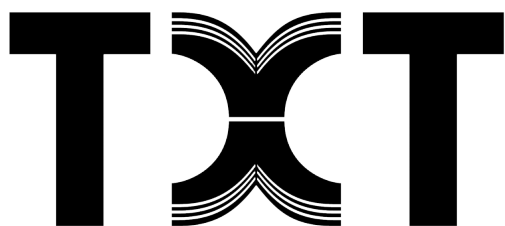


TXt

THE
BOOK
ISSUE



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BOOK
ISSUE

Academic Press Leiden and Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2018



Amsterdam
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EDITORIAL

A BRIEF EDITORIAL NOTE

What is it with books that we simply cannot put them away? I do not even mean throwing them in the bin per se, but passing them away to second hand stores or bookswap initiatives can be hard enough. Why is it that the tangibility of a book, its smell, its size and shape, are so determining for our reading experiences? How does handmade paper stand apart from paper fabricated in big rolls with machinery? What is it with books? That images of reading men appear to be material for an Internet hit with its own hashtag, Instagram account, and even wall calendars and – how suitable – books, with inside those same images.

What is it with books?

It may be the central question of *TXT Magazine: The Book Issue*, the issue you now find in front of you. In it, you will find articles addressing the central issue of the book; the paper codex. The articles have been distributed over three sections. The first one addresses the historical significance of the book, like it's symbolism in World War 2. The middle section addresses the

materiality of the book. What is the significance of materiality, and what determines a codex' bookishness? In the final section, the social significance of the paper book is being discussed, for instance its significance within a bookswap project from Germany.

The magazine in front of you would not have come to existence without the help of all those who were involved in its production process. Of course the authors who wrote the articles which together make up this issue. The hard-working and dedicated members of the TXT editorial team, who put a lot of dedication and effort in this magazine, as did Adriaan van der Weel, one of the instructors of the Book and Digital Media Studies Master's Programme, who assisted our team. We would like to thank Amsterdam University Press, which has supported us in our work on this magazine. Without AUP, this issue could by no means have been realized. We owe them, and Max Haring and Vanessa de Bueger in particular, a great debt of gratitude.

Sam Koster
Editor-in-Chief

INTRODUCTION

CELEBRATING FIVE YEARS OF TXT

The MA-programme Book and Digital Media Studies (BDMS) is proud to present you this new issue of *TXT*, and much obliged to Amsterdam University Press for its generous financial, logistical and moral support. This is *TXT*'s fifth issue. That we are thus celebrating its first lustrum does not mean, however, that *TXT*'s history started five years ago. That history began almost thirty years ago. In 1990 Peter Davidson, Paul Hoftijzer and I started a programme called Book and Publishing Studies, under the wings of the Leiden English Department. This was a specialisation aimed at students of English with an interest in texts and how they are produced, distributed and consumed, chiefly in book form. Besides a smattering of what we affectionately called 'bib and pal' (bibliography and palaeography), the programme offered courses in book history and the opportunity to gain some hands-on bookmaking experience, ranging from the hand press to the then still revolutionary Aldus PageMaker desk top publishing software running on Apple Classics

with a 9-inch monochrome display.

The programme built on a tradition of departmental research in book history. Following his interest in the history of books and printing, as far back as 1961 the Leiden professor of English Jan van Dorsten wrote his dissertation on Thomas Basson (1555-1613), an English printer working in Leiden. It was published by the Sir Thomas Browne Institute for the Study of Anglo-Dutch Cultural Relations founded by his illustrious predecessor and mentor, professor Fred Bachrach. The publication in 1979 of Elizabeth Eisenstein's groundbreaking study *The printing press as an agent of change* inspired Van Dorsten to stimulate further research on Anglo-Dutch book trade relations. This resulted in two more dissertations: *Engelse boekverkopers bij de beurs. De geschiedenis van de Amsterdamse boekhandels Bruyning en Swart, 1637-1724* by our own Paul Hoftijzer in 1987 and *Govert Basson: Printer, bookseller, publisher (Leiden, 1612-1630)* by Theo Bögels in 1992.

The popularity of the Book and Publishing Studies programme testified to unplumbed depths of student desire for pursuing careers in the book industry. Attracting students from all over the faculty, before we knew it we had what was then known as an *afstudeervariant* on our hands. Doing an *afstudeervariant* meant devoting all of one's optional subjects to book studies, and writing a thesis straddling Book and Publishing Studies and one's primary subject.

Those were adventurous days. Forays into the rapidly vanishing world of letterpress printing led to the acquisition of a Vandercook printing press with type and other necessities for setting up a print shop. The faculty furnished a real APL 'Press Room' in the basement of the Lipsius building. The *stichting* Academic Press Leiden (APL) was founded to support student and staff projects, publishing some 25 book titles under the APL imprint between 1992 and 2004. Students were offered placement opportunities in the academic publishing and library world, and came back reporting about such cutting-edge digital developments as SGML (later to become XML) and PDF.

By December 1992 the Book and Publishing Studies community was large enough to warrant a newsletter, and students and staff jointly produced the first trial issue of *The Galley*: the first forerunner of *TXT*. The last issue appeared eight years later, in 2000, by which time Book and Publishing Studies had morphed from a programme under the auspices of the Department of English into the independent *afstudeervariant*

Boekwetenschap (Book Studies). This was run by the Werkgroep Boekwetenschap, with representatives from the university library, the university's central IT department (these being the heady early days of digitisation) and the Faculty of Arts. Membership of the *Werkgroep* ran to more than fifty staff, and the need was felt for a newsletter aimed primarily at them. The first issue of *Ezelsoor* (dog's ear) duly appeared in November 1998 – and the last in Spring 2006: another clear run of eight years. (All issues of *Ezelsoor* may be found at <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/apl/index.php3-c=12.htm>.)

In the meantime, in September 2004, the BDMS MA programme had been launched in roughly its present-day form. The last two issues of *Ezelsoor* were both produced by students of the MA in the academic year 2005-2006 – a clearly exhaustive exertion because for five years there was no sequel to *Ezelsoor*. It wasn't until 2011 that – student-initiated – *EDIT* appeared. Though it announced itself proudly as a 'quarterly magazine', in fact only one issue saw the light. The format, of a student-led annual, did however establish a new tradition. The second such was entitled *RE_* (2012), followed by *YAPP* (2013). Given such ample and consistent student enthusiasm it made sense to give the initiative a more solid basis and a greater sense of continuity. In 2014 it was decided to fix the journal's concept, title and logo and to give it an annual theme, all with a view to harnessing its potential not only as a showcase for the student's energy and commitment but as a departmental visiting card. It is in that still relatively young tradition that the current issue

of *TXT* appears.

For a programme with a publishing studies specialisation and probably the first university course in the Netherlands to teach about SGML, Leiden book studies have been remarkably cavalier in the use of bibliographical metadata for their own publications. But then, can we even call them our 'own' publications? Over the last seven years we have received welcome assistance from a variety of industry sponsors (Brill, Elsevier, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Van Duren Media, Boom Uitgevers Den Haag and now AUP), many of whom have acted as (co-)publishers, and many issues carry company ISBNs in addition to our APL ISSN. It sounds like the makings of a bibliographical nightmare. But that may be just what will one day exert a fatal attraction on an ambitious young bibliographer who will hopefully finally disentangle the bibliographical knots and neatly

twist together the many strands that make up our departmental publication history. Such a history would also reflect many other histories: that of the department that produced it as well as, inevitably, those of the people who have made up that department over time. It will also offer a fascinating case history exemplifying the fast and vast changes in print origination over the last 30 years: from producing camera-ready copy (CRC) through cutting and pasting with real scissors and glue to digitally aided electronic pre-press (EPP) to a fully hybrid digital-first workflow, with the PDF serving both the online and paper publication. But until such time as that history is written, let's live in the present and celebrate the *TXT* team's magnificent achievement.

Adriaan van der Weel

INTERVIEW

READING INTO 'OUR WORDS'

A Conversation with David Whitlaw

Eric Brotchie and **Hilary Drummond**. Universiteit Leiden Book and Digital Media Studies Alumni, 2012–2013.

This article considers the contested nature of reading and readership, and divergent meanings ascribed to texts following publication. It asks three important questions. 1: How does the physical or digital form of text, and the mode of geospatial transmission, influence readership and a given reader's ascription of meaning. 2: Is there any such thing as a misreading of a text? or are all readings of texts valid, regardless of the intended meaning of the author? 3: Can powerful misreadings lead to contested ownership of texts between authors and readers?

*The article takes as its case study Nova Scotian retiree David Whitlaw's passionate reading/misreading of Eric Brotchie's poetic verse *Verba Nostrum: For our teachers*, published in a previous edition of TXT magazine (Yapp, 2013). In finding the poem in a printed book 5,000 kilometres from Leiden (and 17,500 kilometres from Eric), David's readership could never have been intended, and his ascription of meaning ever presumed.*

Following an introduction, the article takes the form of an interview conducted with Mr David Whitlaw by Ms Hilary Drummond (BDMS Alumna 2013) in Greenwich, Nova Scotia in January 2018. Audio files (.mp3) of the full interview and David's reading of 'Verba Nostrum' are available for online readers.

Key words: digi-textual authority; literary ownership; poem; textual medium; TXT



Not surprisingly, Shakespeare's plays bustle with pedantic schoolmasters... in Love's Labour Lost, [Holofernes] can "smell false Latin" in the clown's confusion of
ad inquem and ad dunghill ...

but Shakespeare also assigns great rhetorical skill to characters traditionally denied rhetorical education and the social power it confers.¹

Misreadings are poetic relationships.²

A Canadian and an Australian walk into a bar in Amsterdam...

If the story ended here, dear reader, if for some reason the author was interrupted before they could finish, you couldn't be faulted for anticipating a *punch* line, assuming that it's just a joke. But what if the speaker's intention is misdirection? What if they mimic a conventional style—in this case, a 'so-and-so walks into a bar' gag—in order to deliver an unexpected story? How do your assumptions about textual archetypes and the forms they take affect your understanding and experience of a tale?

Playing with conventions of poetic form in order to divert and amuse is precisely what Eric 'the Australian' Brotchie had in mind when he penned 'Verba Nostrum: For Our Teachers' for the 2013 edition of TXT (then published as *Yapp*). A long-form verse following the dramatic exploits of famous literary characters and written in the style of a classical epic, the poem alludes to the downfall of literature in an era of digi-textual supremacy, and ends with the utter destruction of Leiden's Lipsius Building. While its nostalgic agenda appears clear, the subtext is replete with veiled private references, semi-mythical agents,

and innuendo which could only be apparent to fellow BDMS alumni of that particular academic year. During a wine-fuelled editorial meeting in Amsterdam, Hilary 'the Canadian' Drummond wryly suggested that Eric title his epic doggerel with dog Latin—implying scholarly seriousness where none existed.

Nearly five years after *Yapp*'s modest print run was realized, Hilary received a call from her mother, Margaret, who regularly volunteers at a local nursing home in Nova Scotia. One of the elderly residents, David Whitlaw, had read a newspaper article on the topic of book art, and wished to know more. Book art does not mean artisanal work featured in books—illuminated manuscripts, lavish illustrations, and tooled leather jackets, for example—but rather books repurposed by artists to *become new works of art*: books that transcend their original intention as textual 'containers' to become materials for new artistic expression in a different context, resulting in fresh reception by a new audience. *Yapp* happened to feature a list of contemporary book artists as well as an article exploring 'bookwork',³ and David was given a copy to help satisfy his curiosity.

An electronic text is to a book as an avatar is to a body: expressive and operative, yet (currently) limited to two senses: sight and sound. Reading online is a practical yet partial experience, and while the temporary disembodiment of digital communication allows us to disregard material constraints (such as geographical distance), from time to time we must make *things* with our words. Objects, much like people, can end up in unexpected places—with unexpected consequences. David not only read the article about book art; he read *Yapp* from cover to cover. He read about literary protest in the American South, medieval monastic poetry, Europe's last type founder, *prêt-à-porter* libraries, the printing press and the dawn of Humanism in Holland, and the symbolic capital of books. In *Yapp*'s final pages, he read 'Verba Nostrum' ['Our Words'], and—much to our initial surprise—took it quite seriously. He read it and reread it, he read it aloud, and he allowed his interpretation to be recorded: first the poem itself, followed by an interview with Hilary and Margaret about the experience.

In finding 'Verba Nostrum' in a book 5000 kilometres from Leiden (and 17,500 kilometres from Eric),

David satisfied the intention of *Yapp*'s creators: discovery and enjoyment. In choosing to express the poem orally, with respectful gravity succeeding our original irreverent levity, he built a bridge to further reinterpretation far removed from the ivory tower. Authorship and publishing are creative acts, but the reader also plays an essential role, and can arguably claim 'ownership' of a text through usage. The reader who reanimates long-forgotten words, who breathes life into a silent text by speaking the words aloud, is no less a creator than the poets themselves.

We appreciate that the editors of TXT see the value in this unexpected story, and are providing an opportunity for our words to come full circle. Consider for a moment: Who is around you now? Which voices in the past, present, and future might you be reading into, or reaching out to? An exchange of ideas—a murmuring of discontent, the nectar of the vines—and inevitably the pages begin to fill. At the end of your studies here in Leiden, your words may also make a difference to someone, somewhere.

You never know.



The following interview was recorded on 24 January 2018 at Shannex Blomidon Court in Greenwich, Nova Scotia, Canada. It has been edited for clarity and length.

HILARY DRUMMOND: SO, THIS STORY IS GOING
TO BE PUBLISHED IN TXT MAGAZINE.

David Whitlaw: I'm so surprised. I'm absolutely amazed!

HD: DID YOU HAPPEN TO LOOK UP ANY OF
THE PREVIOUS TXT MAGAZINES?

DW: No, I didn't. That's beyond my technical skills.

HD: I'M SURE THEY ARE AVAILABLE AS PDFs.

DW: I don't know what a PDF is.

HD: BUT YOU KNOW THAT TXT IS A LATER INCARNATION OF *YAPP*.
COULD YOU TELL THE STORY OF HOW WE GOT TO HERE? WE
ARE ALL LOOKING AT THIS FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE.

DW: Don't forget, I'm an old guy who lives in a nursing home. I
don't remember everything that's happened over the last few years.
Sometimes I have to look things up to refresh my memory.

HD: IN THE CASE OF [THE POEM 'VERBA NOSTRUM' BY
ERIC BROTHIE], HOW DID IT COME TO YOU?

DW: I read an article about people making art out of old books. I
mentioned that to [Margaret], and you said, 'My daughter was at
university, did a part of her work studying books, literature...' And
you brought in [*Yapp*] to show me. There was an article in it about
folding books... I'd never heard of book art in my life. I didn't know
there was such a thing. At the end of [*Yapp*] there is this poem, and I
sat in my room and read it out loud and enjoyed it because I like to
read poetry out loud... It's a huge poem, five pages long, and nobody
around here would ever take the time to listen to me reading it, so I
read it out loud to myself, and then [Margaret] said we could record
it.

HD: I WAS SO TICKLED THAT THIS POEM WOULD ENJOY A SECOND LIFE
ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD FROM THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR.

DW: I had to read it more than once to get the references. I didn't
understand some of the pronunciations. 'Leeden, Leiden...' I didn't
quite follow it at the beginning, and had to go back and read it over

until I understood the characters. It started with two people and ended up with five people in a boat that sank, they were down with the devil, death came with a hood. There were modern references... and it suddenly dawned on me: that's what the poem is all about, the decline of print literature. And at the end, literature is saved, 'Here in Leiden!'

**HD: THE BOOK AND DIGITAL MEDIA STUDIES PROGRAM
SAVED LITERATURE. IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?**

DW: Exactly! That's right.

**HD: WE'LL BE SURE TO TELL LEIDEN UNIVERSITY
THAT WE SAVED LITERATURE. [LAUGHTER]**

DW: This poem should be on every university course around the world where people are doing advanced studies in literature.

HD: WHY DO YOU THINK THAT?

DW: Because it's valuable. Because it's relevant. The person who wrote this should be recognized for it... That's how it came about. That's my story. I'd never heard of Leiden, but I did recognize most of the characters in the poem.

HD: BECAUSE THEY'RE FROM CLASSICAL LITERATURE?

DW: That's right! Classical and children's literature... Biblical literature as well.

**MARGARET DRUMMOND: THE POEM RECOGNIZES A LONG HISTORY
OF LITERARY TRADITION THAT PREDATES THE DIGITAL AGE.
'FACEBOOK DOESN'T KNOW YOU TWO,' OR WHATEVER THAT LINE IS.**

DW: I love those references. I also like the rhyming scheme, which is irregular, and required reading several times. The first time I read it as rhyming couplets, but it didn't work. I had to pay attention to the rhythm and the punctuation. I enjoyed that.

HD: YOU HAVE SOME EXPERIENCE IN READING OUT LOUD.

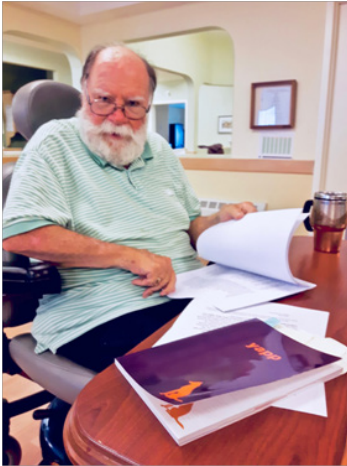
DW: Not as a performer, though I've been around thespians and other theatrical people. I did a bit of amateur radio broadcasting

many years ago.

HD: SO YOU'RE USED TO HAVING MICROPHONES
PUSHED IN YOUR FACE. [LAUGHTER]

MD: YOU WERE ALSO A TEACHER FOR THIRTY-EIGHT YEARS.

DW: That's true. Teaching is like acting, to some degree. It's a performance at the front of the room! ... I am very concerned about what I would call 'proper English,' although there's no such thing because I've learned—in my old age—that language is a living thing. It changes, and we don't speak the same as say Chaucer did. It's evolving. That's why it's difficult to read Chaucer.



HD: LANGUAGE CHANGES.
DO YOU MEAN SPOKEN
LANGUAGE, OR ALSO THE
LANGUAGE WE USE WHEN IT'S
MEDIATED THROUGH PRINT
OR DIGITAL FORMS? YOU'VE
SEEN THIS SOCIETAL SHIFT
HAPPEN. DO YOU HAVE ANY

THOUGHTS ABOUT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO?

DW: Yes. I don't understand the digital. It took me a long time to understand shortened forms like 'OLL'... no, 'LOL,' 'laugh out loud'... First I just ignored them because they didn't mean anything to me. Then I thought I should at least find out what they mean.

HD: WOULD YOU HAVE BEEN AS INTERESTED IN THE POEM
IF IT WAS EXCLUSIVELY AVAILABLE ONLINE? IF I HAD SAID
TO [MARGARET], 'MOM, TELL DAVID THAT HE CAN LOOK AT
THE PDF OF YAPP ONLINE,' WOULD YOU HAVE DONE IT?

DW: No, I would never have done it.

HD: SO THE MEDIUM OF THE TEXT DID MAKE A
DIFFERENCE IN YOUR EXPERIENCE OF IT.

DW: It did for me... I don't read online except for emails, or sometimes the news. I never would have read 'Verba Nostrum' online.

HD: I THINK ONE OF THE REASONS THE EDITORS OF TXT MAGAZINE ARE INTERESTED IN THIS STORY IS THIS IDEA OF CHANGE: CHANGE OF EMBODIMENT, CHANGE IN MEANING WHEN YOU CHANGE HOW SOMETHING IS RECEIVED OR DELIVERED. HOW IT IS MADE—WHETHER OF BITS AND BYTES OR PAPER AND INK—DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

DW: Or whether it was originally chiseled on a piece of stone... What about those paintings they've discovered in caves? Who did those? What kind of message were they sending?

HD: SOME THEORIZE THAT PRINT CAN TELL A MORE ENRICHED HISTORY THAN DIGITAL MEDIA BECAUSE ITS PROVIDENCE CAN BE TRACED THROUGH THE HANDS OF SEVERAL DIFFERENT PEOPLE.

DW: I would agree with that, no question. I would agree with that one hundred percent.

HD: YOU NOW OWN A PHYSICAL COPY OF *YAPP*, IS THAT CORRECT?

DW: Yes I do, and I show it to millions of people. [laughter]

HD: WHO KNOWS WHAT RIPPLE EFFECT MIGHT COME FROM THAT?

DW: I like print, but I'm not opposed to digital change. Who's to be opposed? It's happening. People burned down printing presses because they put scribes out of work. The development of the printing press was earthshattering.

HD: THERE IS A PARALLEL STORY HERE: THE SHIFT BETWEEN PRINT AND DIGITAL, AND THE SHIFT FROM THE AUTHOR'S ORIGINAL INTENT TO HOW A READER RECEIVES AND USES TEXT FOR THEIR OWN PURPOSES. WE'VE TOLD YOU THE GENESIS OF THIS POEM, THAT IT WAS AN INSIDE JOKE FOR STUDENTS IN [LEIDEN'S] BOOK AND DIGITAL MEDIA STUDIES CLASS OF 2012–2013.

DW: I can see that, now that you've told me. I didn't know that at the time.

HD: DO YOU THINK THAT THE AUTHOR'S INTENTION MATTERS, OR MAKES A DIFFERENCE?

DW: It doesn't matter to me. When I read it I just see the poem itself.

There are other poems that I might just read and pass on, and don't have that same feeling as I had towards ['Verba Nostrum']: 'Boy, I should read this out loud.'

HD: AS A TEACHER, YOU MUST HAVE TAUGHT LITERATURE...

DW: I worked with the developmentally handicapped for most of my career, so I didn't really teach literature as such.

HD: ...OR ANY TYPES OF STORIES OR TEXTS THAT HAVE BEEN TAKEN UP IN A DIFFERENT CONTEXT, IN A DIFFERENT PLACE, AND TAUGHT OR LEARNED OR CONSUMED MAYBE IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WAY THAN THE AUTHOR INTENDED. DO YOU HAVE ANY THOUGHTS ABOUT THAT?

DW: I used material quite consciously in a different way than the author had intended because that was expedient to my task at hand. I used it in a way I thought was appropriate to the situation.

HD: IN CRITICAL LITERATURE STUDIES THE INTENT OF THE AUTHOR IS OFTEN A TOPIC OF INQUIRY: 'WHAT DOES THE AUTHOR MEAN BY THIS?'

DW: That's why I never studied literature critically, because that would have spoiled it for me. I'm trying to think of a case where I thought of the intent of the author... Shakespeare's intent was not just to entertain, but to make fun of the aristocracy and other contemporary things of his time.

HD: SHAKESPEARE IS A GOOD EXAMPLE BECAUSE THE AUTHORSHIP IS CONSTANTLY IN QUESTION. SCHOLARS DEBATE IT ENDLESSLY.

DW: Of course! That's right!

HD: AS THE AUTHOR OF THIS POEM, ERIC HAS BEEN ASKING HIMSELF THESE QUESTIONS. HE WROTE THIS TONGUE-IN-CHEEK THING, AND NOW IT HAS BEEN TAKEN QUITE SERIOUSLY BY SOMEONE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD, TO WHOM HE HAS NO CONNECTION.

DW: I didn't erase his authorship entirely from my mind. I thought of what fun he must have had writing it. It's got some good humour in it... many people should read it.

HD: I LOVE THE IDEA OF ALL THOSE STUDENTS READING THIS
LONG IN THE FUTURE, WHEN ERIC NOR I NOR ANY OF US
ARE AROUND TO TELL THE STORY OF HIS INTENTION.

DW: It has as much value as, maybe not Shakespeare, but certainly
as much as Longfellow.

HD: MAYBE THAT IS A FOUNDATIONAL THEORY OF ART: AS AN
ARTIST, WHEN YOU PUT SOMETHING OUT IN THE WORLD,
YOU ALSO RELEASE CONTROL OVER ITS INTERPRETATION.

DW: No question about it, when the painter finishes he puts the
painting away and somebody buys it and it's no longer his painting...

MD: ...AND EVERYBODY WONDERS, WHAT WAS THE
INTENT, WHAT'S HE TRYING TO SAY HERE?

DW: It doesn't matter. It's *that* painting: I will buy it, put it in my
gallery, and look at it.

HD: YOU'RE SAYING IT HAS VALUE...

DW: ...just as a piece of literature has value outside of what the
author intended.

HD: I COULDN'T AGREE MORE. WE CAN ALSO MAKE THE ARGUMENT
THAT THE MEDIUM MADE A DIFFERENCE IN ITS JOURNEY TO YOU.

DW: A great difference. If I hadn't had that book presented to me
in print form, I would never have known that poem... but my life is
enriched having read it!

HD: THAT'S WONDERFUL TO HEAR, ON BEHALF
OF THE EDITORS OF *YAPP*.

MD: NOT JUST THE POEM, BUT THE WHOLE BOOK.

HD: YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE A LOT OF PEOPLE HAPPY.

DW: I'll have to go back and look at the other articles. Yours is the
most difficult. I cannot understand it... If the value of the mark is
determined by the obscurity of the material you could get an A+.

HD: THANK YOU.

DW: It's been fun. I've enjoyed it. Thank you very much, Hilary, for being a student there, and for being a colleague of Eric's, and thank you, Eric, for your contribution. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

To listen to David Whitlaw's reading of 'Verba Nostrum' please visit https://drive.google.com/open?id=1uJ_9kxmF0Wlsoty0n3SJ7V1A6pkXs3c or write to hilarydrummond@gmail.com. An unabridged transcript and recording of the full interview are also available upon request. The full text of Eric Brotchie's poem 'Verba Nostrum' can be found at <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/30033>.

Eric Brotchie is a public sector communications specialist from Melbourne, Australia. He is a lover of classical literature, a decent listener, and happy to be slightly famous in Nova Scotia.

Hilary Drummond has worked in the book industry for more than two decades. She is currently a freelance editor, roving bookseller, backyard hen-keeper, and occasional gardener.

Margaret Drummond was born in Montreal. She enrolled at Acadia University in 1969 and worked as a public school educator for 25 years. She enjoys walking her dog, CBC radio, volunteering, chess, and word games.

David Whitlaw was born in Ontario in 1936. His life experiences include community activism, retail merchandising, radio broadcasting, theatre, and a teaching career that spanned 40 years.



¹ R. DeMaria Jr., H. Chang & S. Zacher (eds), *A Companion to British Literature, Volume 2: Early Modern Literature, 1450–1660* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p. 167.

² R. Ingelbien, *Misreading England: Poetry and Nationhood since the Second World War* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2002), p. 231.

³ G. Dumitrică, "Reminiscences: A Brief Introduction to 'Bookwork,'" *Yapp* 1 (2013): 32–36. The featured book artists included Cara Barer, Brian Dettmer, Matej Krén, Wim Botha, Evy Jokhova, and Pablo Lehmann, among others.

HISTORY

WHISPERING A TALE OF HOPE

On book collecting and the spirit of resistance during Hitler's
'Bibliocaust'

Jantine Broek. Freelance writer, editor and academic writing coach. She studied English Language and Culture at Utrecht University (BA) and Writing, Editing and Mediating at the University of Groningen (MA). She has a research interest in military history, literature and memory studies and is currently writing a book on the different uses of language in war.

During the Second World War, the Nazis carried out violent attacks on Jewish cultural heritage, paying special attention to book collections in libraries, archives and other institutes. This destructive event is now sometimes referred to as the 'Bibliocaust'. The plundering, destruction and dispersal of many private and public collections by the Nazis' ideological brigade, Alfred Rosenberg's ERR, shifts our perception of the Germans as anti-intellectual vandals: their aim was to preserve certain Jewish cultural artefacts to justify their extermination, and destroy the rest. Inspired by an essay on becoming a book collector written by the Jewish writer and culture critic Walter Benjamin, this article investigates what the term 'collecting' meant during this chaotic time, how books lost their meaning as a result of dispersal, and how their owners fought back against the destruction of their memory.

Keywords: biblioclasm; book collecting; Jewish heritage; Jewish memory; Nazis



I must ask you to join me in the disorder of crates that have been wrenched open, the air saturated with the dust of wood, the floor covered with torn paper, to join

me among piles of volumes that are seeing daylight again after two years of darkness, so that you may be ready to share with me a bit of the mood - it is certainly not an elegiac

mood but, rather, one of anticipation
- which these books arouse...'¹

These are the opening lines of an essay written in 1931 by the German-Jewish writer and philosopher Walter Benjamin, titled 'Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting'. In it, Benjamin describes the unique process of collecting books, which involves a lot more than simply buying or borrowing them, and he explains how order can be imposed on the disordered nature of a randomly assembled pile of books. 'For [the collector],' explains Benjamin,

'not only books but also copies of books have their fates. And in this sense, the most important fate of a copy is its encounter with him, with his own collection. . . To renew the old world - that is the collector's deepest desire when he is driven to acquire new things.'²

Two years after the publication of this essay, in 1933, the infamous national-socialist book burnings at universities across Germany signalled the beginning of a ruthless attack on Jewish culture and history, perceived by many as an omen of the horrors of the Holocaust. Benjamin's own works were among those consumed by flames, torn from university libraries where they had been part of a carefully assembled, extensive collection. But while this brutal act of destroying literature, which we like to think of as fundamentally good, has established the Nazis as anti-intellectual vandals in our collective memory, what was set in motion once the war had begun was something far more sinister.³ Plans were made by Alfred Rosenberg, the

ideological leader of the NSDAP and later *Reichsminister* of the Eastern territories, to create an institution that would showcase examples of the literature and culture of the Reich's ideological enemies, allowing German academics to present research that proved the superiority of the Aryan race. Rosenberg envisioned at least ten branches of this *Hohe Schule der NSDAP*, with branches specialized in Slavic cultures, Freemasons, and the Germanic race. Only one of these institutes was to see the light during the war, given the urgency of its mission: the Institute for Research on the Jewish Question in Frankfurt.⁴ But for the research to begin, the institution needed to know its subject.

Accordingly, Rosenberg's own *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (ERR), set up in 1940, dedicated itself to collecting books and other cultural artefacts from private and public libraries all over Europe, from Amsterdam to Thessaloniki, and from Paris to Kiev. The aim was to study Judaica without Jews; 'To exterminate the Jewish people, but not their memory.' 'The Jew' would be preserved as a historical and symbolic enemy,' writes historian Anders Rydell in his study *The Book Thieves*.⁵ 'Their significance and their crimes' would be used to justify 'the merciless war into which the German people had been "forced"'.⁶ Appropriating Jewish scholarship for their own ideological ends was fitting for the Nazis, who grew up in the literature-loving Weimar Republic and built the concentration camp Buchenwald around an old oak tree that Goethe had once supposedly sat under.⁷ Chaim Kaplan, a Jewish teacher from Warsaw, noted in his

diary that what was happening was a clash between two literary peoples:

'We are dealing with a nation of high culture, with "a people of the book"(...)The Nazi has robbed us not only of material possessions, but also of our good name as "the people of the Book." The Nazi has both book and sword, and this is his strength and might.'⁸

In this article, guided by Walter Benjamin's thoughts on collecting books, I want to take a closer look the Nazis' feverish collecting spirit, as well as the ways in which the books – and their owners – fought back.

The plundering practices of the ERR

When the Nazis came to power, the great institutions of their ideological enemies were the first to topple. In the West, German officials calmly surveyed the priceless, centuries-old collections of Ets Haim in Amsterdam, the oldest Jewish library in the world, and the Bibliotheca della Comunità Israelitica in Rome, the city home to the oldest Jewish community in the world – and then packed them up to transport them to Germany. After these pillars of Jewish culture had been removed, they moved on to the many smaller libraries, including the private book collections of those who had fled or been arrested. In Eastern Europe, the Germans adopted a less civil approach, mirroring their brutal treatment of the citizens there. The people were herded into ghettos while many synagogues and libraries were simply torched, as happened during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944.⁹ In addition, few buildings

remained unharmed when the Soviets passed through on their way to Berlin, 'liberating' cities from the Germans while installing their own totalitarian reign.

