



The Book

Newsletter of the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture
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Past, present, and future Wiggins lecturers: Michael Winship, University of Texas at Austin (1999), Robert A. Gross, College of William and Mary (1989), David Paul Nord, Indiana University (1996), Carla Peterson (1997), David D. Hall, Harvard Divinity School (1983), and Michael Schudson, University of California at San Diego (1990). Photo by Doris O'Keefe.

Peterson Delivers Wiggins Lecture

Carla Peterson, professor of English and comparative literature at the University of Maryland, presented the fifteenth annual James Russell Wiggins Lecture in the History of the Book in American Culture. In the lecture, "Reconstructing the Nation: Frances Harper, Charlotte Forten, and the Racial Politics of Periodical Publications," Peterson showed how these two African-American authors used periodical publications to write within and for the black community. "Periodicals offered a vehicle to ponder African-American citizenship," she said. In her serialized fiction, Harper urged self-discipline on her readers, telling them of their important role in insuring the success of Reconstruction and reminding them that the right to vote could still be rescinded. Forten, "who possessed the skill to become a great writer," took a different approach, writing for a "community that transcended racial borders." Ultimately, despite active participation by blacks in literary Reconstruction, the opposition of white Southerners resulted in a complex situation that aggravated rather than reconciled difference. Peterson's lecture will be published in Volume 107, part 2, of the *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*.

Volume 1 of "A History of the Book in America," Delivered to CUP

The manuscript of *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, Volume 1 of *A History of the Book in America*, was delivered to Cambridge University Press on September 3, 1997. Editors Hugh Amory and David D. Hall put the finishing touches on the manuscript at the end of the summer. Research Assistant Russell Martin, who developed the statistical data for the volume, and Caroline Sloat, the project's administrative assistant, delivered the manuscript to the publisher in New York. Publication is expected in late 1998.



From left, Amory, Martin, Sloat, and Hall take a break from their labors on Volume 1.

Canadian Conference Plans for A History of the Book

Plans for a history of the book in Canada were first debated in a public forum at the annual meeting of the Bibliographical Society of Canada/Société bibliographique du Canada in Montreal in 1995. Following that discussion a committee (chaired by Patricia Fleming with Leslie Howsam, Yvan Lamonde, Germaine Warkentin, and Bruce Whiteman) was appointed to develop plans for consideration at the 1996 annual meeting in Halifax. We agreed then to hold a founding conference for *A History of the Book in Canada/Histoire de l'imprimé au Canada* at the National Library in Ottawa in May 1997. More than 100 people attended this three-day meeting: academics in a variety of disciplines, bibliographers, archivists, librarians, conservators, researchers, members of the book trade, and a strong cohort of students.

To provide common ground for discussion regional teams prepared papers distributed before the conference on the state of book history studies in the Maritimes, Newfoundland, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairie provinces, British Columbia, and Yukon. In the opening session these reports were summarized within the conceptual framework of book history studies: authorship (Carole Gerson, Simon Fraser University); printing and production (Patricia Fleming, University of Toronto) publishing and distribution (Leslie Howsam, University of Windsor); libraries and collecting (Bruce Whiteman, Clark Library, UCLA); reading (Heather Murray, University of Toronto); and genres (Michel Brisebois, National Library). Yvan Lamonde (McGill University) led a discussion of the implications for writing book history in Canada.

The fifteen papers which followed were grouped by theme. In a session on cultural history, François Melançon (a doctoral student at Paris I) introduced manuscript culture, book circulation, and reading in Quebec before the arrival of the first press in 1764. Fiona Black, another Canadian completing doctoral studies abroad (Loughborough University), spoke about her research into fur traders' libraries in the Northwest, while Germaine Warkentin (University of Toronto) developed issues she raised last year in Halifax with a paper on wampum and the history of the book. Two sessions on publishing dealt with the role of government (Bertrum MacDonald, Dalhousie University), the Canadian periodical press (David McKnight, McGill University), and scholarly publishing from 1955 to 1975 (Frances Halpenny,

University of Toronto). Publishing in Canada during the second war was the subject of one case study (Grant Campbell, Dalhousie University) and self publication by African-Canadian authors was the other (George Clarke, Duke University). Claude Martin (Université de Montréal) reported on a survey of popular reading in Quebec during the 1960s in 'Les best-sellers de la Révolution tranquille.' Pierre Hebert (Université de Sherbrooke) prefaced his methodological discussion of research about censorship in Quebec by describing 'une histoire du livre sans une histoire de censure' as 'mission impossible'. Three papers in the session on sources and methodology reported on the use of archival collections for book history. Margaret Williams (University of Toronto Press) examined the publishing, printing, and book-selling activities of a major department store chain and Jennifer Connor (University of Toronto) made a case for estate records in publishing history. Labor historian Christina Burr (University of Windsor) spoke about the nineteenth-century printing trades as a study of gender, skill, and craft sense. In the final session Mary L. Macdonald (independent researcher, Halifax) charted the emergence of the author in nineteenth-century Canada and Mary Jane Edwards (Carleton University) concluded with a paper about the publication of William Carbo's *The Golden Dog*.

