

*The History of the Book in
Twentieth-Century Britain and America:
Perspective and Evidence*

IAN R. WILLISON

I START with two recent events in the world of the book. First: on April 27, 1992, the day after it was broadcast jointly by the BBC and the Renaissance Theatre Company, a recording of one of the longest versions yet of the text of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, with stars of stage and screen Kenneth Branagh and John Gielgud playing the Prince and the Ghost, was issued on both audio-cassette and compact disk, with considerable publicity, by Random Century Audiobooks, Random Century Audiobooks being part of Random House UK, itself a subsidiary of Random House New York, which in turn is part of an even larger media conglomerate, Newhouse Publications. Second: almost six months earlier, on the evening of November 5, 1991, the body of another publisher, Robert Maxwell, was found, to the accompaniment of far greater publicity, in the sea off the Grand Canaries, following his apparent failure to restructure the bank and other debts integral to his (and, it would seem, to any) transatlantic publishing conglomerate.

This paper was given as the tenth annual James Russell Wiggins Lecture in the History of the Book in American Culture, held at the American Antiquarian Society on September 23, 1992. The author would like to thank Terry Belanger, Tim Rix, Andrew Brown, Clive Bradley, and David McKitterick for their comments and criticism.

IAN R. WILLISON is a Fellow of the Centre for English Studies in the University of London, and is one of the general editors of the Cambridge *History of the Book in Britain*, with special responsibility for the volume dealing with the period from 1914 to the present day.

Copyright © 1993 by American Antiquarian Society

I would add a third recent event in the world of the book, less melodramatic than the last but having perhaps deeper resonance. We learn that the British national library is to be devolved into two co-equal parts, located two hundred miles apart. The northern division is to concentrate on the processing and the making available of current material through the new national and international library network. The southern division is to concentrate on service to the scholarly and general publics in a new — and controversial — building in northwest London. This systematic reconfiguration of the national printed archive is echoed by the plans for the new Bibliothèque de France and the old Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (a subject of even more violent national controversy), and for the new National Library of the recently reunified Germany, which is to be dispersed not into two, but into three, parts — in Frankfurt, Leipzig, and Berlin — and dispersed on 'functional' lines similar to Britain.

I take the collocation of these three events as a convenient vantage point from which to view the history of the book in twentieth-century Britain and America. Though all history is, clearly, a matter of continuity as much as change, the equally clear fact is that in our contemporary book world we have a sense of change that is major and pervasive. Indeed our projects for the history of the book, if they did not start from this sense of a world we may well have lost, are certainly sustained by it.

We might say that what in the first place distinguishes the history of the book in the twentieth century from previous centuries is the increasing involvement of conventional book publishing with the mass media and with high-risk corporate financing: a time of the book under external threat, *le livre concurrencé* (as our French colleagues, following Marshall McLuhan, have it¹). In the second place this increasing involvement is to be associated with an increasing mutual involvement of the British and American book worlds. Their histories in the twentieth century cannot be writ-

1. Henri-Jean Martin, Roger Chartier, and Jean-Pierre Vivet, eds., *Histoire de l'édition française*, 4 vols. (Paris: Promodis, 1982–86), 4, 'Le livre concurrencé 1900–1950.'

ten and understood in isolation from each other. Likewise (and thirdly) the final transforming of the classic autonomous national library in England and elsewhere marks the passing of an institution of considerable importance in the history not only of the book but of European high culture as a whole in earlier centuries² and its assimilation into a brave new world of system, network, and revenue earning that was largely invented in North America.

In sum: such increasing involvement with supranational changes in both media and archives reminds us that the history of the book is part of general history, as we all have to live through it and as we all have to understand it. Moreover, when we set up our projects for specific histories of the book we stand on no solid ground but on shifting sands. We have need both for interpretive range and for sobriety.

As historians, then, we are entering virtual *terra incognita*; and in what follows I should like to suggest a general perspective to help us order our own experience, and also suggest the categories of evidence which should help to give that perspective solidity.

II

To use a conventional, but convenient, metaphor: our perspective depends on a shifting of the balance of power within the transatlantic world of the book, from Britain to the United States. Let me suggest some highlights.

The British were of course predominant in the American colonies of the first British Empire. Certain elements of that ascendancy, however, remained active until the end of the last century. In publishing, among other British houses in America the branch set up in New York in 1869 by a leading firm of the Victorian high noon, Macmillan, was followed in 1887 by the New York branch of another leading London firm, Longman, and in 1896 by the branch of the then avant-garde firm of John Lane.³ Again: certain

2. Ian R. Willison, 'The National Library in Historical Perspective,' *Libraries & Culture* 24 (1989): 75-95.

3. John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, 4 vols. (New York and London: R. R. Bowker, 1972-81) 2: 352-58.