As the plundered books piled up, the ERR found itself lacking the manpower to go through the hundreds of thousands of volumes and decide whether they should be kept for research or destroyed. Who better to perform this task than the Jewish intellectuals, artists and academics of whom they had plenty locked up? In Vilnius, which due to its thriving Jewish community, rich history and focus on new Jewish scholarship had been nicknamed 'the Jerusalem of Lithuania', prominent members of Jewish academic circles such as Abraham Sutzkever, a poet, Zelig Kalmanovicz, a professor of Semitic languages, and Herman Kruk, a librarian, were ordered by the ERR to begin collecting, cataloguing, and readying the city's valuable book collections for transport.¹⁰ Vilnius was home to YIVO, the Jewish Research Institute, and the famous Strashun Library, whose collection included some of the oldest and most valuable Jewish books, manuscripts, incunabula and letters in the world. Soon nicknamed *Die Papierbrigade*, 'the Paper Brigade', by the ghetto police because of their relatively light duties, the academics were based in the small library that Kruk had turned into a ghetto library at the beginning of the war, its collection quickly supplemented by books the ghetto inhabitants wanted or had to get rid of.¹¹ German quotas dictated that thirty per cent of the material was to be sent off to Frankfurt, while the other seventy was destined for the paper mill. Sutzkever commented that he felt they

were 'digging a grave for our souls', saving certain volumes and throwing away others of inestimable emotional value.¹²

Meanwhile, in the concentration camp Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia, an official *Ghettobücherei* was set up to accommodate all the books that the newly arrived Jewish inhabitants had brought with them.¹³ As Theresienstadt was primarily inhabited by 'selected Jews' from higher social circles, including rabbis, civil servants, and academics, the Nazis had their pick of scholars specialized in Yiddish and Hebrew and assembled another Paper Brigade, officially called the *Bücherfassungsgruppe* but quickly nicknamed *Talmudkommando*, 'Talmud Unit'. The group included Czech Judaist and book collector Otto Muneles, as well as Isaac Leo Seeligmann, a famous book collector from Amsterdam. Many of the books they handled came from depots in Berlin, which the Germans had begun to evacuate after the start of frequent Allied air raids in 1943.¹⁴ As a result, Seeligmann came across his own books, which had ended up in the RSHA depot in Berlin and had now been transported to Theresienstadt to be sorted.¹⁵

Chance and fate

As books were separated from their collections and collections from their owners, resurfacing in depots and emptied libraries all over the Third Reich, Rosenberg's aim as a collector can be explained by Benjamin's definition of the term. He sought to fill his Hohe Schule's libraries with materials acquired through 'the chance, the fate, that suffuse the past', which remain 'conspicuously present' in the resulting 'accustomed confusion of [...] books' that slave labourers had to restore order to.¹⁶ The assembled material would have taken decades to catalogue, and indeed many collections were found after the war still in their crates in basements, abandoned churches, on railway sidings and even on riverboats in southern Poland, stuck in transit towards their great ideological destination.¹⁷

'German quotas dictated that thirty per cent of Vilnius' Jewish books was to be sent off to Frankfurt, while the other seventy was destined for the paper mill.'

The fragmentation of so many book collections inevitably resulted, as Benjamin puts it, in a loss of meaning: though a collection's 'most distinguished trait... will always be its transmissibility', passed on by one owner to the next with a "feeling of responsibility toward his property", Benjamin states that 'the phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal

owner.¹⁸ Rosenberg's method of collecting books laid the emphasis on 'their functional, utilitarian value - that is, their usefulness'.¹⁹ He had no emotional connection to the material he was claiming. Nor was he alone in this; after the war the Soviet Union claimed tons of books, many of them stolen by the Germans during the Russian campaign, as war booty.²⁰ The constant moving back and forth of books and collections divested them of their emotional value. They had become plunder, perhaps less valuable than food or even art, but still worth something, if only as a prize which the owner could throw in another man's face.

Books as weapons of spiritual resistance

The value of the plundered books was perhaps best appreciated by the Jewish intellectuals who had to make ad hoc decisions every day about which materials to save and which to give up to the Nazis. In Vilnius, Khaikl Lunski, the owner of the Strashun Library, was ordered to destroy the collection he had painstakingly assembled over a period of forty years. The Paper Brigade felt emotionally compromised while throwing away materials they had loved and studied for years, seeing them, in Benjamin's words, as 'the scene, the stage of their fate' and being aware of the 'enchantment' of 'the whole background of an item [which] adds up to a magic encyclopaedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object'.²¹ In this sense, Rosenberg's role as a collector became what Benjamin referred to as

an interpreter of fate, deciding where the books would go and why. They were either to be destroyed, erasing any memory of their owners, or to be employed in the battle against Jewish memory and history. This shows that ultimately, the Nazi struggle was not about economy or politics, but about identity, thus making 'the ability to remember (...) an act of resistance in its own right'.²²

The people who borrowed books from the Vilnius ghetto library shared this vision. It became hugely popular despite the frequent deportations and executions that were being carried out between 1941 and 1943, as well as the overpopulation and undernourishment in the ghetto. During a relatively quiet period between January 1942 and July 1943, the library became a community centre for learning, adding a reading room, an exposition space for religious artefacts, and a conference room for cultural clubs formed in the ghetto.²³ The poets of the Paper Brigade would recite poetry during lunch breaks.²⁴ In addition, the work of importing, cataloguing, reading and lending books gave the Jewish intellectuals hope that even if they perished, their culture would persist.²⁵

Despite their lamentable provenance - many books came from the houses of deported inhabitants - the books themselves were an essential means of escape from the horrendous reality of ghetto life.²⁶ Kruk lamented the fact that crime and romance novels were favoured over Dostoevsky and Flaubert, but recognized the importance of 'narcotic' effect that

reading escapist literature had.²⁷ However, many people also asked for more serious literature that gave them a perspective on current events, such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, writings on World War I and the Armenian genocide, and books about Jewish life and persecution during the Middle Ages.²⁸ Similarly, the historian and archivist Emanuel Ringelblum in the Warsaw ghetto noted that the lack of newspapers turned many inhabitants on to fiction, either to escape the daily horrors or to comprehend the historical precedent of their situation. For example, many became interested in Napoleon: "The readers delight in the account (...)of the Russian winter, we hope that history will again repeat itself and the end will be the downfall of the Cursed One."²⁹

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Thus Jewish intellectuals across the Eastern European ghettos began to rebel, trying to save as cultural and literary relics of the past as they could while actively recording the horrors of modern history in the making. 'I do not know if we are redeemers or gravediggers,' Herman Kruk wrote in his diary, which he kept right up to his death in a forced-labour camp in Estonia in 1944 and buried just before his execution. It was dug up after the war and remains one of the most comprehensive and harrowing records of life in the Eastern European ghettos. Similar preparations were made by

Dr Ringelblum, who established a secret archive of the Warsaw ghetto, collecting writings related to the war, the occupation and ghetto life. He buried the archives in two sections right before the uprising; the first was recovered in September 1946 and the second in December 1950.³⁰ The urgent and necessary task of these record-keepers, carried out with one foot hovering above death's threshold,

gives new meaning to Benjamin's statement that 'only in extinction is the collector comprehended.'³¹

Herman Kruk, who was issued a pass that allowed him to walk in and out of the Vilnius ghetto without being searched, found inventive ways to smuggle books and other artefacts out of their workspace in the emptied YIVO building

and into the ghetto – he once made a 'paper waste run' during which he managed to save drawings by Marc Chagall, manuscripts from Maxim Gorki and letters from Tolstoy. Other Paper Brigade members hid papers under their clothes and stuffed their pockets full of books at the end of their work day. As the Germans began to retreat from Eastern Europe in late 1943, the ghetto in Vilnius was liquidated. Sutzkever managed to flee, seeking refuge in Moscow, while other Paper Brigade members, Khaikl Lunski, Herman Kruk and Zelig Kalmanovitz, were sent to concentration camps, where they

perished before the war was over.³² Kaczerginski and Sutzkever had joined a Jewish partisan group and helped Soviet forces to liberate Vilnius in July 1944. After the fighting, they went looking for the materials they had hidden, finding the YIVO institute a blacked-out shell with most of its stock destroyed by artillery fire. The books in the ghetto library had been found and burnt in the courtyard. The stash in the bunker beneath Kruk's house was one of three out of ten that had not been discovered; here, Sutzkever and Kaczerginski found manuscripts, diaries, letters and books.³³ This made all too clear, however, how much they had not been able to salvage. The city's collection of religious books, which according to orthodox religious law had to be treated with the utmost respect and were meant only to be buried, had suffered a particularly degrading fate.³⁴ The Germans had sent ancient Torah rolls off to leather factories to be made into insoles for German soldiers, and after the war one Jewish partisan found women selling herring wrapped in Talmud pages at a market.³⁵

Like the Paper Brigade, the Talmud Unit was torn between doing a good job to avoid persecution, prolonging their task so they would be kept alive, and seeking consolation in the few pieces of Jewish culture they were able to salvage, though still in the name of the regime that was exterminating their people.³⁶ Overall they enjoyed a privileged position in the camp, which was both a blessing and a curse. Muneles, the head of the group, witnessed the deportation of his whole family to Auschwitz, but was not allowed to join them despite

frequent exhortations to the Germans. By the time the Talmud Unit was dissolved in April 1945, just before Nazi Germany's capitulation, they had catalogued around thirty thousand books, labelling their spines and writing serial numbers by hand.³⁷

Conclusion

Instead of Benjamin, it might have been Isaac Bencowitz, the director of the book depot in Offenbach during 1946 – where all the books found in the American-controlled part of the former Third Reich were gathered, including almost the entire YIVO collection – asking us to join him in 'the disorder of crates' and 'piles of volumes that are seeing daylight again after two years of darkness.' When commenting on the nature of his job, Bencowitz stated that it was hard to remain emotionally detached:

'I would come to a box of books that the sorters had brought together, like scattered sheep into one fold, books from a library that had once been in some distant town in Poland, or an extinct *Yeshiva*. There was something sad and mournful about these volumes. . . as if they were whispering a tale of yearning and hope long since obliterated.'³⁸

Despite the millions of volumes found abandoned after the war, the extent of the devastation was severe.³⁹ Those materials that were saved by the courageous individuals of the Paper Brigade and the Talmud Unit seemed, in the harsh light of post-war reflection, relics of a bygone age. A long and difficult process of restitution began. The

borders of Europe had been redrawn, Allied soldiers and commanders took a share of the surplus books they found, and the Soviet government staked a claim upon everything they found in the Eastern European countries they had “liberated”.⁴⁰ Still, several restitution schemes were set up, and while institutions like Ets Haim in Amsterdam welcomed back their unharmed collections, other institutions were not so lucky.⁴¹ Many books were left over because their private owners could not be located, because they had moved during the war or had perished in the Holocaust.

Each book had its own fate, decided in the main by its collector in the battle for control of Jewish memory. In our digital age, with its common cry of ‘fake news’, it is easy to forget just how slippery the slope is when politicians reclaim cultural artefacts to justify their policies for ‘renewing the old world’. If the persistence and courage of the book smugglers, diarists, archivists and librarians during those days teaches us anything, it is surely that the emotional truths we find in books will outlive any individual or people and represent the hope of endurance.



¹ W. Benjamin, ‘Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting’, in H. Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), transl. H. Zoch, pp. 59-67 there p. 61.

² Ibidem.

³ A. Rydell, ‘Foreword’, *The Book Thieves* (New York: Viking, 2017), transl. H. Koch, p. xiii.

⁴ Books were also sent to smaller and more specialized collections, such as the Ostbücherei or the Zentralbibliothek der Hohen Schule. The division of the books over various projects within Amt Rosenberg resulted in a fragmentation during which many collections were irreconcilably split up. (Rydell, *Foreword*, p. 229)

⁵ Ibidem, p. 241.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 37.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 242.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 197.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 211.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Ibidem, p. 212.

¹³ Theresienstadt was a model camp, based in a former garrison and made to look like a ghetto. It was called ‘the city the Führer gave to the Jews’ and a promised visit by the Red Cross led the Nazis to give the houses a lick of paint, feed the inhabitants an extra ration to make them look healthier, and even bring together a jazz band, the Ghetto Swingers (jazz was degenerate ‘*Negermusik*’ according to the Nazis) to showcase their tolerant and benevolent treatment of the Jews. (Rydell, *Foreword*, p. 220).

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 222.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 223.

- ¹⁶ Benjamin, *Unpacking my library*, p. 60.
- ¹⁷ Rydell, *Foreword*, p. 227; *Ibidem*, p. 249.
- ¹⁸ Benjamin, *Unpacking my library*, p. 66; *Ibidem*, p. 67.
- ¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 60.
- ²⁰ Rydell, *Foreword*, p. 260.
- ²¹ Benjamin, *Unpacking my library*, p. 60.
- ²² Rydell, *Foreword*, p. 241.
- ²³ D. E. Fishman, *De boekensmokkelaars* (Amersfoort: Colibri, 2017) , transl. J. van den Berg & P. Dal, p. 100.
- ²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 165.
- ²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 110.
- ²⁶ *Ibidem*.
- ²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 104.
- ²⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 105-106.
- ²⁹ J. Borin, 'Embers of the Soul: The Destruction of Jewish Books and Libraries in Poland during World War II', *Libraries & Culture*, 28 (1993), pp. 445-460, there p. 454.
- ³⁰ *Ibidem*.
- ³¹ Benjamin, *Unpacking my library*, p. 67.
- ³² Rydell, *Foreword*, p. 215.
- ³³ *Ibidem*, p. 217.
- ³⁴ Borin, *Embers*, p. 447.
- ³⁵ Fishman, *De boekensmokkelaars*, p. 293.
- ³⁶ Rydell, *Foreword*, p. 223.
- ³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 224.
- ³⁸ Borin, *Embers*, p. 456.
- ³⁹ To illustrate the scale of destruction: according to research, 70 per cent of all books in Poland were destroyed or lost during the war; public libraries and schools lost over 90 per cent of their collections. (Rydell, *Foreword*, p. 197).
- ⁴⁰ Rydell, *Foreword*, p. 274.
- ⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 276; *Ibidem*, p. 270.

‘THEY HAVE WHOLE WORLDS INSIDE OF THEM’

A brief journey into the practice of book gift giving through history

Adele Pusiol has a BA in Cultural Heritage Studies and an MA in Historical Sciences. She is currently enrolled in the Book and Digital Media Studies MA programme at Leiden University.

This article analyses the practice of giving books as gifts through history, in Europe. It starts from the book as a ‘gift of power’ in the Merovingian and Carolingian time, going through the presenting of books amongst scholars as signs of friendship and professional appreciation, the book as ‘public gift’, and the emergence of the early nineteenth-century genre of ‘gift books’, to eventually reach the present days and the dispute between eBooks and physical books in gifting habits peculiar to the period. Wealth, symbolism, the ability to convey messages: different aspects are taken into consideration, to try and give reason of why books have always been considered so appropriate for gifting.

Keywords: book symbolism; paper books; books as gifts; gift giving; eBooks



From an anthropological point of view, gifts seem to represent a fundamental part of existence: they have been described as the ‘cement of social relationships’, and countless are the reasons that lead people to donate to those around them.¹ Gifts, however, are not as neutral as they may appear:

they symbolise some of the qualities of both giver and receiver, and each of them is actually an action conveying some meaning.² In this perspective, it is highly interesting to consider how books have been deemed suitable gift material throughout history. If gifts are so symbolically charged, what does the gifting of books say about givers

and receivers? But, above all, what is the value attached to them, aside from their material worth, that makes them so appropriate for gifting? How did the practice of giving books as presents evolve? Has the value attached to them reached us unchanged, or has it transformed through time? This article will try to offer a brief overview of book gift giving through history, and some considerations on the value represented by the paper object, which still makes it such a great present.

First of all, it is necessary to clarify that – as long as the past is concerned – it is possible to identify a gift as such thanks to external cues, such as letters or journals, but also from indications within books themselves, caught in bindings, flyleaves, or title pages. Obviously, that is no simple task, since gifts – especially those made within households – did not leave as many traces as economic transactions did.³ During the Merovingian and Carolingian times, for example, only ‘unbalanced’ gift giving made it into the records, that is gifts that spoke of power relations; it is interesting to note how, along with horses, weapons, and jewels, precious books were listed within those ‘gifts of power’.⁴

‘Books,
especially
sacred ones,
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They were holy
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content they
carried.’

In the Middle Ages, in fact, books were often rich gifts exchanged amongst rulers and members of both lay and ecclesiastical elites. An example of this practice is the so called Vivien Bible, a lavishly illustrated manuscript presented, in 846, to King Charles the Bald by Count Vivien, the lay abbot of St. Martin of Tours.⁵ This book, also called the ‘First Bible of Charles the Bald’, was one of the enormous, one-volume Bibles produced in the *scriptorium* of Tours, massive and beautifully decorated; it had been given to the King soon after Count Vivien had received his abbacy, and therefore was meant as a sign of gratitude and loyalty.⁶ On a similar note, but with reversed actors, also kings could donate rich books to favourite monasteries and churches, in a gesture that signified patronage.⁷ It is easy, here, to figure out how the focus was on the

wealth of the gifts (finest parchment, ornate handwriting, precious bindings, etc.), but this does not diminish the interest sparked by them being books, chosen for their opulence as well as for their symbolic meaning, which – considering that they were usually of a religious kind – connected them to faith and protection. This fluttering between wealth and symbolism can be visualised even better if one takes a step back in time.

During the 8th century Anglo-Saxon missions to spread Christianity in the Frankish Empire, precise conventions existed for what concerned gift giving between the Anglo-Saxon Church and its missionaries. It was a well-defined ritual inserted in the wider picture of a society in which the ritualistic exchange of precious gifts played a major role in the creation and strengthening of social relations.⁸ Nevertheless, despite their being fundamental to the mission, books seem to have been evading the strict cage of that ritual: gift giving and book giving did not share the same 'ritual discourse', one that required senders to show 'conventional modesty' concerning what they were presenting.⁹ The first explanation that comes to one's mind is of an economic kind: as books were not at all cheap, presenting them in the required way would have meant belittling their value; many of the traditional gifts exchanged in the same context, however, were precious, costly items, no matter how humbly presented.¹⁰ Another explanation is to be found in the conceptualisation of the gift as symbol. As certain members of the Church strongly disdained material wealth, when exchanging precious gifts, they always treated them – and begged others to treat them – just as symbols of loyalty and affection; but books, especially sacred ones, were not mere symbols and could not be treated as such. They were holy in themselves, like relics, by virtue of the content they carried.¹¹

In addition to that, books had also an 'advantage' over traditional gifts, in that they could explicitly

convey a message: this was the case, for example, with books gifted by city governors to monarchs and high officials, which could expressly carry the message of the hoped-for reforms or actions that the city was expecting from its rulers.¹²

A different context, one in which it is not curious at all to find gifts of books, is that of an intellectual milieu. In 1359, for example, Giovanni Boccaccio, one of the most relevant poets and writers of the Italian Middle Ages, moved to Milan in order to pay visit to his good friend and mentor Francesco Petrarca. To thank him for the hospitality Petrarca was offering him, Boccaccio brought him a copy of Dante's *Divina Commedia*. This, however, was not the first copy of the book Boccaccio gave Petrarca (he had already sent him one in 1351), and, surely, it was not the only book they gifted each other. Those interactions fit in a larger network of book lent, borrowed and, obviously, gifted amongst scholars of the time, who were extremely interested in showing each other the newest discoveries on the subject of antique and classical literary works.¹³ In this environment, gifted books were tokens of friendship, gratitude, and embodiment of communal interests shared amongst kindred spirits. Some gestures, nevertheless, stand out for their thoughtfulness and affection; one of those, for example, is represented by the small, compact breviary gifted by Francesco Nelli, a Florentine notary, to Petrarca: Nelli had it made specifically for him after the poet's brief stopover in Florence while on his way to Rome. The notary, in fact, had noticed how the

breviary Petrarca owned looked too heavy in the hand of a pilgrim, and wanted something to make him more comfortable.¹⁴

If in the early years of the Middle Ages, as mentioned above, manuscripts were considered suitable gifts amongst the members of the nobility, this does not seem to be the case anymore towards the end of the same historical period. In 1456, in fact, preoccupied with the customary New Year's gift to Charles VII on behalf of the Milanese Duke Francesco Sforza, the ambassador to the Valois court acknowledged how a manuscript would not suffice, and a horse had to be added.¹⁵ Books still featured as gifts in asymmetrical relationships, but with a totally reverse role than that held during the Carolingian era: no more as gifts of power, but rather as items that courtiers and people from lower social ranks could present to their superiors.

In this category of gifts to superiors, it is probably possible to also include those books which were given as 'public gifts', that is, dedicated to someone. In this context, the component of self-interest – of which gift giving is never completely free – is surely predominant. Gifts of this kind could be considered as a sort of investment: an author would gift a book to a person richer than themselves; in

exchange, the recipient would send back a gift of money and, through their reputation, would add to the importance of the work.¹⁶ That is the case, for example, with one of Erasmus' fellow scholars who, unable to sell his books, would make revenue by gifting them to important people instead.¹⁷ In this presenting of books to patrons, it is possible to see the faint shadow of what had always happened, for the longest of times; indeed, the difference with, for example, the gifting of the Vivien Bible is substantial: for one, Count Vivien was not an author actively trying to promote his work; moreover, his gift was meant as a thank you for something that he already had, and not for something that he had

hoped to receive. Nevertheless, it is not possible to completely overlook the fact that, with his lavishly decorated Bible, Vivien wished for good things to come as well. With the introduction of the printing press, things changed substantially, as more people started to dedicate books: not only authors anymore, but translators, printers, and publishers as well, all of them looking for patrons capable of helping them financially with

their endeavor.¹⁸ If already marred, the most profound meaning of the gift was here completely shattered, as books were picked for no other reason than they being what donors were trying to sell. Dedications,

**'Gifted books
were tokens
of friendship,
gratitude, and
embodiment
of communal
interests
shared amongst
kindred spirits.'**

however, did not completely cancel the poetry of gift giving: many works, in fact, were dedicated by literary men to their friends and colleagues as pure signs of friendship and professional appreciation;¹⁹ but since whole editions were gifted, at this point, instead of single items, this discourse is probably straying from the purpose of this article.

The printing press did not influence only the dedication of books, but their whole use as gifts in a wider sense: not only did the number of available reading material increase; in fact, so did the number of people who could read it. While in the Middle Ages the gift of books had been somehow restricted to rich people and scholarly settings, from the 16th century onwards, the habit of presenting books expanded. Books were exchanged between spouses, as is the case, for example, of Jean de Coras, a Protestant judge living in Toulouse, and his wife, to whom he gifted various volumes with the intent of her using them for her 'recreation' while waiting for him; gifts were also a way to have books circulate in the countryside, when there were no routes developed enough for the passage of peddlers.²⁰

The relevance of books as gifts can also be detected thanks to the emergence, around the beginning of the 19th century, especially in England and America, of a new, specific genre of books expressly called 'gift books'. Designed specifically as gifts (for example, they sported a page explicitly made to carry a dedication), usually containing miscellanies of prose and

verse, they were issued yearly for the holidays or for particular causes (for example, the 'anti-slavery gift books', created for, and sold during, anti-slavery fairs).²¹ Although, as already said above, the focus of this article is on people choosing to gift someone else a book, and the reasons behind that choice, and not on agents inextricably connected to books (in this case, publishers) intent on advertising their product, this specific kind of books had certain characteristics that make it relevant for the analysis at hand: it shows, for example, that sellers were catering to a habit of gifting books that was surely widely developed. Moreover, it is interesting to notice how they were not just 'normal' books advertised as great gifts for the holidays (a trend well developed on its own as well), but were items specifically crafted for this purpose.²²

As we approach the contemporary era, one cannot avoid mentioning the so-called *Jolabokafloð*, or 'Christmas Book Flood', the Icelandic tradition of giving each other books on Christmas Eve, and then spending the night reading.²³ Although Icelanders assure that they would never gift an eBook, this is undoubtedly something that has to be taken into account when considering book gift giving nowadays. For the first time in history, in fact, the paper book has a contender; nevertheless, the enemy does not seem to have an easy life. In the words of Cathy Langer, director of buying for Denver's Tattered Cover Book Store, in fact, although millions of households are equipped with eBook readers – and various seem to be the suggestions on

how to gift eBooks²⁴ – the paper book is still the preferred vehicle for gift giving.²⁵ Various reasons can be found. First of all, for example, it seems that eBooks feel too impersonal.²⁶ eBooks take away an additional layer of interest, which has been given to printed books throughout history by the possibility of them being second hand objects.²⁷ Moreover, print and paper have a ‘lasting value’, something that people want to gift.²⁸ Surely, it is possible to write a nice note on the email that informs a loved one of their newly received eBooks, but there is no way – at least for the time being – to make those words stick to the front page of that same eBook, thus robbing the recipient of the joy of reading them over and over again, at every opening of the cover, as it would be with a physical book.

Also, it has to be considered that the value of gifts is not the same as their economic value, but it is actually established by their users: in this case, by givers and receivers.²⁹ And the value attributed to books as

‘In gifting a book, the giver acknowledges the receiver as ‘worthy’ of the cultural value of the object, at the same time establishing their own worth.’

‘cultural objects’ influences the way they are perceived as gifts.³⁰ This affects both parts involved: in gifting a book, the giver acknowledges the receiver as ‘worthy’ of the cultural value of the object, at the same time establishing their own worth. In this perspective, gifting books is a ‘very strong, personal statement’.³¹

To conclude, it is possible to see how books have been considered as a great gift material throughout history, for many different reasons. Through time, the book has always retained a special, symbolic value, which is still attached to the paper object, even if the focus has shifted from a heavily sacred

symbolism to a level of mostly pure enjoyment, as books gifted nowadays are mainly thought for people to enjoy themselves, to reflect, to be moved. Books are gifted because ‘they have whole worlds inside of them. And it’s much cheaper to buy somebody a book than it is to buy them the whole world!’³²



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² C. Camerer, ‘Gifts as Economic Signals and Social Symbols’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 94 Supplement (1988), pp. S180-S214, there p. S182.

³ L. Purbrick, 'Wedding Presents: Marriage Gifts and the Limits of Consumption, Britain, 1945-2000', *Journal of Design History*, 16:3 (2003), pp. 215-227, there p.215.

⁴ F. Curta, 'Merovingian and Carolingian Gift Giving', *Speculum*, 81:3 (2006), pp. 671-699, there pp. 697-8.

⁵ R. McKitterick, 'Script and book production', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 221.

⁶ R. McKitterick, 'Charles the Bald (823-877) and His Library: The Patronage of Learning', *The English Historical Review*, 95:374 (1980), pp. 28-47, there p. 37; McKitterick, 'Script and book production', p. 221.

⁷ D. Pratt, 'Kings and Books in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 43 (2014), pp. 297-377, there p. 298.

⁸ J.W. Clay, 'Gift-giving and books in the letters of St Boniface and Lul', *Journal of Medieval History*, 5:4 (2009), pp. 313-325, there p. 314.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 323.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 324.

¹² N. Zemon Davis, 'Beyond the Market: Books as Gifts in Sixteenth-Century France', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 33 (1983), pp. 69-88, there p. 79.

¹³ G. Billanovich, *Petrarca Letterato* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1947), pp. 96-7.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 105.

¹⁵ B. Buettner, 'Past Presents: New Year's Gifts at the Valois Courts, ca. 1400', *The Art Bulletin*, 83:4 (2001), pp. 598-625, there p. 604.

¹⁶ Davis, 'Beyond the market', p. 73.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 69.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 74.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 77.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

²¹ K.F. Huff, *Printing friendship and buying feeling: exchange and gift books in the antebellum United States*, Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware (Summer 2012), p. 14.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 11 and ff.

²³ Treehugger, 'The beautiful Icelandic tradition of giving books on Christmas Eve', <<https://www.treehugger.com/culture/icelanders-give-books-christmas-eve.html>> (28 February 2018).

²⁴ Bookriot, 'How to gift a Kindle book (and five reasons why you should)', <<https://bookriot.com/2017/11/03/how-to-gift-a-kindle-book/>> (28 February 2018).

²⁵ Mediashift, 'Print Books Still Rule the Holidays: The Trouble With Gifting an E-Book', <<http://mediashift.org/2011/12/print-books-still-rule-the-holidays-the-trouble-with-gifting-an-e-book347/>> (28 February 2018).

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ WiseBread, '5 Reasons to Choose Traditional Books Over E-Books', <<http://www.wisebread.com/5-reasons-to-choose-traditional-books-over-e-books>> (28 February 2018).

²⁸ Mashable, 'Why Printed Books Will Never Die', <https://mashable.com/2013/01/16/e-books-vs-print/#WQ_m4WthT8qy> (28 February 2018).

²⁹ Purbrick, 'Wedding Presents', p. 215.

³⁰ P. Buckridge, 'Books as Gifts: The Meaning and Function of a Personal Library', *Australian Literary Studies*, 27: 3/4 (2012), pp. 1-14, there p. 12.

³¹ Shank, 'Print Book', n.pag.

³² Neil Gaiman.

PIETY, PRACTICALITY, AND PRECIOUS STONES

Decoding Symbolism of Girdle Books

Khrystyna Kernytska. Student of the Book and Digital Media Studies MA programme

A rare find these days, a girdle book, was once a powerful symbol of piety, status, and even fashion. The girdle book was one of the clever medieval book technologies that allowed it to be used anytime, anywhere. For monks and religious people, it was very convenient to have their breviary at work and on the road to have their 'hands free'. The travelling pious people also favoured keeping girdle books within reach and taking notes on the go.

Apart from being practical, the girdle book also symbolised religious devotion, knowledge and social status. For noble women it was a treasure to get a small book of hours or prayer book that they would wear on a golden chain or on their belt. It would demonstrate their literacy but also symbolise their status, fashion, and taste.

Keywords: *fashion symbol; female literacy; girdle books; Middle Ages; religious devotion*



For centuries, books have been changing shapes, scripts, and materials. They have been of a different significance, availability, and with a diverse use and readership. They represented wisdom and knowledge, piety, nobility, and a great deal of other things. Books have

always been used as symbols and medieval girdle books were not an exception.

Little known these days, the girdle book was one of the most innovative bookbinding inventions of the Middle Ages. The girdle book is a term used to

describe a bound book that can be hung from or by the girdle (belt). The distinguishing feature of this unique book format is its long extension of the leather cover along the lower edge of the book, held there by a large knob or hook incorporated into the overhanging leather.¹ A need for portable books of personal devotion, such as breviaries and prayer books, arrived with the increasing interest in pilgrimages and the founding of the mendicant religious orders, like the Franciscans. Girdle books were conveniently adapted for the use of clergy and monks to be carried around and consulted at any convenient time with the purpose of reciting their offices.² The girdle book was in production between mid-14th to mid-16th century and appeared to be common in the narrow area of the Netherlands and Germany, but examples from France, Spain, Italy, Scandinavia, and England are also seen.³

A dramatically small number of girdle books can be found these days. According to U. Bruckner, there are only 23 surviving copies⁴ accompanied by comprehensive visual documentation.⁵ Many have perished simply due to wear and tear and could not be preserved. It is believed, however, that many more may be

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And yet, it was a
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could fend off evil.'**

housed, unrecognised, in libraries and other repositories if the leather extension, for example, was removed to facilitate shelving. Fortunately, there are 813 known observations of girdle books represented in the visual arts including paintings, prints, painted altars, tombstones, and sculpture, most likely referencing 1450-1600 time period.⁶ Their popularity in art indicates a much wider distribution and adoption of the girdle book as binding, than surviving copies suggest. Thus, the wide range of extant depictions of girdle books will allow us to decode the symbols hidden inside them.

Medieval girdle book as a symbol of religious devotion

Girdle books most certainly were a powerful symbol of being pious and devout. The medieval girdle book was a convenient portable

device that was quite common among people associated with the church. According to visual and written sources, most owners or carriers of girdle books are biblical figures or clergymen with approximately a third (33%) of those being Apostles (John being the most prevalent).

Saints, monks, and nuns are also seen.⁷ The evidence of this is found in the Arts, where girdle books appear in the hands of different figures but are most frequently used as symbolical attributes of saints, the Virgin, the four evangelists, and apostles. Relying on the artwork, we can assume that religious figures fancied having their portable Bibles or prayers on them, for example on the ‘The Presentation of the Virgin Mary in the Temple of Jerusalem’ (1493), painted by German painter Hans Holbein the Elder (fig.1), or in ‘St John the Evangelist in Crucifixion with the Muller family’ (1462). Diehl mentions that monks ‘must have been consoled by the ever presence of their breviaries, made possible by the girdle book’.⁸

Monks, nuns, and other religious people had to read their prayers several times during the day as directed by their orders, and since they often worked outdoors and travelled between monasteries and convents, or on missions and pilgrimages, it was important to have the prayer book, breviary, or book of personal devotions always handy.⁹ This can be observed on the few studied paintings, altarpieces (*The Temptation of St Anthony* (Hieronymus Bosch, between 1500 and 1525). ‘s-Hertogenbosch, F. van Lanschot Collection (fig.1); The Apostles farewell from an altarpiece at the Franciscan church at Bozen (1495 – 1505); San Antonio Abad, *San Antonio Abad Ala of the altarpiece of Our Lady of the Conception* (preserved incomplete), Joos van Cleve c.1530-37, Agaete (Gran Canaria) and on one instant girdle book (A “girdle book” breviary, 1454, New York Public Library, New York Spencer Coll. MS 39).



Figure 1: *The Temptation of St Anthony* (Hieronymus Bosch, between 1500 and 1525). ‘s-Hertogenbosch, F. van Lanschot Collection.

