



THE BROADVIEW  
INTRODUCTION TO  
BOOK HISTORY

MICHELLE LEVY & TOM MOLE

2017



broadview press

## Contents

*List of Figures* ix

*Acknowledgements* xi

*Introduction* xiii

### *Chapter 1: Materiality* 1

Reading Books 3

Bibliography 10

Making Printed Books 17

Typography 22

### *Chapter 2: Textuality* 29

Who's Been Tampering with My Text? 31

Copy-Text 38

Variants 41

Authorial Intentions 45

Textual Pluralism 54

### *Chapter 3: Printing and Reading* 63

Print and the Book 66

The Impact of Print 70

Models for Book History 74

Print Economics 77

Controlling Print / Controlling Reading 81

Methods for a History of Reading 89

### *Chapter 4: Intermediality* 99

Models of Intermediality 103

Orality and Writing 105

Manuscript and Print 112

Text and Image 123

## Chapter 5: Remediating 133

New Media, New Materiality (Hyper)Textuality	135
Digital Printing and Screen Reading	141
Reading, Knowledge, and the Digital Turn	145
Computer-Assisted Reading	153
Conclusion	156
<i>The History of the Book: A Brief Chronology</i>	163
Glossary	171
Further Reading	179
Permissions Acknowledgements	205
Index	215

## List of Figures

1.1: The First Folio, frontispiece and facing page	15
1.2: Basic anatomy of the roman letterform	23
3.1: Copy of one of Gutenberg's 1454 indulgences	68
3.2: Darnton, "Communications Circuit"	75
3.3: Adams and Barker, "A New Model for the Study of the Book"	76
3.4: Messrs. Lackington, Allen & Co., Temple of the Muses, Finsbury Square (1809)	81
3.5: Thomas Bowdler, <i>The Family Shakspeare</i> (1861)	88
3.6: Men reading newspapers in Chicago, outside the <i>Chicago Daily News</i> offices	93
4.1: Emily Dickinson, "We talked with each other about each other," c. 1879, Amherst Manuscript #514	120
4.2: Emily Dickinson, "We talked with each other about each other," in <i>Bols of Melody: New Poems of Emily Dickinson</i>	121
4.3: Thomas Bewick, "The Great Bustard," <i>A History of British Birds</i> (1787–1804)	127
5.1: <i>New York Times</i> Subscription Plans, 21 January 2016	147
5.2: Jane Austen, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , Interactive Edition (2014)	149

## Introduction

Book history is the study of books as physical objects: as devices for storing and circulating knowledge and ideas. It is also, therefore, the study of how books are produced, circulated, and received at different historical times and places. It is interested in every aspect of books: how they are made; how they are promoted and sold; how they are purchased, used, kept, organized, and re-circulated; and by whom. The books it studies can take many forms. They may be manuscript, printed, or electronic, produced on vellum, paper, or computer chips. They may be ornate luxuries made as gifts for kings or mass-market commodities for everyday consumers. They may be books of scripture read aloud in services of worship or pornographic ones viewed in private, slim volumes of avant-garde poetry printed by hand, or graphic novels viewed on an e-reader. Book history is also interested in material that was not bound into volumes—printed broadsides, pamphlets, periodicals, engravings; loose sheets of handwriting; such as letters; and even inscriptions, such as one might find on a gravestone. We use “books,” then, as a capacious term, standing in a much broader field that studies both material artefacts and the cultural practices of their creation and use. For much of our recorded history, books—understood expansively—have been a key technology for conveying information, ideas, and entertainment. As a result, book history is a wide-ranging and important area of study.

Book history emerged as a distinctive and dynamic field of inquiry in the 1980s and 1990s by bringing together a variety of existing intellectual activities and setting them into new relationships with one another. It drew on existing core humanities subjects such as history, literature, and art history, as well as areas of specialization that had previously been seen as marginal within these disciplines, such as economic and publishing history (within history), bibliography and textual criticism (within literary studies), and reproductive prints (within art history). It has generated new areas of study, such as the history of authorship and reading. In the last two decades, the study of books has been invigorated by the rise of digital media: as material artefacts have migrated into new electronic formats, they have raised profound questions about the nature of materiality and textuality. The result has been not just a new sub-specialization within an

existing subject but also a disruptive new way of thinking. Book history has helped to produce new accounts of major historical events and movements, fostered a new kind of attention to material culture, and challenged some of the core assumptions of literary and intellectual history.

