

The History of the Book as a Field of Study within the Humanities¹

I.R. Willison

‘Tout, au monde, existe, pour aboutir à un livre’ Mallarmé.

The recent development of the History of the Book

The History of the Book has emerged not only as a field of study in its own right but as critical for the development of the world of learning in general. Implicit recognition of this can be seen in the resources – financial and human – that the academy is devoting to its pursuit. Collaborative, multi-volume national and regional projects for an authoritative History of the Book, that are now either complete (as in the case of France) or well under way, compete successfully for these resources that are by no means unlimited. This success and the drive towards a comprehensive coverage through these projects provide at least *prima facie* evidence for the increasing centrality of the History of the Book.

¹ A revised version of a lecture delivered to the Friends of the Library of the University of Adelaide, July 2005: ‘Bringing History to Book’. To be published in *Histoire nationale ou histoire internationale du livre et de l’édition? Un débat planétaire/National or International Book and Publishing History? A Worldwide Discussion*. Ed Martyn Lyons, Jacques Michon, Jean-Yves Mollier & François Vallotton, (Québec: Nota Bene, 2007). The cases cited were of necessity largely taken from anglophone sources. I am grateful to Mr William St Clair, Dr Rowan Watson of the Victoria and Albert Museum, Dr Peter McDonald of St Hugh’s College, Oxford, and Professor Alistair McCleery of Napier University for their comments; and for their advice to Professors Katharine Ellis, Jill Kraye and James Dunkerley of the Institute of Musical Research, the Warburg Institute, and the Institute for the Study of the Americas, School of Advanced Study University of London, respectively.

The History of the Book as a field of interest to book professionals such as publishers, printers, and librarians, or to bibliophiles such as compulsive readers and collectors, is of course no recent matter; but it is fair to say that in the past it has tended to be introspective and self-contained, concentrating on the exact description of books as artifacts. By contrast, the characteristic of what one might call the ‘new’ History of the Book is its concern to demonstrate, to the academy at large, the role of books – and other, interlocking, media such as manuscripts, newspapers, and now electronic modes of communication – as carriers of texts from authors and editors to readers, a way of regarding them that makes them an intrinsic, and prominent, component of all cultural history. In the words of its founders, Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin in their *L’apparition du livre* of 1958, the concern of the new history is to present *le livre* as a pervasive cultural *ferment*, a carrier of active cultural capital or, in the words of the subsequent *Histoire de l’édition française*, to present “les questions que l’histoire du livre, de l’édition et de la lecture, ainsi redéfinie, peut reformuler concernant les évolutions majeures qui transforment la civilisation européenne, ou plus largement occidentale”.² In this respect *l’histoire du livre* can be seen as an integral part of *la nouvelle histoire* – the history of commonly-shared *mentalités* of which the production

² Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L’apparition du livre* (Paris: Albin Michel, “L’Évolution de l’Humanité”, 1958); pp.xxix 557; Roger Chartier, ‘Postface’, in *Histoire de l’édition française [tom 4] le livre concurrencé*, ed Roger Chartier and Henri-Jean Martin, 2nd ed (Paris: Fayard/Cercle de la Librairie, 1991), p.636.

and reading of texts is an essential element – as opposed to the conventional *histoire événementielle*, the history of the events of high politics.³

In the English-speaking world *l'histoire du livre* was received and assimilated into the drive to re-introduce hard bibliographical fact into the somewhat frantic cultural theorizing associated with the upheavals of the 1960s in the academy.⁴ D.F. McKenzie's renewal of traditional bibliography through the influential lectures reprinted as *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* was of seminal importance.⁵ In 1983 the German project, *Die Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, was launched, calling for a return to the great nineteenth-century tradition of the German book-trade regarding itself as a leading agent of the *Kulturnation*, and to the discipline of *Kulturgeschichte* associated with Karl Lamprecht: "aus ihrem berufsständischen Ghetto...herausgetreten und integraler Teil der kulturwissenschaftlichen Disziplinen geworden."⁶ However we should also recall the priority of the more apocalyptic Toronto School and its all-encompassing theory and history of media and communication, established by Harold Adams Innis as early as 1950 (in Northrop Frye's words, 'perhaps

³ *La nouvelle histoire*, ed. Jacques LeGoff, 2nd ed (Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe, "Historiques", 1988), pp.334; Frédéric Barbier, 'Postface', in Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L'apparition du livre*, 2nd ed (Paris: Albin Michel, "Bibliothèque de l'Évolution de l'Humanité", 1999), pp.537-79.