One of the most distinct symbolic meanings of the girdle book can be observed in Hieronymus Bosch depiction of St. James the Greater— a pilgrim who carries two objects attached to his belt: a knife in a sheath, and his girdle book (St. James the Greater as pilgrim, *Last Judgement Triptych* (left outer wing), Hieronymus Bosch). Apparently, the book is of a great significance for St. James; despite the gloomy and threatening landscape, bent and weary, he still carries it in a conspicuous fashion. For pilgrims, their books might have been indispensable objects, with the same power as the St. James’ knife – to deal with evil and danger. The book is well protected with the leather overhanging the top edge and secured by the barely discernible clasp. On the picture in “The Breviary of Queen Isabella of Castile” (1497) used by the Dominicans, an old monk is holding a girdle book bound in the

green cloth in his hand instead of being attached to his girdle, as no belt can be seen on this illustration. For medieval religious travellers, girdle books provided easy portability, as well as protection against inclement weather, dust, or insects. Similarly, in the breviary, on a page displaying the month of May, Christ is raising His right hand in blessing and holding a girdle book with His left hand (Breviary, c. 1315-1325, Italy, Bologna. The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, MS M.0373 fol. 3r).

From the artworks examined, it becomes clear that the girdle book was a convenient format for members of religious orders, priests, clerics, and for nuns, in the form of breviaries, diurnals, and books of hours. And yet, it was a powerful symbol of their belief that the girdle book could fend off evil.

The earliest recorded date, 1454, is found in a manuscript breviary from the monastery at Kastl in Germany (A "girdle book" breviary, 1454, New York Public Library, New York Spencer Coll. MS 39). The latest date mentioned in a girdle book text is 1540 in the extraordinary manuscript containing the personal devotions and prayers of a Cistercian nun (Katharine Röder family crests and illustrated fly-leaves. Schweinfurt, Otto Schäfer Bibliothek, OS1233). On its fly-leaves Katharina Röder von Rodeck, member of an ancient aristocratic German family,

includes illustrations of her family's crests and in the first few pages also recalls her entrance into the convent, and records her parents' birth and death dates.¹⁰

Some of the depictions demonstrate dramatic scenes of saints being tormented by demons and in all of them they wear girdle books as a symbol of their belief in God and His ability to save and protect them. On

Schongauer's engraving, Saint Anthony gazes serenely out at the viewer as frenzied demons grab at his limbs, clothes, and hair, as they pound him with sticks and yet, his girdle book is on him (St. Anthony by Martin Schongauer, c. 1470-1475, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art). A similar illustration is that of Saint Catherine of Siena ("Saint Catherine of Siena Besieged by Demons", unknown artist, c. 1500. National

Museum, Warsaw, Poland).

It is noticeable, on some paintings, that the girdle book has served as a religious status symbol in addition to being of practical use. St John the Evangelist in Crucifixion with the Muller family (1462, Salzburg, Institut für Realienkunde) shows a girdle book hanging off the girdle on the right. We might also think that the girdle book owned by a religious person was mainly for personal use rather than preaching or teaching.

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Interestingly, there are two instances in the literature that demonstrate

the varied and contradictory views of girdle books as a symbol. Stressing the negative connotations of the ownership of girdle books, James Kearney points out that the Redcrosse Knight and Una describe Archimago in a quite malicious way.¹¹ In this example, the girdle book marries Archimago with the reformed iconography of the faithless papist and depicts him as either a '...hypocritical fraud or superstitious idolater'. On the contrary, in Acts and Monuments, the girdle book symbolises protestant faithfulness to the Word of God.¹²

It can be safely assumed that the majority of girdle books purely symbolised religious and devotional nature. Glauning offers significant statistics of figures carrying girdle books: apostles (89), saints (40), Saint Jerome (7), Saint Anthony (5), Saint Nicholas (3), priests ranging from prior to pope (31), and only fourteen women.¹³ However ambiguous these numbers are, they will not be taken into consideration in this essay, as a more recent inventory is required for more reliable reference.

Girdle books denoting female literacy and fashion

'Apart from practical use, girdle books were a powerful symbol depicted in the visual arts. Not only people connected to the church, but also rich medieval ladies and queens were avid users of their own unfolding and folding handy devices.'

In the late Middle Ages and early modern era, apart from being practical, girdle books also became fashionable in certain circles of society. Girdle books started to be used in female portraiture denoting piety, literacy, and also fashion. Books of prayers and devotions were written by, or for, lay persons, both men and women, for whom a girdle book might have served as a status symbol in addition to religious use.

Some of the girdle books, of course, were very plain, but there are some examples of highly

decorated girdle books with brass corner pieces, engraving, tooling, ornate fastenings and clasps, and even a coat of arms or other adornment in the centre of the cover (Philippa Rosewell with a girdle book. Artist unknown, 1592. Victoria and Albert Museum).

There is plenty of evidence found in the artworks, as well as in written documentation, that in the 16th century girdle books were worn and admired by noble women. They became quite fashionable among aristocracy, possibly brought

to England from Spain by Catherine of Aragon.¹⁴ According to H. Newman, a girdle book was a small devotional book, often bound within elaborately decorated gold covers, carried in the 15th-17th centuries by women of rank or wealth.¹⁵

Many historical sources seem to indicate that Elizabethan ladies and gentlemen were fond of carrying very small, almost miniature-sized books, often enamelled and decorated with precious stones on gold covers, containing portraits of their lovers, love poetry, or prayers.¹⁶

Based on the evidence studied we can assume that the girdle books in a tiny format were especially popular among some medieval queens. Queen Elizabeth I is said to have owned several such miniature books (fig.2: *“Elizabeth I When a Princess”, William Scrots ca.1546/47 Royal Collection*).¹⁷ Likely, Queen Elizabeth I herself and her mother Anne Boleyn might have been the initiators of this trend. These diminutive and richly decorated chained little objects, hanging from ladies’ necks or waists, were part of the Henrician fashion, fashion of Elizabeth’s formative years.¹⁸ It may be said that these tiny relics are signs of piety; however, they are also equally indicative of fashion and taste.

One of these precious artefacts is “Psalms in English verse” (c. 1540), one of the smallest manuscripts in the British Library’s collection (fig.3: *Portrait of Henry VIII, from Psalms in English Verse, metal girdle book South East England, c.*

1540, Stowe MS 956, ff. 1v-2r.). It has the illustration of King Henry VIII as the main decoration and is believed to have been owned by Anne Boleyn.¹⁹ Possibly, this holstered miniature book may have been worn on a necklace or girdle and is only slightly bigger than a modern postage stamp.

Another bright example of a highly decorative miniature girdle book from c. 1549 is a printed Prayer Book that is believed to be made by Hans von Antwerpen and presented to Queen Elizabeth I by the Lady Elizabeth Tyrwhit (*Girdle book, c.1540–1545, The British Museum, 1894,0729.1*).²⁰ It is bound into enamelled gold covers with suspension loops on the upper edges for use as a girdle book. The front cover of the binding depicts the biblical scene of “The Brazen Serpent” and the back depicts “The judgement



Figure 2: *“Elizabeth I When a Princess”, William Scrots ca.1546/47 Royal Collection.*



Figure 3: Portrait of Henry VIII, from *Psalms in English Verse*, metal girdle book South East England, c. 1540, Stowe MS 956, ff. 1v-2r.

of Solomon”, while the spine and two clasps are enamelled with Moresque. Additionally, there is a leather storage case.

More written literature indicates that all the Tudor queens owned books of devotion, many of which were described as “little” and thus may have been girdle books, which seem to have been admired mostly because of their elaborate bindings.²¹

Most girdle books were small, compact, and could easily fit into the reader’s hand. Their size varied from approximately 90 mm to 160 mm high, and up to 50 mm thick.²² It must be assumed that because of their small size, they were not heavy. This would also assure that they could be carried comfortably on the belt without unduly dragging it down. The depiction of a girdle book on “The Visitation” (The Visitation, c. 1480-1490, Institute for history studies of Middle Ages and Early Modern period, University of Salzburg), however, appears massive and thus raises the question: could this really have been carried or tucked into a belt?

Another proof of girdle book being a symbol of fashion and status is a luxurious exemplar of a book of note from Nuremberg, dating from 1471, with furnishings that carry the coat of arms of the Nuremberg patrician family of Kress (Girdle book from German National Museum in Nuremberg, GNM MS 17231).

Additionally, a few other illustrations depict girdle books used as attributes of ladies of rank, most likely to demonstrate their religious devotion (Portrait of Louise of Savoy as Sibylla Agrippa, Jacques Daret, [c.1404-1470] Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington D.C., HC.P.1923; illuminated fragment cut from an unidentified medieval book, *Newbury Library*, Special Collections 4th floor, Medieval Manuscript Fragment 65). Lastly, girdle books appear in the hands of Saint women, however, they are depicted in aristocratic outfit which most likely denotes a high status.

Despite the little number of extant girdle books and a scarce literature about them, based on the artworks and the historical sources found, we can decipher the girdle book’s symbol with success. Girdle books were the hottest technology in portable literacy - they hung upside down so that a monk or a noble lady could just pick their book up from where it hung on their belt or chain and start reading. Apart from practical use, girdle books were a powerful symbol depicted in the visual arts. Not only people connected to the church, but also rich medieval

ladies and queens were avid users of their own unfolding and folding handy devices. In most cases, girdle books would symbolise religiosity and devotion for both religiously devoted people and noble ladies. However, commonly in portraiture girdle books would denote not only religious inclinations, but also female learnedness, or simply fashion;

specially the elaborately decorated girdle books with gold, precious stones, and heraldic achievements, which depicted wealth and status.

The research is based on written sources, depictions of girdle books and few of the surviving objects in libraries around the world.



¹ M. Smith & J. Bloxam, 'The Medieval Girdle Book Project', *The International Journal of the Book*, 3:4 (2006), p. 4.

² E. Diehl, *Bookbinding: Its Background and Technique (Two Volumes Bound as One)* (New York: Dover Publications, 1980), p. 175.

³ J. Szirmai, *The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding* (Hants U.K, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999).

⁴ U. Bruckner, *Studien zum Buch- und Bibliothekswesen*, Beutelbuch-Originale 9 (1995): 5-23.

⁵ According to Margit J. Smith, there are twenty-six extant girdle books. Twenty-three are held in museums and libraries in Europe, three are in the United States. However, their current locations are not necessarily the place where they were made.

⁶ Szirmai, *The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding*, p. 236.

⁷ Diehl, *Bookbinding: Its Background and Technique*, p. 175.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ Smith & J. Bloxam, 'The Medieval Girdle Book Project'.

¹⁰ M. Smith, 'Anna, Katharina, Dorothea und Margarethe: Das Beutelbuch im Besitz von vier Frauen des Mittelalters', *EinbandForschung*, 24 (2009), pp. 11-22.

¹¹ J. Kearney, 'Enshrining Idolatry in The Faerie Queene', *English Literary Renaissance*, 32:1, (2002). pp. 3-30. (p. 11)

¹² Smith & J. Bloxam, 'The medieval girdle book project'.

¹³ O. Glauning, *Der Buchbeutel in der bildenden Kunst*. Deutscher Buchgewerbeverein, (Jahrgang, 1926). Band 63.

¹⁴ H. Newman, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Jewelry: 2,530 Entries, Including Definitions of Jewels, Gemstones, Materials, Processes, and Styles, and Entries on Principal Designers and Makers, from Antiquity to the Present Day* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p. 231.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Smith & J. Bloxam, 'The Medieval Girdle Book Project'.

¹⁷ Some sources claim that the portrait depicts Queen Elizabeth I with one of her girdle books; others say she is just holding it.

¹⁸ P. Collinson, *Elizabethans* (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2003), pp. 92-93.

¹⁹ E. Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), p. 406.

²⁰ H. Ostovich & E. Sauer (eds.), *Reading Early Modern Women: An Anthology of Texts in*

Manuscript and Print, 1550-1700, (New York & London: Routledge, 2004), p. 471.

²¹ R. M. Warnicke, *Elizabeth of York and Her Six Daughters-in-Law: Fashioning Tudor Queenship, 1485-1547* (Springer, 2017), p.100.

²² Smith, & J. Bloxam, 'The Medieval Girdle Book Project'.

KEEPING THE DUTCH PRINTED HERITAGE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

The acquisition of a 'unique' printed book from The Hague¹

Marieke van Delft. Curator Early Printed Collections at KB - National Library of the Netherlands

One of the tasks of a national library is to collect and keep the national printed heritage of a specific country. In this article the author discusses how this is managed for early modern imprints (books up to 1801) in the KB | National Library of The Netherlands. Through the acquisition of a very rare book – Humphrey Bland, Eene verhandeling over de militaire discipline (The Hague 1740) – she demonstrates how the Short-Title Catalogue Netherlands (STCN) and other national and international catalogues help to identify unique copies. These should be acquired to keep the Dutch printed heritage available for future generations.

Keywords: collection retrieval; early print; heritage; KB; libraries



The Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB) in The Hague is the national library of the Netherlands. National libraries have many tasks on a national library level. They coordinate activities in the library world in a specific country, make sure that all libraries cooperate, design library strategies in

a developing world, establish national and international networks and collect a country's national heritage in printed and, nowadays, also in electronic form. In the Netherlands, the situation with regard to that last task is exceptional. Almost all countries have adopted a law to regulate legal deposit, establishing by law that of

every printed book, one or more copies must be sent to the national library.² Countries such as France and Britain have had a legal deposit since 1537 and 1610 respectively.³ The Netherlands is missing from the lists of countries with a legal deposit because it does not have one. Since 1974, the Netherlands does, however, have a voluntary deposit. Publishers are encouraged to send books to the KB, where they are kept for eternity – at least, that is what we would like. So almost all publications published in the Netherlands since 1974 are kept at the KB. But what about the ones published before that date? Are these available at the KB as well?

The national printed heritage of the Netherlands

The answer to this question is a clear ‘no’. The KB was established in 1798, when the collections of stadtholder William V, who had fled to England because of the revolution of the Patriots, were confiscated to become a library for the government. He had collected a library for his own use and his aim had not been to collect every book printed in The Republic. Neither did the early librarians of the KB try to acquire a copy of every book that came on the market. From this, it can be concluded that the KB does not hold a copy of every publication printed in the Netherlands up to 1974.

Since the Netherlands is a small country, this is not a very big problem. Researchers can easily travel to other research libraries in the country to study unique

books. Especially since all books printed in The Netherlands up to 1800 are described in the Short-Title Catalogue Netherlands (STCN). This bibliography was started in the 1980s and new titles are still added to it every day. At the moment, about 210,000 books in 600,000 copies kept in public collections in the Netherlands and abroad, have been described in this bibliography of the early modern period (up to and including 1800).⁴ The STCN can guide researchers looking for a specific book, but curators of rare books and librarians developing their collection can also use the STCN to find out if an early modern book on offer is already available in a public heritage institution in the Netherlands. Research libraries tend to have a defined focus area. In general, university libraries acquire books printed in the town where their university is based. Thus, Leiden University Libraries buy Leiden imprints, Amsterdam University Library Amsterdam imprints, the KB The Hague imprints, etc.

Most libraries have one or more specific fields of interest. Leiden, for example, is very strong in publications of and about the Dutch Revolt, the KB and Amsterdam both collect almanacs, the KB is strong in travel journals, occasional writings, pamphlets, and official publications. Moreover, the KB has the additional task of acquiring publications that are not collected by other Dutch major libraries, and for this task the STCN is indispensable. This latter task is increasing since more and more libraries have decided not to invest in the expansion of their

heritage collections. For instance, Utrecht University Library and the heritage collection of the former Stadsbibliotheek Haarlem (now in the Noord-Hollands Archief) no longer regularly acquire early printed books. They curate their heritage collections and prioritize investing in digitization and supplying researchers with modern digital and printed books and journals. This is also a priority of the KB, but besides that, the KB wants to keep our shared heritage for future generations. As a curator of the KB, I therefore try to find unique Dutch imprints at auctions, in antiquarian bookseller's catalogues and on the Internet, acquire them for the KB and add them to the national printed heritage of the Netherlands, where they will also be made available in digitized form. And newly acquired books are, of course, also described in the STCN. According to the STCN, in 2017, the KB acquired, through purchase and donations, 66 unique copies i.e. copies not present in the collection of one of the libraries described by the STCN. Hereafter I will discuss one of them.

'The KB has the additional task of acquiring publications that are not collected by other Dutch major libraries, and for this task the STCN is indispensable. This latter task is increasing since more and more libraries have decided not to invest in the expansion of their heritage collections.'

A Dutch translation of Humphrey Bland, A Treatise of Military Discipline

On the 1st of October 2017, I visited the Amsterdam International Antiquarian Book & Map Fair at the Marriott Hotel in Amsterdam.⁵ More than 40 antiquarian booksellers from the Netherlands and abroad offered a wealth of beautiful books for sale. Walking around one gets overwhelmed by the number of rare, special, unique, and wonderful books. Some of the precious books at offer I knew very well, such as the splendid book on wood by Martinus Houttuyn and Jan Christiaan Sepp, or the description of the East and West Indies by Joris van Spilbergen and Jacob Le Maire. I checked other interesting books in the KB catalogue, the STCN and the national library system Picarta. Most of the books I checked were either already in the KB, or in another Dutch library.

Then I came across a book in a simple parchment binding by an author I did not know: Humphrey Bland.⁶ It has almost 600 pages and contains some folding illustrations. A common bulky book, which I expected to be present

in some of the Dutch libraries, but it turned out that none of them owns a copy of this edition. It even has a The Hague imprint and I decided to buy it for the KB, thereby adding it to the national printed heritage kept in Dutch public collections.⁷

It is remarkable that no copy of this book was present in any of the Dutch libraries whose collections are described in the national library systems Picarta and the STCN.⁸ It is a Dutch translation of Bland's treatise on military discipline, originally published in 1727 in London and Dublin. The author Humphrey Bland was an army officer born in Ireland in 1685/6, who served in the army from 1704 to 1756.⁹ He was stationed in the Low Countries during the War of the Spanish Succession (1710-1714) and was wounded at the Battle of Almenara (1710). In the introduction of his book he states that he used his own experiences to write this treatise, in order to educate a new generation of soldiers that had not yet had the chance to participate in wars. Bland's conviction was that the most important characteristic of a successful army is discipline, and that idea constitutes the core of his treatise. In a very structured manner, in 20 chapters divided into several articles, Bland treats all aspects of the army. He describes exercises, how to handle weapons, how to attack, how an army should be commanded, how soldiers should run watch, and so on. Six folding illustrations support his text. The treatise was very popular and reprinted many times: in 1734, 1740, 1743, 1746, and 1753. After that, two revised editions by Sir William Fawcett were published in

1759 and 1762.¹⁰

Two booksellers and printers from The Hague, brothers Ottho and Pieter van Thol, published the Dutch translation of the work. The Van Thols were an important printers' family of The Hague. Father Pieter (I) van Thol started his business around 1690. From 1730 Ottho joined the firm and the father's position was later taken over by Ottho's brother Pieter (II) van Thol. The brothers worked together from 1739 up to 1755; they then decided to split the firm and each continued on his own.¹¹ At the time, many booksellers in The Hague published in French, but the Van Thols focused on Dutch works. The translation of Bland's book fits perfectly in their publications' list. In his preface the translator states that the publishers decided to have the treatise translated and published because no such work existed in Dutch and they thought that many officers would benefit from it. The STCN shows that a book on military discipline did indeed not exist at that time. But from 1590 onwards, a number of official publications (*artikelbrief*) on military discipline was produced. Still, the book must have been very useful for officers and must have been used in the army. It is, therefore, remarkable that no copy could be found in the major libraries of the Netherlands.

Lessons from this book

Army men will have learned many lessons from this book, but we can also extract some lessons from the acquisition of this copy. First of all, although the STCN

strives to describe all publications ever published in the Netherlands, the STCN is not complete and never will be because some books have disappeared. Over time, some books were heavily used, got worn out, and were eventually thrown away. The STCN worked in all major libraries in the Netherlands, but as we have seen these libraries do not keep a copy of every book published. The curators of these libraries try to expand their collections with unique copies and the KB has a special role in this and tries to complement the national heritage collection in public collections in the Netherlands by searching and acquiring copies of books not yet described in the national library catalogues of the Netherlands.

Another lesson is that unique might not be unique, since collections not described

‘Although the STCN strives to describe all publications ever published in the Netherlands, the STCN is not complete and never will be because some books have disappeared. Over time, some books were heavily used, got worn out, and were eventually thrown away.’

in these national catalogues may hold another copy of such a book, as we saw with the book of Bland.

Cataloguers of the STCN still travel around in the Netherlands to describe books in collections not yet included in the STCN, but their number is limited – only two part-time bibliographers at the moment. The acquisition of this book shows that the work must go on to get a good overview of the national printed heritage in The Netherlands. And we should also look abroad. The Netherlands was once “the bookshop of the world”. Books printed in the Netherlands are found in libraries worldwide, from Sweden to Salamanca and from Saint Petersburg to New York. These collections also need to be searched for Dutch imprints and the KB is envisaging projects to make this happen. The work never stops.



¹ With thanks to Marja Smolenaars for editing the English of this article.

² For an overview of countries with a legal deposit, see: Wikipedia, ‘Legal deposit - Wikipedia’, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_deposit> (30 January 2018).

³ Larivihre, *Guidelines for Legal Deposit Legislation: a revised and updated edition of the 1981 publication by Dr. Jean LUNN* (Paris: UNESCO, 2000), p. 6.

⁴ For information about the STCN, see: KB, ‘Short-Title Catalogue, Netherlands (STCN) |

Koninklijke Bibliotheek' <www.kb.nl/en/organisation/research-expertise/for-libraries/short-title-catalogue-netherlands-stcn> (1 February 2018).

⁵ For this fair, see: Amsterdam International Antiquarian Book & Map Fair; 'Home – Amsterdam International Antiquarian Book & Map Fair', <amsterdambookfair.net/home/> (1 February 2018); UvA, Reinder Storm, 'Blogs UvA Erfgoed - Antiquarian Book Fair 2017', <<http://www.blogs-uva-erfgoed.nl/antiquarian-book-fair-2017/>> (1 February 2018).

⁶ H. Bland, *Eene verhandeling over de militaire discipline; in welke de plicht van officiers en soldaaten, in de verscheide graden van den krygsdienst, te needergesteld en verklaard is*. Translated after the 2nd edition by Gerard Westerwyk (The Hague: Ottho en Pieter van Thol, 1740). Now: The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KW GW A113898.

⁷ WorldCat gives three other copies worldwide: Skokloster Slott Library (Sweden), Zurich, ETH-Bibliothek (Switzerland) and Zürich, Landesbibliothek (Switzerland).

⁸ It turned out later that there is a copy in The Netherlands, in the Nationaal Militair Museum. This collection is not yet catalogued in collaborative systems. With thanks to Marja Smolenaars.

⁹ J.A. Houlding, 'Bland, Humphrey (1685/6-1763)', in H.C.G. Matthew & B. Harrison (eds.), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 6. (2004), pp. 158-160. With more references.

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 159.

¹ See: E.F. Kossmann, *De boekhandel te 's-Gravenhage tot het eind van de 18^{de} eeuw* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1937), pp. 395-404. The book is listed on p. 404.

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Adele Pusiol

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The acquisition of a “unique” printed book from The Hague’

Marieke van Delft

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MATERIALITY

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

The many shapes of the printed book

Mart van Duijn. Curator of Western Manuscripts and Archives, Leiden University Libraries. Board member Stichting Drukwerk in de Marge. Member editorial board Jaarboek van het Nederlands Genootschap van Bibliofielen. Member editorial board Yearbook for Dutch Book History.

Physical shape is very relevant for understanding the position of the printed book in this digital age. Compared to the greyish rectangle of most digital devices it offers a wealth of shapes, sizes and materials, and it actually offers something for everyone. It is this aspect that contributes to the resiliency of the printed book in a time in which many have predicted its end.

Keywords: book design; fine printing; printed book; reading devices; special editions



In this digital age, it seems the printed book has to withstand the force with which digital media are invading the market of books, and dominating information culture in society in general. In every showdown, actual, fictional, or predictive, it is the printed book that gets defeated by digital media. Comparing the two seems obvious, but what is being compared exactly? Sales figures of printed books and e-readers? Or the reading experience with different types

of media, which was, also, the subject of TXT magazine in 2015? Certainly not the physical shape of both objects, which, however, could be very relevant.

This edition of TXT is about the resiliency of the printed book in a time in which many have predicted its end. Again, this asks for a comparison between the printed book and digital media, this time focussing on what the printed book has to offer that digital media lacks. Inevitably, the

physical appearance of the printed book is the first that springs to mind. Although a text can take many shapes when shown on a digital device, even each time it's being shown to its readers – especially on tablets and smartphones –, the actual device itself is rectangular, in black, white, or space grey, and with a few buttons on the side. The book, however, comes in a multitude of shapes and sizes, printed on all kinds of paper, and with many different cover designs.

The impression is that the fixity of print is an obstacle for the book in a digital age where everything is constantly changing. This fixity suggests that the printed book cannot cope with ever-changing preferences, personal tastes, and fashion trends. For television, recently, the comparison between regular broadcasting and Netflix is often made. Netflix has an ever-changing offer, always in line with your own wishes and preferences. Of course, Netflix is based on algorithms that very precisely compute what films and series match with what you've been watching earlier. We obviously do not need to expect these high-tech strategies for the printed book, but the old-fashioned "something for everyone" still applies. And with that, we come into the wonderful world of book design and publishing strategies, with paperback and deluxe editions

and everything in between. And this, to my idea, is where the resiliency of the book is partly based on.

For example, the Harry Potter stories can be read on digital devices, such as tablets and e-readers, but they are still being published in print in many different kinds of editions. The first story, *The Philosopher's Stone*, is available as hardcover and softcover, as well as with illustrations by different artists. It is available as a single volume, but also as part of a box set with all the other stories in a similar design. Recently, celebrating the 20th anniversary of *The Philosopher's Stone*, a Gryffindor, Slytherin, Hufflepuff, and Ravenclaw edition appeared. Each edition features the individual house crest on the jacket and line illustrations exclusive to that house, and, also, has coloured edges in the house colours.¹

'The impression is that the fixity of print is an obstacle for the book in a digital age where everything is constantly changing.'

With special editions in different colours we touch upon the subject of fine printing: books in limited edition that are handprinted on paper, and sometimes even on vellum, in a special design. Some of the most famous examples are printed by The Kelmescott Press, founded by William Morris, and The Doves Press, both of which existed around 1900 in England. Both presses produced familiar texts, such as the works of Geoffrey Chaucer

and that of the Bible, but in very intricate designs and printed in the highest quality.² Although the quality of The Kelmscott Press and The Doves Press is hardly ever matched, this kind of publishing is still done today.³ Some of these books are seen as art objects. With books as art objects, it's exactly the shape that makes it stand out from everything else, such as the book designs by Dutch book artist Irma Boom.

The diversity in editions and accompanying shapes is not restricted to Harry Potter, or modern books in general. This is a characteristic that printed books have always had, from the invention of printing onwards. A diversity in editions seems obvious for a historical text, as every publisher might have had different ideas on how to market a certain text – just take a look at the publishing history of some of the classics –, but also within an edition, there may be elements that result in different appearances. An example is the Delft Bible, containing the Old Testament but excluding the Psalms, and which was printed in Delft, in

1477. The text was printed spread over several different composition-units, each consisting of a certain number of quires containing specific Bible books, which could be arranged as wished. The result was that one and the same edition could be shaped into different types of copies.⁴ Another historical example is the catalogue *Museum Catsianum*, which was first published in 1870 and was meant to describe the collections on Jacob Cats, by the collector Willem Cornelis Mary de Jonge van Ellemeet. It was published in several different bindings: paper covers, board, linen, and parchment. It was not advertised as such, but these different bindings are evident from the archival sources on the publishing history of this particular catalogue.⁵

To conclude, one of the aspects that contributes to the resiliency of the printed book in this digital age is its physical appearance, with which it beats the greyish rectangle of most digital devices, and, in this respect, offers something for everyone.



¹ To get an idea of the diversity in Harry Potter editions, just search for 'Harry Potter' on Amazon.com.

² See C. de Wolf & P. van Capelleveen, 'De opkomst van de private press', in: C. de Wolf & P. van Capelleveen (eds.), *Het ideale boek: honderd jaar private press in Nederland 1910-2010* (Nijmegen: Uitgeverij Vantilt, 2010), pp. 19-43, there pp. 22-24.

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‘OH LOOK, A FERRY’

Or The Smell of Paper Books

Beth Driscoll & Claire Squires. Senior Lecturer in Publishing and Communications at the University of Melbourne & Professor in Publishing Studies at the University of Stirling

One of the ways in which people express bookishness is through a declaration of love for ‘the smell of books’, a phrase that evokes nostalgic attachment to print. Rather than accepting, critiquing, or deconstructing this familiar rhetoric, our research proposes a non-traditional response. As researchers, when people have brought up the smell of books, we have redirected the conversation by gesturing towards ferries. The diplomatic non-sequitur ‘Oh look, a ferry’ has become a catchphrase that we have extended metaphorically and literally. In this paper, we report on a range of arts-informed experiments, including a YouTube channel, pyjamas, and a manifesto. These creative, playful experiments suggest ways of expanding discussions about print and e-books amongst academia, industry and members of the public. Our research suggests that arts-informed experiments can produce tools for thinking about the materiality of books, thereby contributing towards the development of book culture epistemologies.

Keywords: *bibliosma; book culture; bookishness; materiality; print books*



‘I’ll drown my book’

The Tempest, William Shakespeare

PART A: Salt Spring Island

Crossing the strait between Vancouver Island and Salt Spring Island in June 2017 following the annual Society for the History of

Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP) conference, the two authors of this article, both researchers in contemporary publishing studies, fell into a conversation with a stranger.

‘What I really love,’ the woman said,
‘is the smell of books.’

‘Oh look, a ferry,’ one of us replied.

This diplomatic non-sequitur has since become something of a catchphrase in our research.

PART B: The Smell of Books

The smell of books, or bibliosmia, is a cipher. It is a popular shorthand for a nostalgic attachment to print books that invokes a (possibly imagined) olfactory memory. As with all forms of nostalgia, an expression of love for the smell of books usually involves looking backwards to how things used to be, and a desire to return to that state. It’s a bittersweet longing to preserve an older way; in this case, an older way of interacting with books. The idea of the smell of books comes up quite often in media articles about the rise/decline of print books/e-books. A thoughtful example is a 2016 article in the *Huffington Post*, titled ‘Why I Still Love Printed Books’.¹ The author, Lev Raphael, lists a number of reasons for his preference for print over e-books, concluding with the immersive sensory experience offered by print objects: ‘I love the smell and weight and feel of a book.’

‘As with all forms
of nostalgia, an
expression of
love for the smell
of books usually
involves looking
backwards to
how things used
to be.’

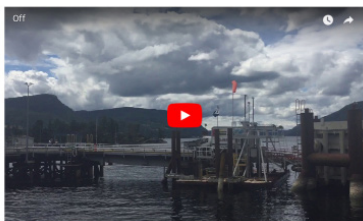
Googling ‘the smell of books’, though, doesn’t take you straight to such pieces of cultural journalism. The smell of books has become its own commodifiable property — a trope that can be invoked to badge oneself as a book lover. There are discussion boards about the smell of books on Goodreads and LibraryThing, human interest pieces about the science of book smell on websites, and reams of merchandise, mostly perfumed, including candles, eau de toilette, and an aerosol with which to spray an e-reader.² Such merchandise represents a commitment to the objectness of the book and its status as quirky, personal and material rather than digital. Expressing fondness for the smell of books, either in words or through purchasing decisions, is a performance of bookishness.³

PART C: Anecdotes

Rather than accepting, critiquing, or deconstructing this mode of engagement with book culture, our research proposes a non-traditional, arts-informed response. Following experimentations with a series of book festival card and board games in our article ‘Serious Fun: Gaming the Book Festival’, we are pursuing creative, playful and material forms of exploring and re-directing discussions about print books amongst

academia, industry and members of the public.⁴ For this investigation, our series of experiments begins with this question: is the comment 'Oh look, a ferry' really unrelated to the smell of books? No. Because ferries turn out to be linked to print books in all sorts of ways. Ferries can, we argue, be seen as metaphors. We have explored this idea through a YouTube channel, featuring two short films of things getting on and off of ferries.⁵

Are the things getting on and off ferries—lorries laden with logs, cars carrying commuters—metaphors for books, which are also material objects that do the work of conveying? At a meta level, our contemplative, meditative videos are acts of digital communication that reference practical tasks, logistics and material challenges. The thoughts prompted by a metaphorical consideration of ferries and books lead to more extended engagements, in which we also explore how ferries are literally relevant to book objects; ferries and books are both inside and outside



each other. Books may be transported or read on ferries, and other aquatic vessels. Books are also published about boats. Books meet watery deaths.

i) Books Afloat

Charles Darwin and Captain Fitzroy had a library on the Beagle during their round-the-world voyage.⁶ Cruise liners would have ship's libraries, in times of old. The QE2, for example, had over 6000 volumes on board, as commemorated by an Isle of Man postage stamp.⁷ We have ourselves pleasingly arranged books along the shelf of a tightly packed canal boat; or turned to an e-reader when baggage weight was a concern. But when things go bad at sea, reading on the waves takes a turn. Raging storms, an overbearing ship's captain, even a mutiny. In our childhood reading, the Lost Boys are threatened by Captain Hook with walking the plank while Wendy watches aghast, lashed to the mast; Billy Bones tells 'dreadful stories' of plank walking and storms at sea in *Treasure Island*; and the Swallows and Amazons make their 'Captain Flint' walk the plank, in piratical homage.

