



# The Book

Newsletter of the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture  
Published by the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts

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## *On Literary History*

So often nowadays we hear complaints that departments of English have listened to the siren song of "deconstruction," a term that designates (to those complaining) an involuted mode of close textual analysis that makes the "New Criticism" of yesteryear appear marvelously lucid and succinct. To make this note more personal, I should add that deconstruction has begun to affect my own field of intellectual history — to outcries of alarm. Yet all is not as bleak as it may seem to those of us who profited from old-fashioned literary history as practiced by Frank L. Mott, Norman Foerster, Perry Miller, Everett Carter, Henry Pochman, Frederick Carpenter, Rene Welleck. . . . I stop lest I give way to something like nostalgia. In recalling this tradition, I also want to recall the work of cultural historians who used the American novel as their means of identifying certain social tensions. I think of the chapter on James Fenimore Cooper in Marvin Meyer's *The Jacksonian Persuasion*, and of William Taylor's *Cavalier and Yankee*, which explicated the fiction of William Gilmore Simms and several other southern writers. But once the concept of American national character began to collapse, as it did some two decades ago, this mode of interpretation became problematic, a tendency that was hastened by the rise of a more quantitative social history.

But like skirt lengths, what is out of fashion at one moment returns at the next. We are witnessing a revival of literary history and, with it, the revival of a cultural studies that claims to assimilate the literary and the social. I am not referring to a movement known as the "new historicism," about which I know very little, or to the self-conscious efforts to reconstruct a "new literary history," as in the journal with that title. What I have in mind are recent books that move back and forth between the novel (or writers in general) and society. Mary Kelley, Cathy Davidson, Jane Tompkins, Michael Gilmore, Stephen Watts, and, for English literature, Michael McKeon and the contributors to a series edited by Raymond Williams, are among those who are reestablishing a history of literature that also functions as social and intellectual history.

What is different this time around is the emphasis on capitalism and the marketplace — a term that sometimes figures as a metaphor for capitalism. The older literary history was often infused with a beneficent liberalism, and though it may have construed the American writer as restless and uncertain, the social correlate was the

unbounded society that Tocqueville seemed to describe. We are more alert today to the ways in which ideologies of power (or, as Robert Gross would say, "authority") invest the literary imagination and the relationship between texts and their readers. Some critics are more self-conscious than others in perceiving the act of writing (or the actions of printing, publishing, and reading) as involving domination and subordination; and some are more explicit in attributing the specifics of the novel (or of literature in general) to capitalism.

It goes without saying that such recent work bodes well for a history of the book that presumes that the world of print consists of social, intellectual, and economic relationships. In keeping with some aspects of structuralism, the newer literary history has broadened our perception of the social factor — for example, of writing and reading as acts infused with subtleties of domination and subordination. Somehow this general perception must be joined with a more precise description of continuity and change in the structure of capitalism, the marketplace, and social relationships. Otherwise, we are left with an explanation that, in covering everything, gives very little satisfaction in particular.

D.D.H.

## *AAS Imprint Records Loaded in RLIN*

Over two weekends in January 1987, the American Antiquarian Society tape-loaded 31,728 records into the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) Books file. These records represent six years of cataloguing of the Society's preeminent collection of early American imprints.

One major component in this massive cataloguing labor is the Society's North American Imprints Program (NAIP), which has as its goal the creation of a union catalogue of books, pamphlets, and broadsides printed before 1801 in the United States and Canada. In its first phase, NAIP created 20,371 records describing materials held by AAS. Added to this figure are 2,044 records for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century broadsides held by AAS and catalogued by the American Broad-sides project. These records are now available in the RLIN Books file. Two years from now, the entire eighteenth-century portion of the NAIP file, recording the holdings of hundreds of libraries in addition to AAS, will be assimilated into the Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue (ESTC).

Another project that is contributing records to RLIN is the Society's American Children's Books project, which is now cataloguing the Society's collection of children's books, 1821-76. To date, over 2,500 records have been created and added to the RLIN file, with 3,500 more to follow over the next two years.

Scholars doing research in the field of the history of the book will find these AAS cataloguing records of particular value, since the records carry thorough bibliographical descriptions and offer extensive access. Researchers, for example, will find detailed information about the physical characteristics of a book, and, by using the information on printers, publishers, and booksellers in the RLIN files, scholars will find it more practicable to trace the provenance of a work (such as the work by 1986 Wiggins lecturer Cathy Davidson on *Charlotte Temple*).