⁴ I.R. Willison, 'Remarks on the History of the Book in Britain as a Field of Study within the Humanities, With a Synopsis and Select List of Current Literature', *Library Chronicle of the University of Texas at Austin* 21: 3/4, 1991, pp 95-154

⁵ Donald F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, 2nd ed (Cambridge: University Press, 1999), pp.130

⁶ Herbert Göpfert, in *Die Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Band 1 Teil 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Buchhändler-Vereinigung, 2001), p 10

the most comprehensive structure of ideas yet made by a Canadian thinker’) and taken forward by Marshall McLuhan: “Innis saw media, old and new ... as living vortices of power creating hidden environments that act abrasively and destructively on ... forms of culture”.⁷

In the current multi-volume collaborative national projects for the History of the Book the many technical, specialist chapters on book production, publishing, reading etc. are accompanied by introductions – narrative linkages – with at least the opportunity, indeed responsibility, of drawing out the implications of those technical chapters for the general cultural history of the particular period .

The Reception of the History of the Book within the Humanities

The main evidence for the History of the Book coming of age as a public good is the recent recognition by the established historical disciplines themselves of its increasing role in substantially broadening and deepening their penetration into their own subject matters, not least in the context of the new concern with globalization in history.⁸

⁷ Harold Adams Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1950), *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1951) Northrop Frye, ‘Conclusion’, in *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, 2nd ed (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1976), p.341 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The making of typographic man* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1962), ‘Foreword’ to Harold A. Innis, *Empire and Communications*, rev ed. M.Q.Innis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), p.v

⁸ *Globalization in World History*, ed A.G.Hopkins (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. ix 278

What might be called the ‘new’ literary histories focus on the interaction of the aesthetic and generic features of texts with the sites of their production, reception and circulation: an interaction that often exceeded national boundaries.⁹ For example the current global phenomenon of Harry Potter and his translation into 50 or so languages can be seen to be as much a matter of the development of J.K. Rowling’s publisher (Bloomsbury), from its origin as a medium-sized house taking on the risk of an unknown author to a virtual transnational involved in multi-media deals and franchises, as it is of Rowling’s development of the genre of children’s literature pure and simple. We can expect a comparable ‘new’ linguistic history, as the implications of R.C. Alston’s exhaustive yet sensitively categorized *Bibliography of the English Language from the Invention of Printing to the Year 1800* are absorbed by the academy.¹⁰

In a similar manner the new convergence between political and cultural history focuses (among other things) on the ‘dynamism’ of textual, in particular, print culture¹¹: for example in eighteenth-century Europe, accounting for the distinctive exuberance and

⁹ These ‘new’ literary histories are represented in the English-speaking world by *The Oxford English Literary History* (Oxford: University Press, 2002 in progress), *The New Cambridge History of English Literature* (Cambridge: University Press, 1999 in progress), *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge: University Press, 1994 in progress), and *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*, ed Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Strauss, associate editor Chris Wallace-Crabbe (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. vii 488.

¹⁰ R.C. Alston, *Bibliography of the English Language from the Invention of Printing to the Year 1800* (Leeds: E.J.Arnold, 1965 in progress)

¹¹ Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England 1689-1727*, (Oxford: University Press “The New Oxford History of England”, 2000), p.178

modernity of the British Enlightenment¹²; or for the role of underground, (semi-) pornographic literature in the cultural origins of the French Revolution.¹³ As regards the convergence of print culture and high politics in twentieth-century Britain, Northcliffe can be featured as “a figure whose opinions mattered in a political system in which newspapers were a major instrument of communication”¹⁴. For print and the ‘middlebrow’ and ‘lowbrow’ cultures of the time and their, in part, politically conservative consequences, we have Ross McKibbin’s essay on ‘The Community of Language’.¹⁵ Much earlier in the time scale, script culture is now seen as critically important in the whole Carolingian making of Europe.¹⁶ Research into the collateral textual mode of map culture is likewise deepening the disciplines of political and cultural

¹² Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2000), pp. xxiv 727

¹³ Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. ix 258; Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1995). Pp. xxiii 440; Roger Chartier, *Les origines culturelles de la Révolution Française* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, “L’Univers Historique”, c 1990), pp. 249. For the comparable situation in the London of time, see Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.xvi 338

