

Introduction: The History and Future of the Nineteenth-Century Book

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In its focus on the history and future of the nineteenth-century book, this issue of *Gramma* takes up issues of cultural memory and its bibliographic forms across two major technological divides: from hand-press to industrial printing, and from analog to digital textuality. Looking both backward and forward, investigating a history and adumbrating a future for the printed volumes of the Romantic and Victorian eras, our contributors give us new purchase on our present moment, a time of opportunity and disruption. As our international print collections are being digitized, they are becoming more available, dynamic, and searchable; they are also at risk of occlusion by their own surrogates. Books produced during the nineteenth century are particularly involved with this transition. Representing as they do the height of book culture in the west (after general literacy and before film), such books provide rich occasions for analysis of media change and the consequences for human expression and remembering across cultural contexts and historical periods.

Maurice Halbwachs fittingly opens his classic study on collective memory (originally published in 1925) with an anecdote of an experience of reading:

When one of the books which were the joy of our childhood, which we have not opened since, falls into our hands, it is not without a certain curiosity, an anticipation of a recurrence of memories and a kind of interior rejuvenation that we begin to read it...But what happens most frequently is that we actually seem to be reading a new book, or at least an altered version. The book seems to lack pages, developments, that were there when we first read it...(46).

For Halbwachs, the cause of this bewilderment when reading a favorite book from childhood lies in the way memory is always a socially and temporally embedded phenomenon, a product of repetitions that necessarily evolve with time. When we come back to the books of our youth, we bring to the experience a remembered copy that, upon collation with the original, reveals Wordsworthian sad perplexities and discontinuities. Born in 1877, Halbwachs is testifying here to a reading experience that spans the century's divide: his encounter with those

early volumes— “the books which were the joy of our childhood”—involves a step back to the nineteenth century, to the *Belle Époque*, a time of splendor in the leaves. The revisited book, like one of Wordsworth’s landscapes, offers a way of measuring internal changes following youthful experience and “its aching joys.” In offering a nineteenth-century book (that is, one that was “the joy of [his] childhood”) as an anchor for meditations on the dynamics of memory, Halbwachs suggests the deep connections between consciousness and codices in that historical period. Modernist literary precepts famously pushed the nineteenth century aside in order to “make it new,” but it is clear that early book encounters irrevocably shaped the sensibilities of that generation of writers and cultural critics.

The Halbwachs anecdote also evokes the way ideas of loss are bound up with nineteenth-century books, especially from the vantage of twentieth and twenty-first century readers. Products of bygone era of technology and social relations, they incarnate myriad forms of life that have moved out of reach—Housman’s “land of lost content” that “cannot come again.”¹ Indeed, nineteenth-century books were the Velveteen Rabbits of the modern era, loved into shabbiness and becoming Real—and lost—through the nursery magic of early reading. We all know the 1922 Margery Williams story: a pristine toy bunny becomes a Boy’s beloved plaything and bedfellow, getting worn and dirty and thereby becoming Real. The venerable Skin Horse delivers the moral early on:

When you are Real, you don’t mind being hurt. . . . It doesn’t happen all at once. . . . You become. It takes a long time. . . . Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out, and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real, you can’t be ugly, except to those who don’t understand. (Williams 13)

After the Boy suffers an episode of scarlet fever, his doctor orders his toys to be burned: “the little Rabbit was put into a sack with the old picture-books and a lot of rubbish, and carried out to the end of the garden behind the fowl-house. That was a fine place to make a bonfire. . . .” (xx). Thanks to a magic fairy, the once-velveteen rabbit bounds off into the bracken with the other real rabbits, but the books, now rubbish, presumably meet the flames. And it is this parable that haunts our reception of the nineteenth-century print record: its tenderness and loss, its leaping free of material and its lonely burning, its intimacies and our consequent betrayals. Above all, the wave of sentiment that so fully subsumes our thinking about old books as to become the only Real we know. Derrida suggests that all archival urges to preserve are twin-born with appetites toward erasure—the leaping bunny and the picture books in ashes. Maybe the Boy didn’t have scarlet fever after all: maybe it was a case of archive fever.

1. The quotation is from poem XL in A.E.Housman’s *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), which begins “Into my heart an air that kills.”