Book history emerged in different ways in different contexts and places. In France (as *histoire du livre*), its early focus was on the circulation of books in society and their effect on large historical events. In Germany (as *Buchwissenschaft* or *Geschichte des Buchwesens*), its focus was on the history of how books are published and distributed. In Great Britain, it has been connected to bibliography or textual editing, which studies the different versions of a work, usually in order to produce a new edition of it. In literary studies, it emphasizes the material circulation of literary texts in manuscript, print, or digital media and the ways in which they become meaningful in historical contexts. In history departments, book history has been allied with the *Annales* school, which tends to focus on long historical durations, quantitative evidence, and the history of ordinary people; it has also been practised as micro-history, which uses narrow case studies to illuminate broader historical mentalities. In economic history, the focus has been on the operation of the book trades, the system of copyright, or the marketing of books. Art historians consider the production and circulation of printed images, or the role of books in circulating early photographs. Students of information studies may focus on how books were collected, organized, stored, and preserved in the past by collectors and libraries. The history of reading has emerged as a specialization in its own right. Among scholars of digital humanities, media archaeology, and new media studies, book history has taken still other forms.

The aim of this introductory guide is not to provide a comprehensive overview. It tries not to privilege any one disciplinary perspective or historical period, although it undoubtedly bears the marks of our training in literary studies and of our background as scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. No short introduction of this kind could take account of the increasingly global range of book history, as scholars investigate the history of the book in South Asia, New Zealand, Canada, colonial America, and elsewhere. Nor could it hope to offer anything like a satisfying survey of the millennia-long history of books, from their earliest appearance to their current transformation by electronic media. Rather, this guide and its accompanying Reader aim to help you to find your bearings within the field, and to provide a map that will help you navigate as

you explore book history more widely and identify your own particular interests within it.

To get started, we might think about four epochs in the history of the book, to help clarify the story that unfolds in this Introduction and its accompanying Reader. The first is the appearance of one particular form of the book, called the codex, and its slow adoption in the first centuries of the Common Era. A codex consists of a number of sheets (of paper or papyrus or vellum), folded and/or stacked on top of one another, fixed together along a spine, and usually surrounded by a cover of some kind. Almost all of the books we're familiar with today are codices (the plural of codex). Before codices, books took the form of scrolls, where the reader rolled a long piece of papyrus or vellum from the bottom to the top, reading downwards, or from one side to the other, reading in columns. The codex took quite a long time to replace the scroll as the default form of the book. It was first described by the Roman poet Martial in the first century CE, but it didn't come to dominate book production until about the fifth or sixth century. The codex's rise in popularity coincided with the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. During those centuries, Christians were early adopters of the codex form; they used it especially for their scriptures and pioneered some of the techniques for making codices. The codex was portable, resistant to wear and tear, and it allowed you to flip back and forth between pages and to move more easily between different sections of the text.

The second important epoch in our story is Johannes Gutenberg's invention of moveable type and the printing press around 1439, and its subsequent adoption throughout Europe and beyond. Printing with moveable type is described in more detail in Chapter 1. Whereas previously texts had to be laboriously copied by hand, printing made it possible to produce large numbers of (reasonably) accurate copies much faster. Scholars debate the nature and speed of print's impact (see Chapter 3) but there's no debate about the massive significance of printing for Western science and culture. It became possible to copy text faster, to produce large numbers of copies, and to disseminate them widely. Much time that had previously been spent by scientists and scholars in copying was now freed up for research, and where scholars had previously travelled to look at books, books now increasingly travelled to their readers. New ideas could reach larger audiences more rapidly. The literature and knowledge of previous centuries could increasingly be encountered first hand rather than mediated through

oral tradition, and the scriptures could be read by believers rather than mediated to them through sermons and other kinds of oral teaching. Nor was print used only for books: a wide range of other printed matter, like song-sheets, posters, and proclamations also appeared. Print did not immediately displace manuscript books, which continued to circulate alongside printed volumes. But with the invention of print, the history of the book moved into a new epoch.

Although printed books were produced in quite large numbers throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe, they remained fairly expensive and their circulation was confined to a literate elite, usually concentrated geographically around the court and/or major centres of learning. The third important epoch in the history of the book occurred over the course of at least a century, beginning in the late eighteenth century, as the amount of printed matter that was produced increased dramatically and the cost of print gradually decreased. There are a number of reasons for this: changes in copyright law, rising literacy rates, improvements in technology that industrialized print production (discussed in Chapter 1), and the opening of non-local markets, among others. In several waves that began at the end of the eighteenth century and continued to the end of the nineteenth, print saturated European culture. The default assumption became that most people would engage with print. From around 1800 onwards, it makes sense to speak of the West (and, in due course, most of its colonial territories) as a “print culture.”