Books fall in the water. Pages swim in the sea. An electric charge bolts through the ocean. The tide waxes and wanes with the moon.

ii) 21st Century Seamanship

Some visiting speakers come to talk to students learning about publishing. They work for the nation's oldest publisher, producing guides for the marine industry. They don't have the glamour of trade

publishers with their stories of launch parties and canapés. Instead they speak of precision and regulation, the importance of editorial control and house style, literally a life-and-death matter at sea. Their titles use laminate pages, fold flat with spiral binding, have maps which open out across the ship's bridge. They show us a manual which details berthing for commercial ports around the world (how to park your boat, for the non-specialist). It's also available as an e-book. (This is definitely not a stupid product.)⁸ They tell us about unauthorised copies of their content circulating on the web, and take-down notices served to an amenable Russian pirate.

At the end of the session they give out branded pens and mints. One of us gets the cardboard box in which the goodies were stored. It advertises a new title, *21st Century Seamanship*.

Later, the box turns into a boat, with a whisky bottle box for its funnel. The cat gets into the box. She dreams of mince and slices of quince.

iii) It's Like Drowning Kittens

We're on a trip. The life cycle of book production. First, we're at a printers. Books roll off the presses: school textbooks, novels, political biographies, picture books. Gilt-edged covers, special effects. Digital presses, the smell of glue and the guillotine. Hope and aspiration in the hundreds of thousands.

Goods in. Despatch.

Next we go to the book distribution warehouse. Carefully stacked and stocked, metres high, forklift trucks finding the right pallet, moving and shipping it out to bookshops around the country. Slow-moving books, gathering dust. Overstock.

Out the back in the yard, we're shown a container of books, surplus to requirements. 'What will happen to them?' someone asks.

The warehouse manager shakes his head. 'Pulping,' he says.

'Oh no!' she replies. 'It's like drowning kittens.'

A publisher liquidates. Its books are pulped. Dead books, dead Kindles.⁹

PART D: Ferry Pyjamas

In happier times, everyone likes curling up with a good book. Or lying with it on the beach, sun tan cream and sand smearing its pages. Or maybe in the bath, steam rising, curling the pages. This intimacy is precious. But also potentially dangerous. To reader and to book.¹⁰

For our research, we have built upon these thoughts, experiences and reflections to develop some experiments with Bookish Boats, and Boat(ish) Books. In our first extended attempt to consider 'Oh Look, a Ferry' and its relationship to books and reading, we wondered: what might it be like to curl up in bed with a good book and some ferry pyjamas? So we took the following steps:

1. An internet search for ferry fabric.
2. We were not satisfied with the results.
3. Next, realising we could get custom-digital printed fabric, we decided to self-publish.
4. Using our favourite ferry picture—the Stornoway boat coming into Ullapool—we manipulated it using a web picture editor.
5. We uploaded some of the images to a digital fabric printer.
6. We waited for the samples.
7. The samples came through the post.
8. We elicited opinion face-to-face and via social media about the best design.
9. Members of our focus groups requested ferry pyjamas.
10. We ordered some more samples.
11. The new samples came through the post.
12. We ordered fabric.
13. To be continued.

This experiment is, as yet, only partially actualised. The sewing machine awaits.

PART E: Do Books Float?

Our most thorough experiment on books, boats and materiality had two aims: to expand material experiences of the book (beyond holding or smelling it), and to investigate how it feels to destroy a book in a playful and aesthetically pleasing way. We developed the following method:

1. Rip pages from book.
2. Fold a page (into origami shapes if desired) and place in water (first tub of water, then nearby fishpond). Assess if page floats or sinks.
3. Place an unfolded page from book in water. Assess if page floats or sinks.
4. Place the rest of the book itself in water. Assess if book floats or sinks.

Before this method could be followed, materials needed to be assembled. The most important step was choosing a book. A large number of books that we own were eliminated from consideration, because they were needed for other purposes (for example, reading). We roamed the corridors of our workplaces and asked our colleagues for discarded books. However, many of these were contemporary novels and poetry. We decided not to publicly destroy a living author's work. A colleague suggested we might also want to stay away from any holy book.

As a last resort, we examined our own office shelves. One of us had an old copy of *Moby Dick*, which instantly felt like the right book object for the experiment. It is an old edition (circa late 1990s) and the print is tiny, blurry and nearly unreadable. In fact—confession—this particular book is unread. One of us prefers e-books for long, classic books that are unwieldy to hold and usually aren't nicely typeset. (Note that neither of us was prepared to sacrifice a Kindle for this experiment). Besides these practical considerations, the

experiment was about water, and *Moby Dick* is about whales and boats and unrealistic expectations. Having chosen the book, the steps outlined in the method were carried out.



The experiment yielded several key findings. First was our experience of shock on destroying a book. This, we imagine, is how the woman on the ferry might have felt if she tore a page out of a classic novel. There is a reverence surrounding the book object, particularly for those (like ourselves) who were brought up in the aspirational middle-class.¹¹ As academics in publishing studies, we can critique this reverence, but it is still part of us. Desecrating books for the purposes of art and scholarship—drowning them, even just annotating them—requires confidence born from the possession of significant cultural capital. Acceptable middlebrow ways of handling the material object of the book sit within defined limits (holding,

smelling, collecting, arranging, alphabeticising) and extending this set of physical practices challenges deeply-felt cultural norms.

A second finding concerned the effect on the fish. As a bystander observed, fish are very sensitive to changes in their environment, including the addition of chemicals. This produced a moment of anxiety about research ethics. As it transpired, the fish were fine. However we were prompted to consider unexpected dimensions of the materiality of books—the chemicals in paper and glue.

Finally, we were struck by the prettiness of this experiment. Cutting up and folding book pages creates beautiful physical objects. Flicking through pages underwater feels lovely, especially when surrounded by the warm scented air of an Australian summer. The cover of the book stood up like a sail as the book slowly sank. The wet book was satisfyingly heavy. Handling the book object in this way was meditative and rewarding. As a result of this experiment, we are resolved anew not to dismiss lovers of the print book, but rather to continue exploring different aspects of the book's materiality.

PART F: Concluding Reflections Towards a Manifesto for Book Cultures Research

We have an abiding interest in the epistemology of book culture—how best

to understand and gain knowledge about the circulation of books in contemporary society, in ways that move beyond case studies and empirical data. Our make-and-do experiments are not designed to produce merchandise for Etsy stores or the Literary Gift Company; rather, we aim to create opportunities and prompts for thinking about the materiality of books.

Our research manifesto, which is still in development, is a way for us to set out some guiding principles.¹² Two of its eleven principles are 'Materiality' and 'Oh Look, A Ferry'. In this article, we've explained how those ideas intersect to generate new ways of looking at, touching, and perhaps even smelling books. Bon voyage.



¹ Huffington Post, 'Why I Still Love Printed Books | HuffPost', <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/lev-raphael/surprise-readers-still-lo_b_11844626.html> (24 February 2018).

² For examples, see <<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/smell-of-books>>, <<http://smellofbooks.com/>>, <<https://www.scienceabc.com/nature/why-do-books-smell-so-good.html>> and <<https://ebookfriendly.com/book-smell-perfumes-candles/>> (24 February 2018).

³ J. Pressman, 'The aesthetic of bookishness in twenty-first-century literature', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 48:4 (2009) <<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0048.402>>.

⁴ B. Driscoll & C. Squires, 'Serious Fun: Gaming the Book Festival', *Memoires du Livre/Studies in Book Culture*, 9: 2 (2018) <<https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/memoires/2018-v9-n2-memoires03728/1046988ar/>>

⁵ B. Driscoll and C. Squires, 'Ullapoolism: Things Getting On and Off of Ferries', <<https://ullapoolism.wordpress.com/2017/10/26/things-getting-on-and-off-of-ferries/>> (24 February 2018).

⁶ Darwin Day, 'The Books on the Beagle' <<http://darwinday.org/event/the-books-on-the-beagle/>> (21 February 2018).

⁷ The Telegraph, '50 Facts about the QE2', <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/cruises/articles/50-facts-about-the-qe2/>> (21 February 2018).

⁸ H. Gill, "'The Ebook Is a Stupid Product: No Creativity, No Enhancement,'" Says the Hachette Group CEO', *Scroll.in* <<https://scroll.in/article/868871/the-ebook-is-a-stupid-product-no-creativity-no-enhancement-says-the-hachette-group-ceo>> (21 February 2018).

⁹ The Bookseller, 'Freight Books' Creditors Owed Nearly £160k', <<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/freights-debt-amounts-160k-711921>> (23 February 2018). Freight Books was the publisher of, among other titles, *101 Uses of a Dead Kindle* (Adrian Searle and Judith Hastie, 2012).

¹⁰ S. Bollman, *Women Who Read Are Dangerous* (London: Merrell, 2008).

¹¹ See P. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993); B. Driscoll, *The New Literary Middlebrow: Tastemakers and Reading in the Twenty-First Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); J. Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste and Middle Class Desire*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

¹² B. Driscoll and C. Squires, 'Ullapoolism Manifesto', <<https://ullapoolism.wordpress.com/manifesto/>> (24 February 2018).

ARTIFACT, CRAFT, AND MEMORY

Recordness in Handmade Paper

Robert B. Riter. Assistant Professor in the College of Communication & Information Sciences at The University of Alabama (USA)

The reader of books formed with handmade papers engages with a record that offers evidence of ecology, practice, maker, and craft. The persistence of handmade paper, and of books formed by handmade papers, in an increasingly digital production environment is evidence of the continued valuation of these material narratives, and of paper itself as a text. This paper offers an artifactual discussion of handmade paper (within the context of functional books), placing emphasis on explicating its material narratives, evidential significance, and lastly, its function as a particular communicative form. An argument can be made that the continued presence of handmade paper, as craft, process, and object, is informed by an assignment of value to its material narratives, and the information and evidential elements that these express. Read archivally, these works are also valued for the material, craft, maker contexts that they can evoke.

Keywords: *artifactual; craft; handmade paper; material narratives; reading*



Handmade paper is often used in the formation of artist and fine press books. This form of paper is adopted because of the unique properties of its materials and the quality of the resulting sheets.

Particular expressions of paper, in terms of fiber and process, may be selected based on their aesthetic and sensory qualities.¹ Book artists that create their own paper as part of their creative practice may select fibers, and create particular forms of paper,

as a means of offering a specific experience or presentation affect.² While handmade paper, like machine made paper, captures and carries the inked impressions that mark a book copy's pages, its role and value extends beyond this architectural function. The character of the paper will inform how the page is perceived, how the printed material is displayed, and the physical sensation of navigating the book.

In these works, textual characteristics extend beyond the printed texts that they contain.³ The papers contain additional tangible and intangible texts. Narratives of fiber, process, infrastructure, knowledge, and the identity of the papermaker, are also present.⁴ These particular materials, evidential, and contextual texts coexist with the more immediately visible printed texts that rest on the paper. While hidden, they can be read.⁵ Focusing on these elements can assist us in considering definitions of evidence, information, and textuality.

It is difficult to discuss handmade paper generally. Each sheet, and its associated pages, will be informed by a unique combination fiber materials, pulp formation processes, craft practices, and particular craft of the papermaker.⁶ Sheets of paper that are seemingly similar, created by the same papermaker, composed of the same fibers, and formed by the same papermaking process, will be distinct. Each sheet is linked to a specific context; papermaking is an event. The geography or source of the fiber material, the environmental conditions on the day that the paper

was made, the specific tools used, and the expertise of the papermaker, will contribute to this variation.⁷ In contemporary books, handmade paper can be thought of in terms of its utilitarian purpose, but can also be appreciated in reference to these narrative elements. Associated with these texts is a memorial function. Handmade paper can read as a record. This is a record of geography, craft, individual expression of craft, and of process and practice. Handmade paper communicates texts that also operate as records.

This discussion offers an introduction to these textual and artifactual narratives. Here, emphasis is placed on drawing attention to how the material characteristics of handmade paper operate as inscriptions, which coexist with a book's printed text. These inscriptions provide access to an artifactual history. This history includes material composition, process, and the identity, skill, knowledge, and intentions of the papermaker. When perceived and read, these markings become texts, communicating narratives of an artifact, its associated craft practices, and the memory of its making.

Reading Handmade Paper

How can handmade paper be read? In books, the printed texts that appear on handmade paper are often the primary focus of reading. However, handmade paper contains multiple material narratives, which can also be purposely read. These narratives

are informed by the diversity of materials, tools, and practices that define this craft.⁸ The types of fibers, primarily plant material, used will affect the appearance and texture of paper.⁹ The particular practice, and its associated tools and processes, will also reveal itself. Papers created using Japanese (Washi), Korean (Hanji), and Western methods will exhibit distinct characteristics and communicate specific paper narratives.¹⁰ Similarly, as craft, the specific expression of the papermaker's practice, and of each sheet as an individual generative act, will also be reflected.¹¹

Reading these inscriptions requires varying degrees of expertise. Differences in fiber and practice can be appreciated by even the most novice reader of handmade paper.¹² An individual familiar with hand papermaking practices will be able to identify the particular fiber material, forming process, and paper expression.¹³ Contextual narratives may be less visible. The identity of the papermaker, and possibly the paper mill, is more difficult to read. This narrative will likely not be readily known unless specific paper evidence is available [a watermark, for example], or if secondary documentary evidence exists, such as a description of the paper in a book's colophon. Though specific identities might be unknown, characteristics and traits can be inferred. The expertise, knowledge, and skill of the papermaker can be observed.¹⁴

'Handmade paper provides for a sensory reading experience.'

Handmade paper is read visually and tactilely. Difference in texture and color can be read visually, allowing the reader to make inferences regarding the type of paper, its source materials, and processes of its generation. Texture can also be read through touch, with different forms and expressions of paper offering distinct sensory experiences. Knowledge of the fibers, processes, and craft can be acquired through observation and direct physical experience. Handmade paper provides for a sensory reading experience.

Textuality of Handmade Paper

Reflecting on how handmade paper can be read is helpful in identifying and understanding its textual characteristics.¹⁵ A carrier of texts [printed inscriptions], handmade paper consists of additional, less explicit, texts. These can be categorized as: material, infrastructural, process, and craft. These correlate to the primary elements of handmade paper. *Material* texts include the fibers that form the papers, their originating plants, and the context of their collection and processing. *Infrastructural* texts refer to the tools of papermaking. The presence of each sheet of paper is evidence of the tools that supported its creation; evidence of this context can be identified and read. *Process* texts correlate to the physical actions that support papermaking [gathering,

cooking, beating, agitating, pulling, couching, drying].¹⁶ And lastly, *Craft* texts refer to the specific practice of a papermaker evidenced in paper. This includes the associated knowledge, skill, intentions, goals, and creative practice that informed the work. This categorizing provides a method for considering the narratives of paper, and how they might be identified and read.

These four elements will express themselves uniquely in each book made up of handmade paper. Sheets made at the same point in time, from the same pulp, and by the same papermaker(s), will each be unique artifacts. Each sheet is the result a specific series of creative, physical, and environmental acts, which will be present in the books that they form. When handmade paper is read, it is through the perception and analysis of these material, infrastructural, process, and craft texts, and their unique textual characteristics.

Varieties of Inscription

How are these texts constructed? What is the nature of their associated inscription mechanisms? Handmade paper often exists first, as an idea.¹⁷ Concern with how it will be used, and the desired physical characteristics inform fiber selection, the processing of fibers, the creation of the pulp used in the forming the sheets, and the technique deployed in making the paper. If handmade paper is being purchased by an author, printer, or publisher, similar considerations of use and affect may

information a selection decision.¹⁸

Following the processing of the fiber material to create the pulp, sheets are formed through physical action. In Western style papermaking, paper is formed through dipping a mould and deckle into the vat containing the agitated paper pulp. As the water drains from the mould, the papermaker joins the fibers with a quick shake of the mould. Following this process, the paper is moved from the mould to a dry felt. The paper will then be pressed and dried.¹⁹ All of these actions, from the consideration of a paper's substance, to the physical acts of papermaking, mark the sheet, determining its final form.²⁰

Hand papermaking can be framed as a writing process that generates narratives. The paper pulp is the raw writing material of the sheets. Hand papermakers have experimented (and continue to experiment) with fiber materials, and cooking and crafting procedures to create paper with particular physical characteristics.²¹ Process also marks the page. In reference to form, the characteristics of paper will be influenced by tools used in the process [Western and Japanese style papermaking, for example, require different tools]. At an artefactual level, papers will reflect the specific tools used in their formation. A skilled reader of handmade paper can engage with this narrative, and by focusing on how evidence of process is captured, imagine and visualize the tools that contributed to a paper's creation. A papermaker's identity is similarly inscribed.²² As noted, specific

biographical information is difficult to determine, unless supported by documentary evidence, or if already known to the reader. However, papers will reflect the knowledge and skill of papermaker, craft is inscribed in the paper, and can be appreciated and read.²³

Handmade Paper as Archive and Record

A discussion of hand paper-making, writing, and inscription draws attention to the contexts of creation that papers reflect. Their existence is the result of fiber materials, infrastructure, craftspeople, and their knowledge. Handmade papers are uniquely linked to their material contexts. If made from natural fibers, they are tied to specific plants and their geographies.

Each sheet is also specifically linked to physical production infrastructures. Evidence of paper mills, vats, beaters, moulds, deckles, paper presses, felts, and drying stations find their way into the paper. This is a record of intellectual, creative, and physical actions.²⁴ The identification of materials, the formation of pulp, the pulling of sheets, and their pressing and drying are all elements of a sheet's context, waiting to be discovered.²⁵ Their specific identities might be hidden, but evidence of the labor and creativity is visible.²⁶

**'The intentions
and goals of the
papermaker,
though hidden,
are reflected
in a paper's
composition
and how it is
used.'**

Handmade paper expresses recordness. Along with printed texts, and material and production texts, handmade papers carry the contexts of their creation and can be read as records. Geography, infrastructure, intention, process, and identity are present in each sheet. Fibers have a geographic and ecological origin. Papers are contextually fixed to specific tools and making sites. Handmade papers also offer an intellectual record. The intentions and goals of the papermaker, though hidden, are reflected in a paper's composition and how it is used. Much of this information is subtle, and is inaccessible without the aid of paper evidence, or secondary objects that contextualize these values, intentions, material origins, and biography. However, even when precisely indeterminable this recordness is present.

Handmade papers are records of experimentation, method, and craft.²⁷

Conclusion: Materiality, Narrative, and Communicative Power

Handmade paper is a site for reflecting on the plurality of texts, traditional and non-traditional, that are presented in traditional books. In books composed of handmade paper, linguistic texts

are joined by material texts, which if framed as such, offer material, geographic, and craft information. Handmade paper offers a unique set of material narratives, which possess particular communicative capabilities. While as a structure, handmade paper contributes to the delivery of evidence and information, handmade paper used in books also communicates these material narratives. Handmade paper is a site for engaging with material histories, acts as a record of process, and presents evidence of skill and expertise.

In this paper, my objective was to offer an introduction to the textual characteristics of handmade paper, and its capacity to record and communicate material, artifactual, and craft narratives. Considering these characteristics and functions supports an understanding of the role of handmade papers in contemporary books, and more broadly, how these works can be evaluated and read. Handmade paper presents opportunities for multiple readings, if they are engaged.



¹ E. Adnan, 'The Unfolding of an Artist's Book', *Discourse*, 20:1/2 (1998), p. 20.

² S. Dawson & S. Turner, *A Hand Papermaker's Sourcebook* (New York: Design Books, 1995), p. 5.

³ M. Lorenté, *The Art of Papermaking with Plants* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), pp. 16-17.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 13.

⁵ T. Barrett, 'Listening to Paper', *Hand Papermaking*, 32:2 (Winter 2017), p. 6.

⁶ Comprehensive overviews, and illustrations of this complexity, can be found in Helen Hiebert's *Papermaking with Garden Plants and Garden Weeds* (North Adams, Massachusetts: Storey Publishing, 2006) and Hiebert's *The Papermaker's Companion: The Ultimate Guide to Making and Using Handmade Paper* (North Adams, Massachusetts: Storey Publishing, 2000).

⁷ M. Tasillo, 'For Beginners: More Couching and Drying', *Hand Papermaking Newsletter* 96 (October 2011), p. 10.

⁸ Hiebert, *Companion*, pp. 91-114.

⁹ Hiebert, *Garden*, pp. 66-81.

¹⁰ Timothy Barrett's *Japanese Papermaking: Traditions, Tools, and Techniques* (Warren, Connecticut: Floating World Editions, 2005) provides a comprehensive examination of Japanese papermaking history, methods, and practice. Aimee Lee's *Hanji Unfurled: One Journey into Korean Papermaking* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The Legacy Press, 2012) provides a comprehensive examination of Korean papermaking practice. Both offer autoethnographic accounts of their experiences in papermaking.

¹¹ Barrett, *Papermaking*, pp. 7-8.

¹² Hiebert, *Garden*, pp. 6-9.

¹³ Papermaking recipe books offer a good introduction, and visual illustration, of the distinct expressions of handmade paper. See Hiebert, *Garden*, pp. 64-97. and Lorenté, *Papermaking*, pp. 41-147.

¹⁴ Hiebert, *Garden*, p. 62.

- ¹⁵ D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 12-13.
- ¹⁶ Hiebert, *Papermaking*, pp. 22-61.
- ¹⁷ Hiebert, *Ibidem*, p. 1.
- ¹⁸ Adnan, *Unfolding*, p. 20.
- ¹⁹ Hiebert, *Companion*, pp. 91-115.
- ²⁰ Dawson & Turner, *Sourcebook*, p. 8.
- ²¹ M. Tasillo, "For Beginners: Selecting Source Fibers", *Hand Papermaking Newsletter* 97 (January 2012), pp. 8-10.
- ²² The bibliographer, Allan H. Stevenson, offers early comment on issue of identify, evidence, and papermaking in reference to early printed books. See: A. Stevenson, *Observations on Paper as Evidence* (Lawrence, Kansas: The University of Kansas Libraries, 1961), pp. 12-16; 24-26.
- ²³ Barrett, *Listening*, pp. 6, 9.
- ²⁴ Lorenté, *Papermaking*, p. 154.
- ²⁵ Barrett, *Listening*, pp. 8-9.
- ²⁶ Barrett, *Papermaking*, pp. 69-70.
- ²⁷ Hiebert, *Papermaking*, p. 23.

BOOKS WITHOUT SCENT, SHAPE OR WEIGHT

Peter Verhaar. Digital Scholarship Librarian at Leiden University Libraries. Lecturer of the Book and Digital Media Studies MA programme at Leiden University.

Over the course of several centuries, the printed book has evolved into a medium which can facilitate deep and attentive reading in a highly productive manner. This ability results to a large extent from specific material properties of paper-based books. As few of these properties can be replicated effectively on digital devices, the transition to screen-based texts invariably leads to different forms of reading. While the immateriality of digital books may affect our capacity to concentrate on texts and to remember their contents, the plasticity and the computability of digital words simultaneously engender innovative ways of engaging with books.

Keywords: bookishness; digitality; paper books; screen reading; typography



The concept of the ‘horseless carriage’ has become a widely-used trope to describe the human tendency to view new technologies primarily as continuations of older technologies. For those who witnessed the introduction of engine-powered automobiles in the early nineteenth century, the concept

may have been useful as it enabled them to conceptualise radically new concepts as innovative manifestations of concepts that were familiar already. An evident shortcoming of the trope is that it undervalues the extent of the differences between two distinct types of machinery. When new phenomena are conceived of narrowly as modifications of past inventions,

this can easily result in unwarranted simplifications which can place a shackle on our capacity to recognise new uses and new functionalities. Similar types of misconceptions are often difficult to forego completely, nonetheless, when we analyse the pragmatic and functional differences between paper-based texts on the one hand and texts read from the screen on the other. Over the course of several centuries, the printed book has become a crucial medium for the dissemination of knowledge and information, and this intimate familiarity with the printed book directly informs our efforts to come to grips with the concept of digital text. The continued importance of paper-based media is evident, for instance, in e-reading devices which digitally replicate the physical experience of turning a page. Texts that consist of atoms and texts that consist of bits both have many distinctive characteristics, nonetheless, and the numerous fundamental differences also lead to different forms of reading.

When written words are communicated via printed books, the material substrate of the medium invariably produces a range of sensations which cannot be replicated through digital devices. The combination of paper and ink may produce distinct olfactory sensations, for instance, and the quality of the paper on which books are printed likewise produces specific tactile experiences. The flimsy paper of a newspaper, for instance, feels differently on our fingertips than the more sturdy paper of hardback novels. Books also have a certain size and a certain weight.

When we read a book, a comparison of the weight in our left hand and the weight in our right hand enables us, consciously or unconsciously, to make an assessment of our reading progress. A crucial characteristic of printed texts, furthermore, is that they have a fixed typography. Units such as paragraphs, titles, block quotes and footnotes have all been given a distinct visual appearance, and such visual distinctions can help readers to identify the genre of the text and to quickly understand its logical structure. Various scholars have emphasised that typography makes a crucial contribution to the overall experience and significance of text. Don McKenzie, for instance, explained that “the material form of books, the non-verbal elements of the typographic notations within them, the very disposition of space itself, have an expressive force in conveying meaning”.¹ Similar to the way in which a conductor of a musical piece can choose to highlight specific aspects of the original work of a composer, typographers can emphasise specific features of a text in order to steer prospective readers in the direction of a particular interpretation.

The properties which have been listed typically originate during processes of “mise en page” and “mise en livre”, and they determine what Shillingsberg refers to as the “bookness” of the printed codex.² The process of “mise en objet numérique” results, by contrast, in resources which are immaterial. Digital texts essentially consist of arrangements of binary numbers which can be rendered temporarily as words on specific reading devices.

The intangibility and impermanence of digital texts also complicates a systematic analysis of their nature. The types of manipulations that are allowed, for instance, vary strongly along with the format of the file and along with the devices that are used to open and to render these files. 'Digital text' is clearly a very broad phenomenon, which can manifest itself in different ways. Texts can firstly be constructed digitally in the form of eBooks, commonly in the ePub format. E- book devices generally make use either of e-ink technology or of liquid crystal display (LCD). E-books are manipulable, as readers can usually change the font type, the font size and the colours or brightness of the background. Digital Texts can be made available, secondly, in the form of HTML-based web pages. As is the case for ePub, the typographic form of web pages can be modified by zooming in, or by associating different stylesheets. Social media posts such as Twitter feeds or Facebook updates are most commonly consumed via webpages, and they may be argued to fall within this third category as well. Incidentally, any claim that the digital age leads to a decrease in the amount of time spent on reading will have to be revised if it is accepted that the act of reading includes the time spent on text-based social media. The term 'digital text' can thirdly refer to plain text files, which only contain the lexical codes of the text, and which have shed their typography. Examples of this third type may be found on text corpora such as *Project Gutenberg*. Texts can fourthly be embodied digitally as PDF files. Out of the four formats which have been distinguished, the risks and the

limitations alluded to in the trope of the horseless carriage are visible most clearly in this fourth manifestation, as PDF files fix the typographical form of a text, together with its division into pages. Inquiries into the nature of digital text ought to diversify, taking the principled differences between these four formats into account.

An important characteristic of ePub files and web pages is that it has become possible to separate the lexical codes of the text from their typographic form. When texts are available in such rescalable formats, layout artists only have limited possibilities to stabilise their presentation. The ease with which typography can be altered or discarded on the digital medium has led a number of theorists to question the function and the importance of typography. In their article "What is a Text, Really?" DeRose et al. claim that the meaning of a text is produced principally by the words contained in these texts, and that "adjustments of typography" are only "superficial and transient".³ This somewhat callous stance clearly underestimates the expressive value of the typographic form, and overlooks the fact that the presentation of a written text can have strong implications for the manner in which readers experience this text. The position that typography is transparent and semantically void is challenged strongly, moreover, by literary texts in which authors convey meaning via formal aspects. Examples of such texts can be found in the works of George Herbert, Paul van Ostaijen and Dom Silvester Houedart. If readers would be able to modify the font size of the words in

Herbert's "Easter Wings", for instance, the unity of the form and the contents of the poem would easily get lost. For much the same reasons, the poem can scantily be mediated via the plain text format.

The immateriality of digital texts also engenders different forms of reading. When

we read from printed pages, we can readily get immersed in what we read. This aptitude for reading deeply and attentively stems from the fact that we can experience the printed medium as a transparent interface. Tasks such as flipping the pages, or making an assessment of our reading progress, generally become sub-conscious activities. Reading via screens discordantly involves a number of tasks which undermine our ability to become deeply engaged in a text. As we often read texts on different devices with idiosyncratic interfaces and with singular navigational aids, handling the medium still demand a conscious effort which can interfere with our ability to get immersed into text. The ability to read attentively is challenged further on devices such as tablets or web browsers, as the texts that we want to read need to compete almost continuously with the many other applications on these environments

which jauntily attract our attention.

In many cases, the digital book is also a pageless book. While texts printed on paper typically form fixed bundles of information with a set number of pages, the plasticity of the digital form wreaks havoc with many of our traditional bibliographic units.

'While texts printed on paper typically form fixed bundles of information with a set number of pages, the plasticity of the digital form wreaks havoc with many of our traditional bibliographic units.'

The texts of ebooks is generally reflowable so that they can flexibly be used on multiple devices. On web pages and in plain text files, there is no technical need to divide the text into pages, and words are frequently shown in one long sequence. The lack of a formal stability and the dearth of fixed recognisable chunks are additional factors which can complicate comprehension.

When we read a text, we connect what we learn to the position on which we found the new information. Various studies have shown that readers create cognitive maps of texts, based on

visual clues encountered during the reading process.⁴ The stable physical structure of printed texts can serve as scaffolding on which readers can buttress their understanding. On the digital medium, the notion of the page becomes increasingly irrelevant, and there are generally very few other permanent explicit landmarks on which readers can base their

orientation. With the exception of PDF files, digital texts are constantly in a state of flux, and this makes it more challenging for readers to organise and to interpret their contents.

It can be observed, in summary, that the various distinctive properties of the digital medium places heavy strains on our capacity to concentrate deeply on a single text for a longer period of time. Sustained attentive reading is only one specific form of reading, nonetheless. Although digital texts may not facilitate deep reading as productively as analogue texts, they may vice versa provide support for other forms of reading which cannot be practiced as well via paper, if at all. Close reading can only occur, obviously, when readers have already selected their texts. Especially since the invention of the printing press, however, there have always been more books than people can read within a lifetime. To combat their sense of information overload, readers have sought to develop techniques that enabled them to learn about the contents of books without fully reading all of these. One such technique is the form of textual engagement which Katherine Hayles refers to as 'hyper reading', which includes "skimming, scanning, fragmenting" and which aims "to conserve attention by quickly identifying information".⁵ Library systems have helped us to discover the substance of printed books we have not read by supplying information about contextual aspects, such as their author, their publisher or date of publication. Digital texts, with the possible exception of some PDF files, are usually machine-readable.

The possibility to let computers process the full text of digital books can form the basis for faster and more encompassing forms of hyper-reading. This form of engaging with texts, which can also be referred to as distant reading, can enable us to study patterns and correlations within textual data or to examine large-scale historical developments.

Very similar to the way in which the horseless carriage is currently evolving into the self-driving car, distant reading is essentially a form of reading performed by software, and which delegates parts of the human reading process to computers. This very development, in which texts disseminated digitally are evolving into self-reading books, demonstrates that it is specious to view texts restrictively as printed books behind a screen. Analogue texts and digital texts simply cannot support the exact same functions. The shapelessness and the weightlessness of digital books may affect our ability to read deeply and attentively, but the computability and the plasticity of digital books can, by the same token, allow for innovative ways of engaging with texts. Computational tools may help us to deal with multiple books at the same time, or they may automatically generate abstracts or summaries of texts. Computers may help us to interpret and to understand texts, by highlighting specific significant passages, or by showing us striking similarities between texts from different periods or from different genres. Applications such as these reduce the need for human readers to develop erudition, as

computers can be trained to formulate recommendations for the texts we ought to read, and to cull those books we can ignore. It is clear, in any case,

that when words are transferred to the digital medium, reading does not continue to take place as usual.



¹ D. MacKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press 1999), p. 3.

² P. Shillingsburg, *From Gutenberg to Google: Electronic Representations of Literary Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006), p. 139.

³ S.J. DeRose et al., 'What Is Text, Really?', *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 1:2 (1990), pp. 3-26, there p. 3.

⁴ Scientific American, 'The Reading Brain in the Digital Age: The Science of Paper versus Screens - Scientific American', <<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/reading-paper-screens/>>, (19 June 2018); S.J. Payne & W.R. Reader, 'Constructing Structure Maps of Multiple on-Line Texts', *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 64:5 (2006), pp. 461-474.

⁵ K. Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 2012), p. 12.