What, after all, is to become of the study of the nineteenth century in its material forms, its interfaces and its platforms? Having by now fully turned the millennial corner and watched the last living Victorians fall away behind us (Ethel Lang, the last living Victorian, died at age 114 in January of this year), we must now think seriously about what kinds of attention to bestow on the textual productions of that twice-removed era. What do we do with those old books—those shabby Skin Horses—that, for their nineteenth-century readers, were once Real? Personal attachments and affectionate bonds have given place to the historical and aesthetic judgments of our discipline, brought to bear upon literary texts as objects of critical inquiry. In other words, our grandmothers' books are becoming evidence, part of the nineteenth-century archive committed to libraries for public use, for the better understanding of a human past recently but now firmly separated from our own. And precisely at this moment, that archive is undergoing a profound transition as the global library goes digital.

The essays presented here address themselves to the fact that it is not yet well understood what nineteenth-century books *were*, either as objects in isolation or as fully-embedded cultural objects shaped by myriad forces in their production and ongoing reception. Indeed, in a very real sense, we will never fully know what books—as fusions of textual and physical materials—meant to their readers. Our efforts to produce digital replicas are always shaped by our own conceptions of what old books are for, even as we uneasily acknowledge that they have been, and been for, many things over time. We tend to characterize physical books as stable and singular as opposed to the ephemeral and fluid nature of electronic textuality. Yet this dichotomy belies the fundamental ontology of books, which, as physical things in the world, are necessarily subject to forces of alteration and transformation. We are thinking not only of the occasional torn cover, inscription, or tear-stained page—but also of the entire condition of books in their relationship to history. That is, even if some books appear to have changed little, our own human and cultural changes are relentlessly apparent; and so our perceptions of and interactions with books from other eras alter the very nature of those books. As Halbwachs notes, whatever a nineteenth-century book was, it is not the same thing in our eyes and in our hands now. It follows then that our understanding of the historical book is necessarily grounded in a calibration of practices, a measuring of the many stage-changes between the moment of the book's production and the multiple moments of its ongoing reception, including our own.

The authors of the essays in this issue take up that challenge from a variety of perspectives. Indeed, the variety of approaches included in this volume suggests the multiple critical, generic, and theoretical contexts within which “The History and Future of the Nineteenth-Century Book” operates, highlighting the multiple levels of interpretation and the intellectual flexibility the topic invites. **Andrew Piper's** essay opens this issue of *Gramma* by arguing for a new way of thinking about digitization and its role in contemporary culture; namely, one that does not see digitization exclusively under the sign of preservation but one which

rather helps us realize how important loss and transformation are to the process of mediation. Piper uses the material artifact of Goethe's *Swiss Journey* to suggest that this hybrid nineteenth-century book helps us reorient our thinking about printed-ness or even reproducibility as that which moves *through*, and has much to tell us about the possibility of imagining a world of digital reproduction defined by the passaginal and the transactional. Although the next essay moves the spotlight to editorial/textual rather than collecting practices, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's scrupulous supervision of the print production of his works ties in with Goethe's meticulous collecting of printed leaves of paper in that they both included a paginal mass. Following Rossetti at his work on the proofs, **Jerome McGann** illustrates the proofing process of the poet's two 1881 volumes—*Poems. A New Edition* and *Ballads and Sonnets*. Taking the *Ballads and Sonnets* volume as an especially clear and dramatic case of Rossetti's creative habits, McGann's essay exposes how meticulous and how significant were the corrections and changes that Rossetti made to that book.

The idea of "collecting" is also strongly present in **Diego Saglia's** investigation of the phenomenon of foreign book trade in London at the turn of the nineteenth century. His essay reminds us of the cultural capital London assumed at the time on account of the availability of foreign-language works on its literary market. Saglia emphasizes the role played by periodicals in reviewing foreign titles and advertising the lists and catalogues of those booksellers who stocked and sold foreign works. Focusing on some of the most successful among them (such as Boosey, Treuttel and Würtz, Deboffe and Dulau), the paper sketches out a map of their businesses in London, the languages they covered, their different groups of customers, as well as the commercial and political risks to which they were exposed. The role of periodicals and press reports in shaping literary and cultural history is also stressed by **Catherine Boyle**, who maintains that *Galignani's Messenger* helps us better understand Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1819 political poetry, particularly *The Mask of Anarchy* and *Song, To the Men of England*. Based on quantitative data made available after the recent digitization of *Galignani's Messenger*, Boyle argues that Shelley's engagement with the expatriate newspaper with regard to the account of the Peterloo massacre is close and meaningful, and is solidly reflected in the themes and imagery of his two political poems.