British magazines had retained their prestige and presence in North America. In his fictional reconstruction of the closing frontier, *Lonesome Dove*, Larry McMurtry has his cultural heroine, Clara, compensate for the bleakness of the 'empty plains' by subscribing to *Blackwoods*:

Reading stories by all the women, not only George Eliot, but Mrs Gore and Mrs Gaskell and Charlotte Yonge, she sometimes had a longing to do what those women did—write stories.⁴

A new and, as it was to prove, major element in the world of the magazine (and the book)—the literary agent—was 'a British invention' of the 1880s.⁵ So was the collateral invention of the authors' association (the Society of Authors).⁶ In book production, William Morris's Kelmscott books spurred a renaissance in American typography.⁷ Earlier, in librarianship and bibliography, the promotion of the Library of Congress as the *de facto* national library had been initiated by Ainsworth Rand Spofford acting under the influence of Panizzi's newly reformed British Museum Library.⁸ Likewise American library professionalism had been encouraged by Charles Ammi Cutter under the influence of Panizzi's 91 cataloguing rules; and even if, in the case of bibliography and bibliophily, the earlier preoccupation of James Lenox and John Carter Brown with collecting and itemizing Americana had been based on patriotic resistance to, rather than continuation of, 'traditions inherited originally from England,'⁹ the influence of the British Museum Library—through its research affiliate, the Bibliographical Society—can be seen in the rise of the great tradition of Amer-

4. Larry McMurtry, *Lonesome Dove: a Novel* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), p. 590.

5. Tebbel, *History of Book Publishing*, 2: 130.

6. Tebbel, *History of Book Publishing*, 2: 133.

7. James M. Wells, 'Book Typography in the United States of America,' in Kenneth Day, ed., *Book Typography 1815-1965 in Europe and the United States of America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 325-70.

8. John Y. Cole, 'Ainsworth Rand Spofford, the Valiant and Persistent Librarian of Congress,' in *Librarians of Congress 1802-1974* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1977).

9. John Carter, *Taste & Technique in Book Collecting* (London: Private Libraries Association, 1970), p. 18.

ican bibliographical description and textual scholarship¹⁰ associated with the Bibliographical Society of America.

And yet, the period after the Civil War in the United States was increasingly, as Howard Mumford Jones has reminded us, the 'Age of Energy'¹¹ — of transcontinental expansion and consolidation in the American book and magazine world as well as in other parts of the American cultural economy. One might take certain events in the year 1897 as symptomatic of things that were to come in the Anglo-American book world. In that year two energetic, Yankee, transcontinental book and magazine mail-order specialists, Horace Everett Hooper and William Montgomery Jackson, arrived in London to move in on, and indeed virtually take over, two of the by then wobbling pivots of the British late-imperial publishing establishment: the *Times* newspaper and the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.¹² This suggests a growing American managerial and marketing supremacy in the transatlantic book world that was confirmed by the rescue in 1921 of the relatively new, innovative London firm of William Heinemann by the even more energetic and epoch-making Frank Nelson Doubleday;¹³ as it had been foreshadowed a decade earlier in more specifically avant-garde transatlantic publishing circles by the truly hyperenergetic American, Ezra Pound. Indeed 1897 also saw the first formal meeting of the recently formed associations of publishers, of booksellers, and of authors in Britain which led to the Net Book Agreement of two years later. This made manifest an interventionist, defensive institutionaliza-

10. W. A. Jackson, 'America,' in *The Bibliographical Society 1892-1942: Studies in Retrospect* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1949), pp. 185-87.

11. Howard Mumford Jones, *The Age of Energy: Varieties of American Experience, 1865-1915* (New York: Viking Press, 1971).

12. *The History of The Times: The Twentieth Century Test 1884-1912* (London: The Office of The Times, 1947), pp. 443-59, 509-72.

13. John St. John, *William Heinemann: a Century of Publishing 1890-1990* (London: Heinemann, 1990). For an impression of Doubleday's 'business energy' by a British publishing contemporary, see Grant Richards in his chapter, 'Fifth Avenue Enterprise,' in *Author Hunting by an Old Literary Sportsman: Memories of Years Spent Mainly in Publishing* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1934; new ed., London: The Unicorn Press, 1960), pp. 141-45.

tion of the British book establishment that marked a change in its whole culture, from the competitive 'free trade in books' of the High Victorian era to 'economic orderliness, ethical decency, [and] "everlasting boom"'.¹⁴ From our point of view this had its first serious impact on the transatlantic scene after the Depression, with the sustained attempt by British publishers to exclude American cheap reprints, such as Doubleday's Star Dollar Books, from the British Commonwealth, in particular Australia, an attempt that led to an actual exclusion agreement with the American Book Publishers Bureau in 1945.¹⁵ In retrospect, in the light of the United States Justice Department's 1976 decision—activated by the Australians—that the agreement infringed antitrust law, and the damaging effect of its consequent abandonment on British book exports, some might see in all this an eventual decline—though one hopes not fall—of traditionalism in British book production that was inevitable given the new, external pressures of the post-Victorian world. Be that as it may, one can think in terms of a general gravitational pull exercised by New York entrepreneurship on the 'new men' in London publishing of the 1920s and '30s, who reacted against the gentlemanly 'cosy nestling'¹⁶ of their seniors. Thus we have Jonathan Cape; Victor Gollancz; Frere-Reeves and Alan Bott at Heinemann (modelling the first British book club, the Book Society, on Scherman and Sackheim's Book of the Month Club¹⁷); at a more elitist level, Faber and Faber; and even—though this is a highly sensitive matter, given the received view of the British origin of the Paperback Revolution—Allen Lane of Penguin Books, who followed his uncle, John, in his fascination with New York marketing *chutzpah*. Yet American influence on the British book and magazine trade was also perceived negatively, as a major factor in the final disintegration of the traditional

14. John Sutherland, 'The Institutionalisation of the British Book Trade to the 1890s,' in Robin Myers and Michael Harris, eds., *Development of the English Book Trade, 1700-1899* (Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic Press, 1981), pp. 95-105.

15. R.J.L. Kingsford, *The Publishers Association 1896-1946, with an Epilogue* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1970).