THE PERSISTENT PREDILECTION FOR PAPER

Adriaan van der Weel is a Senior University Lecturer and Professor by special appointment of Book and Digital Media Studies at Leiden University

When it comes to book-length texts, readers around the world continue to display a preference for print over screens. This article speculates about the possible reasons why digitisation has not (yet) affected the printed book the way it has other media. Among the reasons advanced are emotional and sentimental attachment at a personal level; the long history of prestige of printed books at a social level; the fixity of print, which answers better to the embodied nature of human cognition than the ephemerality and fluidity of the immaterial digital text; and the unconscious appreciation that the investment required for the production of material goods is likely to act as a publication membrane filtering out the most worthless texts. To this may be added a certain weariness about the virtual world which seems to have set in more recently.

Keywords: book materiality; digital deluge; print persistence; reading habits; textual medium



In 1994 the American novelist Annie Proulx memorably went on record writing in the New York Times: ‘Nobody is going to sit down and read a novel on a twitchy little screen. Ever.’¹ She may not have been right about the nobody ever, but her conviction was – and is – undeniably

shared by most readers. For so much is clear: if the digital deluge should indeed spell the end of the book, it is certainly taking its time succumbing. A quarter of a century after Proulx’s lapidary pronouncement, and a decade after the advent of the ground-breaking Amazon Kindle in 2007,² book industry

statistics still speak for a collective fondness for paper books. E-books have their highest market share – about 20% – in the US. Elsewhere the figures range between 15% in the UK – the second highest uptake – to as little as 0% in quite a number of countries. Most European countries are sitting at the low end in between, with for example France at 3%, Germany at 4.5%, the Netherlands pushing 7% and Slovenia at less than 1%.³ These figures are especially noteworthy if we compare them with what happened in the case of music and film. For where watching and listening are concerned, analogue and digital show a roughly inverse proportion.

Given the rapid digitization of music and film, but also newspapers, over the last few decades, it is astonishing that so many paper books are still being published – and bought – in paper form. Readers' attachment to paper – 'curling up with a good book' or affectionately smelling its pages – has been recurrently disparaged as a matter of mere emotion and sentiment. Emotion and sentiment or not, the American researcher Naomi Baron found that tertiary students in the three countries she researched (Germany, America and Japan) stated a clear preference for hardcopy, both for academic and pleasure reading.⁴ The American textbook publisher Scholastic found in 2015 that 'nearly two-thirds of children (65%)—up from 2012 (60%)—agree that they'll always

want to read print books even though there are ebooks available'.⁵

One way in which readers' preference for hardcopy expresses itself is in the lack of seriousness with which people read texts on screen compared to texts on paper. Two vast meta-studies have recently corroborated this recurrent research finding, establishing this effect of screens on our reading habits beyond doubt. Indeed, they found that the effect is even becoming stronger over time. Rather than younger people becoming used to screens and treating them as an equivalent alternative substrate to paper, they are in fact increasingly less inclined to take screens seriously as a reading surface.⁶ For example, one very notable way in which this lack of

seriousness about screens expresses itself is that people are less motivated to engage in metacognitive learning regulation in the case of digital texts.⁷ That is to say that they take less care to check whether they have understood what they have just been reading before continuing.

Paper-based reading habits are thus proving remarkably persistent, also among young people. Whence this persistence? Why has digitization not taken over the book the way it has the other media? Trade figures of course say nothing about the reasons why people continue to prefer paper. Neither do the meta-studies just cited attempt to answer the question why

**'Paper-based
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people of all ages should take screen texts less seriously than they do texts on paper. Is the continuing preference for paper really just a matter of emotion and sentiment, as many commentators insist?

Clearly emotion and sentiment do play a role in the resistance to e-reading – and indeed, why should they not? It matters for their personal and social status that books have a history. In your own life you may treasure memories of being read to when young. You may have been struck by the veneration of a favourite teacher for her books. You may remember the intense joy of discovering that you could independently read your way through volume after volume of your local library. But books have a social history, too. In that social history reading aloud goes back further than reading silently to oneself. Reverence for books is of all time, as is the habit of using them to make our store of knowledge visible and tangible, for example by collecting them in libraries or displaying them on coffee tables. For the possession of books represents symbolic capital and prestige, even if this does not go for all genres and purposes equally. The experience of such reverence may of course be merely vicarious; not everyone has a personal affinity with books. Nevertheless the amount of discussion generated by the question whether swearing oaths on

e-readers or even tablets showing a bible app is acceptable given that the ‘inherent respect given to the print version of the bible ... doesn’t attach itself to a Kindle or the iPad’ testifies to deeply and widely held convictions about the symbolic status of the printed book⁸ – as does the continuing effectiveness of, say, book burnings.⁹

A personal history of emotional connections with printed books, in combination with a social history of prestige attached to them, no doubt helps to explain the special regard in which paper books are held. But there may be others at play, too. Especially the finding that texts on screen are taken less seriously than texts on paper may offer a clue. For example, it does not seem far-fetched to surmise that the ephemeral, fluid nature of the immaterial digital text is central to this effect.¹⁰

‘The screen is a notorious temptation space. Online it takes an almost superhuman effort to keep reading’

Over the last couple of decades the notion has been gaining ground that human cognition is embodied. It has been suggested that one notable effect of this is that it causes a predilection for giving things real-world ‘addresses’.¹¹ Just as we ourselves bodily have to be somewhere in space, we like the things we deal with similarly to be in a known space. When it comes to text, it has been found, for instance, that dealing with hypertext or text that needs to be scrolled makes

cognitive demands over and above text that is ‘anchored’ to the page. This ‘cognitive overload’ as it is often called, may be a consequence of the embodied nature of our cognition.¹² In the case of music and film the materiality or otherwise of the substrate is irrelevant: we only consume them through our eyes and ears just as we watch or listen in real life. In the case of text there is always a medium involved. The embodiedness of our cognition – or so the thinking goes – would then prefer the text to be mapped to the dimensions of a material object. This would explain the – perhaps partly or largely subliminal – advantages of paper compared with screen that have been reported in research of reading fluency and comprehension.

That the famous centuries-old Art of Memory demanded its practitioners mentally to assign a physical location to all items that needed to be remembered attests to the importance of real-world spatial orientation.¹³ If the lack of anchoring of digital text in a fixed material location should be in any way detrimental to the reading experience would this not affect reading for the purpose of learning and memorising in particular, adding to the perceived inferiority of screen texts mentioned?

Indeed, to explain the widespread preference for reading from paper materiality may also be relevant in a more indirect way. In a world governed by the concept of scarcity of resources (think of money, time, attention), the very fact that someone has thought to invest such scarce resources in something ipso facto makes that

something meaningful. That a paper book takes effort to produce, and that someone has demonstrably lavished care and money on its creation, may thus be interpreted – consciously or (equally likely) unconsciously – as evidence of value. Material products are by definition finite, and scarcity contributes to their value. By contrast, there is no economic scarcity attached to their digital counterparts. A digital file – say a text at a given Web address – may be downloaded an unlimited number of times. Its intrinsic value can only be established from actual reading of its content; scarcity and other qualities of material goods (such as ownership and collectability) are irrelevant.

Perhaps those who never gave up their paper habits have always intuited the benefits of reading from a material substrate. However that may be, among those who did largely turn to a more digital way of life a certain weariness about the virtual world has recently begun to set in. It has, for instance, been known for years now that intensive social media use can make people feel worse rather than better. As a case in point, researchers from Humboldt University in Berlin and Darmstadt Technical University found in 2013 that users frequently perceive Facebook as a stressful environment. One in three people felt worse after visiting the site and more dissatisfied with their lives. People who browsed passively without contributing were affected the most, the chief cause being envy of other people’s lives and experiences.¹⁴ It took Facebook a few years to acknowledge the bald facts, which it did reluctantly in December 2017.¹⁵ Similar effects have been

reported for other ways of being online, such as gaming apps and the use of smartphones in general.¹⁶

Many people report feeling empty and drained with nothing to show for time spent online. This common experience may be an additional factor playing into the revival of offline reading. Reading has been shown to be a good antidote to online stress. 'Reading carried out in "fertile solitude" fosters readers resilience and greater impermeability to social pressures and expectations, such as those encountered especially

on social media.'¹⁷ It appears that it is reading, not the paper book as such, that serves as an antidote to the sense of emptiness induced by social media. Yet as we know, the screen is a notorious temptation space. Online it takes an almost superhuman effort to keep reading in the face of the incessant and insistent siren calls of distraction. The fierce debate about whether the paper book will survive the digital revolution has yet to die down. But if a good read is your preferred remedy to the sense of time waste associated with so much screen use, a paper book is definitely the better choice.



¹ Annie Proulx, 'Books on Top', *New York Times* (26 May 1994), <http://www.nytimes.com/books/99/05/23/specials/proulx-top.html>.

² And several decades after the birth of the e-book, often identified as the moment Michael Hart keyed in the United States Declaration of Independence on the University of Illinois' mainframe in 1971.

³ It must be noted that these percentages mostly concern trade channels, excluding e-reading of self-published books, fan fiction and other such alternative sources. For more details and trends in the e-book market, see Wischenbart Content and Consulting, *Global eBook 2017: A report on market trends and developments* (Vienna: Rüdiger Wischenbart Content and Consulting, 2017).

⁴ N. Baron, *Words onscreen: The fate of reading in a digital world* (New York: OUP, 2015), Chapter 4, 'The appeal of words onscreen', pp. 62–92.

⁵ Scholastic, *Kids & Family Reading Report*, 5th edn, 2015, <http://www.scholastic.com/readingreport/Scholastic-KidsAndFamilyReadingReport-5thEdition.pdf?v=100>.

⁶ L.M. Singer and P.A. Alexander, 'Reading on paper and digitally: What the past decades of empirical research reveal', *Review of Educational Research*, 87 (2017), pp. 1007–1041; P. Delgado, C. Vargas, R. Ackerman et al., 'Don't throw away your printed books: A meta-analysis on the effects of reading media on comprehension', under review, 2018.

⁷ R. Ackerman and M. Goldsmith, 'Metacognitive regulation of text learning: On screen versus on paper', *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 17 (2011), pp. 18–32..

⁸ Donald Whitney, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, quoted in: *Fox News*, 'Is A Digital Bible Less Holy? U.S. Officials Increasingly Sworn In On Tablets | Fox News', <<http://www.foxnews.com/lifestyle/2014/07/14/is-digital-bible-less-holy-us-officials-increasingly-sworn-in-on-tablet.html>> (1 March 2018).

⁹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_burning.

¹⁰ Other factors may include the fact that textual communication online is increasingly a two-

way street, fostering in the reader a sense of equality with the author, effectively robbing him of his special status. Also, the need for constant evaluation of any online text's reliability on the reader's part will weaken its authority. And then there is the lack of control on the part of the individual user in the face of the power of the large platforms: texts may vanish or change, functionalities disappear and permissions be withdrawn.

¹¹ Mark Changizi 'The Problem with the Web and E-Books Is That There's No Space for Them', *Psychology Today*, 7 February 2011 <www.psychologytoday.com/blog/nature-brain-and-culture/201102/the-problem-the-web-and-e-books-is-there-s-no-space-them>, (1 March 2018).

¹² D. DeStefano & J.A. LeFevre, 'Cognitive load in hypertext reading: A review', *Computers in Human Behavior*, 23 (2007), pp. 1616-1641.

¹³ Cf. Frances Yates, *The art of memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

¹⁴ H. Krasnova, H. Wenninger, T. Widjaja, et al., 'Envy on Facebook: A Hidden Threat to Users' Life Satisfaction?', https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256712913_Envy_on_Facebook_A_Hidden_Threat_to_Users%27_Life_Satisfaction. See also M.L. Nguyen Steers, R.E. Wickham & L.K. Acitelli, 'Seeing Everyone Else's Highlight Reels: How Facebook Usage Is Linked to Depressive Symptoms', *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 33: 8 (2014), pp. 701-731,...

¹⁵ Facebook presented the data as a reason to introduce new settings, supposedly to enhance active participation, although cynics have suggested that the new settings would force advertisers to pay more for appearing in people's timelines. At any rate, in recent months many tech world insiders have been calling to make social media less addictive, ameliorating their negative effects on people's sense of wellbeing.

¹⁶ See, for example, T. Panova & A. Lleras, 'Avoidance or boredom: Negative mental health outcomes associated with use of Information and Communication Technologies depend on users' motivations', *Computers in Human Behavior*, 58 (2016), pp. 249-258.

¹⁷ The Conversation, 'How reading fiction can help you improve yourself and your relationship to others', <<https://theconversation.com/how-reading-fiction-can-help-you-improve-yourself-and-your-relationship-to-others-88830>>, (1 March 2018).

THE LANDSCAPE OF THE PHYSICAL BOOK

Space and Memory in the Printed Page

Pino Trogu is an associate Professor of Information Design at San Francisco State University and a visiting Scholar at Delft University of Technology.

Although useful, digital screens have not yet replaced physical books. The printed book offers three concurrent psychological advantages that explain its puzzling resilience: (1) Better learning and remembering are associated with the physical act of moving through the space of printed pages, which stimulates the visuo-spatial sketchpad component of working memory; (2) since reading is based on temporal, sequential processing, the fixed frame of reference of printed pages and their fixed shape are great aids to memory; (3) the properties of paper and the standard design of a printed book guarantee that it will always function properly: one day, a year, or many centuries later. One reads the same words on screen or in print, but the context in which the symbols are read is very different. The digital book appears and vanishes. The physical book – where kinesthetic experience is more vivid – remains as an actual, remembered space.

Keywords: e-reader; memory; printed book; reading; space



The Screen Offers Simulation But Not Replication

Can a digital reader ever function as adequately as a physical book? In a 2010 CNN interview, the digital guru Nicholas Negroponte

predicted that physical books had only five years left in them. Eight years have passed and the video of the interview has since been deleted from the internet.¹ The death of the book is not what it used to be. Lewis Carroll may have predicted why. In a novel he published in 1893, one of the

characters describes an actual-size map of the country which turned out to be rather useless. Carroll's satire plays up the initial enthusiasm for this far-fetched enterprise:

'We very soon got to six yards to the mile. Then we tried a hundred yards to the mile. And then came the grandest idea of all! We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of a mile to the mile!'²

But in the story, the proposed map is rejected by farmers who question its practicality and object to the adverse effects it would have on their crops. In the end, the country itself is used as its own map.³ As digital devices become ever more advanced, with ever-more ingenious attempts to imitate paper and spatial location by means of a flat screen, perhaps, in some Alice-in-Wonderland world, with 3-D glasses, engineers may fool us into thinking we are holding an actual book.

But will we ever get to the ultimate Carroll map? It is doubtful because while a map is a map, a 2-D screen is never really a 3-D stack of pages. Let's now turn to some expert witnesses for the defence of the physical book. Their actual experiments show in more detail why this 3-D stack has distinct psychological advantages for scanning, remembering, finding, and learning.

Singer and Alexander recently studied the "effects of reading digital and print texts on comprehension."⁴ They further surveyed research of the past twenty-five years into the process of reading and

summarized the differences and trade-offs between reading in print versus reading on screen.⁵ In an additional study, in collaboration with Berkowitz, they confirmed through measurements of comprehension of key points and other relevant information presented in text passages, that performance is significantly higher when reading in print versus reading on screen.⁶

The scientific literature on reading is openly revising its former predictions about the death of the book. *Scientific American* and *WIRED* have recently carried titles like 'Why the brain prefers paper'⁷ and 'Why the smart reading device of the future may be... paper'.⁸ These two sources alone cite over twenty-five scientific articles to support the advantages of paper. So long as the digital counterparts to the printed book remain suboptimal, the situation calls for a sober skepticism toward breathless futurism. Let's look at some of the reasons for the conservatism of our 'wetware' brains.⁹

For the college students involved in their recent 2017 studies, Singer Trakhman, Alexander, and Berkowitz also pointed out that '...the medium in which [they] are reading is more influential when the questions being answered go beyond a gist understanding of the text.'¹⁰ Paradoxically, in these studies, students always judged their comprehension as better when reading on screen, while in fact they performed better when reading in print.¹¹ This unconscious advantage might explain why, in a 2015 international study by Naomi Baron, ninety-two percent of college students still indicated a preference for reading books in print versus on e-readers.¹²

‘Building a physical map in my mind of where things are’ is one of the revealing comments offered by students to explain this preference.¹³

So far, the ability of a screen to mimic a physical book seems to depend on whether engineers can manage to make a Lewis Carroll-style representation that goes all the way. In the meantime, sales of printed books continue to rise while sales of electronic books (e-books) continue to fall. For example, in the UK e-book sales declined from 26 percent of the market in 2015 to 25 percent in 2016.¹⁴ People are still buying and reading physical books. Why? The study of memory provides a possible answer.

1. Working Memory and the Visuo-Spatial Sketchpad are Marshalled Better with Print

The remarkably durable model of human memory by Baddeley and Hitch explains why print fixes meaning in memory.¹⁵ Originally, they built their 1974 model on the ground-breaking work by George Miller and his (magical) number seven limitation on the human brain’s ‘immediate’, or short-term, memory capacity.¹⁶ Later, they refined the view that this limitation is more one of time rather than number of items, hence the more precise definition of *working memory*, that time span of just a few seconds after exposure, after which immediate recall becomes quite difficult.¹⁷

Among its components, their model includes the *phonological loop*, which addresses verbal and auditory information, and the *visuo-*

spatial sketchpad which addresses visual and spatial information, as well as movement through space.¹⁸ One of the strengths of Baddeley’s model, backed by decades of research, is the recognition that working memory processes are best viewed as a combination of *distinct* components: oral and auditory, verbal, visual, and spatial. The more physical the input, the more of these elements are present.

Viewed through Baddeley’s working memory model, the process of reading appears to involve *all* these components, but what is most pertinent for this discussion is how the *spatial* in the visuo-spatial sketchpad component enhances the experience of reading a physical book and contributes to long-term memory storage and recall.

Reading on screen, the lack of physical space suggests that the spatial component processed by the visuo-spatial sketchpad is greatly diminished. If true, this loss is quite problematic for screen-based learning. For the development of the ability to read appears to be a direct adaptation of the eye’s evolved ability to identify and distinguish physical objects in the surrounding landscape.¹⁹ The decoding and recognition of written letters as ‘objects’ in the field of vision is associated in the brain with the same general area responsible for recognizing faces and physical objects.²⁰ This proximity of the region dealing with written language with the one dealing with physical objects suggests that ‘...the brain deals with letters as if they were physical objects.’²¹

There is not at first any apparent reason why humans' ability to orient themselves in their environment's physical space could not extend equally well to the two-dimensional space of the digital screen, just as it does for the two-dimensional space of the printed page. But it turns out that orientation on the printed page benefits memory and understanding, and is far superior to orientation on the electronic page. Indeed, the similarity of these two-dimensional spaces is deceiving. With paper, we can physically move left to right and front and back, much like we do in our physical world. With the screen, the left and right are generic as typically only one page is displayed at a given time. In the screen there is a front but no back: one can never get behind the screen, which has a *recto* but no *verso*. Don Bouwhuis points out that "This prevents the reader from organizing text sections into a left/right structure as in a [printed] book, increasing the actual text planes to be remembered by a factor of two."²²

If reading a printed book involves the spatial perceptual apparatus at work in the visuo-spatial sketchpad component of working memory, the absence of physical space in reading on screen suggests that the same mental apparatus is likely to remain underused when facing a digital screen that lacks the surprising spatial depth

of the printed page. The flat screen thus degrades this spatial reading process. If this psychological privileging of physical space is correct, it would mean that the flatness – of the screen with its lack of the familiar cues that one gets from the physical environment – omits important memory cues found when moving through a physical book.

'Reading on screen, the lack of physical space suggests that the spatial component processed by the visuo-spatial sketchpad is greatly diminished'

Remembering better: Baddeley's visuo-spatial sketchpad component combines the visual and the spatial into a complementary pair. This duality was apparently noted in classical times, when physical space was often invoked as an aid to memory. This technique was known as *ars memoriae*, or art of memory, and consisted in remembering things by imagining them inside different rooms in a house.²³ The pages in a book are like the rooms in a house, and we typically remember where things are

stored in different rooms. Likewise, we seem to remember if we read a passage in a left-hand page or in a right-hand page. The margins of a page are like the walls of a room: a discrete, finite, and fixed orientation system.

The familiar experience of moving through a house or walking down a street can indeed be an analog of our experience when flipping through and reading on the pages of a printed book. But with the screen

our bodies cannot experience the same movement through space simply because that space is not there. Paper returns a deep, three-dimensional experience, the screen returns a flat, one-dimensional experience.

This difference is unimportant if the task is the quick consultation of an address, a procedure, or a standalone short text such as a dictionary definition. For this context the electronic medium's obvious advantages of large storage and fast retrieval are best retained and used as needed. But if the context is reading a novel, a long essay, or a chemistry textbook, this difference is much more important as physical space reinforces understanding and long-term storage and recall of the subject matter.

If the 3-D physical space afforded by a printed book cannot be replicated by the flat screen of a computer, tablet, e-reader or smartphone, perhaps it is wise for a student or professional to limit the reading activity on those devices to content that does not require long-term storage and retrieval. Memory mechanisms associated with such requirements seem indeed to benefit greatly when the medium of delivery is printed paper, and suffer when the medium is the screen. This is why so-called dead tree editions are currently alive and well.²⁴

2. Print and Paper Offer a Familiar, Fixed Frame of Reference

The process of reading is based on temporal and sequential processing, thus the *fixed frame of reference* given by the left-right arrangement of the pages and the fixed, 'immutable' sequence of letters, words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters are a great aid to memory and recall.²⁵ Although the fixed sequence of these elements may be identical, in a digital edition their overall shape is always elastic and subject to change, offering an ever-changing landscape, not a stable context. It is a paradox of the digital freedom from the static nature of the printed page that the digital introduces spatial uncertainty, thus dissolving the familiar, memorable, fixed frame of reference.

In a printed book, the third dimension of the stack of pages helps the reader remember the location of specific passages much like one is able to remember the location of objects in physical space. A King James Bible, open at the end of the Old Testament and beginning of the New Testament, gives when viewed from the side, a sharp depiction of the difference in size, in total pages, between the two sections. On the left, the stack of pages of the Old Testament is almost three times as tall as the stack of pages of the New Testament on the right.²⁶ Because the perception of the passing of time is fundamental in memory processes, the paper stack offers a nice, direct way of marking space (the number of pages) and time (the time spent reading

the pages) simultaneously: 'The importance of this is that there is an almost perfect correlation between the temporal organization of the reading process and the spatial organization of text.'²⁷

Our eyes are constantly moving and constantly fixating, in a series of quick movements called saccades, repeated approximately two hundred times every minute, not just when reading but during our complete waking hours.²⁸ Reading, on a smaller scale, is a good model of our scanning the environment in large saccades, but also focusing on smaller, localized environments with smaller saccades. Each time one reads a line of text, the eyes jump forward in small saccades until the end of the line forces a necessary backward saccade to the beginning of the next line.²⁹

The parallelism between the stack of printed pages and the space of our physical environment explains how our non-reading brain accommodated itself to our reading brain.³⁰ One's ability to recognize objects and get oriented on the surface of the earth explains in part one's ability to read a text on a page and sense the relations of the pages. Both abilities depend on a highly sophisticated mode of vision. The acculturated mode of vision in a book is a relatively recent human adaptation derived from a natural ability that required a much longer evolutionary development.

If proper orientation and understanding the physical environment was key to survival, and if the adaptation to reading required the rewiring of certain areas of the

brain originally devoted to spatial cognition, then it would not surprise that this sense of space would reinforce the process of reading on a printed page in a way that would be lacking in the reading on a digital screen where a physical environment is absent. This kinship between reading and moving through space suggests that the apparent two-dimensional, spatial structure of the printed page is as conducive to reading a text as is the simple direct reading of the elements in a geographic map. Thorndike and Stasz showed that reading and understanding two-dimensional maps is one of the very few cognitive activities that does not show a difference between novices and experts.³¹

Thus a printed page and a geographic map both demonstrate one's ability to intuitively interpret and 'map' mental representations of two-dimensional space. In maps, this is possible due to the conventional expectation to find a direct isomorphism between the representation and the real corresponding areas on the earth. The printed page seems to offer a similar built-in isomorphism requiring zero cognitive load for interaction: left page = left hand, right page = right hand. Industrial designers picked up this type of efficient isomorphism when designing controls that are easily 'mapped', by their shape, location, and orientation, to the functions activated by the controls: from knobs, levers and switches for simple devices such as stovetops to more complex car seats and airplane cockpits.³² This approach, termed natural mapping, is a sign of superior design where the product affords an immediate reading of its

functions without the need for labels, warnings, arrows or similar remedial directional crutches. Imagine a printed book with a picture of a thumb on the margin of every page: 'this is how you hold the book and turn the pages.' Alas, the white margin is an invitation to our fingers and we don't need instructions to understand its function. *Every good printed book is also a very good, natural map of itself.*

3. Paper and the Psychological Advantages of Materiality

In the future, will paper be a thing of the past? One such scenario is depicted in a 1954 short story by Isaac Asimov:

Margie even wrote about it that night in her diary. On the page headed May 17, 2157, she wrote, 'Today Tommy found a real book!' It was a very old book. Margie's grandfather once said that when he was a little boy his grandfather told him that there was a time when all stories were printed on paper.³³

Efforts to mimic the physical book's properties and turn its tactile experience into a digital electronic equivalent have so far failed to replicate the satisfying, traditional reading – and writing – experience.³⁴ Companies such as Apple have filed patents for electronic embedded signatures.³⁵ Some have experimented with raised

'Paper is a humble, simple material, and this simplicity may be the main reason why it has survived the continued attacks from its electronic simulations'

keys for typing on a tablet.³⁶ Others have added to e-books the simulation of stacks of pages already read and still to be read.³⁷ While the visual mimicry of paper has somewhat been obtained in e-ink technology, a corresponding tactile experience has not been realized yet. But the unique properties of paper are difficult to replicate digitally and are the reason why virtually everyone today

still uses some form of paper, as pointed out by Abigail Sellen and Richard Harper in *The Myth of the Paperless Office*.³⁸ A warning that could apply to the many unsuccessful developments in e-books and e-readers that try to replicate real books is 'Do not reinvent the wheel.'³⁹ Thus, a stack of sheets of paper bound on one side is a simple recipe – a kind of sandwich with ink and paper

between two covers – that, if it cannot be improved is better left alone. The design of the printed book seems unlikely to get a major overhaul anytime soon. A printed book, like a pencil, is guaranteed to function properly every time it's used: one day, a year, or many centuries later.⁴⁰

Of course, printed books should be protected from water damage and other perils, but in general, given proper care, their stability and permanence are quite remarkable. Printed books are not so easily damaged or destroyed. But if the same written content is stored inside an electronic device, it could vanish in

a blip, caused by a botched software update, an accidental delete, or worse, an intentional one performed remotely by an all-seeing electronic watchdog. Such was the case in 2009 when Amazon deleted, of all books, George Orwell's 1984 and *Animal Farm* from the Kindle e-readers that customers already owned.⁴¹

Paper is a humble, simple material, and this simplicity may be the main reason why it has survived the continued attacks from its electronic simulations, underscoring '... a quality [...] that may be its greatest strength as a reading medium: its modesty', and '... unlike screens, paper rarely calls attention to itself or shifts focus away from the text'.⁴² The major obstacle, so far, of digital books is that they can replicate some visual features of printed books and thus somewhat replicate the superficial retinal experience of reading, but they can only simulate the physical experience of flipping through the pages and reading with all the senses. So far, *paper has been simulated but not replicated*. Can it ever be?

The philosopher John Searle warns about the confusion between simulation and replication when discussing the digital: 'Even with a perfect computer emulation of a stomach, you cannot then stuff a pizza into the computer and expect the computer to digest it'.⁴³ Since the invention of the codex, the basic

structure of the physical book has remained virtually unchanged. Today, where text is the main feature, pages are still rectangular, oriented in portrait format and bound along one of the long edges. A simple object, but a very hard one to replicate digitally.

If a printed book cannot be replicated digitally, perhaps it's best to simply make good use of the better properties of both media.⁴⁴ In a printed book, one can usefully exercise the natural ability of spatial orientation, fast random-access, and perception of the text in its entirety, all great aids to memory and understanding. But if what is needed is quick consultation of information such as addresses or dictionary definitions, or even complex procedural information like a sequence of instructions, perhaps a digital format is not only acceptable but superior. Another good example of the digital is the ability, for visually impaired users, to increase the font size of a text, especially since large print books have recently become less available. But focus, attention, comprehension and fixation in memory in the reading process of a long, complex text seem to benefit greatly from the physical interaction afforded by paper and the printed page. A physical interaction cherished by lovers of print like the singer-songwriter Patti Smith, for whom: 'There is nothing, in our material world, more beautiful than the book'.⁴⁴



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PRINTED SCHOLARLY MONOGRAPHS

Pronounced Dead Prematurely?

Helène Pannekoek is an information professional at Nyenrode Business University and a Book and Digital Media Studies alumna.

The scholarly monograph is a topic of discussion, as different stakeholders have different reasons for keeping or abandoning this particular form of publication. Texts in digital form are increasingly pervasive and pose a serious threat to the printed form. This essay aims to explore concerns from the perspectives of scholarly readers, scholarly authors, publishers of academic texts and their different models, and, finally, the perspective of libraries and consortia, to see if there is a possible future for the printed scholarly monograph.

Keywords: *business models; digitisation; OAPEN; Open Access; scholarly publishing*



The scholarly monograph is at a turning point in its existence, as a subject of many discussions of what measures should be taken to go in to ensure the best possible way for researchers to publish and read scholarly texts. Changing roles of libraries in combination with different ways of allocating budgets, as well as digital reading are some important factors influencing the future of the scholarly monograph. At this point in

time, the monograph is often available in both print and digital form, but there is a chance that the print form will disappear. This essay will further explore possible threats to the printed form, concerns from the perspectives of the scholar as a reader, the scholar as an author, the publishers and different models used for publishing and finally the perspective of the library, to see if there is a possible future for the printed scholarly monograph.

Paper vs. Screen Reading

The first question that comes to mind is: do scholars still want to read a printed version, or do they prefer a digital version? “Paper versus screen” has been a subject of research, and the findings provide a dual outcome: digital reading is preferred for short, shallow reading, often used for skimming through the text, whereas reading off-screen is deemed suitable for immersive deep-reading.

This is partly due to the (in) tangibility of the text, since the way readers handle books and devices have different effects on how easily texts can be read. Typically, the internet is used for searching texts, and fragmented texts are the most read texts online. Longer texts, where the reader concentrates on the reading, are preferably read on paper.¹

When reading, the brain goes through the same movements as when writing, since the same areas responsible for writing are activated.² The mental involvement with text goes even further, since the brain also connects parts of the text to their location on paper pages, which cannot be done when reading from a screen.³ It is because of this connection that paper is easier to navigate and more easily remembered. This is

important for any kind of reader, but even more important for scholars who depend on their readings for their writings.

Scholars make use of paper for immersive reading, and part of this process is making annotations and highlighting parts that might be useful. It serves scholars in two ways: increasing the understanding of a text, by slowing down the pace, as well as ensuring that they can revisit the relevant passages for their own research.⁴ Most scholars do not read digital texts completely on screen, but rather print these, since ‘the traditional habit of highlighting and annotating text has not migrated to the digital environment’.⁵ Skimming through a text can help decide to either discard it, or read it with more focus. This skimming can be done digitally, while

the reader is not yet committed to read the text in full and can be a first step towards immersive reading.⁶ Since the annotations are often still handwritten, the text has to be available offline.

Digital texts can more easily be adjusted to the reader and are more easily accessible through the internet.⁷ The drawback is that these texts come with many distractions on the page itself, as well as the option to click on parts of the page that will lead to other pages or pop-ups. Even if the reader does not intend to click,

‘Committees responsible for selection and promotion continue to perceive printed monographs as more prestigious than a monograph published digitally’

there is an urge to do so, which in itself is a distraction from the text.⁸ This urge exists because people have wandering minds, there is a need to keep fighting it by paying attention to reading, and it is much easier to just click than keep fighting off external distractions in our minds.⁹ The text itself is static, it remains the same constantly, so it is hard to keep paying attention to it.¹⁰ The clicking urge is further increased by eye-catchers that try to get the user to go to another page, so the reader is prone to interruptions during his/her readings.¹¹ Immersion is further disrupted by images that can be found everywhere. Images add meaning to texts and can carry meaning in themselves; through this self-contained meaning, they can be a distraction for the reader.¹²

Besides the distractions within programs, computers can be a distraction in themselves. Computers are multifunctional, which makes it hard to use them for just one task at a time.¹³ Their multifunctionality demands attention from the user and can pose a serious threat to the immersive reading process. It also reminds the user of unfinished tasks, by sending notifications from different programs that are running in the background. It is difficult to ignore these notifications, and this maintains the awareness of the device. In off-screen reading, the reader's conscious mind wanders to an alternate reality, whereas newer technology keeps the reader aware of reality, with technology as an ever-present object.¹⁴

E-readers have gotten rid of a great deal of the distractions, since they do not have all the apps,

advertisements, and backlight issues that computers or tablets have.¹⁵ Still, the reader is aware of the technology, since e-readers are not one with the text. There is a distance between the content and the form, because the content can change without a change in the device itself. This is impossible with a book, pages have to be turned in order to reveal new content and it is not possible to change the text on a page without turning it.¹⁶ This difference creates an awareness in the reader of the e-reader technology, while the book as an object easily fades into the background, enabling the reader to focus solely on the content.¹⁷

Concerns of authors

In scholarly communication, the authors are also part of the group of readers, making this a special group within the field. The authors, especially those within humanities and social studies, depend on monographs for their careers. They are encouraged to write monographs for promotions, but it is also viewed as a prestigious contribution that might lead to further career opportunities, such as grants for new research.