Two keynote speakers launched the Saturday and Sunday morning sessions with wide-ranging talks. Bill Bell of the *History of the Book in Scotland* spoke about print culture as part of the Scottish emigrant experience in Canada and New Zealand in "Books across Borders: The National Press in an International Context." Robert Gross of the College of William and Mary and AAS offered a stimulating analysis of common themes in our separate histories in "Books, Nationalism, and History," which will be published in the *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada* in the autumn of 1998.

Although the outlines of the project were discussed in only one public session, the whole conference was animated with enthusiasm and energy for the work ahead, a three-volume interdisciplinary history in French and English. Working groups for each volume were formed to collaborate in evaluating the research infrastructure and in identifying major topics. Members of the organizing committee have agreed to continue on as an editorial committee and the project will soon announce a home page on the Web with an inventory of work-in-progress and texts of the regional papers.

Sponsors of the event were the Bibliographical Society of Canada, the National Library, and the Faculty of Information Studies at the University of Toronto, which administered a conference grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Additional funding was provided by the Antiquarian Booksellers' Association and the University of Toronto Press.

The conference ended with a call to meet in 1998 in Vancouver with SHARP.

Patricia Fleming, University of Toronto

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The editors welcome all news relevant to the interests of the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture.

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Front row: Leonard, Hiltner, Waterman, DeWolfe, Todd; second row: Young, Cluff, Homestead, Rubin, McGill, Garvey; third row: Ryan, Smith, Turner, Baker, Harker, Gitelman, Gable, Genz; top row: Sloat, Cox, Jones, Hench, Russo, Grossman, Fabian, Godleski, Ford.

Eleventh Summer Seminar

The 1997 Summer Seminar in the History of the Book met in Worcester, June 9-15, 1997—a week in which the temperature range was almost as great as the spectrum of interests among the participants. Twenty-two students—bibliographers, literary scholars, and cultural historians at work on such subjects as feminist bookstores, Anti-Shakers, and publishers’ advertising—joined us to explore the topic “Getting Into Print.”

The structure of the seminar reflected our desire to incorporate primary and secondary sources from both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and to consider a variety of factors shaping the creation of printed texts. Taking the concept of the professionalization of authorship as a starting point, we examined the impact of gender and identity on access to publication. We then investigated the roles of editors, booksellers, agents, distributors, and reviewers as mediators in the publishing process. A session on the constraints of copyright and one on the transatlantic context of the American book broadened the scope of our investigations, which concluded with reflections on recent scholarship in book history.

Throughout the seminar, participants had opportunities to study materials from AAS collections in archival exercises designed to illustrate the multiple forms in which the “same” works circulated. In addition, the AAS staff immeasurably enriched the course by instructing all of us about the resources available for research in the history of the book. Two guest lecturers, Ann Fabian and Michael Warner, shared their work in progress. “Getting Into Print”

proved a capacious theme and a congenial meeting place for history and literature, theory and practice.

Joan Shelley Rubin, University of Rochester
Meredith McGill, Rutgers University

PARTICIPANTS

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PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES

Reading *The Cost Books of Ticknor and Fields* in preparation for our first seminar session, I wondered if I'd breached the "radius of pertinence" for a student of social and cultural history. Struggling to calculate the number of quires per form, leaves per gathering, and other esoterica of book production, I stretched my mind to see what relevance the history of the book had to my concerns about cultural power, social order, and evangelical religion in two cities in the antebellum West, Cincinnati and Louisville. But if ems and tokens appeared unlikely starting points for intellectual happening, I was happily—and immediately—proven wrong: once lit, the intellectual fires in Worcester never abated.

With the help of Joan Shelley Rubin, Meredith McGill, and my seminar peers, I realized the "Getting into Print" seminar had launched a conversation about access to print and publishing with important ramifications for understanding the relationship between authors and their readers. Conceptualizing this relationship has been a recent thorn in the side of many cultural historians, but by considering authorship alongside access, editing, publishing, and circulation—as this seminar did—we cast the problem more broadly. Examining the roles played by patrons, printers, publishers, editors, agents, reviewers, and booksellers, we began to delineate the intriguing relationships and negotiations mediating authorship over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We also examined the legal, commercial, and technological contexts governing print distribution and circulation. And interwoven through all our discussions were questions about how gender, class, and ethnicity shaped authors', publishers', and reviewers' identities and delimited access to print. Examining the production side of print ultimately complicated my notions of reader "reception": over the course of the week, the seemingly intimate and singular relationship between author and reader, between text and meaning, opened out to reveal a startlingly complex "print culture."

