Cover Page

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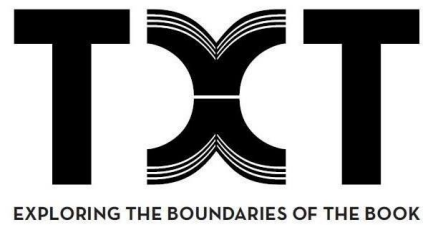EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE BOOK

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Social Developments and Reading

A Comparison with the Twelfth-Century Renaissance

Verlicht maar weinig zicht
Mijn God wat ik u schreeuw
Geef ons voor extra licht zo'n donkere
Middeleeuw.

– Herman Finkers, *Men fietst niet meer*

By Linda Vermaas

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In the research project 'Turning over a new leaf: Manuscripts innovation in the twelfth-century renaissance', Erik Kwakkel and his team of researchers examine the influence of social developments on the physical characteristics of manuscripts.[1] Their findings can also help us gain more insights into the current developments in reading with regard to technological innovations and the advent of digital reading.[2] In this essay, a number of similarities between the Middle Ages after 1100 and modern times with regards to social developments concerning reading and book production will be discussed.

A first similarity is the opposition between a *lingua franca* and many different 'vernacular' languages. In the Middle Ages, Latin was the language used in the monasteries and the universities, and books were almost exclusively written in Latin. Later on, after 1100, the national languages, or the vernaculars, were rising, and more and more books were produced in Italian, French, German, Dutch and other national tongues.[3] Today, we can observe a similar phenomenon; as Latin was before, English is now the new *lingua franca*. English is the primary language in scientific publications and in online communication English is also dominant.[4] The same goes for literature; English books are read all over the world, whereas books in other languages require translation, which, as prof. van der Weel argued during one of his lectures, has led to a dominating

influence on the part of Anglo-American literature. Interestingly, many 'vernaculars' have also arisen due to the rise of new technologies; think of SMS language and internet slang.[5] Interestingly, as the vernaculars of the Middle Ages, these languages have slowly gathered fame and recognition, and dictionaries and grammars have started to appear for these vernaculars, which was also the first step towards acquiring official status for the medieval regional tongues.

Another interesting similarity between twelfth-century renaissance and modern-day reading and book production is the development from reading extensive texts and entire books to a preference for shorter texts and a more selective style of reading. After 1100, deep reading, which was characteristic of monastic practice, made way for more selective reading and a reading style that was aimed more at the gathering of information from multiple sources than at intensive studying of a single book. In the monasteries, monks received a book each year to study until they received a new one the next year. This type of studying was known as *lectio divina*.[6] When during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries universities gained more and more influence, reading habits changed. Instead of deep reading, studying now took the form of acquiring and analysing information from a greater variety of texts. This also resulted in a different presentation of the text; in order to find the desired information quickly, indexing, running titles and referencing systems were introduced. As Parkes writes:

> Many of these readers required easier access to details of the information contained in a text, in order to apply them to immediate problems. (…) Some of these features first appeared in copies produced for scholars or specialist readers, but subsequently in copies of other texts (including vernacular texts) intended for a wider spectrum of readers, both male and female, to enable them to read more quickly.[7]

A similar development has taken place due to the rise of the internet. This technology has intensified the focus on finding information in a greater variety of texts as opposed to the deep reading of few texts.[8] For years on end now, people are reading less and less longer texts; book sales have dropped and surveys have demonstrated that people are reading less books.[9] On the other hand, people spend more time online, where they come into contact with a great variety of (shorter) texts. A large amount of time is moreover specifically spent on finding information. As in the Middle Ages, this new focus on information retrieval has brought about several changes in the presentation of text. To aid the search for information, search engines have been developed. In online texts, one also finds hyperlinks and other tools to facilitate and speed up the process of information retrieval. Thus, both in twelfth-century renaissance and today a development can be detected from deep reading of longer texts to a focus on gathering information from multiple sources. In both cases, this development goes hand in hand with changes in presentation of the text as well.

A final social development is the decentralisation of book production. Before 1200, monasteries, with their monastic

scribes, were the main centres of book production. In the monastic scriptoria, which were usually located near the monastery's library, monks would spend a great number of hours a day working on the copying of biblical, theological, and classical texts.[10] With the rise of cathedral schools, and the support for non-monastic *scriptoria* from the orders of the Franciscans and the Dominicans, who did not have their own *scriptoria*, book production became less centralised. Moreover, with the advent of universities, a larger demand for books also meant that university towns themselves took up the copying of texts. In order to meet the demand, the *pecia* system was introduced; books were divided up into parts, known as *pecia*, which were then handed over to students or professional scribes for copying.