The future work of scholars will also profit from the fruits of a Title II-C grant recently awarded to AAS. This grant is intended to enhance the work of NAIP and to create computerized cataloguing of the Readex Microprint Evans series of Early American Imprints.

Alan N. Degutis,  
American Antiquarian Society

## Book Notes

### A DICTIONARY OF BOOK HISTORY

Seven years ago, John Feather published an article in *The Library* entitled "Cross-Channel Currents: Historical Bibliography and l'Histoire du Livre," a paper G. Thomas Tanselle said "deserves careful attention for its lucid discussion of the need for a more unified approach to the history of books." Specifically, Feather urged more cross-

fertilization between the Anglo-American approach to bibliographical studies and the newer social and cultural history of the book pioneered by such French historians as Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin. Such a goal is in fact one of the objectives of the American Antiquarian Society's Program in the History of the Book in American Culture.

Now, Oxford University Press has brought out Feather's *A Dictionary of Book History* (\$35.00). Although this is a useful book, it represents something of a missed opportunity, for Feather has not heeded his own advice of 1980. In fact, its basic design is not much different from the longer reference work by Geoffrey Ashall Glaister, *Glaister's Glossary of the Book* (2d ed., 1979; orig. publ. 1960).

Geographically and conceptually, Feather stays well on the western side of the English Channel. In his introduction, Feather admits to "a certain concentration on British and American topics, although other parts of the world are not entirely neglected." Thus, there is an interesting article on "Bibliography," as well as several cross-referenced articles on different types of bibliography, but there is no entry under "L'histoire du livre" or its English translation "History of the Book." In fact, his only mention of the French school comes near the end of the article on "Bibliography," where Feather calls the scholarship of Martin and Febvre "an approach increasingly favoured by younger scholars in both Britain and the United States." In similar fashion, there is a two-page entry on the "Stationers' Company" and a one-page article on the "Longman" publishing firm, but no entry for or mention of the "Société typographique de Neuchâtel," whose extant archives have fueled the scholarly career of Robert Darnton. Though "Censorship" receives an entry, there is none on the underground press that circumvented censorship and that speaks to the history-of-the-book approach of scholars like Darnton.

Within Feather's concentration on British and American subjects, there is an even greater bias toward the British, which is not too surprising in view of the compiler's position as senior lecturer in library and information studies at Loughborough University in England. The entry on "Ballads" contains no reference to the printing of or trade in ballads in America. The article on "Bibles" similarly omits the American side of the story. One would suppose from the article on "Bookbinding" that this craft was not practiced on this side of the Atlantic. There are entries for the university presses at Cambridge and Oxford, but none on any American university press.

The book does function well, however, as a dictionary relating to basic terms and subjects within the fields of bibliography, the history of printing, publishing, and bookselling, libraries, book collecting, and the physical aspects of the book. Its entries defining or describing such topics as "Analytical Bibliography," "Cancel," "Edition,"

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*The Book: Newsletter of the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture* (ISSN 0740-8439) is published in March, July, and November by the American Antiquarian Society at the above address.

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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.

"Format," "Issue," "Part Books," "Quire," "Signature," "State," and "Watermarks" should prove helpful to scholars approaching the history of the book from such specialties as intellectual and social history, literary history, and the history of journalism. The entries in Feather's book are extensively cross-referenced. Nearly every entry contains at least one citation to a source of further information.

J.B.H.

#### U.S. COPYRIGHT RECORDS 1790-1800

Article 1, Section 8 of the Federal Constitution, whose bicentennial we commemorate this year, laid the enabling framework for a national system of copyright protection. That legislation took the form of the Copyright Act of 1790, "An Act for the Encouragement of Learning." As so often happens, legislation or other government action leaves in its wake vast quantities of paperwork, much of which can provide useful documentation for the historical researcher. In the case of the American copyright system, from 1790 until the Library of Congress assumed responsibility for it in 1870, this paperwork took the form of copyright registrations entered at the federal district courts throughout the United States, and included submitted title pages of the works. Full copies of the published works were sent first to the State Department, then between 1854 and 1870, to the Patent Office. Some of this extensive documentation has been lost, but a considerable amount remains, almost all of it housed at LC. LC's collection of this material between 1790 and 1870 consists of 615 court registration ledgers, more than 44,000 deposited title pages, about 23,000 deposit copies, and Patent Office and State Department ledgers recording the deposits of copies of published works.