The prestige that comes along with monographs is greater than with articles, and there is still a tendency in academic circles to think that printed monographs are more prestigious than those available online.¹⁸ Further evidence suggests that committees responsible for selection and promotion continue to perceive printed monographs as more prestigious than a monograph published digitally.¹⁹ Some people from

a focus group indicated that universities have 'effectively outsourced their tenure and promotion decisions to the publishers who commission and select content'.²⁰

Open access publications are believed to be less critically evaluated, thus of lesser quality, than printed materials.²¹ Even though the process for open access publications can be just as strict, the way they are perceived is far from positive and it will take time for researchers to change their opinion. This belief is further influenced by the funding models that some open access publication platforms hold: through processing fees for authors. There is a suspicion towards authors who pay their own fees, and this is seen as 'vanity publishing'.²² Of course, this is part of the idea that the one who pays is essentially the one making the final decisions, and that publishers will accept anything as long as they can make a profit. On the other hand, the author might be concerned about the marketing for his/ her monograph, since the publisher receives money no matter what.²³ The publisher no longer relies on book sales to have an income, so why bother to pay marketers for the promotion of the material? The point of publishing a monograph is that people will read the work and, more importantly, they will cite it. This leads to more prestige for the most quoted authors, but if the authors and their works cannot be found and read, they will not be as likely to receive a grant or promotion.

New ways of selling (e-)books

In summary, readers as well as authors are still interested in the print version, but are publishers still willing to provide printed texts, and is this financially sustainable? Digital publishing does cost as much as traditional printing, with material costs and the costs of the physical distribution of the books. Yet, there is still a need to cover other costs, for example for the editing process and the marketing of monographs (assuming that publishers will still need to market books if author's fees do not cover everything). The printed version has material costs but at the same time, the consumer is willing to pay for them, whereas digital material is often viewed as having to be (nearly) free, since there is no physical product. Publishers need to find out how they can deal with these expectations and make enough money to continue their work. Since it is essential for scholars, especially in the humanities, to publish monographs, publishers must find ways to do so. Different models to publish monographs have been developed, but are these still considering printed monographs, or is print left out of the equation?

A decline in print title sales and little revenue from e-books in the humanities and social sciences calls for a new approach regarding book sales; the traditional model cannot be sustained.²⁴ Scholars have the option to bypass publishers digitally, so this is a threat to the already declining sales;²⁵ publishers have to find ways to enhance and emphasise their services in order to stay relevant.²⁶ One way to

enhance their services is to come up with metadata plans and standards, for which they have more time and expertise than researchers have in general. It is imperative that new ways of doing business are created, but what are some new models that are used?

Ice-cream model

One model that is used, is the 'ice-cream' model, which is used by Bloomsbury Academic. This model takes into account the need for open access, meeting the expectation of free materials. The publisher provides a free HTML version on a creative commons non-commercial license, which would be the 'plain vanilla ice cream' as Frances Pinter describes it.²⁷ They provide extra services to enhance the experience of the reader, such as more accessible formats (the 'cone'), e-books that contain extra metadata and extra materials (the 'toppings').²⁸ In this model, it is entirely up to the reader how much money they want to spend on the monograph or article. The free version is used as a marketing tool, as it draws in the customers, who can check the content before paying anything. Traditional monographs are expensive, and there is an audience that can't be reached by selling printed books. Through digital means, some scholars want to 'bypass publishers altogether'²⁹, in order to provide affordable books. This model can compete with those scholars.

OAPEN

An open access business model that is currently in use, is OAPEN. The OAPEN project is funded

by JISC and the Arts and Humanities Business Council.³⁰ Open access business models are already used for journals and articles, especially in the STM fields.³¹ Many open access models still rely on different versions of the publication, as is the case in the aforementioned ice-cream model. The OAPEN project is a collaboration between stakeholders in the field of publishing, such as publishers, academics, and their institutions that focus on publications in the humanities and social sciences.³² The OAPEN model provides publishers with a sum of money to provide a PDF format of monographs under a creative commons license, the publisher can still sell prints and e-books.³³

ILCOAb

A third model for funding is working in consortia to combine funds and negotiations with publishers. One example of this is the International Library Coalition for open access books. This is a possible solution for a problem that occurs within libraries; their budgets cannot buy all essential scholarly books since the 'corpus of research material is expanding whilst the funds to pay for dissemination are contracting'.³⁴ Books are ordered from the publisher by the coalition if enough members are interested; the price that is paid covers all pre-printing costs, which is often one-third of the costs of a monograph.³⁵ The publisher will provide an open access file, but is still allowed to sell different versions of the book.³⁶ The funding model benefits both sides, since the title price per library decreases tremendously, based on how many libraries take part in the

consortium. This will help libraries use their small budgets to buy more materials. Scholars benefit since they have access to more materials and the discoverability of their work increases. The publisher, on the other hand, has a guaranteed revenue and can still sell books to increase profits.³⁷ The larger a consortium is, the more demands it can make.

Consortia may focus on just their field, which would make them a specialist group with knowledge of the preferences from their own specific field. An example of this is the 'Sponsoring Consortium of Open Access Publishing in Particle Physics (SCOAP3), hosted and organized by CERN'.³⁸ This consortium has gained open access to a few prestigious journals, showing that consortia in a highly specific field of interest can work.

(University) Libraries

Another contributor to the discussions about paper versus print are the libraries. They are the ones who traditionally bought and stored books, and made them available for readers. They have seen their budgets decline in recent years,³⁹ while having to deal with buying both the physical books and journals, as well as paying subscription fees for digital content.⁴⁰ Adding to that is the expanding amount of monographs that are being published.⁴¹ This in addition to the pressure from patrons to provide more services, such as extra computer rooms.

Libraries did notice a trend in citations from journals and articles: as the online availability increased, a decrease occurred in the number of journals and articles that were cited.⁴² A 2004 study within a university library found that print books were less frequently demanded after the titles became digitally available.⁴³ Libraries had to start thinking about other options than to just buy books and find out who is going to use them later. One solution to this particular problem was the demand-driven acquisition, in which a number of requests would lead to the purchase of an item. This reduced the amount of purchased materials, and consequently, the amount of money that was spent on monographs decreased. This does increase the risk of missing out on buying a book that is later deemed important, and undermines the traditional task of preservation. Being part of a consortium could be a feasible solution for this, since the libraries within a consortium do not have to purchase all of the materials themselves; they can share copies and archiving responsibilities.⁴⁴

Providing and preserving books was a logical role when dealing with printed materials, but for digital materials there is more room for discussion about who is responsible for preservation. It might be wise to look at other options, such as a centralised depository; or a decentralised system, which might be a risk since open access monographs could disappear altogether if there is no central institution keeping track of them, or if the publisher responsible for the preservation ceases to exist.⁴⁵

Conclusion

In summary, the readers are still interested in reading scholarly monographs in printed form, since they want to do some deep reading and add their own remarks to the texts. However, that only goes for the deep reading part, while most texts are just being skimmed in order to see if they fit in with the current research. Deep reading is done on paper because there is no practical alternative, as screens are too distracting and e-readers do not offer marking- and note-taking tools to the satisfaction of the reader.

Additionally, the authors and their institutions seem biased towards a printed version, for this is deemed more prestigious and selection committees focus more on print than on digitally published texts. Open access is not seen as having equal standards of peer-reviewing and accepting, and the perceived quality is further doubted through the publication fees that are paid by the authors themselves. This view of print quality versus digitally published quality might change in the future, especially when digital publications are normalised, but that will be a slow and gradual process.

Publishers have already begun to realise that their business models based on printed monographs are

not sustainable and they are coming up with newer models to secure their position in the field of scholarly communication. These models include print but are mainly focused on providing digital texts and additional data. From a publisher's perspective, the monograph has moved from the main product to a by-product, while the content is kept similar to traditional texts and digital texts are often just the print versions published through a digital platform.

Finally, libraries are seen as the keepers of printed books, with rows of monographs on their shelves. This image is gradually changing to an image of an expertise centre, with most of their collections preserved in a depository. Libraries are working together on stretching their budgets, since there is an emphasis on providing access rather than owning and lending items. Libraries too are focusing on the digital material in increasing numbers, but at the same time, they do acquire the most demanded printed materials.

‘Digital publishing does cost as much as traditional printing, with material costs and the costs of the physical distribution of the books’

Overall, the emphasis on the digitally available texts is dominant and as scholars are getting more used to working with screens and e-ink, the need for a printed monograph declines. Current models within publishing companies as well as libraries are already making a shift towards the digital world and

the new options that it provides. The printed monograph has been declared dead on multiple occasions, but all of the stakeholders are not yet prepared to let it go for very legitimate reasons.

New technological developments will further increase the use of digital texts, but until then, the printed monograph is here to stay.



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SOCIAL SYMBOLISM

THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE PRINTED BOOK AS A MEDIUM

Ute Schneider is a professor of Book Studies and Director of Studies at the Gutenberg-Institute of World literature and Written Media / Book Studies at the Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz.

Social practices of using printed books in the digital age are mostly based on the symbolic power of book communication. All contemporary values attributed to the printed book are built on (traditional) social practices on the one hand, as well as triggering dynamical social practices on the other hand. The following contribution covers some examples of using printed books with the aim to generate situations of follow-up communication in various social dimensions. We still can find a common agreement in western societies about the values of the book as a medium, which obviously cannot be expressed by an e-book. These values are only some of the reasons that lead to the survival of the printed book.

Keywords: book symbolism; BookTube; communication power; #hotdudesreading; slow reading



Introduction

Since late 2017 a new trend in private libraries of the U.S. has been observed: “backwards books.” Owners of books turn their books backwards on the shelves. In this way, you can only see the front of the book block, so author names and titles are hidden.¹ Nobody

can see which book is which. Only the quantity of the available books gives an impression of the collector’s suspected reading performance. In a German newspaper article this strange kind of collecting books was called “burn-out-library”,² because the books do not disturb the stressed readers and owners respectively. What is the reason behind this behavior? Is the

book simply an object of decoration? The individual reasons are hardly interesting. More important are the reactions and comments of the observers; almost all disapprove of this treatment of the book.³

This almost unanimous verdict leads to the question: What values do we associate with printed books?

The book as a medium is a system of valences. It develops its importance and power mainly through its multifunctional use. The functions of books become apparent while using them, because the only way to determine the meaning of something is through its use. The traditional values attributed to the printed book are the following: the book is regarded as a place of certain knowledge, as an adviser and as an object of memories, not least as an entertainment medium. So, the book is separated by materiality from its environment, but, at the same time, reading a book triggers social practices through its medial elements and characteristics. Not only the contents of books, but also their materiality communicate special semantic meanings.

Theories in Material Culture Studies have shown that the materiality of objects can be grasped as social references, which can be generally understood in society.⁴ It is easy to prove how the social reference of books works: a large number of books, properly arranged in the bookshelves of a house, symbolizes accumulated knowledge, such as literary interests and literacy.⁵ If the art of literature belongs to high culture, it

stands for a certain intellectual level. The entire society understands the symbolism of books. For example, a background of books is used in journalistic contexts in order to give interview partners a certain degree of seriousness on television. The book as a symbol of knowledge and scholarship has a symbolic tradition going on for centuries. Even in the digital age of media change, the printed book remains a frequently used instrument of social positioning, especially through social networks.

Reader's Identity and the Pile of Unread Books

Readng books is – undisputedly – one way to create your individual identity.⁶ Especially reading fiction is a way of discovering new worlds, or becoming acquainted with other models of life. The function of the book and reading as instruments for the creation of individual identity should be separated from the function of the book and reading as an expression of one's reading identity. In the first case, the book serves as a means to construct one's own identity in a social context; in the second case, it serves as a symbol of the concrete reading identity and the values associated with it. These typical media techniques of the self are obviously not outdated. In March 2016, the German Börsenverein⁷ started a survey with the question: what object would you like to be photographed with for a portrait? Two-thirds of the people who took part in the survey answered that they would like to be portrayed with their books, followed by their pet and their sports equipment.⁸ Book possession is part of one's identity; consumer goods can 'fulfill the

function of personal distinction solely through the individual combination of many existing objects.⁹ However, this is only successful if all actors are aware of the symbolic meaning of these objects. In western societies, not only reading ability, but also the capability of understanding long and complex texts, are seen as necessary requirements for participating in democratic processes. In domestic settings, books are more important than any other type of object because they serve as the embodiment of these ideals, as well as expressions of religious or professional values.¹⁰

Since the possibilities of social media platforms like YouTube have grown, everybody can take part as an active user and this has resulted in a flood of so-called BookTubers uploading videos every day. In their vlogs, they show their filled bookshelves and demonstrate their reading interests. These practices stem from times when the book was undisputedly the main means, and reading the only way to create a media-based identity. The staging of the self by what one reads or does not read is usually closely linked to what is socially desirable in a social milieu.¹¹ Reading in social reading groups offers the possibility of a follow-up communication after the reading act, in order to confirm or correct your opinion, if necessary. In many facets, literary critical statements are posted online by many readers. Their vlogs reach a considerable number of clicks up to well over one million. These videos are used both for the dedicated advertising of individual book marketing, as well as for the self-presentation of the mostly young literary critics. The criticism of readers for other readers is quite standardized

in the videos: a lay, often female, critic stands in front of her bookshelf holding a printed (!) book she has already read, and stares into the camera in order to give a summary of the book, as well as a positive or negative evaluation of her reading impression.

The BookTubers present themselves as enthusiastic readers who always maintain a positive attitude towards the cultural techniques of reading. Moreover, they always keep a so-called “pub”, a pile of unread books, in the background, which reveals future reading experiences. Some vloggers post videos just to display their unread books and to announce further reading adventures, as well as to prove that they are able to fulfill intellectual and social challenges.¹² Demonstrating the huge size of one’s pile of unread books can hardly be realized with e-books. Reading printed books is connected with the imagination of a great achievement, which will be rewarded with appreciation in one’s social milieu. Hence, printed books offer high potential in integrating cultural and habitual identities, because, apart from their specific content, their materiality and contexts allow them to communicate social values which are understood by many people – not only by readers.

Printed books as symbols of a delightful and sustainable life

In 2001, the literary scholar Sabine Gross presented a wealth of examples of how readers associate their reading habits with a place, a piece of furniture or a time of the day.¹³ Readers without fixed reading habits have hardly been found. The readers’

self-placement in a special armchair, or on the couch of their living room, or their bed, on a deck chair in the garden etc., is often ritually connected with physical enjoyment. Readers actively shape their settings: the body must feel “comfortable”, and the preparation of special props such as coffee, tea, champagne, wine, cigarettes, or nibbles completes the enjoyment. Almost twenty years later, nothing of this has changed, as can easily be seen on today’s social media platforms.

A close look at the online platform Instagram offers a meaningful overview of the contemporary symbolic staging of printed books. Users post innumerable pictures with books as instruments of self-referential expressions. The symbolic meaning can be decoded by the target group, maybe the peer group of the user who has posted the pictures. One of the most important values that the pictures project is that reading printed books is delightful.

Books are very often accompanied by homemade food and drinks.¹⁴ Cakes, biscuits, fruits, and any other kind of tasty food surround books, along with coffee, tea and wine. It seems that it is impossible to read a book without drinking a glass of wine or a cup of coffee. Not only photographers, but also illustrators

‘Even in the digital age of media change, the printed book remains a frequently used instrument of social positioning, especially through social networks’

display a reading atmosphere in similar ways. Last August, the famous US magazine *The New Yorker* had a cover

of a family on holiday. The mother is reading and sipping wine.¹⁵ Reading settings are in most cases illustrated in this way. The book as a motif in context with treats in general and with food in particular, seems to be a generally imagined tableau.

More typical contexts for displaying books on digital platforms can be found. In many cases, the books are closed. The materials

surrounding the books are often wood, flowers,¹⁶ wool,¹⁷ as well as pets, mostly cats.¹⁸ Cats, books, and reading are a very popular triadic.¹⁹ We can also find herbs, trees, and more nature in the pictures posted. Uncountable examples present books surrounded by natural products. What does this mean? In the virtual space of the transitory and volatile internet, books and other things are symbols of permanence and stability. Reading printed books does not signify temporary pleasure, but a long lasting passion, like using wooden things and wool. Printed books are used to slow down the hectic digital age and to join the current mainstream idea of a simple and sustainable life.

Instagram users often present themselves as empathic readers. The act of reading printed books should

be associated with a certain lifestyle, frequently combined with the rejection of cultural mainstream ideals and turning away from technical progress. Homing and cocooning are the most often shown contexts for an aesthetic representation of printed books. Most people have to handle electronic media for professional use. Private leisure time gives them a chance to create their individual, old-fashioned slowness. Slowness and the empathic use of slow, printed books are the favorite contexts in representing the book as a medium. The pictures regularly quote aesthetic traditions, which are very old-fashioned; nowadays, these traditions undergo a renaissance, like crafts and traditional cooking, getting in touch with nature, and: reading printed books.²⁰ This renaissance is caused by the search for an intensive, healthy, sustainable, and aesthetically simple way of living.

Reading printed books is sexy

Reading printed books in public spaces draws attention to readers and their books. Many people try to identify the reader's book in order to start a conversation on the book's content, or to draw conclusions about the reader's mentality. Since 2015 a group of six women and seven men, has been posting pictures of young, very good looking and seemingly smart men under the hashtag *#hotdudesreading* on the platform Instagram. The account has now got over 900 thousands followers, both male and female. All the pictures of the young men were taken in a moment of concentrated reading. The men are sometimes partly undressed and stand, or sit, in a pretty relaxed way, in the New York subway,

the Central Park, or any other subway station, while they are reading. All of them hold the old fashioned printed book in their hands, none of them gazes at an e-book. This is important. One comment of the followers on the highly concentrated readers in a situation full of intimacy, for example, is 'old-school guys (so hot)'.²¹

In 2016, seventy-five of these photos were published in a printed book by American publisher Simon and Schuster.²² The comments on these photos are also cited in the book. Some of the commenting people pick up on the erotic undercurrent, for example: '[t]his sexy striker must be killing time before his next scrimmage, and I'd love to be picked first to help warm him up'²³ (on a picture of a football player), or '[i]f he didn't look so comfortable on that bench, I'd cozy right up next to him and show him he's not the only one who prefers it horizontal'²⁴ (on a picture of a man lying on a bench and reading). The reviews of this book, on the platform Goodreads.com, for example, are without any exception similar and extremely enthusiastic: '[n]othing is as sexy as a man reading a book'.²⁵

It is not even relevant for the intended effect whether the readers were really passionate readers, or whether a scene is possibly only staged. All comments in the pictures go in the same direction: male readers have an erotic charisma whether they hold a fiction or a non-fiction book in their hand. However, it is decisive that the books they are holding give these men an air of intelligence. Perhaps, reading in the eye of the viewer is identified as intelligence, and intelligence is estimated as erotic or sexy. Reading

looks seductive.

Apparently, this opinion has general validity. A publicity campaign of the German book trade was accompanied by surveys on different topics around the book as a medium. In 2015, one of the surveys confirmed the assessment: 'reading men are better lovers'.²⁶ And to read out loud to each other triggers erotic anticipation. It seems that reading as an intimate process has an erotic effect.

This appears to be true even for a group of readers, not only for single readers. From New Zealand and the U.S. a new reading practice has been imported to Europe: "slow reading". Slow, highly concentrated and deep reading is a reaction to our fast and digital everyday life, and therefore people meet to read together in silence. Everyone reads their own book. They meet in hotel lobbies and clubs in order to read silently, without talking about the books, or to each other.

The flow-experience and the happiness of reading in so-called silent reading parties, starting in Seattle in 2014, caused a journalist of the newspaper *The Stranger*, Christopher Frizzelle, to talk about an 'Unexpected Sexiness of Many People Quietly Reading and Drinking in Public'.²⁷ The harmony of

body and book-reading merge together to create the feeling that reading is a sexy thing. It is obvious that reading and the communication capability of printed books symbolize intellectual wealth on the one hand, but on the other hand also develop sensual potential.

The social effect of book communication

It should be emphasized that the content and, in particular, the materiality of every book represents not only cultural values, but also the social value of communication. The communication power of the book is its *most important* and in fact, its *essential* value. Of course, book communication naturally also includes a storage and a reminder function, but the social value of "communication power" is more important to constitute the specific practices of the use of a book. The communication power includes actual reading, as well as a symbolic function: every symbolic use

of a book communicates social values just as every functional use of a book is based on social values.

The users of Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest and other social media platforms are used to dealing with digital media, with online

'The act of reading printed books should be associated with a certain lifestyle, frequently combined with the rejection of cultural mainstream ideals and turning away from technical progress'

communication and the newest hipster trends. But it seems that it is important for them to show their skills in dealing with the old-fashioned printed book. Reading printed books is indispensable and has acquired a high reputation in the virtual world. The presentation of books and reading processes is being realized in traditional ways, but through new digital media.

nor can we find a social agreement on certain reading subjects. The treatment of books is on the one hand *individually* designed, but on the other hand *collectively* practiced in its structure and character. This treatment of the book seems permanently established in western societies and will, presumably, not be outdated in the future.

In a socio-cultural dimension, the reading process is neither fixed or limited to special reading media,



¹ Some pictures of backwards books can be found here: *news.com.au*, “Backwards books”: New interiors trend is driving people nuts’, <<http://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/home/interiors/the-backwards-book-trend-is-one-of-the-silliest-things-weve-seen/news-story/bf6e3841a6c14db0ae2cd236fcc71f7a>> (12 February 2018).

² Author’s translation ‘Burn-out-Bibliotheken’. P. Kümmel, ‘Die “umgekehrten” Bibliotheken’, *Die ZEIT*, 11 January 2018, p. 43.

³ See here for example: <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BdySqYnhn6r/?hl=de&tagged=backwardsbooks>> (9 February 2018).

⁴ For an overview see: D. Hicks & M. Beaudry (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies* (Oxford: University Press, 2010).

⁵ About the cultural power of bookshelves, see: C. Norrick-Rühl, ‘(Furniture) Books and Book Furniture as Markers of Authority’, *TXT Magazine*, 3 (2016), pp. 3-8.

⁶ A. Kuhn, ‘Lesen als Identitätskonstruktion und soziale Integration’, in U. Rautenberg & U. Schneider (eds.), *Lesen. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 833-851.

⁷ The *Börsenverein des deutschen Buchhandels* is the syndication of the German booktrade to represent its professional interests.

⁸ See Börsenverein des deutschen Buchhandels, ‘Pressemitteilung Umfrage-Ergebnisse: Mit welchem für Sie charakteristischen Gegenstand würden Sie sich gerne für ein Porträtbild fotografieren lassen?’, <https://www.boersenverein.de/sixcms/media.php/976/16-03-10_Vorsicht-Buch_Portraet_Umfrageergebnisse.pdf> (12 February 2018).

⁹ Author’s translation. T. Habermas, *Geliebte Objekte. Symbole und Instrumente der Identitätsbildung* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1996), p. 187.

¹⁰ Author’s translation. Books are ‘mehr als jede andere Objektart bedeutsam, weil sie der Verkörperung von idealen und dem Ausdruck religiöser und beruflicher Werthaltungen dienen’. M. Csikszentmihalyi & E. Rochberg-Halton, *Der Sinn der Dinge. Das Selbst und die Symbole des Wohnbereichs* (München, Weinheim: Psychologie Verlags Union, 1989), pp. 86-87.

¹¹ L. Holbe, *Konstruktion von Leseidentität am Beispiel des BookTube-Kanals Kossis Welt* (Master

Thesis in Book Studies, JGU Mainz 2016), still unpublished.

¹² Examples: YouTube, 'MEIN SUB!! Juli 2017 | Stapel ungelesener Bücher Teil 1 | katharia', <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHy96jadpVc&t=68s>>; YouTube, 'Mein RIESIGER SUB Teil 2 | Stapel ungelesener Bücher #2 | katharia', <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUN5rWVLT0Y>>; YouTube, 'Keine Lust mehr! | Mein SuB und ich', <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JuFlfxxveI0&t=337s>>; YouTube, 'Ich habe meinen SuB satt | Bücher werden nicht schlecht!' <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rF1q-YbH3Fs&t=629s>> (5 February 2018).

¹³ S. Gross, 'Das Buch in der Hand. Zum situativ-affektiven Umgang mit Texten', in Stiftung Lesen (ed.), *Leseverhalten in Deutschland. Eine Studie der Stiftung Lesen* (Mainz, Hamburg: Stiftung Lesen, Spiegel Verlag, 2001), pp. 175-197.

¹⁴ See here, example for coffee on Instagram, 'bookish_girl!', <https://www.instagram.com/bookish_girl/?hl=de> (12 February 2018).

¹⁵ See The New Yorker 'The Magazine, August 21, 2017', <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/08/21>> (12 February 2018).

¹⁶ See for example Instagram, 'booksandflowers_', <https://www.instagram.com/booksandflowers_/?hl=de> (12 February 2018).

¹⁷ See for example Instagram, 'eatsbooksfordinner', <<https://www.instagram.com/eatsbooksfordinner/>> (12 February 2018).

¹⁸ See for example Instagram, 'reading.with_cats', <https://www.instagram.com/reading.with_cats/?hl=de> (12 February 2018).

¹⁹ For example see Instagram, 'eatsbooksfordinner', <<https://www.instagram.com/eatsbooksfordinner/>> (12 February 2018).

²⁰ L. Stahlmann, *Der zeichenhafte Gebrauch des Buchs* (Master Thesis in Book Studies, JGU Mainz, 2016), p. 86, still unpublished.

²¹ 'Between the covers'. *Hot Dudes Reading* (New York: Atria Books, 2016), (pages not numbered).

²² *Hot Dudes Reading* (New York: Atria Books, 2016).

²³ *Ibidem*, 'pier40' (pages not numbered).

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 'Christopher Street pier' (pages not numbered).

²⁵ Goodreads, 'Hot Dudes Reading', <<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/27220739-hot-dudes-reading>> (12 February 2018).

²⁶ Author's translation 'Lesende Männer sind die besseren Liebhaber'. See Börsenverein des deutschen Buchhandels, 'Jetzt ein Buch/Presse/Lesende Männer sind die besseren Liebhaber', <<https://vorsichtbuch.de/presse-downloads/pressemitteilungen/zeige/lesende-maenner-sind-die-besseren-liebhaber/>> (12 February 2018).

²⁷ The Stranger, 'The Silent-Reading Party. On the Unexpected Sexiness of Many People Quietly Reading and Drinking in Public', <<http://www.thestranger.com/seattle/the-reading-party/Content?oid=3845017>> (12 February 2018).

AGAINST THE MARGINS

Mark Z. Danielewski's House of Leaves and the Persistence of Print

Cathryn Piwinski is a Master's Student and Research Assistant at New York University

Mark Z. Danielewski's novel, House of Leaves, is a narratively complex and typographically experimental text that asserts the importance of print books in a digital world. This paper argues that, while its production mingled both analog and digital technologies, it remains steadfastly material to claim the distinctive capabilities of print. Yet, despite this material manifestation, House of Leaves launches a more nuanced debate between digital and print technology within the plot of the novel itself. The novel conscripts the reader into the conversation and demands recognition of the precariousness of print, which is always haunted by a threatening digital presence.

Keywords: experimental typography; House of Leaves; print book; reading experience; unconventional design



Mark Z. Danielewski writes upside-down. He writes sideways and includes footnotes for footnotes and leaves pages almost entirely blank. His debut novel titled House of Leaves, published in 2000, unapologetically complicates the process of reading with its convoluted narrative and experimental typographic design. At the center of the narrative is a film about a house that

is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside. Photographer Will Navidson's house grows into a labyrinth at its own will, leading to an exploration that Navidson records for a documentary. Yet the printed *House of Leaves* cannot and does not present the film; instead, it offers layers of narrators-as-archivists who attempt to discover the truth of what each who came before them alludes to in their own piece of a manuscript. First comes an academic

analysis of Navidson's film, written by a man named Zampanò. Johnny Truant then discovers the disorganized remains of this manuscript and attempts to reconstruct it for an imaginary reader. Before reaching 'us', however, the quasi-restored work winds through one last round of revisions by an otherwise unnamed group of 'Editors'. When presented in printed form, this layered narrative—filled with mis-leading, misinterpretations, and mistakes—twists itself into a visual labyrinth to parallel both the house and the plot. When a bullet strikes and 'splinter's a wooden door, the words scatter themselves across the page'.¹ As Navidson stares at a 'stretching' and 'expanding' staircase, so, too, do the letters stretch and expand across the largely blank page.² The way the novel looks, then—meaning, the way the words are precisely placed, the way they are colored, oriented, and sized—matters a great deal to the story told. This means, though, that the process of producing and printing *House of Leaves* was particularly complicated, especially during a period where the publishing industry began to focus more on digital presentations.

Roughly eighteen years after its initial publication, *House of Leaves* still has no authorized e-book, audiobook, or film adaptation.

'To emphasize the crucial role of the audience in engaging with and sustaining the form, Danielewski assigns several characters in House of Leaves the role of reader'

Despite the narrative's interest in filmmaking and the experimental design of the text that necessitates the use of technology, Danielewski's novel remains steadfast in its printed form. The book directly engages with popular questions of the rise of the digital and the death of the analog, as it negotiates the limitations of both mediums through the manipulation of text in a traditional book format.

Yet while the resulting book of this internal debate is printed, I argue that the musings within its narrative are far less concrete. After examining the complicated process of its construction, which blurred the divide between analog and digital production, this paper turns to the narrative within *House of Leaves* to study how the book thinks of itself and its readers. I ask: how does *House of Leaves* and its author respond to the supposed death of the printed form? What does this response mean

for its readers and, most importantly, what do these readers mean for it? When focusing specifically on how the book engages with the reader, a paradox of technological priorities and limitations emerges. While *House of Leaves* intentionally never resolves this problem, it does make clear that the audience of a medium plays an essential role in its continuing conversation between print and digital media. This paper aims to ultimately discuss why,

despite Danielewski's claim that *House of Leaves* always tries to 'get beyond the page, get beyond the binding',³ it necessarily remains within it to assert to and for its readers the significance of the print book in a digital world.

In many ways, the production and manifestation of *House of Leaves* parallels Johnny Truant's encounter with the fictional manuscript he comes to restore for his own readers, which already alludes to a book aware of its material self. He remarks that there were 'reams and reams' of material paper, with 'endless snarls of words, sometimes twisting into meaning, sometimes into nothing at all'.⁴ Danielewski's own 'snarls' faced publisher trepidation in response to the unconventional design specifications of his manuscript—and it was only when he travelled to Pantheon's offices and typeset the manuscript himself that 'everyone believed in it'.⁵ With digital technology as a useful tool during this typesetting process, it is no surprise when N. Katherine Hayles initially wrote that the novel 'screamed "digital!", for it would have been almost impossible to set without a computer'.⁶ Yet she comes to remark that:

'Mark makes a point of underplaying the role of the digital... pointing out that he storyboarded the ferociously complex Chapter IX, where print runs riot in many directions on the page, entirely in pencil, a technology he praises for its robustness and reliability.'⁷

Hayles writes of a phenomenon unique to *House of Leaves*: it is a book that feels digitally

produced—and it certainly needed modern technology to successfully come together—yet it ultimately denies further relationship with the digital. Once printed and circulated, *House of Leaves* settles into its tangibility both literally and within its own narrative, becoming a text that exists for this particular reader engagement.

When asked about the reasons behind the design of *House of Leaves*, Danielewski talks about ways of reading, thus spotlighting the role of the reader in material production. In an interview circulated on his publisher's website, Danielewski emphasizes:

'How quickly pages are turned or not turned can be addressed... pages can be tilted, turned upside down, even read backwards. I'd love to see that. Someone on the subway spinning a book as they're reading it.'⁸

Here, Danielewski points to a demand that *House of Leaves* makes of its readers: the roughly 700-page novel is wider and heavier than most, requiring the reader to hold on with both hands as they alter its orientation to read the winding type. This design is intentional, as Danielewski aims to emphasize the intensity and wonder of print. He claims:

'Books have had this capability all along, but somehow the analogue powers of these wonderful bundles of paper have been forgotten. Somewhere along the way, all its possibilities were denied. I'd like to see that perception change. I'd like

to see the book reintroduced for all it really is.⁹

This quotation explicitly underlines Danielewski's belief that book production has recently turned its focus from print to digital. Regardless of accuracy, this authorial idea nonetheless emphasizes that *House of Leaves* is necessarily printed with a goal in mind: to showcase the power of paper to its readers. Yet, as will come to be seen, the printed novel 'for all it really is' is more complex to *House of Leaves* than simply text on a page; rather, it is a form capable of actively communicating its malleability to, with, and for the readers.

