

Book Reviews



Across Boundaries: The Book in Culture and Commerce. Eds. Bill Bell, Philip Bennett, and Jonquil Bevan. Winchester, Hampshire: St. Paul's Bibliographies (ISBN 1873040474); New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Pr. (ISBN 1584560061), 2000. 160p. \$39.95. LC 99-056404.

This collection of nine essays, first presented at a 1996 conference at the University of Edinburgh, is meant not only to contribute to the ever-burgeoning literature of *l'histoire du livre*, but also to challenge existing academic, disciplinary, and geographic boundaries. This book ranges from the fourteenth to the twentieth centuries, from manuscripts to printed books, from medieval France to the Canadian Northwest. Contributors include historians, literary critics, and librarians; and the authors variously employ the methods of lit/crit theory, archival studies of readers and libraries, and analyses of the economic factors surrounding book publication and purchase. The "thematic integrity" of the whole is sometimes elusive, but the individual essays provide an interesting vista of the possibilities for the historian of the book.

Following a brief preface, Roger Chartier's "Orality Lost" introduces the collection. He urges book scholars to consider the difference between the text as "monument," or fixed and stable, and the text as "event," in which the act of reading, whether in silence or aloud, whether in private or public, becomes a "quest for meaning, a work of interpretation." In a discussion covering *Don Quixote*, Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, ballads whose only publication were in the archives of the Star Chamber, and Castilian romances, Chartier shows how oral and print variants of the same "work" can have different purposes and interpretations, depending on the reader or teller's education, social class, or political orientation. The length of chapters in a longer

work, visual clues such as illustrations, and even punctuation can be signs of a text's origins in oral culture. Only by becoming aware of these material features of the book can we really understand the nature of a particular work; for Chartier, form is profoundly implicated in meaning.

Sylvia Huot uses the poetic compilations of fourteenth-century poet Watriquet de Couvin to explore the ways in which books are used as metaphors for the self, a self awaiting reading and examination. For the medieval reader, the book was not only a mirror of the self, but also an incarnation of the body of Christ, the exemplary text every reader should realize. Huot, not quite convincingly, elides this notion of the book authored by God with the transition to author-centered manuscript compilations. In this change in focus from individual reader or patron to the figure of the author, she sees an opening for the mass-produced book, which is stable, reproducible, and accessible to all.

Lisa Jardine's brief contribution on book purchasing by the Medici family argues that the Medicis bought books not just for their content, but also in order to "construct a lasting family reputation." The Medici library was meant to compete with other existing scholarly collections and to establish the family's generous patronage, moral worth, and erudition. The books acquired by the Medicis created cultural capital that was both personal and communal: They commemorated family events but also provided a history of humanistic scholarly activity; they were instruments for self-promotion and signs of conspicuous consumption but also helped create a great library.

The problems of book distribution are the focus of essays by Wallace Kirsop, James Raven, and Fiona Black. Kirsop

gives attention to the commercial aspects of subscription publishing in Enlightenment France, suggesting that author and subscriber enter into a kind of social contract in which the subscriber (who may never be a reader of the work) pledges allegiance to the political, educational, or aesthetic purposes of the author. Raven's study of book exports to North America between 1750 and 1820 shows that books published in London continued to be the main source of reading material through the mid-nineteenth century. Even after printing houses had become established in the colonies, the large market for luxury items (i.e., the book beautiful) and the need to be connected to European "culture" and to one's native country helped sustain the overseas book trade. Black's fascinating survey of book purchases by fur traders in the Hudson's Bay Company in the Canadian Northwest discusses both institutional (i.e., library) and individual book-buying habits. As might be expected, personal collections were geared toward the practical; the Hudson's Bay Archives show an interest in scientific, nautical, and technical works, as well as in periodical publications. The collections in the post libraries were similarly dominated by science and technology early in the nineteenth century, but fiction and other types of leisure-reading materials came to dominate later on. Black's study is an interesting example of the way in which class, social background, and geographic location affect access to and choice of reading matter.

Bill Bell connects texts and exiles in his examination of Scottish emigrant readers in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia in the nineteenth century. He suggests that a "geography of communications" should supplement our recent studies on the "sociology of the text." His essay shows how immigrants (and the children of immigrants) created imagined communities with their homeland by importing books and newspapers into their new country, with the result that Scottish nationalism was alive and well from Edinburgh to Halifax to Detroit. Ian Willison scrutinizes

the fading away of British hegemony in contemporary literature in his essay on international literatures in English. Earlier histories of English literature classified the literatures of former colonies such as the United States, South Africa, and India with those of the mother country, but now the most creative (and distinguished) writing is emerging from outside the British Isles. A "post-imperial ... consortium of the humanities," among and within the former British, Spanish, and Portuguese colonies, says Willison, could be fruitful for both book historians and scholars of literature. *Across Boundaries* closes with a brief biographical tribute to George Saintsbury by Alan Bell. An "incidental" contribution to the conference, it makes the least significant contribution to this collection as a whole.

For most libraries, sadly, this book will be a marginal purchase. This is not a comment on the quality of the essays themselves but, rather, on the parochial view we in North American academic libraries have of our own collections. The study of books and reading is meant to transcend disciplinary boundaries, but we purchase books for our libraries based on their fit within traditional academic departments and their suitability for curricular use. Book and library studies are not among these departments, even at most of our library schools, and so this book will not find a home in most of our libraries. The authors of these essays are looking beyond local political, historical, and geographic boundaries; but we have become expert at focusing on local needs so that even a book about books will be unlikely to trespass the borders of our sensible, homogenized, library collections. Consider crossing some everyday boundaries and letting this small volume serve as a passport for a reader in your library.—Cecile M. Jagodzinski, *Illinois State University*.

Herrington, TyAnna K. *Controlling Voices: Intellectual Property, Humanistic Studies, and the Internet*. Foreword by David Jay Bolter. Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illi-