¹⁴ Maurice.Cowling, *The Impact of Labour, 1920-1924: The Beginnings of Modern British Politics*, (Cambridge: University Press, “Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics”, 1971), p.46

¹⁵ Ross McKibbin, ‘The Community of Language’, in *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.477-517

¹⁶ Rosamond.McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.271, etc. See also her recent *History and memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: University Press, 2004), pp.xvi 337, where she asks the question [p.1] “how far the physical characteristics of the Carolingian manuscripts in which the texts survive reveal anything of what contemporaries may have thought about those texts and their wider cultural context”

history, particularly as regards their imperial aspects: thus Mathew Edney's *Mapping an Empire* is significantly subtitled *The Geographical Construction of British India 1765-1843*.¹⁷

In the study of religious history we can expect an examination of the “continuum of textuality that ranges from that of ‘primary oral’ or preliterate cultures to that of the most highly literate, typographic cultures” to assist in large-scale, global revisionism: “To understand the phenomenon of scripture in any fashion that is remotely faithful to historical realities, we must look to its function as a text that has above all been read and recited aloud, repeated and memorized, chanted and sung, quoted and alluded to in the oral and aural round of daily life”.¹⁸

As far as the fine arts are concerned convergence between the History of the Book and the history of music reached a landmark with the revision of Grove's canonical *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* in 1980, with its substantial extension of coverage of music printers and publishers (later extracted and further enlarged as a separate handbook¹⁹). The growth of scholarly interest in the significance of printing and

¹⁷ Mathew Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India 1765-1843* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp.xv 458

¹⁸ William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: University Press, 1987), pp.157, 156

¹⁹ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), 20 vols), *Music Printing and Publishing*, ed D.W. Krummel and Stanley Sadie (Houndmills, Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, “The New Grove Handbooks in Music”, 1990), pp. xiv 615

publishing for the history of musical life in general, for example “the popular recognition of the concept of the great composer and compositional originality”, is shown in the study of Artaria (the first important music publishing firm in Vienna and chief publisher of Haydn and Mozart), which ranges from the entries in the original *Grove* of 1879-90, the two editions of the *New Grove*, to the recent full-dress analysis by Dr Rupert Ridgewell.²⁰ As regards the History of the Book and the history of art and architecture, the publication of the parallel *Grove Dictionary of Art* in 1996 marked a similar potential convergence of perspective and evidence. Of critical importance, for example, would be the exploring of the detail of the material production and dissemination of pattern books to solidify the insight into their essential role in the whole perception and practice of art (and architecture), which was launched by Ernst Gombrich nearly half a century ago.²¹

The ‘new’ history of science, represented by the Cambridge History and Philosophy of Science community, seems already more systematically focused: “the disciplines of history of science and History of the Book ... are now ... more closely integrated with

²⁰ *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians, AD 1450-1880*, ed George Grove (London: Macmillan, 1879-90) 5 vols; *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, op cit, 2nd ed (London: Macmillan Reference, 2001), 29 vols; Rupert Ridgewell ‘Economic Aspects: The Artaria Case’, in *Music Publishing in Europe, 1600-1900*, ed. Rudolf Rasch, (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag, “The Circulation of Music” vol 1, 2005), pp.90-11 in the European Science Foundation major survey of ‘Musical Life in Europe 1600-1900’.

²¹ *The Dictionary of Art*, ed Jane Turner (London: Macmillan, 1996) 34 vols; Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon, 1960), pp. 134-44

general social and cultural history”.²² Two conspicuous examples, originating at Cambridge, require revision of our otherwise simplistic reading of the physical and biological scientific ‘revolutions’ of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. These are Adrian Johns’ *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* and James Secord’s *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of ‘Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation’*, with their firm and detailed grasp of publishing and reading practices at the time about which they write.²³

In the more encompassing field of intellectual history, represented by Peter Burke’s *A Social History of Knowledge*, Burke “attempt[s]...to place academic knowledge in a wider framework...the exchange [largely mediated by print] between the intellectual systems of academic elites and what might be called ‘alternative knowledges’ ...[for example, the case of economics] which involved not only the elaboration of new theories but the conferring of academic respectability on the practical knowledge of merchants, an originally oral knowledge which began to circulate more and more widely in print”.²⁴ For a less comfortable view we have Maurice Cowling: “In populous modern societies,

²² *Books and the Sciences in History*, ed M. Frasca-Spada and N. Jardine (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), p 1, Jardine noting the influence of D.F. McKenzie as enabling “the history of science to engage...with the making of scientific knowledge’ (p 404).