16. Sutherland, 'Institutionalisation,' p. 102.

17. St. John, *Heinemann*, pp. 241-45.

British reading public: for example by Mrs. Leavis in her now classic *Fiction and the Reading Public* of 1932 (one of the foundation documents of the Anglo-American critical tradition of cultural studies in general and the history of the book in particular).¹⁸

Again, 1897 marks the arrival in Britain of the Lanston Monotype Corporation and its single-type, as distinct from slug, composing machine. This was one of the latest of the great technological advances in printing developed in North America, led by the response of the newspaper and magazine industry (the web-fed rotary press, for example, or the Linotype) to the challenge of cultural expansion and consolidation across the continent after the Civil War. In due course, under the interwar leadership of Stanley Morison, British Monotype dominated the upper end of the printing industry, concerned less with the book beautiful than with the book legible, and at the same time became a key agency for the book merchandizable (thus Victor Gollancz and his standardized, highly readable page formats and startling dust jackets designed in collaboration with Morison).¹⁹

Indeed, the ability of American business energy to reach out across the rapidly expanding media, not only books and magazines but also film, may now be seen to have been of critical importance in supporting and finally establishing the British and Irish avant-garde in the face of financial restraints, censorship, and other disabling pressures inhering in the traditional British and Irish scene. This support emerged with the new men in New York mainstream publishing—Alfred Knopf, Bennett Cerf, and others—on whom, as well as on New York newspapers and magazines, Joseph Conrad, Joyce, and D. H. Lawrence depended much for their viability;²⁰ though with Conrad's involvement with Holly-

18. Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932).

19. Nicolas Barker, *Stanley Morison* (London: Macmillan, 1972); Sheila Hodges, *Gollancz: the Story of a Publishing House, 1928–1978* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1978).

20. Cedric Watts, *Joseph Conrad: a Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1989); Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959; new and rev. ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); John Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: a Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

wood²¹ perhaps having the most significance for the future. American support for the avant-garde continued through to the Grove Press and *Evergreen Review*,²² which formed an infrastructural bridge from modernism to the Anglo-American counterculture of the 1960s and after. Moreover, the logic of the entrepreneurial thrust of New Yorkers such as Knopf and Bennett Cerf of Random House led to exploitation of the post-Keynesian venture capital market with the first of the high-profile acquisitions, that of Knopf by Cerf's Random House in 1960, a merger that heralds our present age of transnational media conglomerates exemplified by Random Century and its controllers.

Likewise in another area of the world of the book—librarianship—1897 marks the beginning of the wholesale impact of Andrew Carnegie and his American-style cultural philanthropy on the hitherto somewhat uneven efforts of the British at outreach to its new mass reading public, by subsidizing the construction of public libraries throughout the United Kingdom.²³ This impact was solidified by the growing reception in Britain in the 1890s of the new institutional library administrative principles and practice systematized by the progressive and certainly energetic Melvil Dewey. Dewey's system one can see as part of a technologically driven professionalism which (among other things) set up the first library school in the English-speaking world at Columbia University; which introduced a long revolution into the Library of Congress, with the appointment of Herbert Putnam as its head in the last year of the century; and which attained a final, international hegemony with the Unesco/Library of Congress Bibliographical Survey of 1950, breaking the originally splendid, but in a demo-

21. Watts, *Conrad*, p. 124.

22. See, for example, Raymond T. Caffrey, 'Lady Chatterley's Lover: the Grove Press Publication of the Unexpurgated Text,' *Syracuse University Library Associates Courier*, 20 (1985): 49-79.

23. Thomas Kelly, 'The Age of Carnegie,' in his *A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain, 1845-1975* (London: The Library Association, 1973; rev. ed., London: The Library Association, 1977).

cratic age fatally dysfunctional, isolation of the British Museum Library and its nineteenth-century European sisters.²⁴

Finally, in bibliophily and bibliography, one might note that 1897 was the year of the Ashburnham sale at Sothebys.²⁵ This sale pointed to the end of the predominance of aristocratic book collecting in Britain (dating from the Harleian library at the beginning of the eighteenth century) with the arrival in London of the transatlantic wave of the future, in the form of aggressive collectors (and, like Carnegie, cultural philanthropists) of catholic, no longer exclusively Americanist, range—such as J. P. Morgan—and of equally aggressive dealers—such as George D. Smith—whose collaboration begins to dominate the dealing and collecting scene. The formidable team of Huntington and Smith were followed by other formidable combinations (Folger and Rosenbach, Coe and Eberstadt, Lilly and Randall, Honeyman and Zeitlin) leading to perhaps the most significant combination of them all so far as transatlantic cultural transfer is concerned: Ransom and Feldman in the 1960s.²⁶ At the same time through the off- and on-campus research institutions they helped create²⁷ (much as Harley and the then new, ascending antiquarian book trade had done in eighteenth-century Britain), the Krauses, the Barretts, and the rest also helped American research librarians and scholars such as Jackson at Harvard and Bowers at Virginia to project American enumerative, descriptive, and textual bibliography onto the international scene, creatively stimulating the British and, indeed, scholarly bibliographers and research librarians elsewhere.

For I need to emphasize that this shift in the balance of power between Britain and the United States affects the other areas of

24. Willison, 'The National Library in Historical Perspective.'

25. Seymour de Ricci, *English Collectors of Books & Manuscripts (1530–1930) and their Marks of Ownership* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1930), p. 134.

26. Donald C. Dickinson, *Dictionary of American Book Collectors* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986).