For a long time, then, print was the default method for publicly circulating knowledge, information, and entertainment. Printed books and other print matter played an important role in studying, working, and relaxing. Print had always co-existed with manuscript and oral forms of transmitting information, but from the mid-nineteenth century onward, print increasingly co-existed with a wider range of media. This is our fourth (and current) epoch, when print faces competition from an array of new media. The photograph, telegraph, typewriter, phonograph, telephone, cinema, radio, and eventually television are just some of the new media that emerged as other important means of communication, displacing the centrality of print. The story continues with the introduction of personal computing in the late twentieth century and with the rise of digital technology in the last 30 years, which has once again shifted the media ecology in which the book exists. Some people have been prompted to produce gloomy elegies about the death of the book, the demise of print, or the end of serious

reading. Others have worried about the differences between reading on the page and reading on the screen, suggesting that screens—especially when they belong to Internet-enabled devices—make us worse readers. For a long time, these assertions had little hard data to back them up. Now, however, studies are starting to emerge about e-book sales, reading patterns, and the effect of screen reading on how well people understand what they read and how much they retain. Digital technologies are revolutionizing how we interact with, and think about, books. We discuss these developments in more detail in Chapter 5.

Just as the book has taken many forms, so has reading: silently or aloud, perusing many books or repeatedly returning to the same one, paying close attention or skimming. When exactly the practice of silent reading began is a matter of dispute. In St Augustine’s *Confessions*, written at the end of the fourth century CE (just as the codex form was starting to gain ground over the scroll), Augustine describes Ambrose, his teacher, reading silently. He recalls how “[w]hen [Ambrose] read, his eyes scanned the page and his heart sought out the meaning, but his voice was silent and his tongue was still.” Augustine seems to have found silent reading unusual enough to be worth commenting on. Before this, he implies, most people vocalized the text when they read, even if they were reading to themselves. Children learning to read still say words out loud as they read them today. There is some evidence of silent reading as far back as classical Greece: Plutarch tells a story in the first century CE about Alexander the Great reading silently. Many historians argue, however, that silent reading took a long time to become widespread. Even when silent reading became more common, reading aloud continued to be practised in a variety of settings. People read aloud in university lectures, in services of worship, and to their families; monks read aloud to their communities during shared meals; and servants read to their employers. Reading aloud has always been how written texts are disseminated to the illiterate, but literate people have often chosen to be read aloud to as well. Since the twentieth century, audiobooks have provided a new version of reading aloud.

Historians of reading sometimes distinguish between “intensive” and “extensive” reading. Reading “intensively” means returning to a small number of books again and again, whereas reading “extensively” involves reading a much larger number of books (or other printed matter), and often reading them only once. There are several reasons why you might read intensively. When books were very expensive and labour-intensive to produce

(especially when they had to be copied by hand), most people had access to very few books. People often read these books intensively because they didn't have access to any other reading matter. As a result, they came to know their books well and invested significant emotional energy in them. Another reason why people read intensively has to do with the content of the written material. Sacred books may be read repeatedly as part of devotional practice, while a textbook might be read intensively to prepare for an exam. Children often read (or are read to) in this way, asking for the same story over and over again. (They also consume other media "intensively," watching the same movie repeatedly.) Many of us have favourite books that we return to regularly. Extensive reading is a response to easy access to reading matter and has often been associated with the proliferation of print. Historians of reading have at times suggested that the history of reading can be told as a transition from intensive to extensive reading. With more printed matter in circulation, most people's reading experience shifted from conditions of scarcity to conditions of relative plenty. By the end of the eighteenth century, the sense of information overload—already experienced by scholars in the early modern period—became a generalized concern. But historians of reading have also identified a whole range of problems with and exceptions to this narrative. We prefer to think about intensive and extensive reading as describing a set of practices that have long co-existed, and that also co-exist in the lives of individual readers.