²³ Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. xxi 753; James Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. xviii 624

²⁴ Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge from Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), pp 14-15

where printing and its successors are universal, opinions which have been enunciated severally over the decades jostle together so much without regard to the chronology of their provenance that one may properly speak of the historical English mind taking shape in the blur and fog of an indiscriminating contemporaneity”.²⁵ As a more neutral proposition valid for the field of study as a whole, at least for the modern period, we now have Stefan Collini: “A historical account of intellectuals cannot ignore the changing economics of the relevant media: the pricing and marketing of certain publications will normally determine the publics they reach far more than does the quality of the contents”.²⁶

Regarding the new concern with globalization in history Christopher Bayly, in a leading work, establishes the role of missionary printing in entangling aborigines and native peoples in projects for cultural empires in the nineteenth century, and then the role of the mass book and media publishing industry that emerged globally at the end of the century, the “vehemence” of which destroyed any chance of resisting “the catastrophic conjunction of August 1914”.²⁷ In his *Parchment, Printing, and Hypertext*:

²⁵ Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England. Volume III: Accommodations* (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), p.695

²⁶ Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain*, (Oxford: University Press, 2006), p 54. For the continuing debate between book historians and intellectual historians, see the important exchange between Robert Darnton, ‘Discourse and Diffusion’, and Quentin Skinner, ‘On Intellectual History and the History of Books’, *Contributions to the History of Concepts*, , 1:1, 2005, pp. 21-36

²⁷ C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, The Blackwell History of the World”, 2004), pp. 483, 486-7.

Communication in World Order Transformation Ronald J. Deibert expands the range and penetration of the more traditional, specific discipline of International Relations to provide a deeper perspective on the present human condition – from consumerism to terrorism – by mobilizing the media theory and history pioneered by the Toronto School of Innis and McLuhan.²⁸ Converging with the new interest in globalization in history, and contributing to its deepening, we have the ‘new’ imperial history represented by the *Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* (1986) and the five-volume *Oxford History of the British Empire* (1998-9), and their concern with empire “as part of the larger and dynamic interaction of European and non-Western societies ... [and] globalization and national cultures” and in particular their concern with “empires in the mind” and “the primary importance of printing and publishing” in their development.²⁹

As the study of globalization in history is moved further backwards in time we return to the ‘new’ literary history. The steady mass diffusion and vernacularization of great epics such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramyaana* have been seen by Sheldon Pollock of Chicago and his collaborators not only as a political and cultural agency helping constitute the whole ‘Sanskrit cosmopolis’ and its regional vernacularizations but also as dependent for its effectiveness *inter alia* on a remarkably powerful and enduring

²⁸ Ronald J. Deibert, *Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia: Communication in World Order Transformation* (New York: Columbia University Press, “New Directions in World Politics”, 1997) pp.xi 329

²⁹ W. R. Louis, ‘Introduction’, in *Historiography*, ed R.W.Winks (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, “The Oxford History of the British Empire”. Volume V , 1989), pp. vii, x; A. Porter, ‘Empires in the Mind’, in *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire*, ed P. J. Marshall, (Cambridge: University Press, 1986), p.212.

manuscript culture. This perspective has both a global analogy with the Latin ‘countercosmopolis’ and its vernacularization in the nation-states of late medieval Europe, and can also be taken forward to the present day by demonstrating the sequence of the material textualities that underpin what Pollock call the three “globalizing literary cultures: Sanskrit, Persian, and [with the advent of print] Indian-English” (Regarding the third, 2004 saw the appearance of *Print Areas: Book History in India*, with its programmatic opening chapter, ‘Under the Sign of the Book: Introducing Book History in India’).³⁰ Concerning the Western hemisphere Gordon Brotherston likewise sees the ‘iconic scripts’ of the pre-Columban cosmopolis underpinning the entire foundation literature of the native Americas as the ‘Book of the Fourth World’.³¹