To emphasize the crucial role of the audience in engaging with and sustaining the form, Danielewski assigns several characters in *House of Leaves* the role of reader. Most obvious is Johnny, who leaves footnotes behind detailing the traumatizing process of working through the manuscript. At one point, he directly addresses his imaginary reader and simulates the fear he feels while reading:

'To get a better idea try this: focus on these words, and whatever you do don't let your eyes wander past the perimeter of this page. Now imagine just beyond your peripheral vision... something is quietly closing in on you, so quiet in fact you can only hear its silence... But don't look. Keep your eyes here.'¹⁰

Here, Johnny pulls the reader into the novel; he makes them into a character, participating in an anxious act of reading alongside the narrator. This scripted engagement

with the text reinforces it as markedly physical: the reader, here, must accept the power inherent in the material, which makes them an essential participant in the novel's conversation about printed matter. With the width of the book obscuring any peripheral vision and the weight of the book in the reader's hands emphasizing the intensity of the experience, the reader is called to engage with a passage that would not hold as much power were it digitally produced. Alongside these directions to the reader, though, Johnny also forces the reader into a much broader project: to accompany him in this panicked effort of restoration.

When Johnny demands that the reader take a position empathetic to his work, he conscripts the reader to join him in decoding the contents and materiality of the text, which has already begun to actively impact his (and now the reader's) mind. Such an effort alludes to what Jessica Pressman terms an 'aesthetic of bookishness'.¹¹ She notes a certain genre of books, ascribing to this theme, emerging since 2000 that 'pursue a thematic interest in depicting books as characters and focal points of narrative action'.¹² While she only briefly discusses *House of Leaves* in her essay, she locates the novel as a primary example of aestheticizing the book-as-object to not only blur the lines between reality and fiction, but also between print and digital.¹³ In making Johnny's found manuscript a character—that is, in making it a *being* with agency which does the very blurring of which Pressman writes—Danielewski engages with 'aesthetics of bookishness' in a way that simultaneously asserts the importance

and consequence of *House of Leaves* as a printed book. Deeper into the manuscript, Johnny indicates that he feels those consequences when he writes that:

‘[T]his terrible sense of relatedness to Zampanò’s works implies something that just can’t be, namely that this thing has created me; not me unto it, but now it unto me... inventing me, defining me, directing me.’¹⁴

Here, Johnny nervously writes of the agency of the manuscript—an agency he attributes neither to himself ‘or even for that matter Zampanò’¹⁵—as something that has both captured him and created him. And because of his earlier invitation to the reader to participate in its reading, the reader becomes captured as well; the fictional manuscript is to Johnny what the actual novel is to the reader. *House of Leaves*, then, creates a tenuous relationship with its own printed form: though by its very nature it must remain analog, it also alludes to a danger inherent in materiality. It is an elusive danger that blocks your peripheral vision, weighs down your arms, and eventually threatens your mind.

Danielewski’s second character—as-reader faces an even more immediate danger as he engages with his own iteration of *House of Leaves*. As Will Navidson sits lost within the ash-black labyrinth of the house, he

turns to his only form of entertainment: a novel he brought along, titled *House of Leaves*. While the reader never knows exactly what is inside Navidson’s *House of Leaves*, both his novel and the reader’s novel contain 736 pages;¹⁶ it is enough to determine that, even if the stories inside are not the same, the reader’s version is aware of Navidson’s. Yet, in an ironic or paradoxical twist, the reader’s *House of Leaves* resolves to destroy itself. As Navidson sits in the dark and burns through his limited box of matches to read the book, he eventually must apply ‘the flame to the page’.¹⁷ Zampanò writes:

‘House of Leaves
repeatedly
engages with
ideas of print and
affirms its place
as necessarily so
to express them’

‘Here then is one end: a final act of reading, a final act of consumption. And as the fire rapidly devours the paper, Navidson’s eyes frantically sweep down over the text... until... the book is gone leaving nothing behind but invisible traces already dismantled in the dark.’¹⁸

In this moment, Navidson completely transcends the role as (one) protagonist and becomes, instead, the reader. But, more importantly, he becomes the reader of a *material* book. Were he to take his imaginary e-reader along on his journey into the labyrinth, he would not face that same poignant choice of burning the object to read it. This scene, though, presents a paradox within *House of Leaves*: as something that emphasizes its materiality while simultaneously obliterating it. With this reality, we are faced with an even more nuanced debate between the digital

and the analog that extends beyond the mere production of the actual text.

When writing about this moment in *House of Leaves*, Alexander Starre points to the concept of ‘medial metalepsis’.¹⁹ Metalepsis—which he defines as the ‘paradoxical transgression of narrative boundaries’—describes the phenomenon in which Navidson’s consumption of *House of Leaves* within *House of Leaves* both ‘reinforces’ and ‘[subverts]’ the borders of the novel.²⁰ ‘It strengthens the borderline between different media’, Starre writes, ‘while undercutting narrative realism’.²¹ Yet, while this scene emphasizes *House of Leaves*’ preoccupation with printed matter, there is a silent recognition of its precariousness versus the imaginative, yet relative stability of the digital. Too easily is the paper destroyed, a property echoed in Johnny’s own volatile consumption of the manuscript—to ‘make it only a book’²²—and the reader’s conscripted role of uncovering whatever mysteries Johnny presents to them. Yet, as already shown, this manuscript-taming or destruction seems to elude Johnny and, as he hints to the reader in the introduction, ‘there’s a good chance you [the reader] won’t leave it behind either’.²³ Whatever precariousness exists alongside the materiality of *House of Leaves*, so too is there a certain level of persistence. Indeed, to ‘make it only a book’, Johnny acknowledges he must allow its contents to overwhelm him as he writes: ‘the horror beyond all horrors, sits at last upon my chest, permanently enfolding me in its great covering wings, black as ink’.²⁴ It seems, then, that the scene in which Navidson destroys his own novel demonstrates

the ways in which Danielewski’s novel plays with the reader: to assert its weaknesses while steadfastly preserving its strength, to claim that its material can ruin itself but also you. *House of Leaves* destroys itself within itself to prove its agency once more, to prove the power that lays inherent in its precariousness.

With this show of might to its audience, *House of Leaves* constructs its argument: print is *precious*. The use of precious, here, carries not only the definition of something of value, but also of something delicate, something elusive. Starre emphasizes that *House of Leaves*’ metalepsis ‘invites the reader to rethink the text as a book’, to ‘navigate the printed maze of the book’, and to ‘finally realize the extent to which the printed product is calibrated and controlled’.²⁵ Though Starre ascribes more stability to the printed form of *House of Leaves* than I, he nonetheless hints towards a unique awareness gained *by the reader* in response to the material nature of both the book itself and the media within its narrative. Danielewski writes precisely, granting *House of Leaves* that ‘calibrated’ and ‘controlled’ consciousness with which to interpolate the reader. From its actual, medially-muddled production to the self-aware ‘bookishness’ within it to the paradoxically stable and porous boundaries between its printed form and the digital world around it, *House of Leaves* repeatedly engages with ideas of print and affirms its place as necessarily so to express them. *House of Leaves* incorporates the readers—both as pseudo-archivists acting upon the text and, perhaps at times, the text’s hostages—into its

concern with remaining steadfastly printed, precariously and preciously so, to overtly claim its physicality, yet flirt with digital influences. A material book needs hands to hold it. And while it proves its internal malleability by incorporating the ghost of the

digital world in its production, in its typographic experimentation, and in its narrative, *House of Leaves* remains within its borders as it presents itself to us. But not without the underlying threat to the reader that it can break right through.



¹ M.Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (New York: Pantheon, 2000), p. 233.

² *Ibidem*, p. 289.

³ YouTube, 'Mark Z. Danielewski | The Familiar Volume 5', < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mF_Rmxl-VCg > (14 January, 2018).

⁴ M.Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, p. xvii.

⁵ M.Z. Danielewski, 'The Brash Boy, The Misunderstood Girl, and the Sonogram—the Works of Mark Z. Danielewski', interviewed by K. Carpenter, *The Cult* <<http://chuckpalahniuk.net/interviews/mark-danielewski#42>> (20 April, 2017).

⁶ N.K. Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), p. 126.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ M.Z. Danielewski, 'A Conversation with Mark Danielewski', interviewed by S. Cottrell, *The Wayback Machine* <<https://web.archive.org/web/20060101050917/http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype0400/danielewski/interview.html>> (15 April, 2017).

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ M.Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, pp. 26-27.

¹¹ J. Pressman, 'The Aesthetic of Bookishness in Twenty-First-Century Literature', *Michigan Quarterly Review: Bookishness: The New Fate of Reading in the Digital Age*, 48:4 (2009), p. 465.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 465-466.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 467.

¹⁴ M.Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, p. 326.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 467.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ A. Starre, *Metamedia: American Book Fictions and Literary Print Culture after Digitization* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), p. 156.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 155-156.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 156.

²² M.Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*, p. 327.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. xxii.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 327.

²⁵ A. Starre, *Metamedia: American Book Fictions and Literary Print Culture after Digitization*, p. 158.

HOW TO MEASURE THE SOCIAL PRESTIGE OF A NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE?

Development of a scale assessing the literary value of a text

Massimo Salgaro is an assistant Professor at University of Verona/Fellow at Institute for Advanced Study, Paris¹

Pasqualina Sorrentino is a PhD at University of Göttingen

Gerhard Lauer is a professor of Digital Humanities at University of Basel

Jana Lüdtke is a researcher at the Center for Applied Neuroscience at Free University of Berlin

Arthur M. Jacobs is a professor of Applied Neuroscience at Free University of Berlin

Starting from Walter Benjamin's definition of aura as an 'effect of a work of art being uniquely present in time and space', the objective of this study is to test whether paper books and e-books have different kinds of "aura" and if so, whether the perception of the aura influences the evaluation of the literary texts within a book and an e-book. 59 subjects read four texts from two different genres (short stories and poems) on two different devices (antique book and Kindle). To determine the effect of aura we developed a questionnaire to measure the evaluation of the literary quality by readers. Results show different attributions of literary value depending on the reading device and on the genre of the text. Despite the study's limitations, these findings support the notion that the context, i.e. the preconceptions of the readers towards a certain medium of reading, plays a determinant role in the attribution of literary value.

Keywords: *digitality; literary evaluation; materiality; Nobel Prize; reading research*



What is aura or the social prestige of literature?

We are living in the era of the third “reading revolution”.² After the invention of writing, 6.000 years ago, and of the Gutenberg printing press in the 15th century, the introduction of digital texts and the arrival of the Kindle in 2007 is changing our reading minds. This change is of pivotal importance since writing has made our human knowledge and culture visible and storable. At least the Western culture is based on the “Order of the Book”.³

A similar medial revolution we are experiencing nowadays happened in the beginning of the 20th century, when radio, film, and photography were invented. To describe the consequence of this revolution on our interaction with objects, Walter Benjamin introduced the concept of aura in his 1936 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (German: *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*). Benjamin discusses the concept of aura to describe the authenticity of an artwork which gets lost by its reproduction. According to the philosopher, ‘even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be’.⁴ Benjamin understood the aura of a work as a “distance effect” in the sense that the object perceived is placed at a certain temporal and spatial realm separated from its intended public. The distance legitimates a certain authority

to the artwork and social prestige to its owners or interpreters. According to Benjamin, the modern reproduction techniques such as cinema, photography and phonograph, nullify the distance between the original work of art and its recipients. For this reason, the aura, the unique aesthetic authority of an artwork given by its existence in a specific time and space is lost in the age of mechanical reproduction.

A similar loss of distance and authority is experienced nowadays through digitalization. With the invention of printing, the aura of a text reproduced in a unique manuscript has already been compromised because, as Van der Weel states: ‘with every cheap edition of the classics ever published something of the “aura” of the original artwork was lost’.⁵ In this way, Van der Weel transfers the concept of aura from the artistic and pictorial field into the literary one, where the status of text is inevitably threatened by the digital environment because ‘the digital medium has marginalized the notion of the original’. Hence, digital copies cannot be distinguished from the original.⁶ In a digital environment, a literary text runs always the risk of “digital obsolescence”⁷ i.e. the deterioration of the materiality. For Van der Weel, ‘all digital texts, regardless of provenance or quality, look identical’,⁸ as they miss the typical paratextual qualities of paper books given by typography, cover, size, color, etc.

In the art market, the original painting has an immense social economic and cultural value compared to its copy. Consequently, the aura of the original implicates a

higher social prestige. Following the parallelism between the artistic and the literary field mentioned above, we postulate that the high symbolic value attributed to books is higher than that of e-books. With our experiment we wanted to empirically test Benjamin's thesis of "the loss of aura" in relation to the evaluation of literary works among contemporary readers. We asked if contemporary readers attribute different values of literary quality to a text depending on the device used to present the text (antique book vs e-reader). Based on Van der Weel's and Benjamin's thesis, we made the hypothesis that contemporary readers evaluate the social prestige for literary texts higher when texts are presented in a paper book compared to a digital version presented on an e-reader. We also tested whether this effect could be observed for different genres (short story vs. poem).

How can we measure the aura of a book? The study's design

To our knowledge, the social prestige of a text has never been empirically tested before, and since no adequate questionnaire to measure it exists, we create a suitable one starting from the literary evaluation model of Renate von Heydebrand and Simone Winko.⁹ The concept of value developed by Heydebrand and Winko to denote 'a complex social act by which a subject attributes value to an object [e.g. a book], in a concrete situation and on the basis of a certain standard of value and certain categorizing assumptions'.¹⁰ Consequently, following the thesis of Heydebrand and Winko, a literary text is not intrinsically valuable, it only acquires an attributive

value in relation to standards of value. For example, for cultivated readers, a "good" book should be "complex" or "rhetorically elaborated" to meet their expectations (values), whilst for less sophisticated readers, a "good" book can be a "suspenseful" love story or detective novel. As Heydebrand and Winko point out, 'literary evaluation is by no means limited by professional judgment on literary texts'.¹¹ It takes place in a complex social system and plays a role in the production, distribution, and reception of literature. Individuals evaluate literature implicitly by selecting particular texts considered worthy of attention. For example, this occurs when literary critics consider a text a part of the canon, when a teacher selects a text for his/her syllabus, or an important publishing house chooses a text for a particular book series. There can be a number of reasons to trigger these evaluation acts including aesthetic, educational, but also economic reasons since assessment of literary quality is governed by norms influenced by economic and cultural spheres. The latter regulates 'the possible gains in terms of knowledge, action orientation, gratification, prestige'.¹² The model looks into two distinct forms of literary evaluation: explicit verbal utterances, and non-linguistic acts of selection (e.g. buying a book instead of another). In the structural typology of axiological textual values, the standards of value are governed by four dimensions: formal values, content values, relational values, reception values. While the first three take place on the social level, the fourth takes place on the individual level. In this study, we focused on the reception values, because we were interested in testing experimentally

the effect of the texts. Among reception values, Heydebrand and Winko propose the following sub-categorization:

1. Individual values. This sub-dimension considers the qualitative offer of literary texts for personal needs¹³ and it includes:

- Cognitive value (reflection, memorability)
- Practical value (making sense, significance)
- Hedonistic value (pleasure, entertainment)

2. Social value. This aspect observes the “use” of literary texts on two fronts:

- Economic value: medium for money. This value captures literary products as objects of the economic system.
- Social prestige. This value represents symbolic capital and the gain in prestige amongst literature in general, or within particular texts.

Following this categorization, we created an instrument to measure the literary value perceived by the single reader. In contrast to the subcategories for social values, the categories and subcategories for individual values overlap with existing subscales from questionnaires developed to assess reading experiences. Hence, we have borrowed existing items from scales like the poetry reception questionnaire,¹⁴ the experiencing questionnaire,¹⁵ the foregrounding questionnaire,¹⁶ the reading experience questionnaire,¹⁷ and the transportation scale¹⁸ to construct the three subscales

to measure individual’s value:

1. Cognitive value:

- I think, the text/ poem introduces a new perspective.¹⁹
- The text/ poem makes me look at things differently.²⁰
- The subject of the text/ the poem concerns questions which I oft thought.²¹
- The text/ poem makes me stop and think.²²

2. Practical value

- I felt that some aspects of the text/ the poem are important for my everyday life too.²³
- This text/ poem continued to influence my mood after I finished reading it.²⁴
- After reading it was easy to concentrate again on other things.²⁵
- After reading this text/ poem I felt refreshed, renewed, and revitalized.²⁶

3. Hedonistic value

- While reading the text/ poem I have noticed the language.²⁷
- The text/ poem is fascinating.²⁸
- It is a worth reading this text/ poem.²⁹

We created, independent from the model of Heydebrand and Winko, the following items related to the economic value and of the social prestige, as we did not find any model to refer to:

4. Economic value

For the prose condition:

- A German book publisher paid 5,000 euros for the rights of a Günter Grass anthology, another publisher paid 200 euros for the rights of an Oswald Wiener anthology. How much did a German publisher pay for the rights of the anthology which contains the text you have just read?

Answer scale: 1 (€ 200.-) - 5 (€ 5,000.-)

Poem condition:

- A German book publisher paid € 5,000.- for the rights of an Erich Fried anthology, another publisher paid € 200.- for the rights of a Friedrich Achleitner anthology. How much did a German publisher pay for the rights of the anthology which contains the poem you have just read?

5. Social prestige

- Do you think that this text/ poem won a literary prize?
- Do you think that the literary critics rated this text as an important text/ poem?
- Do you think that this text/ poem should be taught in school?
- Do you find this text/ poem trivial?

All items were presented together with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from -2 (completely disagree) to 2 (completely agree). The items of the economic value and of the social prestige are the most important values related to our question on the literary value of a text as they explicitly

operationalize the category of social prestige introduced by Heydebrand and Winko.

Furthermore, in order to test the attentiveness and the quality of reading of our participants, we designed two memory tests, one on the formal aspects, and one on the content aspects of the texts. For the memorability of the formal aspects, the subjects had to fill in blanks in quotations of the text which they had just read, e.g.: "How (holy) is the mother's pleasance" ("Wie (heilig) ist - die Mutterwonne"). For the content, participants had to reply to questions like the following, choosing between 4 possible answers: "Where did the tourists come from? India, Italy, USA, France (correct answer: USA)".

Methods

Participants

We tested 59 subjects (37 women, 22 men) with a different background and aged between 18 and 70 years old, in the cities of Göttingen, Northeim, Nörten-Hardenberg, Berlin, and Uslar. Forty-nine participated without reimbursement, the remaining ten were volunteers who participated for compensation. Inclusion criteria for study participation was German as a native language.

Design

The aura study has an articulated 2x2 design with each participant receiving each text genre presented on two different presentation

mediums. Each subject reads two prose texts, one on paper and one on screen, and two poems, also one on paper and one on screen. The order of the texts, the genres, and the medium was counterbalanced in order to minimize genre changes. Thereby, the two short stories and the two poems were always presented directly one after the other.

Reading materials

The prose texts chosen for the experiment were two German translations of Ernest Hemingway's *Cat in the rain* and *A day's wait* from the same collection. The two poems written by the German writer Wilhelm Hauff are entitled *Mother's love* and *Wilhelm to his dear mother on her birthday*. We selected the above-mentioned prose texts and poems because they are not particularly difficult to comprehend, they do not include words and rhetorical figures that are particularly rare or difficult. The stories by Hemingway tell two very simple stories, an encounter with a cat during an accommodation in a hotel and an episode during the Second World War. The poems are focused on a very simple love of a son for his mother. In the paper version, the book had a hard-cover and looked very antique although the typographic characters used were not gothic, but contemporary characters, in order to avoid making the reading task difficult for those readers who were not familiar with black letters. The electronic and the paper version were presented in a very similar layout. For both versions of a text, the same amount of text was presented on a page. The page breaks appeared on identical positions of the text.

Procedures

Participants were told that they were going to read four texts: two short stories and two poems. After each reading session they had to answer the memory questions and fill out the aura questionnaire. The items of the memory tests and the questions from the aura questionnaire were presented on a computer screen via the online platform SoSci Survey.³⁰ The presentation of the texts is described in the Material section. At the end of the study, participants were asked to fill out an additional questionnaire related to their reading habits. The participants' task was not time constrained. During reading they were told that they could go back and forth in the text as they wished, while total reading time was measured. During the question part, they could not go back to the text.

Results

In the first step, reliability analyses were conducted, which evaluated the six subscales of the aura questionnaire. If necessary, items were recoded, so that high numbers indicate high value for the underlying construct. For the subscales hedonic value (hv) and practical value (pv), one item had to be removed (hv – item one, pv – item three). In the end, coefficient alpha reliabilities ranged between .69 and .84, indicating that the remaining items formed consistent subscales. In subsequent analyses, these subscales were used to study effects of medium and genre. To do this, a 2x2 repeated measure ANOVA was run for each subscale, with medium (book vs Kindle) and genre (poetry vs prose) as the two independent variables. Additionally,

we also conducted these 2x2 ANOVA for the memorability items. The mean values and standard deviations for

both memorability values, and the subscales from the aura questionnaire are reported in Table 1.

	independent variables			
	genre and medium			
	poem		short story	
	antique book	e-reader	antique book	e-reader
Dependent variables	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
content memorability	2.69 (1.27)	2.97 (1.21)	3.69 (0.50)	3.73 (0.45)
form memorability	1.24 (1.32)	1.19 (1.22)	3.64 (2.15)	3.81 (2.12)
cognitive value	2.59 (0.95)	2.56 (0.94)	2.89 (1.04)	2.74 (0.97)
hedonic value	2.86 (1.03)	2.89 (1.05)	3.56 (0.89)	3.22 (1.07)
practical value	3.50 (0.84)	3.51 (0.94)	3.10 (0.90)	3.25 (0.91)
economic value	3.80 (1.67)	3.63 (1.54)	4.25 (1.52)	3.83 (1.68)
social prestige	2.63 (0.76)	2.97 (0.79)	3.12 (0.77)	3.04 (0.84)

Table 1: Mean values and standard deviations for each subscale

Memorability measures

The analysis for both memorability measures for form and the form content revealed a significant effect for genre (form: $F(1,61.1)=150.6$, $p<.001$, content: $F(1,57.7)=58.5$, $p<.001$), indicating better memorability for prose texts compared to the poems. Neither the main effect for medium nor the interaction were significant (all $F < 1.7$, all $p > .19$).

Effects of genre: prose vs. poetry

The main effect for genre was significant on four of the five subscales (all $F>4.9$,

all $p<.04$). Only for the economic value, no significant effect could be observed ($F(1,59.1)=2.3$, $p=.13$). For social prestige (Meanshort story=3.08, Meanpoem=2.82), hedonic value (Meanshort story=3.39, Meanpoem=2.88), and cognitive value (Meanshort story=2.81, Meanpoem=2.57) the study participants rated short stories higher compared to the poems. On the subscale practical value, the participants reported higher values for poems compared to the short stories (Meanshort story=3.17, Meanpoem=3.51). With the exception of practical value, the results indicate that evaluation of the literary quality of the two stimuli are in line with that of literary critics and literary historians made on the works of Hemingway and

Hauff in the past. A possible explanation could be Hauff's trivial treatment of the mother's love as a topic which makes it worthy and accessible to everybody.

For the subscale social prestige (cf. Figure 1), a significant interaction could be observed ($F(1, 55.8) = 4.4, p = .04$). These effects indicate that the genre difference was significant only for conditions in which the texts were presented in an antique book ($t(54) = 3.38, p < .001$), but not for conditions with e-readers ($t < 1$). No further interactions were significant (all $F > 1$). It seems that for our readers it made a difference if they read the poem or the prose on the screen or on paper. As the graph shows, when the text was read on paper, the readers were more prone to think that the text should be taught in school, that it had been praised by literary critics, or that it was written by a Nobel Prize author.

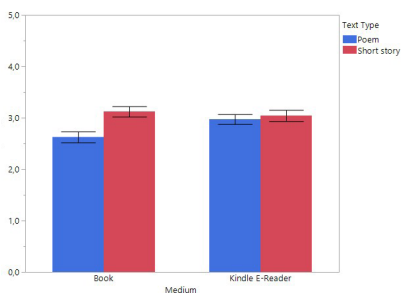


Figure 1: Genre and medium effects for the subscale Social prestige.

Effects of medium: antique book vs. e-reader

The main effect for medium was significant only for the subscale economic value (cf. figure 2).

Here, the economic value was rated higher for texts presented in an antique book compared to texts presented on an e-reader ($F(1, 59.1) = 4.6, p = .04$; Mean antique book = 4.04, Mean e-reader = 3.72). For all other scales, no effect of medium could be observed (all $F < 2.4$, all $p > .12$).

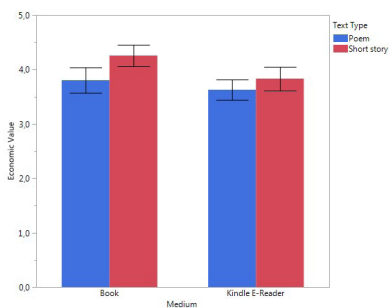


Figure 2: Genre and medium effects for the subscale economic value.

Discussion

We chose two short stories by a Nobel Prize winner, Ernest Hemingway, and two poems by a romantic writer almost unknown to today's readers, Wilhelm Hauff. The texts not only have different social prestige but were also written in two different historical periods and, therefore, entail different temporal distance towards today's readers. In fact, while the prose of Hemingway is very plain, the two poems are written in easy and understandable, but very rhetorical and old-fashioned German. All these factors seem to have impacted the readers, who, in their judgment, consistently show that they attributed higher "literary value" to the prose text than to the poems. One limitation of our

results is that the perceived difference in social prestige between poems and prose puts in relation two different text genres and two very diverse authors who lived in a different historical and cultural period. The imbalance between the literary quality of the poems and that of the prose texts was so strong that the aura our readers grasped was not that of the paper book, as opposed to the screen, but that of a text by a Nobel Prize winner, as opposed to that of an almost forgotten author. More consistent would be a comparison between texts of the same genre and written by the same author or by coeval authors. This difference in the literary quality obscured most of the other factors related to the digital medium.

Nevertheless, we found a significant effect in the interaction between the medium and the text type in the social value, and a clear effect of the medium in

the evaluation of the economic value. Despite its limitations, these results foster our hypothesis that the context, i.e. the positive preconceptions of the readers towards a certain reading, play a determinant role in the attribution of literary value. Previous research on literary reading has shown that three elements are central in the recently elaborated Neurocognitive Poetics model of literary reading (Jacobs, 2015): the text, the reader, and the context. Our research takes a unique place in highlighting the importance of the context that is the material support of the text, in the evaluation of a literary text. Following the results of our study, it seems that the famous claim by Marshall McLuhan that the medium is the message does apply for our experiment, as readers focused not only on the content and quality of the message, i.e. the literary text, but also on the “aura” of the medium they read the text on.



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²⁴ *Ibidem*.

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PAPER WEIGHT

Andrea Reyes Elizondo is a PhD candidate at the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS)

The book reigns unfettered as the cultural object per excellence. Next to being carriers of information and symbols of social prestige, books embody concepts of enlightenment, emancipation, and self-discovery. As an object, it is akin to a sacred object. Yet unlike the relics from many religions, books are anything but scarce. Even as they pile up and gather dust, their cultural status makes it impossible to dispose of them as any other object. As experts on compartmentalisation, we have found creative ways to “ditch” those books we no longer want. Through the secular ritual of book donation we are not “getting rid” of them, we are just “passing them around”. This paper stems from a research in progress with Giulia Moriconi on Little Free Libraries. Based on our framework of book donation as a ritual of disposal, I focus on book donation programmes.

Keywords: book charities; book disposal; book donation; book totems; cultural value



A few years ago, a client walking through a large store in Santiago, Chile, noticed something out of place. Alongside male shoes *lay* books more specifically, parts of them. The books had been torn in halves and covered in varnish. Just as bricks, boxes, or textiles, they were used as simple decorative objects. In 2012, a pedestrian passing by the Meermanno museum in the Hague, the Netherlands,

noticed a large sculpture on the facade of the museum. The work by Alicia Martin was made out of books which were torn apart and glued together.

The first episode caused a stir after the concerned client sent a picture of the shoe display to a local newspaper. How could books be treated in this way? The second episode counted on widespread approval in regular and social media, with people

reacting enthusiastically to those sculptures made of books. A starker contrast to similar incidents is difficult to imagine. Both the shoe display and the museum sculpture used books as a primary material to create new, aesthetically pleasing objects. But are these cases indeed so similar?

Compare these reactions to the infamous pulping of 240k books by Manchester's Central Library. In 2012, various public figures, amongst them poet laureate Ann Carol Duffy, started a campaign to halt the pulping of tens of thousands of books resulting from the library's weeding process. A local councilor claimed that only 'duplicated, outdated or otherwise obsolete' books were withdrawn while the library's team 'ensured that the depth and breadth of the general reference collection was good across all subject areas'.¹ Nevertheless, there was a public uproar no doubt fuelled in part by the unfamiliarity with the endeavours of librarianship. For the public eye, this was a case of book destruction, which is inherently incompatible with the guardian role of a library.

Based on the reactions, the disposal of books by the library and the shoe display share more with each other than the sculpture at the museum. A fundamental element that can explain the outcry is our cultural anxiety of book destruction.

Even though Martin also destroyed books in order to make sculptures, her intention was seen as honourable to books. In contrast, the shoe display was perceived as an affront. Both cases

effectively made aesthetic use of the cultural value of books as objects, yet only the shoe display was perceived as vulgar, perhaps due to its location and its ulterior motive (to sell shoes). In one case, the books were used as ploys to attract customers, while in the other the destroyed books were presented inside a museum, a place which, similarly to a library, is a "temple" of culture.

Worth and value

As a cultural object that has accompanied mankind for thousands of years, the book is charged with many powerful meanings that stem from its double nature. Not only is it a physical object made of paper or parchment, it is also a medium for immaterial content.² The cases mentioned above exemplify the tension between two levels of materiality. On the one hand, a much beloved artefact which signifies knowledge. On the other, the dead weight of an obsolete object which has been discarded and, therefore, lost its original intended use.³

Thus, it can be said that a book has two types of values, a perceived value of "the book" as a general concept, and a specific one linked to a particular copy. This ambivalence between the general and the specific is not necessarily contradictory, nor is it specific to material objects. For example, there is a difference in the perception and acceptance between the general idea of human rights and *particular* kinds of human rights in *specific contexts*. However, for books, unlike for human rights, there seems to be a large disconnection between these two types of values. In other words, the

book as concept trumps the particular copy.

The value of the book-as-concept is profoundly related to its role throughout history as a highly reliable medium for knowledge and information transfer. Despite its young age (around 1,500 years as a codex versus oral communication) and its inherent frailty, it has served as the foundation for the so-called religions of the book. Further, its physicality is strongly linked with presumed notions of authority, accuracy, and veracity.⁴ All these qualities have cemented its status as a vessel for knowledge, an asset to which we owe our development and survival as a species.⁵

The book as totem

The value of the book as a cultural object, beyond that of a codex for reading, knows many examples in book history. In a study, David Cressy illustrates how the Bible was used as a talisman in seventeenth century England and New England.⁶ Older accounts from the New World confirm these phenomena; for example, Thomas Hariot, in his 1588 account of Virginia, tells how the Algonquian peoples sought to touch, embrace, and kiss the Bible.⁷ Further south in New Spain, in his 1650 will, Martín Cerón Alvarado, the cacique of Tepetenchí (Xochimilco), mentions fifteen large books and ten small books which ‘were valuable when I bought them and which must be valuable for mass’.⁸

Although the value perceived by Cerón Alvarado is on a different level than the talismanic experience in Hariot’s account, both

cases refer specifically to religious books. Because of their subject and context, it is not difficult to extend the notion of religious and spiritual books as totems. Yet my concern here is situated a few centuries later, where the book-as-concept is also a totem, but in the realm of the secular sacred.⁹

The term secular sacred might seem contradictory as the definer *secular* assumes the opposite, or absence of any religious, magical, or spiritual element.¹⁰ Additionally, the general Western perception towards magic or religion is of something primitive that pertains to the *other* (who coincidentally happens to be outside of the Western realm, either physically or intellectually). Yet religious theorists like Ronald Grimes have pointed out the subsistence of magical thinking in the supposedly secularised West. See for example the belief that a certain product will *somehow* transform somebody, where this *somehow* need not to be specific, nor explained; it just is.¹¹

The definition of the sacred and, by extent, of religion is cause for a lengthy and fascinating scholarly discussion which supersedes the scope of this paper.¹² Let us focus instead on the attributes of the sacred which can concern an object. Emile Durkheim positions the sacred as something absolute and apart which is hierarchically above (the profane).¹³ Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff highlight “unquestionability” as one of the essential qualities of the sacred.¹⁴ Following this, a sacred object could be defined as one which is unquestionably absolute and stands apart from other things.

By virtue of their status as vessels for knowledge and therefore their relevance to society, books stand apart from other objects. Regardless of their content, they have an unquestionable potency as a communication medium. Much so that their own presence is regarded as an indicator of refinement, culture, and extensive knowledge of the possessor.¹⁵ By their own performative potential, books are both sacred objects and consecrated agents of knowledge.

