence of how the formats and publishing histories of their novels also contributed to discourse over intellectual property. 'In its self-conscious creation of an imaginary', she argues, 'the Victorian novel not only reflects social relationships as they are conventionally articulated through the institutions of the law, education, and so on, but also posits new ways of structuring and thinking about such relationships'. And 'novelists use their writing to work at imagining how far it is ever possible to own a creative act'.[36] Pettit's analysis is both brilliant and subtle, and it will be of just as much use to scholars of patent and copyright law as to those who study the canon of Victorian literature.

Other works take up similar themes but often without attending to the material or commercial specificity of book culture or providing any external evidence that contemporaries interpreted the works within the proposed critical framework. They are not so much contributions to the history of the book but rather to the history, and criticism, of a genre – fiction. In *Novel relations: the transformation of kinship in English literature and culture 1748–1818*, Ruth Perry uses historical and anthropological scholarship on kinship patterns to say something new about popular and canonical literature of the eighteenth century. The familiar historical scholarship of Wrigley and Schofield, Davidoff and Hall, Alan Macfarlane, Naomi Tadmor, and others is put to use to explain the novels. Ties of love, marriage, and the nuclear family (conjugal relationships) replaced those of blood lineage (consanguineal ties). 'Literary texts', she observes, 'provide the insights about how the conception of 'family' changed in eighteenth-century England and the strain that put on existing relationships'. History, for its part, 'provides the causal or correlative explanations for the social and psychological phenomena that literature reveals. It also corroborates these changes from the perspective of another discipline'.[37] Social historians who remember how the history of demographics and kinship relations had to be wrenched away from the powerful stereotypes dictated by literary writers will be disconcerted by this reversal of direction, but historians of culture and the family may discover new insights from Perry's approach. Historians of the material book, however, will find little in Perry's work to interest them; she discusses novels in the sort of pure text-without-paratext terms that book historians scorn.

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[35] Clare Pettit, *Patent inventions: intellectual property and the Victorian novel* (Oxford, 2004), p. 2. See also Mark Rose, *Authors and owners: the invention of copyright* (Cambridge, MA, 1993).

[36] Pettit, *Patent inventions*, p. 23.

[37] Ruth Perry, *Novel relations: the transformation of kinship in English literature and culture, 1748–1818* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 1.

Pam Morris also uses novels, with other literary works, this time to think about the public sphere of mid-nineteenth-century Britain. Entitled *Imagining inclusive society in nineteenth-century novels: the code of sincerity in the public sphere*, Morris's study focuses on the period between the Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867. Arguably this was the moment of mass culture, a time when social relationships were under pressure. But 'inclusive society' was difficult to imagine in that increasingly heterogeneous public sphere. Instead the old hierarchical code of civility broke down, to be replaced by a new, ideological 'code of sincerity' that could be manipulative. Morris draws upon the thought of Habermas, Foucault, Benedict Anderson, Mary Poovey, and Charles Tilley, and reads six key novels as well as a representative body of periodical literature. Like Perry and other literary scholars, she believes 'that nineteenth-century novels can provide unique insights into the collective act of imagination that produced a modern perception of social reality'.[38] And, like them, she does not position her argument in terms of the transformation of printing technology and literacy that was also happening at the time in which she is interested. St Clair's question would likely be: who could afford to read the books that were supposedly shaping social reality? And Sher might ask whether political and philosophical works might not be a better place to look for ideas about sincerity.

Another study of fiction, this time using elements of the Victorian canon that Pettit probed, is a book on citizenship and friendship in works by Dickens, Disraeli, George Eliot, and Oscar Wilde. Richard Dellamora is the author of *Friendship's bonds: democracy and the novel in Victorian England*. This time it is not parents and children, but mentors and protégés, whose relationships are studied, and not 'inclusive society' but 'democracy' that is highlighted. Dellamora argues that the Victorians hoped to achieve a just society that would be that way because friends governed it. He asks how this ideal played out in the actual struggles about who was, and was not, eligible for citizenship. And how did anxieties about sexual orientation inflect the ideal? Although Dellamora observes in passing that 'the study of Victorian political history would benefit from better acknowledgement of the importance of friendship in parliamentary practice' his interests are aesthetic, not culture-historical or biographical. He argues that the ideal of masculine fraternity was tested by 'anxieties about the possible conversion of intimacy into sexual anarchy', so that 'sodomitic intimations inflected debates over the civil, political and social rights of artisans, women, Jews, and Irishmen in Victorian England'. Jews were particularly associated with the sins of the biblical Sodom. Along with other creative arts, the novel, Dellamora argues, was a place where the Victorians could imagine the possibilities of democracy. He calls the novel 'a popular literary genre entrusted with the responsibility of representing contemporary actuality' that also 'offered a means of registering dissent from general maxims about the rights supposedly enjoyed by the inhabitants of the British Isles'.[39]