Finally, extending the global perspective to the “interface between the written and the oral” across the whole of space and time (proposed by Jack Goody in 1987), and bringing together cultural history and cultural anthropology, we have the role of script,

³⁰ *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed Sheldon Pollock, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp39-267, in particular Pollock, ‘Introduction’ and ‘Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out’, op cit pp.1-130; Sheldon Pollock, ‘Literary Culture and Manuscript Culture in Precolonial India’, in *Literary Cultures and the Material Book*, ed S. J. Eliot, A. Nash and I. R. Willison (London: British Library, at press); In *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 664, Pollock elaborates on the analogy with Latin and the late-medieval European vernaculars.. Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorty, ‘Under the Sign of the Book: Introducing Book History in India’, in *Print Areas: Book History in India*, ed A.Gupta and S.Chakravorty (Delhi: Permanent Black, in collaboration with The Department of English, Jadavpur University, 2004), pp>1-16

³¹ Gordon Brotherston, ‘Script and Text’, in *Book of the Fourth World; Reading the Native Americas through their Literature*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), pp.40-50.

print and the other ‘technologies of intellect’ as the dynamic factor driving the written aspect of the interface but by no means necessarily suppressing the oral.³² A recent study of a leading case in this respect, that of the ‘mission empire’ and the specificities of orality and print in the African context, is provided by Isabel Hofmeyr in *The Portable Bunyan: a transnational history of ‘The Pilgrim’s Progress’*. Hofmeyr identifies not only the translation and publishing of Bunyan’s text into eighty African languages but also their consequent ‘indigenization’, and the rise of the distinctively African novel within our new, pluralist cosmopolis.³³

What we might term the ‘new’ history of technical scholarship (represented by Anthony Grafton at Princeton, by Christian Jacob and his associates in Paris, Christopher Ligota at the Warburg Institute, and by Bernhard Fabian in Münster) offers a detached perspective upon the world of learning as a whole, characterized by “an interdisciplinary approach – one that combines the methods of the philologist with those of the intellectual historian and the historian of the book”.³⁴ It is characterized more particularly by a concentration on the history of scholarly reading – *la lecture savante* – and textual editing, located

³² Jack Goody, *The Interface between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, “Studies in Literacy, Family, Culture and the State”, 1987), pp. xxi, 328.

³³ Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: a transnational history of The Pilgrim’s Progress*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, “Translation/Transnation”, 2004), pp. xii, 314.

³⁴ Anthony Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics: Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), p 7.

institutionally in the research library³⁵: “outstanding scholarly work was the result of the interaction of a great scholar with his research environment – which, in the case of the humanist, is predominantly, or even exclusively, constituted by the library”.³⁶ The impact of the History of the Book on the traditional study of the next step in the social embedding of learning – the diffusion and popularization of established, canonical scholarship, primarily through the textbook and the ‘library’ series of ‘classics’ (the *librairie scolaire et universitaire*) - shows the eventual role of textbooks and ‘libraries’ to be the development of cultural empires, domestic as well as global.³⁷ At the terminus of the process of scholarship and learning – its summation in form of the encyclopedia – the new history of encyclopedia publishing, signaled by Robert Darnton’s *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the ‘Encyclopédie’* locates the role of encyclopedias in the development of cultural revolutions as well as empires.³⁸

³⁵ Christian Jacob, Préface to *Le pouvoir des bibliothèques: la mémoire des livres en Occident*, ed M.Baratin and.C.Jacob, (Paris: Albin Michel, “Bibliothèque Albin Michel Historique”, 1996), p 11.

³⁶ Bernhard Fabian, ‘Humanistic Scholarship and the European Printed Archive’, *Bodleian Library Record*, October 2002, p. 431. See also *History of Scholarship: A Selection of Papers from the Seminar on the History of Scholarship Held Annually at the Warburg Institute*, ed C. V. Ligota and J.-L. Quantin, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, “Oxford-Warburg Studies”, 2006), pp. x 504.