Nowadays, a similar decentralisation of text production can be observed: a book may be written by an American author, published by an British publishing house, printed in India and sold online to a person in the Netherlands. Again, internet has played a major role in this development. The text of a book can easily be sent all over the world via e-mail, and websites like Amazon and Bol.com are making sure that books from all over the world are being sold and delivered to the

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inhabitants of many (European) countries. It is even the case now that you no longer need a publisher to produce a book; with the advent of self-publishing everyone can produce and publish his own book.

Thus, as we have seen, there are indeed similarities between the developments in the twelfth-century renaissance and current developments regarding reading and book production. Dr. Kwakkel's research program may thus be illuminating with regards to the relation between social change and changes in reading and textual developments in our own time. From the above comparison, two specific questions arise that merit further research: 1) The developments in medieval book production seem to have instigated a period of major growth in terms of book production, whereas currently, the book industry is suffering from a strong decline in book sales. What causes these divergent effects? 2) The rise of the internet and digital reading are perhaps more revolutionary changes with regards to reading than the technical developments from the period after 1100. Are its effects also more revolutionary, and have we perhaps come to the point where the end of the 'Order of the Book' is in sight?[11] ■

Notes

1. See the university website for a summary of the project: http://www.hum.leiden.edu/lucas/turning-over-a-new-leaf/project-manuscript-innovation/manuscript-innovation.html (22-11-2013).
2. Ibid.
3. M.B. Parkes, 'Layout and presentation of the text', in N.J. Morgan and R.M. Thomson (eds.) *The Cambridge history of the book in Britain: vol. II: 1100-1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 55-74.
4. 54.9% of websites are in English. The other 45.1% is divided up by many smaller language (the second biggest language is Russian with 6.1%), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_used_on_the_Internet (19-11-2013).
5. Both even have their own Wikipedia-page: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMS_language and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_slang (19-11-2013).
6. D.D. Knowles and C.N.L. Brooke (eds), *The monastic constitutions of Lanfranc* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).
7. Parkes, 'Layout and presentation', p. 55.
8. For the relation between the different levels of comfort regarding reading print and reading from screen, see e.g. B.W. Cull, 'Reading revolutions: Online digital text and implications for reading in academe', *First Monday*, 16.6 (6 June 2011), n.pag. http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/ 3340/2985 (26-11-2013).
9. For the levels of book reading in the Netherlands, see http://www.scp.nl/content.jsp?objectid=default:24432 (26-11-2013).
10. R.W. Clement, 'Medieval and Renaissance book production', *Library faculty & staff publications* (Utah State University, 1997), n.pag. http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1010&context=lib_pubs (27-11-2013).
11. The term Order of the Book was coined by A. van der Weel in his book *Changing our textual minds: towards a digital order of knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

Using Listening to Encourage Reading in Thailand

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Introduction

In 2013, Bangkok was chosen to be the World's book capital of the year. The announcement amazed many people because, at the same time, there was a shocking statistic released by UNESCO on the latest International Literacy Day stating that: 'Thais only read eight lines per year'.[1] This statement caused an uproar among Thai book lovers, since it was a flawed calculation based on the ratio of the total Thai population and the number of books sold 'legally' per year. Nonetheless, during the past few years there has been a wide concern that there is a reading crisis in Thailand and something needs to be done to solve the problem before Thailand becomes a member of the ASEAN Community in 2015.

According to the National Statistical Office of Thailand,[2] in 2011 68.6% of Thai people who are over five years old read. The problem seems fairly severe because only 5% of them read daily, while approximately 51% of Thais only read occasionally. Another problem is the lack of reliable studies on reading levels up to the present day. For most Thais reading is not a habit. There have been many efforts to encourage reading in Thailand for a long time, but most attempts have proven to be ineffective and little progress has been made. Every year, the funds for promoting reading are wasted on temporary superficial events such as the Thai national book fairs which take place twice per year and merely last two weeks. It would be no exaggeration to say that these book fairs are the only substantial form of reading promotion that takes place. The Thai government has never spent funding on sustainable projects which could benefit the country's reading in the long term. All things considered, it might be time to try approaching the problem from a new perspective, with a new method such as using listening to encourage reading. This essay is written with the purpose to explore the possibility of using listening to encourage reading. It will cover some background knowledge about reading culture in Thailand, reasons why the method could work and finally how to put the theory into practice.