An archival session held in the AAS Council Room in which we pored over hundreds of editions of Nathaniel Hawthorne's works illustrated how publishing history can alter our understanding of reader reception. Before the seminar, I would have naively assumed that by picking up the most recently published editions of Hawthorne's "The Celestial Railroad," I could begin to reconstruct its mean-

ing. But as we examined seven different antebellum reprints of "The Celestial Railroad" (and there are at least eleven more reprints from the period), we saw that each reprint edition would have suggested a different reading to its audience. The version found in an antislavery collection of writings, *Voices of the True-Hearted*, would have certainly signified differently to readers than that version found in the apolitical anthology *Prose Writers of America* or in the American Sunday School Union's modified rendering of Hawthorne's story. Our foray into nineteenth-century copyright law made it possible to understand the peculiar legal context enabling so many reprint editions, each with a unique publishing history.

For a historian-in-training, this was a heady discovery. As a result of my participation in the "Getting into Print" seminar, I will be far more sophisticated in my approach to evidence: by first asking how authors and publishers produced and circulated books, periodicals, or pamphlets, I can start to answer how ordinary people read a text. This was an important realization for me: the "history of the book" does not seek to reconstruct a literary history by and about an elite; by contrast, our primary readings revealed that access to print often failed to engender power and authority. For example, guest presenter Ann Fabian highlighted the problem of authenticity and the arousal of pity and curiosity in beggars' narratives from the early republic. Our readings also revealed how male editors and social convention circumscribed women's access to print, frequently rendering women's publishing achievements bittersweet.

Our heated discussions about print culture's relationship to social and political power will inform my own research on abolitionist and religious presses in Cincinnati, the antebellum West's publishing center. Despite Cincinnati's proximity to the South and its hostility to abolitionism, this western city was home to one of the most politically radical evangelical tract societies in the country. The "Getting into Print" seminar has provided me with tools both to explain this historical conundrum and to understand how African Americans, women, and abolitionists used Cincinnati's press to disseminate information about slavery.

Historians have much to contribute to and gain from participating in the conversation about book and publishing history. Although initially surprised that literary scholars and librarians so vastly outnumbered historians in the seminar—by a three-to-one margin—I quickly realized my good fortune. With literary scholars' refined questions about authorship and bibliographers' concerns about the material history of the book in mind, I return to my own research with sharpened questions about the role of print in community formation in the antebellum West.

Bridget Ford
University of California at Davis

As a special collections librarian with a Ph.D. in history, I spent an extremely productive week thinking about the evolution of “history of the book” as a scholarly endeavor. My 1970s library school background in the rare book program at Columbia University included a rigorous study of the book as physical object: from binding to signatures to watermarks to typeface to illustrations. This evidence was then used to analyze or verify the bibliographical history of a particular volume. My recent work in U.S. history provided a broader cultural context for analytical bibliography, including the impact of economics, censorship, and other social factors on the history of books and printing. The “Getting Into Print” seminar put those two excellent academic experiences together for me in provocative ways.

I enjoyed, in particular, the extensive readings about such editors as Maxwell Perkins and Edward Bok; about gender issues as presented in Fanny Fern’s work; the legal copyright decisions; and the work of independent booksellers to promote authorship. I do wish we had spent more time on the problems of censorship; in fact, I suggest that an entire week could easily be devoted to that topic alone. The evening sessions on library use were absolutely first-rate, and I fear that many librarians are not getting that kind of training in library school anymore. Two months later, as I write this piece, I continue to be frustrated that many library schools are dropping “history of the book” courses, which are being picked up readily in English and history departments to meet the growing interest in this expanding field of scholarly interest. While it is essential that library schools teach the new electronic formats, I believe that conceptually a book is a type of information format with a rich cultural, bibliographical, and political history, which must be studied by library school students as well as our colleagues in other disciplines.

At the same time, I think that more reading and discussion should have been devoted to traditional analytical bibliography in the writings of such scholars as G. Thomas Tanselle and printing history as addressed by Michael Winship. I believe that my fellow participants in the field of critical literary studies, in particular, would have found this material provocative. In fact, there could have been a round table discussion including one or two analytical bibliographers and perhaps a literary theorist. I would suggest that any real encounter with “text” must include the analytical bibliographical perspective, even if the scholar ultimately blends it with other historical theories.

If I felt myself frustrated at times those feelings are tempered by my excitement that a library history project dancing in my mind for years has finally found shape as a result of this seminar. This happened because of the helpful consultation of the two seminar leaders and my fellow participants, who taught me so much and were willing to talk me through some “rough spots” in my proposal. I also returned to work determined to produce new “routes” into our vast collections. In many instances our current cata-

logues and finding aids don’t reflect the scholarly opportunities in such areas as women’s studies, the history of publishing, or the history of readership. For example, we have the world’s premier H.G. Wells collection, but our new Wells databases should include the rich history of publishing found therein. I am also spending a lot of time thinking about access to noncanonical works which, owing to their historical status, are often hard to find and end up as rare books.

There were only three librarians attending “Getting Into Print,” and I urge more librarians to apply in future years. The week provided an excellent “window” not only into my own scholarly work, but also into the types of scholarship being supported in various academic disciplines today. I was fascinated, for example, to hear five of my fellow participants report that their English departments were discouraging dissertation topics focusing on the work of a single author. Rather, scholars are looking at the public response, publishing history, or censorship of authors. This focus should have an impact on how libraries organize and make accessible their special collections.