27. Louis B. Wright and Gordon N. Ray, *The Private Collector and the Support of Scholarship: Papers read at a Clark Library Seminar, April 5 1969* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1969).

the English-speaking book world and will have to be taken into account in the other projects for the history of the book now under discussion, for example in Australia and Canada. Canadian publishing and librarianship has long been subject to the stranglehold of Britain and America, from the late eighteenth century onwards. One thinks of the textbook controversies surrounding Egerton Ryerson in Canada West²⁸ (and, indeed, the eventual takeover of the Ryerson Press by McGraw-Hill). After Confederation one thinks of the supplanting of the British Museum by the Library of Congress as the model for a Canadian national library.²⁹ Such has also been the case in Australia and New Zealand³⁰ in this century, particularly in the highly symbolic and political matter of the establishment of a national library.

Whether or not this selection of highlights stands up to future detailed examination, the fact of a transatlantic shift of leadership in the English-speaking world of the book is reasonably clear. Toward the end of the nineteenth century the British were still dominant; by the end of the twentieth the Americans, or perhaps rather a new set of mid-Atlantic arrangements, had at least come up alongside, and even overtaken, them in setting the pace. I now wish to suggest some general concepts — based largely on the existing literature — according to which we might order the detail and use our evidence to maximum effect. My purpose is to help establish the agenda for further coordinated research in the history of the book in twentieth-century Britain and America, indeed for research into the general transatlantic history of the book from the seventeenth century onwards. For if it is useful to think of the

28. George L. Parker, *The Beginnings of the Book Trade in Canada* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

29. F. Dolores Donnelly, *The National Library of Canada: A Historical Analysis of the Forces which Contributed to its Establishment and to the Identification of its Role and Responsibilities* (Ottawa: Canadian Library Association, 1973).

30. Harrison Bryan, 'Libraries,' in D. H. Borchardt & W. Kirsop, eds., *The Book in Australia: Essays towards a Cultural & Social History* (Melbourne: Australian Reference Publications in Association with the Centre for Bibliographical and Textual Studies, Monash University, 1988), pp. 139–71. For New Zealand, see various remarks in J. E. Traue, *Committed to Print: Selected Essays in Praise of the Common Culture of the Book* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1991).

twentieth century, even if only metaphorically, in terms of a shift in the balance of power, then our pursuit of perspective requires us to start with an examination in some depth of the origins of that balance. Further, the development of a solid, overall, unitary sense of perspective is important for establishing and maintaining coherence both between and within the individual collaborative histories of the book now in mind for the English-speaking world as a whole. These histories provide the wider context within which we in our twentieth-century volumes must work, but for which, in return, our own sense of an ending will provide essential illumination.

III

To begin, then, with the colonial period. Since Stephen Botein's pioneering study of the Anglo-American book trade from a transatlantic point of view,³¹ we are learning to see the development of that trade in terms of the colonies adjusting to a London center increasingly impotent, or insensitive, in its response to the demands of a growing Atlantic community for cultural, political, and commercial intelligence.³² The agencies responding to those demands ranged from the religious 'networks of affiliation'—missionary as well as pastoral—dominant during the first hundred years (for example, the initiatives of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts), to the beginnings of a systematic London export trade in the middle years of the eighteenth century at the hands of recognizably modern publishing entrepreneurs such as the Longmans and William Strahan. From the colonial point of view, however, it was the simple inability of the London center, for reasons of distance and therefore time-lag, to control the tendency to incohesiveness and heterodoxy integral to

31. Stephen Botein, 'The Anglo-American Book Trade before 1776: Personnel and Strategies,' in William L. Joyce, David D. Hall, Richard D. Brown, and John B. Hench, eds., *Printing and Society in Early America* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), pp. 48–82.

32. Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic: an Exploration of Communication and Community* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

any textual community³³ growing in population, that led in due course to the development of a local trade in printing and publishing. One might establish a progression in the colonial takeover of the modes of communication as the importance of distance and time-lag became critical: starting with local *pièces d'occasion* (newsletters and papers, almanacs, pamphlets, sermons, laws); then magazines and books. At the same time the London center came to regard the colonial market as (in Botein's words):

peripheral . . . [and] like their counterparts in the English provinces, American importers complained repeatedly of being sent unsolicited merchandise that would not 'answer' [increasingly distinct local needs. Indeed] overseas wholesalers [in London] had begun to move aggressively in the direction of transforming the Anglo-American book-trade even further, into a mechanism for disposal of surplus English goods.

Dumping by the center of books that the periphery did not want — 'that would not "answer"' — was balanced by pirating on the periphery of the books that it did: first in the other Atlantic cultural provinces of Scotland and in particular Ireland, then in North America itself. (Ephemera-based local heterodoxy on the one hand, and dumping of books from Britain on the other, spread to the Australasian and Canadian colonies under the second British Empire, as shown by the researches of Dietrich Borchardt, Wallace Kirsop, George Parker and their colleagues³⁴). It is true that even after the Revolution Benjamin Franklin spoke of an unproblematic, imperial, London-based English-language textual community. He wrote to Strahan on August 19, 1784:

. . . the rapid Growth and extension of the English language in America, must become greatly Advantageous to the booksellers, and holders of Copy-rights in England. A vast audience is assembling here for English Authors, ancient, present, and future, our People doubling every twenty Years; and this will demand large and of course profitable Impressions of your most valuable Books.³⁵

33. Brian Stock, 'Textual Communities,' in his *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

34. Borchardt & Kirsop, *The Book in Australia*; Parker, *Book Trade in Canada*.

35. Benjamin Franklin, *Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1987), pp. 1101–2.

But such a prediction was simplistic, though forgiveably so: simplistic, in ignoring the deep complexities of the interplay of center and periphery; forgiveably so, since those complexities only emerged (thus Botein concludes) well into the next century, and as we encounter new configurations that set the scene for our own period.