While Boyle's essay makes us aware of how computer-assisted textual analysis is creating the ability to add new perspectives to our exploration of familiar texts, **David McClay** reflects on the potential capacity of digital technology to reassemble existing archival, print and digital resources into a single, comprehensive digital resource that will provide a more integrated and accessible scholarship. This unified approach broadens the interdisciplinary appeal and usefulness of publishing archive resources making them relevant and useable to a modern research community and audience. McClay's essay focuses on some aspects of book history of Lord Byron's poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. A Roumant* (1812) (publishing story, sales, reception and reviews) in order to il-

illustrate what publishing resources are available for constructing a detailed publishing and literary history and how the scale and type of materials requires a twenty-first-century solution to maximize the potential and use. The next essay by **Jeremy Valentine Freeman** turns to another vital moment in the history of media, namely, the production of the first book with photographs: Henry Fox Talbot's enigmatic work *The Pencil of Nature* (1844). Freeman argues that, departing from Walter Benjamin's formulation of the copy, Talbot's emotional investment in the copying process effectively positions the modern image in an affective (Wordsworthian) field of historical memory, securing the meaning of the copy for futurity. Reading *The Pencil of Nature* as a manifestation of lyrical, etymological, and antiquarian modes of nineteenth-century thought, Freeman's essay negotiates how Talbot nostalgically and sentimentally positions the reproducible modern image, prefiguring image production systems in modernity and postmodernity.

The evolution of the book trade in the nineteenth century into a professional, profit-seeking industry placed literature within a complex interactive matrix of multiple collaborating agents, individuals as well as institutional. As a result, authorship was undergoing significant change. In this context, **Barbara Vrachnas's** article examines the popular and non-canonical Victorian novelist Ouida (Maria Louise de la Ramée) and her relationship with her publishers through the study of nineteenth and twentieth-century criticism and correspondence. Vrachnas maintains that the author's reputation and sales were not only injured by her ostensibly immoral plots, as many claimed, but also by her publishers'—primarily Chapman & Hall and Chatto & Windus—differing priorities and conflicting opinions in their personal and professional relationship. The examination of Ouida's publishing affairs as well as of her vexed concern regarding piracy and plagiarism expressed in her letters to the editor of *The Times* traces one of the paths that led to the gradual decline in her reputation and the posterior obscurity of her works. Adopting a more theoretical perspective, **Elisavet Ioannidou** illustrates how the growth and professionalization of the publishing industry shaped the nineteenth-century author and his/ her work and often created inconsistencies between the text that was originally produced and the text that eventually appeared as a published book. The essay discusses examples drawn from the publishing industry's interference with Romantic fragments on the one hand (such as Byron's *The Giaour*) and Victorian censored or poorly reviewed texts on the other (such as Dickens's *Great Expectations*) in order to explore the implications that the mediation of the publishing industry has not only for the history of the nineteenth-century book, but for the consumption of nineteenth-century literature nowadays.

Another pivotal moment in the history of the book is brought to the fore by **Michael Macovski's** examination of the influence of James Granger's *Biographical History of England* (1769), a volume that launched a remarkable practice of collecting, interleaving, and rebinding during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This phenomenon reflects not only radical changes in concepts of col-

lecting during this period, but also three central dimensions of book history: the era's passion for artefactual collections; its propensity for annotative forms, such as marginalia and prefaces; and its burgeoning publication of compilatory, systematized texts—such as catalogues, almanacs, encyclopedias, and other compendium forms. The essay goes on to suggest that “grangerized” texts extend beyond simple, stochastic gatherings to reveal key precepts of historiographic continuity, serialized succession and ekphrastic reproduction. Like the majority of the essays in this volume, Macovski's analysis underlines the significance of the author's/reader's interaction with the physical and textual materiality of the book and the latter's role in the construction of individual and cultural memory. However, as more and more nineteenth-century print literary materials are translated in digital forms, one begins to wonder: what happens to the content of the book when the body of the book disappears? This question is taken up by **James Mussell** who closes this issue of *Gramma* with an essay on this gothic economy of repression and return, on the shifts in material presence underpinning literacy. Taking in examples from nineteenth-century literature (Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* in particular) to Facebook, Mussell's paper explores reading and writing as embodied practices.

Taken together, these essays suggest that not only is the future of the nineteenth-century book before us, but its history is still being written, still in process. It seems that our current moment of digital remediation of the past is a particularly apt one for re-encountering the printed record of the nineteenth century in all of its detail and variety. Our contributors have helped us do that, looking backward at the bibliographic forms and social structures of the past, even as they have gazed forward to the new interfaces and platforms of the digital. As editors of the volume, we would like to thank all the contributors of this issue for having embraced the present endeavor with interest and enthusiasm throughout all the stages of its completion, and for helping us make it become, like the boy's loved rabbit, Real.

Works Cited

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