The entire week at the AAS was well organized and coordinated. The staff went out of their way to help us and to make access to the collections easy. There was no sign of the “fortress mentality” one sometimes encounters in using special collections. The seminar leaders were extremely accessible, and I enjoyed my conversations with them. They are both energetic scholars, and the excitement they demonstrated for their material was inspiring. Research Librarian Joanne Chaison’s session was among the best. She really knows her sources! Throughout the week she was very accessible and showed that kind of dedication a scholar loves, and that makes me proud to be a librarian.

Barbara M. Jones
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

SYLLABUS

Copies of the syllabus for “Getting Into Print” prepared by Joan Shelley Rubin and Meredith McGill are available from AAS. Please send your request, along with a self-addressed stamped #10 envelope, to Seminar Syllabus, Department of Academic and Public Programs, American Antiquarian Society, 185 Salisbury Street, Worcester, MA 01609.

Reprints Available of Recent Proceedings Articles

“Free Grace, Free Books, Free Riders: The Economics of Religious Publishing in Early Nineteenth-Century America,” David Paul Nord’s 1996 Wiggins Lecture, has been published in the *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (Volume 106, part 2) and reprinted separately. Nord explores the business strategies of religious publishers in early nineteenth-century America through which they sold *and* gave away books at the same time.

Given the not-for-profit goals of the publishers and the economic nature of religious publishing, the author argues, these early mass-media entrepreneurs made sensible, though not always successful, economic decisions. "‘They Flash Upon That Inward Eye’: Poetry Recitation and American Readers," by Joan Shelley Rubin, is based on her paper given at the Fourth Annual SHARP Conference. Derived in part from the responses of a sample of readers, this essay shows that reciting poetry in school between 1917 and 1950 sustained nineteenth-century texts and assumptions about the moral functions of learning verse. "Railway Reading," by Kevin J. Hayes, describes how passenger railways provided an opportunity for the development of inexpensively produced books that significantly influenced what people read, how they obtained what they read, and how they read. "How Much is That in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States: Addenda et Corrigenda" updates and adds to John J. McCusker's 1991 article which suggests a way to express historical prices, adjusted for inflation, in terms of modern values.

Research Note

NEWS IMAGES AS EVIDENCE OF SOCIAL PRACTICE

Scholarship on American illustrated journalism tends to be located in the interstices between the fields of art, photography, and journalism history. Interpretations of nineteenth-century American popular imagery, favoring technological and formalist approaches, usually pose photographic realism as the standard for pictorial representation; in this view, the rapid acceptance of and demand for photography after its introduction in the early 1840s rendered the engraved news image as a holding action, frustrating readers who awaited the technology of photomechanical reproduction. This perspective is abetted by an approach in art history that emphasizes authorship and artistic intention, relegating most engraved news imagery to negligible "hackwork" reflecting dominant beliefs or as the formative stage for recognized artists' later mature expression. The historiography of nineteenth-century journalism provides only glimpses of its illustrated weekly practitioners (with the notable exception of Thomas Nast), usually reserving consideration of news illustration until pictures appeared in daily newspapers in the late 1880s. Finally, the scholarship of nineteenth-century popular culture places the illustrated press into what has been perceived as an increasingly regimented high/low dichotomy. Focusing on the illustrated monthlies, such studies render a social map of cultural pursuits in which all pictorial magazines are comparable as purveyors of a genteel, elite

ethos: *Harper's Weekly* was *Frank Leslie's* was *Harper's Monthly* was *Scribner's Monthly*—with the mischievous exception of the *National Police Gazette*.

To be sure, historians have not neglected the illustrated press, with exemplary studies by Budd L. Gambee, Jr., Madeleine B. Stern, W. Fletcher Thompson, and, of course, Frank Luther Mott. But, for the most part, the ubiquitous appearance of images from *Frank Leslie's* and *Harper's Weekly* as illustrations in history books and articles merely corroborates the nineteenth-century lives, events, and conditions discussed in the surrounding text; their use for largely illustrative purposes ignores news images as evidence of a social practice in its own right.

Inspired by recent art and photography scholarship that compares different nineteenth-century pictorial forms, and aided by recent work in the social history of art and nineteenth-century commercial culture, I am completing a study that explores the ways that popular graphic representation, in the form of wood engravings in the nation's weekly illustrated press, constructed consciousness in the Gilded Age America. Focusing on *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, with comparative work in the competing illustrated press, I find that pictorial newspapers were not interchangeable, nor were their readerships. Moreover, rather than a rigid representational form, illustrated journalism was a complex and social practice, an interplay of production and reception of images that changed over the course of the late nineteenth century. The change was not the result of artists' intentions (engraving's mass production and division of labor undermined a singular vision), nor of photography's hegemony. Instead, through close readings of the narratives and class, racial, and gender types embedded in news engravings, this study considers how the practice of illustrated journalism was altered by changing social conditions, conflict, and the demands of a broad and diverse "middling" readership increasingly characterized by different experiences and perceptions in the crises of Gilded Age America.