IV

Since its establishment as a major analytical tool by Edward Shils in the 1950s the concept of center and periphery is proving invaluable for the ordering of study of the Atlantic community in the colonial period.³⁶ However, for our present post-colonial interests here I would like to explore the usefulness of the more focused, even if subordinate, concept of the frontier and the counterfrontier proposed by Harry Ransom in 1958. When Ransom sketched a historical rationale for his Research Center and its collections in Austin, Texas, he suggested that:

wherever there was a frontier in America there was a counterfrontier . . . the main purpose [of which] was not only to help man grow or dig or catch or kill his living but also to put this man in communication with the traditions of his kind and thereby secure to his descendants the benefits of the free mind.³⁷

Although Ransom seems never to have expanded on this proposition³⁸ we can derive from it an idea of two complexities essential for our understanding of the structure of the English-language textual community in history. The first complexity is that the 'communication with the traditions of his kind' can never be unproblematic, unmediated. Walt Whitman, when he visited the

36. Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Jack P. Greene, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607-1788* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1986).

37. Harry Hunt Ransom, 'The Collection of Knowledge in Texas,' in his *The Conscience of the University and Other Essays: Edited by Hazel H. Ransom* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 75.

38. For another version, see Ransom, 'The Counterfrontier in Texas,' in his *The Other Texas Frontier: Edited by Hazel H. Ransom, Foreword by John Graves* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), pp. 23-28.

trans-Mississippi region at the same time as that fictionalized in McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove*, denounced the reading of frontier people such as Clara:

Lying by one rainy day in Missouri to rest . . . first trying a big volume I found there of 'Milton, Young, Gray, Beattie and Collins' . . . I stopped and laid down the book, and pondered the thought of a poetry that should in due time express and supply the teeming region I was in the midst of . . . One's mind needs but a moment's deliberation . . . to see clearly enough that all the prevalent book and library poets, either as imported from Great Britain, or follow'd and *doppel-gang'd* here, are foreign to our States, copiously as they are read by us all . . . Will the day ever come . . . when those models and lay-figures from the British islands—and even the precious traditions of the classics—will be reminiscences, studies only? The pure breath, primitiveness, boundless prodigality and amplitude . . . of these prairies . . . will they ever appear in, and in some sort form a standard for our poetry and art?³⁹

On the other hand virtual disconnection from the traditions of one's kind could—did—lead to the 'luckless barbarism' and 'unhappy verbiage' which Henry James pilloried in the case of Whitman himself.⁴⁰ The resulting 'complex fate' (in James's famous phrase⁴¹) of being an American, particularly an American writer, required the traditions to be appropriated, though appropriated selectively and deliberately ('fighting against a superstitious valuation of Europe,' to continue with James) with the aid of local textual agencies: publishers, libraries, and universities (in James's case, James T. Fields, the Boston Athenæum, and Harvard). If a distinctively American literature and culture is, in Hugh Kenner's words, 'a homemade world,' then college 'classroom accuracies [that] generate structures in the mind'⁴² have nevertheless been its

39. Walt Whitman, *Complete Poetry and Collected Prose* (New York: The Library of America, 1982), pp. 866–67.

40. Henry James, *Literary Criticism: Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), p. 672.

41. Leon Edel, *The Life of Henry James*, 2 vols. (Harmondsworth Middlesex: Peregrine Books, 1977), 1: 221.

42. H. Kenner, *A Homemade World: the American Modernist Writers* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 159.

distinctive matrix. The counterfrontier, therefore, had—and has—its own complex dynamic in which these textual agencies have increasingly played a far more active and conspicuous role than their equivalent in Britain, and have achieved significant differentiation as a result. In author-publisher relations (and starting with the New England Renaissance) it was the Boston publisher Fields who ‘manufactured’ Hawthorne into a ‘personage’ and initiated the ‘institutionalization of American literature’;⁴³ a prime, distinctive role of which the energetic Yankee editor Maxwell Perkins, disciplining and marketing the luckless barbarism and unhappy verbiage of Thomas Wolfe’s great American novel, is the twentieth-century exemplar. (Again, we should note here that in our century a comparable leading role in the institutionalization of Australian, Canadian, and, since the 1960s, African, literature has been played by the publishers Angus and Robertson, McLelland and Stewart, and the publishing-editing team of Alan Hill and Chinua Achebe with their Heinemann *African Writers’ Series*.) Further, the concern with classroom accuracies led to the development of a distinctive, massive, transcontinental textbook publishing industry, of which the Ryerson phenomenon in Canada was a smaller-scale but still highly significant parallel. Likewise it was what Edward Shils has termed the ascendancy of the American university,⁴⁴ together with that of the university (and the public) library, in actually providing classroom accuracies with an infrastructure across a whole continent after the Civil War, that led to the—by the then British standards—exceptional concentration on library collection development and availability as well as general library management. This bias was embodied in Melvil Dewey’s didactic professionalism:

43. Richard H. Brodhead, ‘Manufacturing You Into a Personage: Hawthorne, the Canon, and the Institutionalization of American Literature,’ in his *The School of Hawthorne* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 48–66.