If some works of literary criticism stake a fragile claim to be the history of the book, other books on authorship, publishing, and reading seem to hold themselves at arm's length from that identity. The author of one particular work about writing and the book trade in Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries signally fails, or perhaps declines, to classify his work in this way. Philip Waller, introducing a volume of 1,181 pages that took over twenty years to write, identifies his work as 'life-writing', not 'book history'. The title

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[38] Pam Morris, *Imagining inclusive society in nineteenth-century novels: the code of sincerity in the public sphere* (Baltimore, MD, 2004).

[39] Richard Dellamora, *Friendship's bonds: democracy and the novel in Victorian England* (Philadelphia, PA, 2004), pp. 23, 5.

is *Writers, readers, and reputations: literary life in Britain 1870–1918* and the book is an invaluable compendium of anecdotes about bibliophiles, reviewers, publishers, lecture tours, literary agents, best-sellers, public service, and censorship. It makes no attempt, however, to engage, or even to identify itself, with the scholarship on the same subject that emerged as it was being written. Simon Eliot's and Alexis Weedon's carefully compiled works of quantitative book history do not appear in the bibliography.[40]

Much more attractive but equally *sui generis* is a book that takes up about when Waller's leaves off, in the 1920s, and moves down the social scale to consider the authorship of factory workers rather than of upper- and middle-class bookmen and women. Christopher Hilliard is a historian, the author of *To exercise our talents: the democratization of writing in Britain*.[41] His book discusses the writers' clubs which, along with guidebooks and correspondence schools and a magazine (*The Writer*) encouraged factory workers – and later soldiers in the Second World War – to express themselves in writing and have their work published. Although Hilliard refers in passing to the work of Altick and other historians of the book, he does not engage deeply with their analyses or identify himself with the book-history approach.

Although the works of literary history discussed in this second section do not contribute to the historiography identified above, a suggestive parallel exists between the methodological approaches of the two groups of works emerging from different disciplinary traditions. In both cases there is a tension between the specific and the general – in the case of the histories focusing on the material book, between localized studies and transnational ones. A particular town's or nation's case is not necessarily representative, but a broader study can be weakened by a lack of evidentiary detail. In a similar state of affairs, some of the works of literary criticism and history are examinations of specific canonical works, well-known and having benefited from textual editing – while others are studies that reach deeper into the rich and undifferentiated body of writing that was in circulation at the same time as Jane Austen's or Dickens's apparently representative works. Scholars should consider critiquing and modifying each others' methodology, not just their broad-brush arguments, if the study of the history and culture of the book is to be set on the firm ground of scholarly practice.

If the question asked by all these historians and other scholars has something to do with the effect of the book on cultural change, then it seems that the answer is to be found both inside and outside the covers, in Genette's paratext as well as in the text. By setting to one side the authority of the author, scholars like McGill and Raven have allowed us to imagine the book in history from the perspective of its reader, and to recognize that in spite of the tremendous importance of national identity in the early national period in the United States, readers badly wanted to identify themselves also with the books and the book culture of a wider English-speaking world. By focusing on the go-between in the relationship between reader and author, Sher and St Clair from their differing perspectives have shown the degree to which the business interests of publishers served to create that bookish culture, and to deploy and manage its manifestations in Enlightenment and romanticism. Pettit, Perry, and others have re-inserted the canonical authors of Victorian novels into that bookish culture and shown how they used their books – texts and material objects – to comment on their contemporaries.

[40] Philip Waller, *Writers, readers, and reputations: literary life in Britain, 1870–1918* (Oxford, 2006).
[41] Christopher Hilliard, *To exercise our talents: the democratization of writing in Britain* (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

Many of the works discussed above have similarly commented upon our own times in the context of book history or literary criticism: Dellamora's concerns with sexual identity provide an obvious example, and so do those of St Clair and McGill with cultural property. Both the lofty ideal of intellectual property and the humble act of reprinting are very much with us in the first decade of the twenty-first century as out-of-print texts are being published again in electronic form, having a new monetary value added by making them searchable and downloadable. That new value translates into profits for publishers and sometimes creates a financial impediment in the way of readers, without necessarily offering any recompense to the author. Historians of the book are themselves authors and also readers; we are enmeshed in complex relationships with publishers and booksellers, and vitally concerned with matters of typography and design, and ultimately of meaning.