³⁷ Jean-Yves Mollier, *Louis Hachette (1800-1864): Le fondateur d’un empire* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), pp. 554 For a detailed case study see Rimi B.Chatterjee, *Empires of the Mid: A History of the Oxford University Press in India under the Raj* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. x 471

³⁸ Robert Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the ‘Encyclopédie’, 1775-1800* (Cambridge Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979)., pp.xiv 624. For a note on the problematic reception of Lucien Febvre’s ‘Popular Front’ *Encyclopédie française* (1935-39) due to its over-sophisticated *mise-en-page* etc, see Alfred Fiero, ‘Des encyclopédies aux livres pratiques’, in *Histoire de l’édition française*, op cit, pp.343-44

The History of the Book as research discipline

If the History of the Book is increasingly perceived as critical to the further development of the humanities, then historians of the book have the task of consolidating their own research procedures, scholarly practices, and methods of presenting information, evidence, and argument of their own, establishing a autonomous dynamic and narrative linkages that nevertheless work interactively with the narratives of these other 'new' histories in the humanities.

A way ahead so far as the print and post-print eras are concerned may be found in William St Clair's recent, pioneering *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*.³⁹ His main ideas are effectively set out in his John Coffin Memorial Lecture in the History of the Book, 2005, *The Political Economy of Reading*.⁴⁰ St Clair lists there the questions that he suggests the 'History of the Book' should address:

What were the conditions within which books came into existence in the form that they did, and not in others? How were those books that did come into existence produced, sold, distributed, and read, in what

³⁹ William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: University Press, 2004), pp.xxix 765.

⁴⁰ William St Clair, *The Political Economy of Reading*, (London: School of Advanced Study, "John Coffin Memorial Lecture in the History of the Book", 2005), pp. 21. This lecture is available to be read, downloaded, and copied free at <http://www.sas.ac.uk/ies/Publications/johncoffin/stclair.pdf>.

numbers, by which constituencies of readers, and over which timescales? - again asking why these events happened in the ways they did and not in others? And what were the consequences of the reading of the texts that were inscribed in, and that were carried by, the books? What were the effects on the minds of their readers, and on the mentalities of the wider society within which the reading took place. By mentalities, a word adopted from the French, I mean the beliefs, feelings, values, and dispositions to act in certain ways that are prevalent in a society at a particular historical and cultural conjuncture, including not only states of mind that are explicitly acknowledged but others that are unarticulated or regarded as fixed or natural. [*The Political Economy of Reading*, p 3].

St Clair further suggests that:

we should conceive of a culture ... as a dynamic system with many interacting agents, into which the writing, publishing, and subsequent reading of a text were interventions that had consequences. [ibid, p 6]

To reconstruct these consequences historically St Clair proposes a rigorous yet inclusive paradigm that includes an economic analysis of the book industry that rests on consolidated quantitative information about economic behaviour:

To trace readership, we need to trace access to texts. To trace access we need to trace price. To trace price we need to trace intellectual property, and to trace intellectual property, we need to trace the changing relationship

between the book industry and the state [*The Reading Nation*, p 42]

To be able to understand how the system of texts, books, readers, and consequences has operated in particular epochs and cultures, the book historian has to depend on the hard evidence of price, print runs etc, which can only be done by seeking out and engaging with the surviving records of publishers, printers, and other agents in the book industry, that are scattered and fragmentary, as well as with the documentary and literary records of historic reading. However the reward of such painstaking search is to produce a continuous, unified historical perspective, from the first printer/publishers to multi-media conglomerates of today, and to generate of provisional explanatory models which can be tested against new empirical research. This perspective, which deepens our understanding of ‘culture broadly defined [p.443], replaces traditional author-centred conventions of literary and intellectual history, and indeed of traditional Whig narrative history, which usually present the culture of the past as a progressive parade of innovative texts. Instead we are shown different layers of readers interacting with texts of differing degrees of modernity and obsolescence within their economic circumstances and cultural horizons.

In the case of the printed book in Britain, among the most important events, in terms of access to texts, is an initial fall in price -“the rise of literature in the English language in the English renaissance, it seems likely, was assisted by a fall in the real price of access to English-language texts imprinted in books” [*The Reading Nation*, p 62]. The seventeenth century however saw a steep rise in the price of books and therefore in the cost of access to readers, as the Stationers’ Company, the book industry guild, exploited