44. Edward Shils, ‘The Order of Learning in the United States: the Ascendancy of the University,’ in Alexander Oleson and John Voss, eds., *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860–1920* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), pp. 19–47.

the time *was* [Dewey had said at the foundation of the American Library Association] when a library was very like a museum . . . the time *is* when the library is a school, and the librarian is in the highest sense a teacher.⁴⁵

The infrastructure for classroom accuracies was also provided by the creative competition between universities themselves to build (again by British standards) massive research collections: first, after the Civil War, the private universities, led by Harvard; and progressively in our century, the state universities (thus the midwest Big Three: Indiana, Michigan, Illinois). Among other things this entailed the likewise exceptional phenomenon of what has been called 'the private collector and the support of scholarship,' which, as we have seen, gave the British antiquarian book market a markedly new look (and here again we might note analogies with Canada—for example, the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto—Australia—for example, the Mitchell Library in Sydney—or New Zealand—for example, the Hocken Library in the University of Otago).⁴⁶

v

As a second complexity, the counterfrontier clearly has an extensive as well as intensive dynamic: a matter of geographic and social distance and variety as well as inward cultural identity, and the need to impose a homogeneity on that distance in order to preserve that hard-won cultural identity. (In this connection we need to keep in our minds—though not to elaborate on here—the continuing presence of another, threatening dynamic latent until recently thanks to the screen of Eurocentered missionary and settler enterprise: that of the ethnic oral textualities on what the Australian cultural historian Henry Reynolds has termed *The Other Side of the Frontier*).⁴⁷ The need to homogenize printed textuality

45. Melvil Dewey, 'The Profession,' *American Library Journal* 1 (1876): 5–6.

46. Wright and Ray, *The Private Collector*. For Australia as well as New Zealand, see J. E. Traue, *Committed to Print*, especially 'For the Ultimate Good of the Nation: the Contribution of New Zealand's First Book Collectors,' pp. 28–42.

47. Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (Townsville Queensland: James Cook University, 1981).

over distance involved an even greater emphasis on the effective distribution and marketing of texts, a 'market-oriented diffusion process . . . established alongside the older hierarchical one,'⁴⁸ than was the case in Britain even during its own phase of rapidly expanding print culture in the nineteenth century. This emphasis on distribution and marketing involved, in turn, major distinctive qualities in American publishing.⁴⁹ As we have noted, these were, principally, distribution by subscription and mail order rather than bookshop, with a consequent leadership role being played by the mass-circulation magazine and its editor rather than by the trade book. Hence we encounter the role of 'George Horace Lorimer and *The Saturday Evening Post*' as 'America's Interpreter.'⁵⁰ Even more pregnant with the future was the introduction into, and eventual spread throughout, the media of the corporate management structures earlier developed (as Alfred Chandler has shown⁵¹) in the first continent-wide field of mechanized communication and distribution, the railroad. Thus Doubleday came up, and out, as manager first of *Scribner's Magazine* and then of Scribner's subscription department. (Canadian and Australian analogies again suggest themselves: the founders of the mail-order syndicate that produced Horace Everett Hooper for *The Times*—Belford, Clarke—started in Toronto, as did Doubleday's initially more successful partner, George Doran;⁵² and on the present corporate, multimedia counterfrontier of the English-speaking world stands the figure of the Australian, now American, Rupert Murdoch.) Magazine writing as distinct from book authorship was likewise the base for the takeoff of American literature as a going

48. Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: the Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700–1865* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 282.

49. James Gilreath, 'American Book Distribution,' in David D. Hall and John B. Hench, eds., *Needs and Opportunities in the History of the Book: America, 1639–1876* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1987), pp. 103–85.

50. John Tebbel, *George Horace Lorimer and The Saturday Evening Post* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1948).

51. Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: the Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977).

52. Tebbel, *History of Book Publishing*, 2: 444–48, 331–44. For Doubleday, see pp. 319–31.

concern. This was as true for Henry James and his indispensable 'friction with the market' as it was for Jack London and later F. Scott Fitzgerald.⁵³ Moreover if, in the persistently homogenizing *Lonely Crowd* on the American counterfrontier, storytelling is the main tutor in social technique (as David Riesman suggested⁵⁴) then, as post-print technology and publishing tie in with the traditional media, the magazinist-cum-novelist converges with the film and video scriptwriter. This—to take both ends of the emerging narratological continuum—was perceived as much by Irving Thalberg at MGM as by Max Perkins at Scribner, with Fitzgerald, exhilarated but by no means at ease, the protagonist in the middle.⁵⁵

Nevertheless such hothouse volatility leads, in the first instance, to what the public service broadcaster Kate Whitehead has called⁵⁶ the 'overall fragmentation of cultural levels caused by the new media,' expressed most conspicuously (I would add) in the underground press and its archives of the late 1960s. However, the overall continuum of 'telling stories to the lonely crowd' does persist; indeed it ultimately contains this fragmentation. It is the relentless technological dynamism informing its volatility, together with the increasingly massive capital funds and corporate management systems required to exploit such dynamism, that leads to our present age of merger, conglomerate, and library network. We can think in terms of a multimedia hypervolatilization of the textual community, enveloping in its insatiable distribu-

53. Michael Anesko, 'Friction with the Market': *Henry James and the Profession of Authorship* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Christopher P. Wilson, 'The Brain Worker: Jack London,' in his *The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), pp. 92–112; Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: the Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981).

54. David Riesman, in collaboration with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, 'Storytellers as Tutors in Technique,' in their *The Lonely Crowd: a Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 84–112.

55. Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*.