A brief version of my work, which will be published by Cornell University Press, is included in a recent article, "Reconstructing Representation: Social Types, Readers, and the Pictorial Press, 1865-1877," *Radical History Review* 66 (Fall 1996), which is also accessible on the World Wide Web (<http://www.ashp.cuny.edu/reconcrep.html>). I also am currently constructing a searchable text index deriving from my research on *Frank Leslie's* illustrations from 1866 to 1889 that will be part of a new history web site organized by the American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning (CUNY) and the Center for History and New Media (George Mason University) under a grant from the Kellogg Foundation.

Joshua Brown
The City University of New York

Communications Revolutions: Writing a History of the Book for an Electronic Age

When does an academic field begin? For the expanding specialty known as the history of the book, the landmarks are many:

- Major publications: Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* and Robert Darnton's *The Business of Enlightenment*, both appearing in 1979.¹
- Intellectual centers: the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress (1977) and the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture at the American Antiquarian Society (1983).²
- Encyclopedias and reference works: since the appearance in the 1980s of the multivolume *Histoire de l'Édition Française*, the French pioneer in the field, national book histories have been launched in the U.S., Britain, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and, in July 1997, in Canada.
- Degree programs, including M.A. courses of study at the Universities of Alabama, Iowa, and Wisconsin, and University College, London, and a Ph.D. minor at the University of South Carolina, all established since 1986.³
- Scholarly associations, notably SHARP, the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing, created in 1991 and now counting some 900 members in twenty countries, many of whom convened in July 1997, in Cambridge, England, for the organization's fifth annual conference.⁴

By such innovations and advances, encompassing multiple initiatives and interests, does a new discipline take shape in the contemporary world of scholarship. Yet, if anybody deserves credit for setting the process in motion, it is surely this organization, the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), whose "preconference," held in Boston exactly seventeen years ago, was arguably the birthplace of an international field. That event beat by three months a similar gathering sponsored by the American Antiquarian Society on "Printing and Society in Early America." And RBMS claimed a wider reach. Featuring such historians as Darnton, Eisenstein, Henri-Jean Martin from France, Bernhard Fabian from Germany, and John Feather from England, RBMS took as its theme "Books and Society in History."⁵

The program attracted over 275 participants and generated an excitement that spilled beyond the formal proceedings. In an unusual step, the speakers, with the support of the RBMS executive committee, drew up a resolution, known as "the Boston Statement on the History of the Book," that crystallized the universal sentiment.⁶ It was the manifesto for a new field. "The history of the book is fundamental to the historical study of society, but we are far from understanding the factors that have shaped the writing

and dissemination of books." Basic facts were lacking on "what was printed, by whom, and for whom." So, too, were the bibliographical tools necessary to investigate "a cultural force that transcends national boundaries." Without such foundations, what analyses were possible? Undaunted by the challenge and heartened by the signs of "rapid progress" at the preconference, the signers summoned researchers of all countries to the task. In this collaborative effort, numerous hands were needed: "We appeal to library directors and all others responsible for manuscripts and books in our libraries to support activities in the field of the history of the book; and . . . we ask funding agencies in our various countries—governments, foundations and other institutions—to support basic projects as well as seminars, workshops, and conferences on an international level. Researchers, money, institutional support: from these combined resources would emerge a comparative history of the book, detailing "how national differences in book production and dissemination have affected the various cultural areas."⁷

Though framed in general terms, this call for research reflected its aegis in RBMS and ACRL. With the emphasis upon bibliographical inquiry, it expressed the outlook of rare book librarians, charged with the intellectual organization and physical preservation of the printed legacy from the past. That perspective informed the collection of essays that emerged from the conference. Published in 1983 as *Books and Society in History* (the same year as AAS's *Printing and Society in Early America*), the volume offered a view of its subject from particular locations: the printing house, the bookseller's shop, the government office. From their interplay had issued the corpus of printed works—books, laws, magazines, newspapers, broadsides, bureaucratic forms, advertisements, and other ephemera—that constitute the essential data base of the field. How did these materials come into being, get disseminated, and survive? The essays offered diverse approaches to that question, exploring such topics as privilege and patronage in *ancien régime* France, the shift from censorship to copyright in Britain, and the publication of English-language texts in Germany. Running through nearly all the pieces was, as G. Thomas Tanselle shrewdly detected, a concern for those "aspects of book distribution" that determined the circulation of ideas in print. That conception, narrower in scope than Robert Darnton's, was set forth in the opening essay, "What Is the History of Books?" Darnton's reply, "the social and cultural history of communication by print" as enacted in a circuit of communications from author to reader and back, has justly won wide acclaim. In *Books and Society in History*, it was a minority view.⁸

Despite the sweeping title, the volume was centered in a specific time and place: early modern Europe. With good reason: if, as Eisenstein argued, the "shift from script to print" launched a "communications revolution," what bet-

ter realm to explore than “Gutenberg’s galaxy?”⁹ The formative age of the printing press is the obvious starting-point of scholarship. Consequently, medieval scribes gain slight notice in the volume, except by Elizabeth Eisenstein, who observes their demise. Twentieth-century technology is no more visible. Convening a couple of years before the personal computer made its way onto faculty desks, the participants in the 1980 preconference paid slight heed to the electronic revolution in their midst.