the monopoly implicit in perpetual intellectual property. The guild, besides operating a wide range of restrictive practices, such as clamping down on abridgement, anthologies, and adaptations, and reversing the growth of a commercial renting sector (circulating libraries), formed a close alliance with the state, in which the industry delivered censorship and self-censorship of texts in return for economic privileges. The rise in prices continued despite the abolition of pre-censorship in 1695, brought about by a commercial “tight corporate cartel” [p.64] established largely by members of the Company – ‘gentlemanly capitalists’.⁴¹ The practice of perpetual intellectual property, though illegal under the statutory limited copyright laid down in the 1710 Act of Queen Anne, being in line with Lockean, Whig ideas of the nature of real property, was only ended by the courts in 1774, largely as a result of Roman Law concepts emanating from Scotland. In the meantime “the general rise in mainstream prices...had the effect of dividing the reading nation in two, cutting off the majority from participation in modern culture widely defined” [p. 77]. Even after 1774, generations of British readers were steeped in what St Clair calls the “Old Canon” (from pre-Enlightenment texts that were released into the public domain by 1774, and carried the rural religious ideology of the early eighteenth century far into the industrialized and urbanized age of the nineteenth. After 1775 the surge in low-priced reprinting of these out- of-copyright texts (greatly reinforced by the technology of stereotyping) produced “a take-off in the nation’s reading, equivalent to the take-off in manufacturing production which accelerated about the same time” [p.13]. When the authors of the romantic period came out of copyright in late Victorian times, one effect was to a largely free-trade “world-wide cultural empire,

⁴¹ P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism 1688-2000*, (Harlow: Longman, 2001), pp.xxiv 739

more extensive in its reach even than the political and commercial” [p.422], characterized by the exports of cheap classics in series by the firms such as Routledge, Warne, Macmillan in London and Gall and Inglis, Nelson and Constable in Edinburgh.

After the relatively laissez-faire book industry of the Victorian age, characterized (among other things) by increasingly cut-throat discount bookselling, and in the international protectionist atmosphere of the end of the century, there was the revival of the cartel in the form of the price-fixing Net Book Agreement, steered by Frederick Macmillan, between the new Publishers Association and Associated Booksellers. The Agreement can also be considered in terms of a revival of fixed-price differentials, reflected in the stratification of the reading nation into highbrow, middle brow, and lowbrow reading publics, and in the conservative, gentlemanly ‘amateurism’ of publishers and booksellers – though with a number of the latter in due course, ranging from Macmillan to Faber and Faber, “willing to invest in the [copyright of] more challenging kinds of literary work”.⁴²

Conservatism in turn provoked the low-priced, mass-produced and distributed, paperback reprint ‘revolution’ associated with Penguin Books, launched in 1935 with the partial recovery from the Depression, and sustained by and sustaining the economically, socially, and culturally distributive wartime and postwar Welfare State.

⁴² Chris Baldick, ‘The Literary Market’, in *The Modern Movement: Oxford English Literary History*, vol 10, 1910-1940 (Oxford: University Press, 2004), pp. 19-33.

However the need to secure intellectual property based on copyright soon forced an integration of paperback and original hardback publishing that for the conservative hardback publishers was distinctly capital intensive. Hence, with the post-Welfare State deregulation of the financial world globally in the 1970s, there emerged the most recent re-cartelization of the trade. This takes the form of cash-rich multi-media transnational corporations buying up traditional, now vulnerably under-capitalized firms (and their copyrights); abandoning the traditional protectionism represented by the Net Book Agreement; and, instead, trading intellectual property rights through joint ventures, with a reversion to aggressive discount selling effectively stabilized by collaboration with cognate bookselling corporations, entailing a globalization of the reading public and its mentalities. In short, “the global media and communication market exhibits tendencies not only of an oligopoly, but of a cartel or at least a ‘gentlemen’s club’”.⁴³ *Plus ça change...*

The Archive

The main material product of St Clair’s book industry in the public sphere and over the long term would seem to be the deposit of texts in the form of a vast archive of printed books, representing the accumulation of texts in printed form, part of the autonomous world of objective knowledge that the theoretician, Karl Popper, called “world 3”:

⁴³ Edward S. Herman and Robert W. McChesney, *The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism* (London and Washington: Cassell, 1997), p 58.

Examples of objective knowledge are theories published in journals and books and stored in libraries... We can call the physical world ‘world 1’, the world of our conscious experience ‘world 2’, and the world of the logical *contents* of books, libraries, computer memories, and suchlike ‘world 3’.⁴⁴

The archive accumulates relentlessly, and its effective administration by library curators and archivists requires the intellectual discipline of the History of the Book.