56. Kate Whitehead, *The Third Programme: a Literary History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 3.

tive system everything in sight, and placing both traditional and alternative publishing and archiving in an array of 'niches'⁵⁷ within the system. This even includes the ethnic textualities which do finally enter the community from the Other Side of the Frontier. So we see, for example, Longman Paul's involvement with Pacific Island narrative, or Time Warner's with rap, or Unesco's with the developing World Information Order.

I have attempted to deepen our overall perspective in order to suggest that conglomeratization in publishing and networking in librarianship are but the latest phase in the steady movement of the entrepreneurial center, from the origination of texts to their marketing and distribution ('entertainment you can take to be anything . . . the rest is a question of a distribution system,' Mr. Murdoch is reported as saying⁵⁸). This geological shift (so to speak) emerged from the dynamics of center and periphery, of frontier and counterfrontier, and (eventually) of the other side of the frontier; and it can explain, largely, the shift in the balance of power between Britain and America with which we began. In my concluding section I turn, briefly, to some major categories of evidence that should help solidify our perspective so far as the twentieth century is concerned.

VI

To attempt some degree of objectivity in narrating the development of Anglo-American mass production and reception of texts—depolemicizing the insights of Mrs. Leavis and some of her contemporaries and successors, shall we say?—we need to see what macrostatistical evidence for publishing, bookselling, the distribution of film and video, literacy, reading, and libraries are available or can be worked up. For access to the books, magazines, newspapers, films, etc. actually produced in the two countries—our primary, physical evidence—we should exploit our retrospective

57. Marion Boyars, 'Publishing as a Career,' in Peter Owen, ed., *Publishing—the Future* (London: Peter Owen, 1988), p. 123.

58. Jerome Tuccille, *Murdoch: a Biography* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1989), p. 134.

national bibliographies (filmographies, discographies, etc.) now, in principle at least, collatable intensively in machine-searchable form. However, our ability to exploit the latter is at the moment limited by the absence, in large part, from the databases of collateral information regarding, for example, price. Thus we will find it laborious to determine the true predominance (or otherwise—whether, for example, there was any North American equivalent) of the 6/-, later 7/6d, 244-page standard format for middlebrow fiction promoted by, among others, Victor Gollancz and Stanley Morison, through which many writers such as George Orwell learnt their trade (as their Victorian predecessors learnt theirs through the three-decker). Moreover, to continue with the case of George Orwell, it is unlikely that databases will at least in the first instance reveal all the reissues by Penguin Books and other paperback houses, which more than anything else established Orwell's popular, international readership after his death by means of an aggressive, constantly updated mode of presentation of his whole *oeuvre*, using hard-sell pictorial covers and blurbs. (This is now an expanding feature of the postmodern world of the book, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf having in 1992 joined Orwell in the paperback canon.) Developing the appropriate archive of such evidence is another lengthy and highly labor-intensive process, the responsibility of (for example) the dedicated author collection, such as the Orwell and Joyce archives at University College London or the Holtzman Faulkner collection at Ann Arbor, Michigan. Again, databases would seem at the moment to be of little use in determining the true extent of the import into Britain of American texts—not so much books, which by the terms of the 1891 copyright agreement should have been picked up by legal deposit in the national archive, but the 'Yank magazines' which Mrs. Leavis saw as 'taking hold of the English periodical press'⁵⁹ and which were less subject, apparently, to effective legal deposit. The as yet imperfectly mechanized retrospective union catalogues of non-

59. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, pp. 14, 29.

national library holdings of magazines (and books) are of critical importance in this respect; and this brings us to our second major area: macrostatistics for the mass-reception of texts by the reading, listening, and viewing public—or rather publics—of the twentieth century.

Here the very concept of 'literacy'—of 'reading capacity,' in Mrs. Leavis's phrase⁶⁰—is highly problematic. Since 'communicative modes' are changing, reading capacity must be 'reconceptualised'⁶¹ as highly interactive with listening and viewing capacities (themselves highly volatile, as we have noted) and as highly interactive with the perceptions of the publishing entrepreneurs in those modes. We come then to our third major macrostatistical area: the corporate finance market that has supported—indeed penetrated—twentieth-century publishing enterprise, from the rescue of Harper by J. P. Morgan at the beginning of the century to the media conglomerates of today.

Two questions immediately present themselves. How far is it the secular trend in the market towards what is now called the 'corporate economy,' and its concomitant the 'professional society,'⁶² that has promoted a managerial revolution in what tended originally to be family publishing businesses (or partnerships) with modest capital resources? Can we establish firmly a sequence from, say, the rise of Doubleday and the Chandlerian departmentalizing of in-house operations, to the post-World War II capital-market-based mergers and the penetration of top publishing management by accountants, the loosening of the author-editor relationship, and the ascendancy of media tie-ups either within or across the conglomerates? Secondly, how far does the inevitable preoccupation of investment bankers (and their partners in top publishing management) with the 'bottom line' and prospective 'goodwill,' as

60. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, pp. 215–34.

61. Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 397–98.

62. Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

instruments of financial 'leverage,' aggravate the hypervolatility inherent in multimedia enterprise? For example, does that preoccupation with the bottom line disallow reliance on the traditional slow-moving backlist and compel 'synergetic' adventures, thus heightening the risk as well as magnifying the short-term profits to an incalculable extent? Indeed, can we say that in his failure to restructure his debts—his entrapment (largely self-entrapment) in 'overleverage'—Maxwell was not so much (or not only) a crook as an outsider:⁶³ that is, was he friendlessly and inextricably locked into a general system of leverage in which for example Rupert Murdoch (Geelong Grammar School, Worcester College Oxford) was an extricable insider? To determine the facts of leading cases such as these will require highly sophisticated research which we historians of the book may well have to commission—collaboratively, I would suggest—from other disciplines. The clinching evidence will have to be found in what private archives can be assembled (public archives becoming increasingly accessible, as the doctrine of freedom of information spreads). This is the other aspect of the search for objectivity to which I now finally turn.