Coming on two decades later, that revolution is a driving force of our times, carrying powerful implications for the history of the book. If new media open up vast opportunities for research and exchange, they also challenge the primacy of print in Western culture. Indeed, to contemporary prophets of “the electronic millennium,” the book is dead. Its fixed form—words on paper, set in even lines, ordered in columns, and bound in covers—was once valued for its flexibility and freedom. Today, it strikes critics as an ancient prison, confining writing in a narrow frame. “Information wants to be free,” declares Stewart Brand of the Electronic Frontier Foundation. Abandon your tired, bookish land, he urges, and stake out “homesteads” in cyberspace. There ideas and information flow freely. Unimpeded by the barbed wire of print, untrammelled by authority, people can saddle up their computers and go wherever their interests and imaginations roam.¹⁰

One sign of the times is the new wave of titles on the pleasures of reading. Like Lynne Sharon Schwartz’s *Ruined by Reading*, they are elegies for a vanishing age, when a young girl in Brooklyn could enlarge her world and forge her identity by burrowing into books. That experience prompts the novelist E. Annie Proulx, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for *The Shipping News*, to conceive an implacable opposition between book and computer. “Nobody is going to sit down and read a novel on a twitchy little screen,” she snipes. “Ever.” Such skepticism is understandable in a writer whose main characters, a newspaperman and a librarian, rebuild their lives and come together in the slow-paced backwater of Newfoundland. It drives Sven Birkerts’s *The Gutenberg Elegies* with fierce passion. “The printed word is part of a vestigial social order that we are moving away from,” he intones, “by choice and by social compulsion.” Print is logical, linear, cumulative; it fixes thought and focuses concentration. Electronic media, by contrast, scatter attention; our eyes skim across the screen, scanning evanescent images soon to dissolve into the ether. Ephemeral encounters, Birkerts warns, yield insubstantial individuals, sundered from the past and shorn of sophisticated speech—“ambiguity, paradox, irony, subtlety, and wit.” Inverting Brand’s judgment, Birkerts nonetheless sees no way to stem the tide. “We are at a watershed point. One way of processing information is yielding to another.” As technology goes, so goes the republic.¹¹

This determinist rhetoric replays a longstanding theme in Western culture. When Victor Hugo’s Archdeacon Frollo

contemplated the printed book in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, he glimpsed the collapse of an age of faith, embodied in the grand cathedral. “This will kill that. The book will kill the building. . . The press will kill the church. . . printing will kill architecture.” So viewed, the culture of print has aroused dissent in every generation. Well before the computer, before television, before radio, when the cinema was still young, the Italian futurist Marinetti seized upon the new visual medium as a weapon in an ongoing struggle. “The book, the most traditional means of preserving and communicating thought, has been for a long time destined to disappear, just like cathedrals, walled battlements, museums, and the ideal of pacifism. . . [Marinetti declaimed in 1909.] The Futurist Cinema will. . . collaborate in a general renewal, substituting for the magazine—always pedantic—, for the drama—always stale—, and killing the book, —always tedious and oppressive. Condemning museums and academies as “the graveyards of vain endeavor,” Marinetti saved his deepest hatred for print. “Go and set fire to the stacks of the libraries.” Sadly, that vision would be realized in the fascist *Fahrenheit 451*.¹²

Against this ideological backdrop, we can embrace our century of revolution and bring to the study of the printed book the unsettling experience of living with multiple media, whose technical capabilities are shaped by the economic structures, social settings, and cultural values in which they are employed.

In turn, our “rereadings of the past,” the theme of this preconference, may generate new perspectives on the electronic age. That prospect, I believe, explains why the *Chronicle of Higher Education* has dubbed the history of books “a particularly hot topic in the humanities and not just in the United States.”¹³

How far have we come since *Books and Society in History*? And what, if anything, have we learned from the computer? Consider the immediate impact of online catalogues, e-mail, and the world wide web on academic research. Overcoming barriers of time and space, organizing and supplying great quantities of information at low unit-cost, these technological aids have at once expanded and shrunk the world of scholarship. Computers give us increased access to research materials, heighten intellectual control over collections, preserve new discoveries in permanent form, and enable the uncovering of error and the cumulation of knowledge. They facilitate standardized practices of cataloguing and coding and reproduce a rich tapestry of images in hypertext. Linked together on the Internet, scholars can communicate with colleagues all over the globe and realize the eighteenth-century ideal of the Republic of Letters. Such abundant possibilities are both liberating and disorienting, one moment tempting with the promise of comprehensive knowledge, the next prompting complaints about too many books, too little time.¹⁴

If this litany sounds familiar, it should. Replace computer with print, and you have the central themes of

Eisenstein's *Printing Press as an Agent of Change*. Economies of scale, multiplication of texts, standardization of copy, systematic arrangement of books through such devices as title pages, tables of contents, and indexes: the logic of rationalization, which Max Weber identified with modernity, drove the printing press centuries before it was perfected by the computer. In its wake, the advance of the press forged an international community of scholars, even as it separated peoples by vernacular languages; weakened existing structures of authority while enabling governments to extend their powers of social control; and evoked sentiments of anxiety and exhilaration over the abundance of reading matter it cast up. It may be small comfort, but if Eisenstein is right, the route to the twenty-first century runs directly through the age of print.