The potential value of these records for a variety of purposes has long been recognized, but the lack of an index or other effective finding aid to such diverse and voluminous records has limited their usefulness. Now the Library of Congress seeks to improve that situation with the publication of *Federal Copyright Records 1790-1800*, edited with an introduction by James Gilreath, and compiled by Elizabeth Carter Wills. This publication is a result, in effect, of a pilot project toward establishing improved access over these materials. The LC staff members responsible for this publication, including John Y. Cole, the director of LC's Center for the Book, clearly hope that this volume will gain the interest of scholars and stimulate support for a much larger project to control the next seven decades' worth of records.

This volume carries entries for 779 titles submitted for registration between 1790 and 1800. The arrangement is by state, with further arrangement within states chronologically. Each entry contains a citation back to the original document and includes such basic information as the

date of deposit, the name of the copyright claimant, the name of author, the title, and an editor's note. In transcribing the title, the editor made an effort to suggest the typography and layout of the submitted title page, facilitating comparison with the eventually published product. An index at the back of the book combines titles, authors, printers, booksellers, publishers, and important names and titles.

The project's editor, James Gilreath, American history specialist in the Rare Book and Special Collections Division of LC, has contributed an eleven-page introduction entitled "American Literature, Public Policy, and the Copyright Laws before 1800." In it, he underscores the fact that few authors or proprietors actually sought copyright protection for their works even after the federal law of 1790 was promulgated. Only these 779 copyright records are extant for the period 1790-1800. All records of registrations in Connecticut, a major publishing center, have been lost, but even adding in a reasonable figure for that state's output still makes the total a drop in the bucket when copyright registrations are compared to the known output of the American press during that period, which Gilreath estimates as 15,000.

Even more interesting, perhaps, is the sense that Gilreath gives of the types of works that authors and proprietors did see fit to copyright in the last decade of the eighteenth century. Gilreath found that the genres most likely to be given federal copyright protection were textbooks, manuals, geographical atlases, and commercial directories. "Practical books rather than literary works," he writes, "were thought to have enough long-lasting commercial value to copyright." Works of imagination were more likely to have been copyrighted under state law, according to him. Gilreath provides an interesting discussion of these matters and in so doing whets the appetite for analyses based on the far more voluminous copyright registrations of the nineteenth century.

This book may be ordered from the Government Printing Office in Washington at \$13 per copy. Using the stock number, 030-000-00184-2, might help speed delivery.

J.B.H.

#### THE HISTORY OF BOOKS: A GUIDE TO SELECTED RESOURCES IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Word has come of the May publication by the Library of Congress of *The History of Books: A Guide to Selected Resources in the Library of Congress*, by Alice D. Schreyer. Sponsored by the Center for the Book, this guide, arranged according to the organization of the Library of Congress into custodial units, is divided into two descriptive parts. The first segment describes pertinent collections in the Manuscript Division and in the Rare Book and Special Collections Division. Part two consists of narrative essays on the copyright collection,

The Law Library, and three separate divisions—those for geography and maps, music, and prints and photographs. The guide also suggests research opportunities at the Library of Congress for those interested in the history of the book. It also provides an introduction to the range of inquiry encompassed by book history and to the diverse types of resources that can support studies in this field. The cost of the book is \$15.00. Copies may be obtained by writing the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. The stock number for this work is 030-001-00117-2.

S. McA.

### *Conferences*

All places in the Program in the History of the Book's June conference, co-sponsored with the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, "Teaching the History of the Book," have been filled and sponsors as well as participants expect a stimulating series of papers and workshops. A grant from the Exxon Education Foundation was made in support of this conference. A report on the proceedings will appear in later pages of this newsletter.

June indeed will be a busy month for conferences. The John Carter Brown Library Center for New World Com-

parative Studies will be sponsoring a conference entitled "The Book in the Americas" June 18-21. This conference will offer a comparative examination of the role of printing, publishing, and reading in the development of colonial Latin American culture and society. For further information, write JCBL Conference, Box 1894, Providence, R.I. 02912. Telephone (401) 863-2727.

### *Fellowships*

Among the scholars awarded fellowships at AAS for 1987-88, the following are researching topics that bear upon the history of the book: Paula R. Backscheider, associate professor of English, University of Rochester, "Biography of Daniel Defoe"; Menahem Blondheim, Ph.D. candidate in history, Harvard, "The News Frontier"; and Sherry Sullivan, assistant professor of English, University of Alabama at Birmingham, "Noble Savage Iconography in American Periodicals and Giftbooks, 1820-1850." Awarded a fellowship by the Bibliographical Society of America is Deirdre Phelps, a Ph.D. candidate at Boston University, whose topic is "The 19th Century Booktrade in Salem, Massachusetts."

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