In this respect postwar rationalization in the book trade has made a major contribution by greatly intensifying the release of in-house archives, either through gift or sale, to research libraries: the University of Reading, the Bodleian, the National Library of Scotland, the British Library for example, in Britain; Princeton, Columbia, the University of North Carolina, Texas, McMaster, Toronto in North America. This is attracting the interest of a new generation of business as well as literary historians who will either themselves provide, or train, much of the manpower for the national histories of the book. But all is by no means plain sailing, in part because the business origin of book trade archives means that their arrangement is highly esoteric and difficult for the historian to use. But the main reason is that, in the words of the British business historian, Charles Wilson:

63. Tom Bower, *Maxwell the Outsider*, rev. ed. (London: Mandarin, 1991).

the documentation [he is talking of W. H. Smith] is, at best, fragmentary. Much of the business . . . was transacted . . . verbally. By far the greater part of such business correspondence as may have formed part of the firm's records at one time or another has either been destroyed or has disappeared in the course of removals, wars, paper drives and all those vicissitudes which afflict historic institutions to a greater or lesser degree.⁶⁴

As historians of the book we have two related strategies at our disposal. First we can order such fragments into narrative according to models derived from contemporary field-work by cultural sociologists such as, in the United States, Professors Coser, Kadushin, and Powell and the readability models reviewed in Carl Kaestle's *Literacy in the United States*⁶⁵ or, in Britain, the work of Peter Mann on readers, bookshops, and libraries, and Jeremy Tunstall and Michael Palmer on the media in general.⁶⁶ In this connection, we still need (and need urgently) models of the operation of corporate finance—the structure of leverage, of goodwill, etc.—comparable to the studies of conglomeratization by our French colleagues attached to the Ministère de la Culture.⁶⁷ Secondly, by appropriating these and similar hermeneutic models we can ourselves deconstruct the vast and rich mass of subjective self-construction by the book world itself in the form of journalism, manuals, in-house histories, and autobiography. Thus Stanley Unwin's *The Truth about Publishing* and *The Truth about a*

64. Charles Wilson, *First with the News: the History of W. H. Smith, 1792–1972* (London: Jonathan Cape), p. xiii.

65. Lewis A. Coser, Charles Kadushin, and Walter W. Powell, *Books: the Culture and Commerce of Publishing* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Carl F. Kaestle, Helen Damon-Moore, Lawrence C. Stedman, Katherine Tinsley, and William Vance Trollinger, Jr., *Literacy in the United States: Readers and Reading since 1880* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991).

66. Peter H. Mann and Jacqueline L. Burgoyne, *Books and Reading* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1969); Peter H. Mann, *Book Buyers and Borrowers* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1971); Jeremy Tunstall and Michael Palmer, *Media Moguls* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

67. Bernard Guillou and Laurent Maruani, *Les stratégies des grands groupes d'édition: analyses et perspectives* (Paris: Ministère de la Culture, de la Communication et des Grands Travaux; Cercle de la Librairie, 1991); Marc Minon, *Chânes & groupements de librairies en Europe* (Paris: Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Cercle de la Librairie, 1992).

*Publisher*⁶⁸ or Frederic Warburg's *Occupation for Gentlemen*⁶⁹ are among the classics for interwar Britain—highly revealing (though perhaps not quite in the way the authors intended) as in a different mode are the interviews with the common reader held in the files of *Mass Observation*. This is particularly true of the in-house histories and autobiographies written in the context of the present Great Change: for example, John St. John's *William Heinemann: a Century of Publishing*,⁷⁰ Alan Hill's *In Pursuit of Publishing*,⁷¹ or Hiram Haydn's *Words and Faces*.⁷² Though sentimentalizing the past and not pleased with the future, properly deconstructed such self-constructions can nevertheless give a sense of things as they really were for the actors who made those things; and they can thereby help us historians of the book to avoid the error of technodeterminism to which, as Michael Warner has recently reminded us,⁷³ we are particularly prone.

VII

Indeed—and this is my final word—technodeterminism might be said to be an aspect of that wider 'exceptionalist'⁷⁴ heresy of which the historians of both Britain and the United States have been guilty (what we locally are is right, and it is our local technology and enterprise that has brought us here). In so far as our joint projects, and those other national projects in the English-speaking world we have mentioned as well as the national projects in Europe

68. Stanley Unwin, *The Truth about Publishing*, 7th ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960); *The Truth about a Publisher: an Autobiographical Record* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960).

69. Frederic Warburg, *An Occupation for Gentlemen* (London: Hutchinson, 1959).

70. St. John, *Heinemann*.

71. Alan Hill, *In Pursuit of Publishing* (London: John Murray in association with Heinemann Educational Books, 1988).

72. Hiram Haydn, *Words and Faces* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974).

73. Michael Warner, 'The Cultural Mediation of the Print Medium,' in his *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 1–33.

74. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, 'Reconstructing British-American Colonial History: an Introduction,' in Greene and Pole, eds., *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp. 1–17.

we have not mentioned, are conducted collaboratively their anti-exceptionalist tendency will produce a de facto world history of the book and related media consonant with the agenda now facing historical studies in their totality: that is, to illuminate the textual condition⁷⁵ in which we all live, move, and have our being.

75. Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1991).

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.