Actually, that path was set well before Gutenberg. Unlike current prophets of the electronic future, Eisenstein was no technodeterminist. Her case for the "printing revolution in early modern Europe" rested upon a concrete chain of connections, linking a specific invention (the printing press), as incorporated within an economic organization (the commercial printing house), to the development of new intellectual practices in the learned community.¹⁵ It was book history as the Boston Statement of 1980 prescribed: an inquiry into the impact of "book production and dissemination upon various cultural areas." Unfortunately, she overlooked the call for bibliographical research. Synthesizing secondary studies rather than viewing manuscript and printed books first-hand, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* was vulnerable to dispute. The current consensus, neatly summarized by the French historian Roger Chartier, is that the change from the manuscript to the printed book was no big deal. In its physical design, the newcomer kept the old ways. It employed devices developed in monastic *scriptoria* to order the text: signatures, page numbers, columns and lines, ornaments, alphabetical tables, systematic indexes. It inherited a hierarchy of sizes, from the learned folio to the humanist quarto down to the bedside *libellus*. And it called upon methods of silent reading of long standing in medieval universities and popularized among aristocratic laymen in the fifteenth century. The printing press thus depended on, rather than altered, the fundamental form of the book. Seen in the *longue durée*, Chartier suggests, the real revolution in book history took place when the scroll was displaced by the codex. That "rupture" gave the reading experience a distinct material form that has lasted to the present, but is now challenged by the computer. If reading does move from the page to the screen, that change will surely rival the adoption of the codex as a decisive turning-point in the history of the book.¹⁶

It is characteristic of French historians, in the tradition of the *Annales* school, to take the long view, across the centuries, in search for the deep structures of social existence. Not their American counterparts, who slice the past into small sections and parcel it out for close inspection, accord-

ing to no common plan. The competitive individualism of our culture puts its mark on historiography. Studies of the book in the American past, interdisciplinary by nature, bear this trait. Accordingly, I find it difficult to generalize about a sprawling area. Loosely connected to one another, American scholars attend even less to the international field. Though many read Chartier and Darnton for France and Raymond Williams for England and draw on their insights and methods, few engage in explicit comparative history. By habit, if not ideology, American exceptionalism endures, attributing principal trends in national life to events and actions within our borders.¹⁷

The one departure is the field of early America, whose history is inevitably entangled with the early modern states—Britain, France, Spain, and the Netherlands—contending for imperial dominance in the New World. Offshoots of Western Europe, the North American colonists transplanted the cultural ways and the reforming projects formed in their native homes. And they imported ideas and goods across the Atlantic down to 1776, deepening identification with the mother country, even as they found themselves on the reluctant road to independence. Appropriately, the initial volume in the AAS's multivolume *A History of the Book in America* is entitled *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*.¹⁸

The coeditor of that volume, David D. Hall, has been the leading conduit of the French *histoire du livre* to these shores, and it is owing to his influence that the book history of early America has taken shape as "the history of culture and society."¹⁹ In that vein, Hall joined with others, particularly, Richard D. Brown, in *Printing and Society in Early America* to set the initial lines of interpretation. Early Americans, as they saw it, inhabited a "traditional world of literacy," which lasted in many places down to the early nineteenth century, when it was shattered under the combined force of capitalism and mass democracy. In this cultural regime, the mass of people adopted the style of "intensive reading," pondering the same religious works—the Bible, sermons, psalters, guides to divinity, the "steady sellers" of the era—over and over. Thus was a familiar fabric of thought maintained.

Then the rapid growth of the literary marketplace, propelled by newspapers and promoted by a rising publishing industry, ushered in a new world of democratic abundance. The great mass of people could now enjoy the literary privileges of the old elite, picking and choosing from a cornucopia of newspapers, periodicals, novels, travels, histories, speeches, reform tracts, Bibles, sermons, and other genres and indulging an unprecedented appetite for the latest news.²⁰

This interpretation began to come apart not long after it was assembled. It lost its principal prop as soon as the notions of intensive and extensive reading, derived from the German scholar Rolf Engelsing, received critical scrutiny. "Intensive reading" now appears politically ambiguous. If it upheld tradition in some places, it could topple kings

and popes in others.²¹ Reading styles also prove difficult to locate in social life. William Gilmore exhaustively excavated household libraries in the Upper Connecticut Valley of New Hampshire and Vermont over the period 1790-1830, only to find such heterogeneity in holdings as to defeat clear delineation of rural *mentalités*.