The major administrative processes within the library, or library network – that is, collection development; record creation; preservation; staff management; service to readers; exhibition; access by the public; and, by no means least, interaction with the cultural and political authorities – represent a set of responses by the library administrator to challenges conditioned by the particular configuration of the (so to speak) text-historical forces, and their archival consequences, obtaining at any one time. The effectiveness of the responses – the ability to secure the assent and cooperation of the staff, the readers, the tax-paying public or private donors, the partners in professional and financial initiatives, the censorial media, and the authorities – depends in large part on shared ordered insight into – which in turn requires solid and sophisticated historical perspective on – that particular configuration in its widest cultural-political context. This is especially so at times when change is felt to predominate over continuity; and is the

⁴⁴ K. Popper, *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp 73-4. Popper’s belief that “of course [*sic*] the physical shape of the book is insignificant” (K. Popper, ‘Autobiography’, in *The Philosophy of Karl Popper*, ed P.A. Schilpp, (La Salle Ill: Open Court, “The Library of Living Philosophers”. 1974) p. 145 may be ascribed to bibliographical naivety - but that is matter to be discussed elsewhere.

key to understanding the great figures in library history such as, in the modern period, Panizzi of the British Museum Library, Harnack of the Prussian Royal Library, and Putnam of the Library of Congress.

At the same time the individual reader is a citizen of the public sphere, and his or her affective connection with the plenitude of the archive is perhaps now best established no longer so much by imperial library architecture, as in the case of Panizzi's British Museum Reading Room, but by the relatively new genre of both historically and also presentationally sophisticated exhibition catalogues and accompanying lecture series and monographs, set up by suitably motivated library curators and conceived as part of the fundamental mission of outreach to the citizenry and, if successful, of original contribution to the new History of the Book as global history. For example Dr Michelle Brown's monograph as curator of the British Library exhibition of the eighth-century Lindisfarne Gospels indicates the global range and aura of material textuality and iconography in the case of this particular cosmopolis:

[The Gospels display] cultural synthesis and reconciliation with the Christian ecumen, interlacing and co-celebrating the Celtic, British, Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, Roman, Coptic, Byzantine and Syro-Palestinian traditions. The apostolic mission had indeed reached the far ends of the earth. The material and literary culture of these extremities

proclaims that they were no provincial outpost, but a vibrant, integrated part of that universal, eternal communion.⁴⁵

Curators of the archive will no doubt and in due course be able to present comparable range if not aura in the case of the e-book and other media archives, as well as the archive of the manuscript and printed book.

In brief

To generalize: the fact that the History of the Book is being drawn towards the cutting edge of the humanities is due to the growing perception by scholars across the board that their various subject matters (which we have been selectively reviewing) are constituted by what has been called ‘the textual condition’ common to humanity

All forms and states of knowledge, including factual and documentary knowledge, are mediated in precise and determinate ways⁴⁶

That condition is constituted - mediated - by the materiality of the various modes of textuality spread through space (East and South as well as West of Suez) and time – oral, script, print, and post-print. In revealing the plenitude of such ‘mediation’⁴⁷, its structure and dynamics, the History of the Book moves to a central position in the general advancement of learning..

⁴⁵ Michelle Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality and the Scribe*, (London: The British Library, 2003), p 408.

⁴⁶ J. J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, “Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History”, 1991), p. 98

⁴⁷ D. Finkelstein and A. McCleery, ‘Book History and Mediation’, in *An Introduction to Book History* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), pp.25-6

Indeed, formal recognition of this is already under way. Roger Chartier has just been elected *Professeur du Collège de France*. In Britain the History of the Book has been recognized as ‘one of its intellectual points of departure’ by the University of London Institute of English Studies as part of the national School of Advanced Study in the humanities.⁴⁸ In Europe the History of the Book is being recognized as part of the grand research strategy of the European Science Foundation, as we have seen in the case of Dr Ridgewell’s work on *Artaria*. Finally, at the global level the Comité International des Sciences Historiques will be asked to recognize the History of the Book in the form of a panel at its next meeting in 2010 (and then, if that is agreed, to be followed perhaps by the setting up of an appropriate International Affiliated Organization). Such institutionalization of the History of the Book could be the final confirmation of its centrality in the humanities.

⁴⁸ School of Advanced Study University of London, *Annual Report 2004-2005* (London: University of London School of Advanced Study, 2005), p.31