xviii

The history of reading also raises questions about the nature or quality of attention itself. One form of reading may be described as "attentive" reading—an immersive, long-form, and linear practice, such as reading a novel from beginning to end, with care and thought. This kind of reading might be supported by annotation, note taking, highlighting, or copying, all of which manifest a certain level of intellectual engagement with a text. Alternatively, immersive reading might mean that you are incapable of stopping to add a note, and even that you are able to read without being distracted by your environment. This kind of reading seems qualitatively different from what has been described as "hypertexting," which includes searching, filtering, skimming, and hyperlinking, all ways in which we might read a newspaper, magazine, or website (Hayles, *Broadview Reader in Book History* [hereafter *BRBH*] 491–510; see below for this referencing format). Studies using eye-tracking software have shown that we tend to scan web pages in an F pattern, our eyes moving quickly down the left-hand side and flicking occasionally across the screen as we skim efficiently to pull

out the information we need. Gannay web designers capitalize on this, putting the most important information (or the most lucrative advertisements) where we're most likely to look. These different modes of reading suggest that the ways in which we read are not always the choice of the reader but are rather cued by the different material forms our reading material takes. Although "hypertexting" might sound like an inferior version of reading, we think of it as a strategy, a positive set of skills that we use to negotiate information overload.

This survey of different reading practices tells us that people read in different ways for different reasons, and that they have always done so. Someone might read a thriller to relax before going to bed, a textbook to become more knowledgeable, a magazine to pass the time in an airport, a bible in search of spiritual edification, and an erotic story because they hope it will be sexually arousing. One person can switch between intensive reading and extensive reading, as well as between reading on the screen and reading on the page. Book history can study all these modes of reading and the books that make them possible. Book historians sometimes have strong attachments to the printed codex or to particular kinds of reading. But book history as a field of study isn't committed to any one form of the book, or any particular kind of reading. Its methods can be applied to manuscripts and electronic texts, to the most intensive kind of devotional reading and the most cursory skimming, to the most expensive books and the cheapest, the oldest and the newest.

Although you can certainly read it on its own, we have designed this book to be read alongside the *Broadview Reader in Book History*. As mentioned above, we refer to the essays in that book using the abbreviation *BRBH*. Like that book, this one is divided into five sections. Chapter 1, "Materiality," considers how our understanding of books is transformed when we think of them not simply as "transparent" vehicles for the texts they contain but as material artefacts. It introduces the idea that books convey messages not only through the texts they contain but also through their material features, which book historians call the "bibliographic code." In order to decipher this code, we have to understand something about bibliography—the study of books as material objects—and about how books were made on the handpress, as well as about how the features we're familiar with, such as the title page, took shape historically. This chapter introduces those topics. Chapter 2, "Textuality," is about how, when the same work appears in different books (or magazines, manuscripts, and so on), one text

often varies in small but important ways from another. Scholarly editors try to reconstruct why those variants appear and to produce the best new edition of the work that they can. This chapter explains how they do that, and, since editors don't always agree about how best to proceed, it outlines some of the ways in which they disagree. Chapter 3, "Printing and Reading," examines the conceptual models and historical narratives that have been developed to help us understand some of the social, economic, religious, and political impacts of print. This chapter also explores the history of reading, focusing on long-standing attempts to control reading, and the methodological challenges presented by studying practices that often leave no trace.

Chapter 4, "Intermediality," considers the book as one medium within a much larger media ecology: Drawing upon the fields of new media studies and communication theory, this chapter argues for the need to understand the book intermedially, that is, to situate it among other forms of communication technology, such as oral, manuscript, and visual culture. Chapter 5, "Remediating," considers how digital media are transforming the aspects of book history and book culture covered in the first four chapters. Many new digital innovations might prompt us to think not only about whether digital media are displacing print media but also about how the printed book has interacted historically with other media. In this chapter, we also think about how digital media offer new possibilities for studying books from the past. The book concludes with a chronology, glossary, and guide to further reading; words that appear in the glossary are **bolded** in the text.

Partly as a result of the media shifts examined in Chapter 5, now is a great time to study book history. For over 500 years in the West, a particular form of the book—the printed codex—has been woven into the very fabric of our lives. It has been the default medium for publicly circulating information and entertainment and has structured the work, leisure, and religious devotion of countless people. When anything becomes as ubiquitous as this—a discourse, a medium, a technology, or a set of ideas—it becomes difficult to make it an object of inquiry. It's so pervasive that we can't really step back and see it clearly. Now, as the cultural centrality of the printed codex is challenged, we are prompted to reassess its value. We are also gaining a new perspective on the printed codex as a material form, which allows us better to analyse its merits and shortcomings as a technology for information storage, circulation, and retrieval, to situate it in the long history of media change, to think about how it differed from the forms of the book that came before, and to contemplate how it might differ from what is to come.

# MATERIALITY

## CHAPTER I