In the face of these imponderables, scholars of early America have retreated from the concept of a "reading revolution." Social configurations, David Hall now cautions, are not easily aligned with reading tastes. "In any given period of time, readers had available more than one representation or ideology of reading, texts, and writing." That complexity resists easy formulations, such as the putative movement from scarcity to plenty, limitation to choice. In its celebration of abundance, democracy, and freedom, our primary narrative of American print culture stands exposed as a triumphal account of liberal progress.²²

What, then, do we say about early America? That dilemma challenges and perplexes the editors of the colonial and early republic volumes for the AAS's *A History of the Book*. David Hall and his co-editor Hugh Amory put their emphasis on the colonial identity of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century print culture.

Peripheral settlements on the outskirts of empire, British North America long relied on the mother country for the basics of printing: presses, types, paper, ink, and the craftsmen to put them to use. It imported most of its literature from England, and its aspiring writers longed for publication back "home." It is customary to describe this state of affairs as "dependency," but that is a retrospective view from the American Revolution. To the participants in Anglo-American culture, such engagement with the metropolis was a mark of cosmopolitanism.²³

More broadly, early America appears to be a New World extension of what Roger Chartier, speaking of early modern France from 1470 to 1830, calls the "typographical *ancien régime*." That era was characterized by an essential stability of technology and economic organization. As in France and Britain, so in the colonies, the process of manufacturing books experienced little change. Printers and booksellers scrambled for the basic elements of their trade and were obliged to make do with what second-hand materials they could get. Marginal players in the market, they turned out drab, inferior products by London standards. Then again, colonists were happy even to approach the metropolitan model. In the first century of settlement, Virginia had reverted to scribal forms to disseminate its laws, while Massachusetts Bay proclaimed its official acts by beat of drums in Boston's public square. These makeshifts were discarded in the eighteenth century, as the press became the medium of public business.²⁴

This brief analysis suggests the intellectual potential of concrete, comparative studies of the book trade and its impact on culture—the agenda laid out in the Boston Statement on the History of the Book back in 1980.

Unfortunately, that message has been neglected in the rapid growth of the field. Today, the hottest topics involve literary and cultural inquiries: ideologies of print, authorship and the marketplace, popular reading. Michael Warner's *Letters of the Republic*, for example, portrays the crucial role of the press in creating a public sphere in mid-eighteenth century port cities. In Warner's telling, this was an ideological project, in which printers redefined their vocation and impressed new meaning on print. The *Massachusetts Spy* was now an impersonal medium of civic republicanism, its editor Isaiah Thomas a selfless servant of the public good. No matter that printers were businessmen, eager for profit. Inattentive to commerce, Warner forgets Benjamin Franklin's famous view of the press as a coach, open to anyone with the fare. A pose of disinterestedness paid well. That contradiction between public persona and commercial strategy, depicted in rich detail by the late Stephen Botein, goes unexplored in Warner's literary analysis.²⁵

In too many studies, the materiality of print disappears from view. How did readers in the past make sense of books? That query has spurred researchers to scour the archives for diaries, letters, and other personal documents recording individuals' responses to their reading. Running commentaries on familiar and forgotten works, these sources disclose individual efforts at self-improvement and self-fashioning. "The freedom of imagination women found in books encouraged new self-definitions," writes Barbara Sicherman, who has used diaries imaginatively to reconstruct the lives of such figures as Alice Hamilton and M. Carey Thomas. Similarly, Ronald and Mary Zboray have pored over the personal papers of families in antebellum Boston to uncover "the meanings they ascribed to the printed goods they used." As it turns out, the books in such studies are seldom treated as artifacts. They constitute texts, abstracted from physical context, and serve, like Franklin's hypothetical coach, as vehicles of self-development and social relationships.²⁶

There are a few harbingers of change, like the recent collection *Reading Books*, in which eight literary scholars and one historian join forces to explore "the material text and literature in America." The volume contains such lucid essays as Jeffrey Groves's account of the marketing campaigns of the Boston publishing house Ticknor and Fields, wherein we see how distinct binding styles, copied from prestigious English models, were deployed to add cultural appeal to the firm's products. The analytical concreteness of these pieces is a welcome development.²⁷ By contrast, too many studies treat print as immaterial—a container of thoughts to be released from the page and appropriated in the reader's mind. That outlook resembles the vision of the electronic word in futurist scenarios.

Nonetheless, the parallel gives one pause. With its interactive technology, in service to individual needs, the communications revolution of our time repeats the role we saw it play with the online catalogue, accentuating a devel-

opment already ongoing in print. In this instance, electronic media may be reshaping our approach to the past. If so, we would do well to consult the 1980 Boston Statement on the History of the Book and be reminded that without the book trade and its products, we would have no scholarly field.

R.A.G.

This essay is adapted from the keynote address presented by Robert A. Gross at the Rare Books and Manuscript Preconference of the Association of College and Research Libraries, held at Claremont, California, June 25, 1997.

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