The problems with totems

Sacred objects stand apart from profane ones due to their unquestionable qualities, yet they remain material things that can erode or be damaged. An old or broken chair might be thrown away or recycled without much thought. In contrast, a scroll of the Torah that has been damaged might not be “useful” any more for reading. However, the damage has not cancelled its status as sacred. Since it cannot be merely thrown away, texts and other sacred objects in the Jewish tradition are stored in specifically designated areas in a synagogue (genizahs), while awaiting cemetery burial.

Akin procedures can be found around the world, rituals for the respectful disposal of dual material/sacred objects. These rituals usually centre around specific objects and demand a set of previously

agreed performative actions from a community. But what if the object is not one, but many and ubiquitous? What if their disposal is not related to them being damaged, but to them no longer being wanted?

In our consumption-oriented society, books are plenty. They are to be found on almost every setting, both in private and public spaces, and, as any other mass-produced item, they tend to accumulate and gather dust. As immaterial objects they might occupy a special place in our hearts, but as material objects they also occupy a physical space; room which could be used otherwise.

‘What to do with all the books of dear uncle Pablo who just passed away, or that How To guide for a 2001 software?’

That book your mother gave you last Christmas because it is a best seller highly regarded on the TV show she watches, is next to the latest novel of a cemented literary star your in-laws gave you because “you like to read”. On top of it lies a book with witty quotes about the age group you belong to, a gift from your last birthday. On a shelf, books from university stand as a proof that you did study. If you need space, you might get rid of some of these. If you have enough space, you might delay this action until your estate executors have to deal with them after your death.

But how, oh how to get rid of them? In all truth, that novel was awful and you couldn’t go beyond 20 pages. Or that How To guide for a 2001

software, which is obsolete in 2018. What to do with all the books of dear uncle Pablo who just passed away? It is clear you do not want them, but they cannot be thrown to the garbage, not even to the paper recycling container. After all, they are books, they must be useful to somebody. Besides, only barbarians would desecrate these totems of knowledge. Enter book donation.

Throwing away without guilt

Book donation is a clever way of outsourcing the possible destruction of sacred objects. Just like buying a packaged chicken breast in a box with a green label absolves us from the horrors of large-scale farms and slaughterhouses, donation prevents us from acknowledging the fate of some books. That Adobe Photoshop 1999 manual is going straight to the bin, but we do not want to be the ones throwing it away.

Like with so many of our actions, there is a certain degree of cognitive dissonance between what we do and what we would like to think we do. Many of those books which we are donating are effectively paper for the recycling container, yet they are shaped like books, our dear secular sacred totems. Donating them, whatever their condition and subject matter, is not solely a dignified farewell but an act which takes place under certain conditions.

Retaking the theme of the sacred, the act of donating books could be described as a ritual. According to Moore and Myerhoff, rituals endow individuals, organisations, values,

and views with legitimacy, whether in the religious realm or in secular life.¹⁶ This particular ritual does not take place in front of a large crowd, which could be ascribed to our modern-day individualisation. Nevertheless, it has a performative element which confirms certain beliefs. Where knowledge is considered as a higher good and books are its vessels, donating them allows us to get rid of them, while at the same time reaffirms certain perceived values and beliefs.

The asserted belief through donation could be framed as a view where everybody can achieve knowledge (and perhaps emancipation) through reading. "Someone might need this book" is not necessarily a lie, but without curation, the right book might not find its reader. Further, this belief overlooks social, economic, and neurological conditions which can determine whether a person reads or not.

Naturally, the donor is not fully aware of these mechanisms. Perhaps they realise donations are plainly an act of book disposal. But by disguising the motif with an idea of sharing books (naturally good) they reaffirm certain political and social structure, whether consciously or not. Not everybody can just grab a book and learn, enjoy, or improve themselves. Although ubiquitous for those who can afford it, the activity of reading requires skills, time, and money (to buy books). Donation focuses on the last aspect despite the price of books having decreased in the last century, except for specialist and academic ones. The resources which could be named as more of an obstacle towards reading

would be time and the skills to read (for some).¹⁷

Considering book donation as a secular ritual should not imply every instance of this act as if it consists of a script. Although rituals mirror existing views, serve to reorganise, and help to (re)create them, their meanings are multi-layered.¹⁸ By performing the ritual, a book donor is building an image of the self, and thus each of them will endow the act with their own particular sense.¹⁹

Book charities: our secular shamans

Analysing such a complex ritual and its motivations by direct observation can be problematic, yet there are organisations which experience book donation on a regular basis. While people can donate objects to different outlets, there are specific charities and non-profits that collect books. For this analysis I will focus on two types of organisations: a charity that has second-hand bookshops, and non-profits which collect books for prisoners.

The charity collects books through its second-hand shops. The donations they receive are very diverse, from one or a couple, up to several boxes at once. The charity does not list specific books which they will not accept. In general they try to make most of what they have received. For example, by separating books that could be sold in a specific shop from those that could be useful for one of their partners in other countries. Nevertheless they must throw out many books.

There are several book donation programmes for prisoners in the US, from general literature and non-fiction to those who cater for specific groups like LGBT+ prisoners. Because of the needs of the prisoners and the prisons' own restrictions, most programmes have lists with the type of books they need and those which they cannot use.²⁰ Nevertheless, they accept all the ones that people bring to them, which can range from one to many boxes. The books they cannot use are passed on to second-hand bookshops or other organisations, though many books will eventually end up in the recycling container.

Although the specifics of these organisations differ, they share the idealistic motive of extending the useful cycle of books. The fact that they are run by volunteers who give up their time attests to this. Both specifically seek books for 'their clientele' by weeding the donations they receive. This process of mining for the 'little seams of goodness' is quite time-consuming.²¹ According to the volunteers I spoke to, a large proportion of books are of no use at all, ranging from 90% to 50% of "useless" books, depending on the programme and the donation. This can owe to the books being in a very bad physical condition, being heavily highlighted, or because there are many copies of the same book, or even because of the subject matter being of no general interest.

Several volunteers working in organised book donation shared their experiences with me. These confirm the uneasiness we have when throwing away books and how book donation allows us to get rid of them "at

peace". According to them, many people are extremely attached to their books, sometimes because they belonged to their relatives, and thus imagine that somebody must want a 1960s Medical Encyclopaedia.²² Although they are grateful for the donations, separating the good from the bad takes time from the volunteers who eventually must be the ones throwing certain books away.

In a few cases, when people donate books in person and some are rejected, the donors feel resentful. This reaction can be a result of them knowing that their books are not that good, mixed with the feeling that their kind gesture of donation is not appreciated.²³ To avoid these confrontations which could affect the amount of donations, volunteers admit to never rejecting books in person, nor throwing them away in front of the donors. The play that is performed by the ritual could be summarised as: we cannot get rid of these totems ourselves, thus we share them with others even if most of those others would not be served by what we are getting rid of. This contradiction arises from the tension of sacred disposal and building our own self.

Knowledge, waste, and the sacred

As mentioned above, book donation is a multi-layered act. Besides its relation to

knowledge structures, the donation takes place in a production system where waste abounds. The volunteers interviewed acknowledged the issues of overabundance, if with different wording. For example, 'people need to make space', 'people want to get rid of books', or more directly by acknowledging that in capitalism, overall, productivity and efficiency are irrelevant, while waste is central.²⁴

Since studying the phenomenon of book donation, I became more aware of how we revere books as objects and the contradictions of their disposal. Many unwanted and useless books populate my own shelves, space that could be used better by those piled on the floor. Some have found a "place" in one of the Little Free Libraries in my city, especially those in less affluent areas (as the rich can better afford books). But those coding manuals from 2003, which I truly never used, and that religious self-help book my uncle-pastor gave me, ended up in the recycling container. Given the size of the coding manuals I had to rip them in half to throw them into the container. A couple was walking nearby and saw my barbarous act. They left out a gasp and looked at me harshly: I had desecrated civilisation.



¹ The Independent, 'Manchester Central Library: Fears that tens of thousands of books may have been pulped during £170m restoration of building | *The Independent*', <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/manchester-central-library-fears-that-tens-of-thousands-of-books-may-have-been-pulped-during-170m-10045558.html>> (2 February 2018).

²⁶ Moriconi & A. Reyes Elizondo, 'Thou Shalt Not Throw Me Away! Notions of Usefulness for Books', *Unnecessary, Unwanted and Uncalled-for: A Workshop on Uselessness*, Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA), 28-30 March 2017. Unpublished paper.

³ I must pause for a second and explain the barbarity just committed. Describing a book as an obsolete object feels violent. Although many writers have complained about "useless books", linking what the codex represents to an adjective that signifies worthlessness is a taboo. Since a book contains knowledge it cannot be obsolete, it is expected to always be useful. As a book historian, I understand the mechanisms at play here, yet as member of a community imbued by its cultural codes, I am aware of the transgression.

⁴ A. van der Weel, *Changing Our Textual Minds: Towards a Digital Order of Knowledge*. (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 90-103.

⁵ Moriconi & Reyes, 'Thou Shalt Not Throw Me Away!'.

⁶ D. Cressy, 'Books as Totems in Seventeenth-Century England and New England', *The Journal of Library History*, 21 (1986), pp. 92-106.

⁷ T. Hariot, *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1903).

⁸ English translation by the author based on the Spanish translations of the original Nahuatl texts. T. Rojas Rabiela, E.L. Rea López & C. Medina Lima, *Vidas y bienes olvidados: testamentos indígenas novohispanos*, vol. III (Mexico: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1999), pp. 238-242.

⁹ S.F. Moore & B.G. Myerhoff, 'Introduction', in: S.F. Moore & B.G. Myerhoff (eds), *Secular Ritual* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977), pp. 3-24.

¹⁰ Moriconi & Reyes, 'Thou Shalt Not Throw Me Away!'.

¹¹ R.L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982), p. 47.

¹² See for example I. Strenski, 'Talal Asad's "Religion" Trouble and a Way Out', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 22:2-3 (2010), pp. 136-155. doi:10.1163/157006810X512338.

¹³ E. Durkheim, 'Ritual, Magic, and the Sacred', in R.L. Grimes (ed.), *Readings in Ritual Studies* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), pp. 188-193.

¹⁴ Moore & Myerhoff, Introduction, p. 3

¹⁵ G. Moriconi, 'These books aren't made for reading: Creating identity with ready-made libraries', *Yapp* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 53-56. <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/30001>.

¹⁶ Moore & Myerhoff, *Secular Ritual*.

¹⁷ European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 399. CULTURAL ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION* (2013), <http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_399_en.pdf> (6 January 2017).

¹⁸ Moore & Myerhoff, *Secular Ritual*.

¹⁹ Moriconi & Reyes, 'Thou Shalt Not Throw Me Away!'.

²⁰ In many US prisons books cannot be sent by individuals and must come from publishers or booksellers, while the books must be new. Some of these programmes have registered as organisations that can send books to prisoners.

²¹ B. Ruhland (volunteer at *Prisoners Literature Project*) in discussion with the author, February 2018.

²² M. Cook (volunteer at *Prison Book Program*) in discussion with the author, February 2018.

²³ Ruhland in discussion with the author.

²⁴ The quotes originate from discussions between volunteers at the charity and book donation programmes and the author. Some interviews are not mentioned in the footnote nor bibliography as the interviewees wished to remain anonymous.

BOOKSWAPPER.DE AND THE EASILY-SHARED PAPER BOOK

Ellen Barth has recently completed the National and Transnational Studies Master of Arts program at the University of Münster, Germany, with a focus on book studies.

The digital age and the Internet have changed the way media are shared. Media spreadability, governed by content producers as well as consumers who share and repurpose content according to their own needs, allows for content to travel in more complex and messier ways than formerly possible. Rather than increasing the spread of e-books, these digital advances have facilitated the spread of physical books. The German book sharing website bookswapper.de is one example of this. Making use of laws and customs surrounding books as objects as well as symbolic and cultural goods, the website uses an online system to spread physical books to its users, highlighting the problematic spreadability of the e-book in the digital age.

Keywords: book swapping; bookswapper.de; book circulation; e-books; media spreadability



In 'What Is the History of Books?' Robert Darnton attempts to bring order to the field of book history, which, in his opinion, had started to look 'less like a field than a tropical rain forest'.¹ With this aim, Darnton proposed a holistic model that links together the many disciplines of book studies and connects the agents in the life cycle of the book. In the model, imagined as a circuit, the book

is a traveler, moving from agent to agent through a path that goes from author to reader. Since its conception, this model has been influencing book scholars; but, as the digital age progresses, and as order gives way to disorder, Darnton's Communications Circuit begins to seem overly simplistic.² The metaphor of the circuit, 'closing, firing, connecting',³ does not always do justice to the

complex movement of digital media as they travel and spread. For this, a new metaphor is apt: dandelion seeds in the wind, floating away from the source in unpredictable patterns.

This is the metaphor used by Jenkins, Ford, and Green to explain what they call ‘media spreadability’, a term that describes digital-age media circulation as it is posted, re-posted, shared, linked to, blogged, re-blogged, and so on.⁴ The use of the term spreadable media is an alternative to the oft-used ‘viral’, which, according to the authors, places too much agency on media producers and not enough on audiences who ‘share content for their own purposes.’⁵ Instead, their understanding of modern media circulation is ‘a hybrid model’, one where a ‘mix of top-down and bottom-up forces determine how material is shared across and among cultures in far more participatory (and messier) ways’ than previously possible.⁶ In the digital age, media-sharing websites that make use of this circulation model—such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram—are ubiquitous. On many of these sites, professional and amateur content is given away freely, shared with others based on interest and blown into the online breeze.

And while this hybrid model of media spreadability is not a purely digital phenomenon (informal and creative person-to-person media sharing has always been possible—just think of the mixtape), the Internet has certainly contributed to this messy, participatory media spread, although at times in surprising ways. While video and music have made the jump to digital—songs are streamed

and remixed with personal videos, and television shows are no longer confined to television sets—the e-book lags noticeably behind. Although e-books, as digital files, have the capacity to be shared infinitely, cheaply, and quickly, these potential added values are rarely exploited. The opportunities for online media spreadability, rather than enabling and increasing the spread of *digital* books, are, in fact, benefiting the *physical* book.

This contradictory situation is evinced by the existence of online book sharing websites like bookswapper.de, a German website aimed at providing readers in Germany with access to used English-language books.⁷ Nearly everything about the website’s book exchange system is digital: the organization and description of books, the coordination of swaps with people from all over the country, and the feedback for completed swaps. However, despite this streamlined online system, when it comes to the actual book exchange, things move offline. This is because the books shared on bookswapper.de are physical, not digital.

The bookswapper.de system works like this: participants that want to swap their reading material for something new register with the website and create a user profile, then upload information about the books they own but no longer want, such as the length and condition of the book, a brief plot description, and a digital photo of the cover. They wait for another user to request one of their books, and when a request is made, the owner is notified with an email containing the name and address of the requester so

the book can be sent through the mail. After the book is received, the user gets a 'token', a piece of online currency they can use to request a book from another bookswapper.de user. Hence the idea of the 'swap'.

Immediately, the disadvantages of this system become apparent. To receive books, participants must give up their online anonymity and divulge their name and home address to complete strangers on the Internet. They must find packaging, buy postage, and make a trip to the mailbox, all to send the book via "snail-mail". With an online system already in place, it seems as though swapping e-books would be far easier, and potentially safer, than swapping paper books. Yet, these disadvantages have hidden advantages; in particular, the legality and traditions of sharing physical objects, and the low rate for sending books as cultural goods through the German mail.

These advantages stem from the fact that physical books are *supposed* to spread. Designed to be portable, books are vehicles, both real and symbolic, of knowledge and culture.⁸ Books are objects, and, as objects, according to the German law, they are able to be shared with others.⁹ Acts of sharing, such as giving a book to a friend or 'lending' a cup of sugar to a neighbor, are so common that they go nearly unnoticed. The legal right of exchange of ownership is woven into

the fabric of everyday life. For book lovers and readers in Germany, this includes visiting a city's free bookshelf; purchasing second-hand books; and picking up a novel while on vacation from a hostel's take-one-leave-one shelf, to be read at the beach, and then be discarded before the journey home. These are mundane actions that have become so commonplace, that the laws to support them are rarely, if ever, consulted. Evidence of this from bookswapper.de is that the website makes no mention of the legality of exchanging physical books through the site's online system. The closest they come to addressing this is in their Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section. In reply to the question 'Do I get my books back?' the website responds: 'No, you do not lend books here but swap them for good. The swapper who requested and received one of your books then owns it'. This, apparently, is all the website feels it must say on the matter. As an object, a book is free to be shared and spread.

**'German culture
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But physical books are not only material objects; they also possess symbolic and cultural value. German culture has been unquestionably influenced by the book, both by what it contains and by what it represents. This is, after all, the country of Gutenberg, Luther, and the Frankfurt Book Fair. The cultural importance of the spreadability of physical books is supported in Germany by the ability to send books through the mail at a

reduced rate, of which the bookswapper.de system takes advantage. To get this low *Büchersendung* rate—one Euro for books up to 100 grams—the envelope must be clearly marked as a book and closed in a way that facilitates inspection by post office officials. The only other caveat is that nothing else may be inside the envelope besides books (or other approved printed material, such as maps).¹⁰ This method of sending books through the mail goes back to the 1950s, with earlier iterations dating back to the early 18th century.¹¹ Through changing governments and world wars, from government oversight to privatization, the cultural value of spreading books easily and cheaply through the mail has been supported in Germany. This is because, according to Rolloff, the state has an interest in spreading knowledge, and ‘the cheaper prices [for sending books] are supposed to simplify the sending of the book as a cultural good’.¹²

In making use of German laws and customs regarding books as objects, as well as cultural traditions regarding the spread of knowledge and culture through books, the bookswapper.de system gets the best out of both worlds: the ability to share their physical books legally and cheaply through the mail, while, at the same time, using a modern digital system to connect a large number of interested readers. But the bookswapper.de system also highlights the problematic spreadability of the digital book. Although it might be expected that digital technologies, especially the Internet, would bring about a shift from the sharing of physical books to the sharing of digital e-books, that has not been the case. Many websites

allow bibliophiles to congregate online in order to review, discuss, and recommend books, but sharing the content of those books remains heavily restricted. When compared to the material book, it seems as though e-books are not supposed to spread. They are *not* owned but licensed, they have an uncertain existence (as evinced by Amazon’s 1984 Kindle erasure debacle),¹³ and they are restricted by digital rights management (DRM). ‘[A] convoluted set of electronic rules put in place to protect the copyright owners’,¹⁴ DRM prevents digital books from being copied and shared, from person to person, or even from device to device.¹⁵ The e-books that do live up to their full potential as digital files, without DRM, and freely shared with the online masses, mostly exist on pirate websites. Thus, sharing these books, even if they are scanned from the physical copy sitting on your own bookshelf, is illegal.

Further complicating the issue is the fact that the book exchanges taking place through bookswapper.de resemble online file sharing, in which one file is made available to many people. For example, there is the bookswapper.de ‘current reading list’ function. When a swap is made and a user receives a book, the online listing of that book is not deleted from the website, but is instead saved in the new reader’s ‘current reading list’. When the user has read and/or wants to swap the book again, they do not have to create a new book profile. Books can thus be re-listed on the website with a simple click of a button, facilitating multiple swaps of the same book. The website acknowledges this as its aim, stating that with the ‘current reading list’, users ‘can easily relist books to offer them for

swapping (again).¹⁶ This shows that the website's intention is not for books to be swapped once and then find a permanent home on the new reader's bookshelf, but instead to be part of ongoing and continuous exchanges between many different users.¹⁷ In this way, bookswapper.de has similarities to the continuous copying and sharing of digital files; however, the bookswapper.de system of sharing physical books shields the website from any question or conversation about potentially illegal activity.

It is no wonder that in this environment, with e-books so tightly shackled, it has been questioned whether the e-book will ever be able to possess cultural and symbolic value similar to that of the material book.¹⁸ As Jenkins has noted, 'if it doesn't spread, it's dead'.¹⁹ So far, e-books have been dead; they are neither objects allowed to be shared like any other, nor valuable symbols for those who come in contact with them. Without this spreadability, which should be simple for digital media, e-books are limited in the ways they can become a

'So far, e-books have been dead; they are neither objects allowed to be shared like any other, nor valuable symbols for those who come in contact with them.'

fundamental part of their readers' lives, as the material book has been. In this way, Darnton's model remains relevant. It is a circuit of *communication*, with the book, the traveler, symbolizing the 'mediated relationships' of those involved in its spread.²⁰ We may wonder to what extent readers can commune with and through their digital e-books, but evidence—from Instagram images of reading devices posed next to steaming mugs of coffee, to scannable QR codes for out-of-copyright books on

Project Gutenberg—shows that e-books not only can be shared but, in fact, are already being shared in unexpected ways, by readers interested in spreading this medium for their own purposes. The limited spreadability of the digital book and all the cultural implications it entails may simply be part of our current transitional phase of the book: the growing pains resulting from a gradual shift to digital

media. History reminds us that physical books were once locked in chains, and what we are experiencing now might be the e-book in chains.



¹ R. Darnton, 'What Is the History of Books?', *Daedalus*, 111:3 (1982), pp. 65-83, there p. 66.
² Although it continues to be a valuable tool in the digital age, it should be noted that Darnton's model was only ever intended to be applied to the life cycle of the printed book. *Ibidem*, p. 67.

³ L. Howsam, *Old Books and New Histories: An Orientation to Studies in Book and Print Culture* (Toronto/ Buffalo/ London: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 31.

⁴ H. Jenkins, S. Ford & J. Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York/ London: New York University, 2013), pp. 291–292.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

⁷ On this, the website says: ‘For all those expats or just lovers of English books who return frustrated from flea markets where English books are always rare. For all those who don’t want to or simply cannot buy new books all the time. For all those who have run out of space to put all the books they own. For all those people there is now a place to meet and swap English books for free.’ Bookswapper.de, ‘bookswapper.de - swap English books for free’, <<https://h5.bookswapper.de/bookswap/#howitworks>> (5 February, 2018).

⁸ Books, to quote Van der Weel, ‘carry an important symbolic meaning, especially as carriers of knowledge (both religious and secular), and culture’. A. van der Weel, ‘e-Roads and i-Ways: A Sociotechnical Look at User Acceptance of E-Books’, *Logos*, 21:3 (2010), pp. 47–57, there p. 53.

⁹ According to § 903 and § 929 of the German Civil Code (BGB). Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz, ‘German Civil Code BGB’, <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_bgb/englisch_bgb.html> (10 February, 2018).

¹⁰ Description found in the Lexikon des gesamten Buchwesens Online. Brill, ‘Büchersendung - Brill Reference’, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/lexikon-des-gesamten-buchwesens-online/buchersendung-COM_021921> (14 January, 2018).

¹¹ E. Roloff, ‘Unterwegs mit Rabatt: Die Büchersendung und ihre Regeln’, *DAS ARCHIV. Magazin für Kommunikationsgeschichte*, 4 (2013), pp. 34–37, there pp. 35–37.

¹² ‘Die günstigeren Tarife sollen als unveränderter Grundsatz den Versand des Kulturgutes Buch erleichtern’. Author’s translation. *Ibidem*, pp. 36–37.

¹³ The New York Times, ‘Amazon Erases Orwell Books From Kindle – NYTimes.com’, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/18/technology/companies/18amazon.html>> (5 February, 2018).

¹⁴ J. Gomez, *Print Is Dead: Books in Our Digital Age* (Hampshire/ New York: Macmillan, 2008), p. 122.

¹⁵ For more on DRM and its effects on consumers, see T. Gillespie, ‘Designed to “Effectively Frustrate”: Copyright, Technology and the Agency of Users’, *New Media & Society*, 8:4 (2006), pp. 651–669.

¹⁶ Bookswapper.de, ‘Bookswapper FAQ - all about tokens books how to swap books and use this site’, <<https://h5.bookswapper.de/faq/>> (1 February, 2018).

¹⁷ As of January 2018, the number of swappable books on the website was over 1,600, with many of these books likely having been swapped many times over.

¹⁸ Van der Weel, ‘e-Roads and i-Ways’, p. 54.

¹⁹ Henry Jenkins, ‘If It Doesn’t Spread, It’s Dead (Part Three: The Gift Economy and Commodity Culture) — Henry Jenkins’, <http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/02/if_it_doesnt_spread_its_dead_p.2.html> (5 February, 2018).

²⁰ Howsam, *Old Books and New Histories: An Orientation to Studies in Book and Print Culture*, p. 31.

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Bookswapper.de and the Easily-Shared Paper Book

Ellen Barth

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INTERVIEW

‘BOOKS MAY SURVIVE, BUT WILL BOOKSHOPS?’

Three booksellers on their past, present and future

Loren Snel and Charlotte Boelens

The paper book's chief accomplice? Who could it be but the bookseller. TXT consulted three independents. What will the future of bookselling look like? We spoke to the new director of Athenaeum Booksellers, Caroline Reeders. We talked to comic bookstore owner Menno Barkema, of Leidse Stripshop Mevrouw Kern. Lastly, we spoke with entrepreneur Tim van den Hoed of the crowdfunded De Utrechtse Boekenbar. They may be fortes and cities apart, but these booksellers show striking commonalities. All waved digital goodbye and returned to paper. They have faith in the paper book, but do they have equal faith in the bookshop?

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Caroline Reeders

Director of Athenaeum Booksellers, Amsterdam

**YOU HAVE BEEN DIRECTOR AT ATHENAEUM FOR SOME
MONTHS NOW. WHAT HAS IT BEEN LIKE THUS FAR?**

Very fun, very special. I have worked all over the business. I imported

English books at Van Ditmar, freelanced and did consulting for various publishers, worked for Mindbus, the company that designs online stores for bookshops. But never before did I work on the bookstore side of things. I ran into an old colleague recently. We worked together at newspaper de Volkskrant twenty years ago. I told him about my job and he went, 'You already wanted that back then!' Clearly, it has been a long-cherished dream of mine. As is common with those, they can disappoint when they come true. You might have idealized things. But that romantic ideal I have dreamed of, has become reality.

YOU USED TO DO MARKETING FOR NEWSPAPERS. HAS THE PAPER BUSINESS PREPARED YOU FOR YOUR CURRENT PROFESSION?

Absolutely. Back then, the newspapers' printers were located in the same building as the editorial and marketing offices. So I basically worked in a factory. You could smell the ink, hear and feel the presses. It made for a high-paced daily dynamic. Later, at the book publishers', things went much slower. A book took six weeks, sometimes a year. I really had to get used to that. At Athenaeum, I have returned to that old, fast dynamic. I feel it, recognise it. The store is open daily, and that is a good thing. I should somewhat stay out of that dynamic though. There is a long-term plan I need to keep my eyes on. Now I am here, I am even more aware of the need to make sure bookstores like ours will still be relevant in five, ten years.

ATHENAEUM IS PERHAPS THE MOST FAMOUS BOOKSTORE IN AMSTERDAM. HOW, IN YOUR OPINION, DOES ATHENAEUM CURRENTLY DISTINGUISH ITSELF?

We offer quite some languages, like Italian, Spanish, German, French. We also offer books on subjects like classical antiquity, philosophy of science, *belles lettres*. Other bookstores offer some of that, but Athenaeum specifically pursues a policy to provide such niches. We also sell academic textbooks, an important division of our business, especially within Amsterdam, and especially for our online store. In Leiden you go to Van Stockum, I presume?

VAN STOCKUM QUIT SELLING ACADEMIC TEXTBOOKS TO STUDENTS AND STUDY ASSOCIATIONS.

Ah well, very understandable. The margin on textbooks is small. But they are part of our identity and we like to maintain our connection with the academic audience. They can come to us for whatever,

Mother's Day, Christmas. The average Athenaeum client does not read middle-of-the-road. People know they can come to us with their difficult questions, offline and online. The fact that you can approach a bookseller here with a highly specific request, and that that bookseller immediately knows what you mean, is, I think, unique. Rare recommendations, that is what you come to us for. But there is also a danger in that. We could become too exotic, go adrift. It would discourage potential new clients.

WILL A BOOKSELLER NOT KNOW SOON ENOUGH WHAT TO OFFER
THE KIND OF READER THEY HAVE IN FRONT OF THEM?

Yes, but that reader has to come to the store first. My predecessor, Maarten Ascher, has said 'Athenaeum is the elite's clubhouse, but the elite may be big'. I wonder if you will make it that way. I do not mean leaving people out in the cold. You will want to cater for the elite, and address a larger audience at the same time. Perhaps we should shed our academic and literary skin somewhat, stretch the concept of what we mean by 'quality'. But how to do that, without becoming a bookstore of ten a penny? That, I consider a quest.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE FUTURE OF BOOKSELLING
IN THE NEXT FIVE TO TEN YEARS?

I think the physical book will make it through. People do not think twice about abandoning one medium for a technically superior one. But the physical book is both sentimentally and technically the better option. People say they miss that tactility, that feeling when they read digitally. Digital reading has its perks, of course. An e-reader is easy to transport. But we peer at screens all day already. Reading a real book then offers a different experience. It will remain, but it will diminish. There are too many alternatives available nowadays. It becomes a question of trade, of money, or time. How are you going to spend the hours available in a day? Perhaps watch a movie, message friends all evening. People have not started to hate reading; their attention span is just shortening to messages of 140 characters. That shift to fragmented reading is bad news for the novel. People do not hate the things that disappear. Those things just lose their exchange value.

COULD THE PHYSICAL BOOKSHOP DISAPPEAR
TOO, JUST LIKE THE RECORD STORE?

Yes. It would be a shame and it would make me nostalgic, as you do with beautiful things beyond saving. I would resist it in the sense that I would keep on asking 'why do I want to save it? Is there reason to? Are there reasons not to?' Of course I hope and believe some bookstores will remain, and that Athenaeum will be among them. But that will only happen when we are constantly occupied with adapting, and with answering the question 'why?', instead of 'why not?'.

DUTCH PUBLISHING GROUP WPG IS DEVELOPING TEXT MINING
PRODUCTS. ONE SUCH TOOL WOULD USE DATA, MINED
FROM A NOVEL FOR EXAMPLE, TO PROVIDE BOOKSELLERS
WITH INFORMATION ON THEME, STYLE AND QUALITY.
WOULD THESE TOOLS HAVE A PLACE AT ATHENAEUM?

Naturally. Everything to help people find what they are looking for. I am not very emotional about these things. I understand other people want to resist such developments. But what I see, particularly when it comes to non-fiction, is that the better organized your metadata are the more you sell. Not just that, but it makes it easier for people to find what they are truly looking for. I do not see what the objection to that could be. By the time we are there, we will all be OK with it. When I was young, we thought a mobile phone was ridiculous. They once conducted a research in France to find out if people were prepared to take cash out of a hole in the wall. No, no one was going to do that. Preposterous idea...

DO YOU STILL HAVE TIME TO READ, DESPITE THESE BUSY TIMES?

Yes, cannot do without it. My daughter asked me this morning whether I had had a good sleep. No, I said, I was reading till late. She said: 'You say it as if that is not what you always do!'



Tim van den Hoed

Owner of De Utrechtse Boekenbar, Utrecht

**HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE IDEA OF SELLING
BOOKS WITH COVERS FACING FORWARD?**

There are quite some bookstores – in Berlin, Warsaw, Korea, Japan – that display books this way. They inspired me. Books are too beautiful to just be showing us their spines. The downside of this set-up is that there is less space for more titles. But that is not a big problem when you are as small a bookstore as I am.

**RECENTLY, LOUIS BOOK CAFÉ OPENED IN THE CENTRE OF UTRECHT.
DOES THEIR BOOKISH AURA POSE A THREAT TO YOUR BUSINESS?**

Louis does not sell books. They are just a café, with chesterfields and a 1930s-theme. I wanted my shop's interior to be clean, bright and inviting. And I wanted to sell books, and serve The Village Coffee, the best in town.

**SOME YEARS BACK, YOU WORKED AS A PRODUCT
SPECIALIST AT ONLINE STORE BOL.COM. IS THAT
WHERE YOUR BOOKSTORE DREAM WAS BORN?**

The idea had been playing around in my head before that. I have always loved books, but what they look like is very important to me. If I do not like the paper or the way it has been printed, I often do not want to read it. I believe everyone cares about that. You want to hold before you decide, which is why buying online is never ideal. When I was a product specialist, I had people call to claim their book was a misprint, when the frayed look of the outside of the pages was by design. Look, like this one, [the Dutch translation of Haruki Murakami's latest novel in hardcover].

HOW DID PEOPLE RESPOND WHEN YOU SHARED YOUR BOOKSHOP DREAM WITH THEM?

Some were supportive. They believed there was demand for what I wanted to offer. But there was plenty of criticism too. People asked what balance I would strike between bookselling and catering. Or told me there would be too much competition. An editor at a publishing house told me 'the last thing Utrecht needs is another bookshop'.

WHAT DID YOU TELL HIM? WHAT IS YOUR USP?

What I think makes my business unique is that you can walk in without the arresting feeling of needing to buy a book. Pop in and have a coffee. Stay awhile. Read some. Most literary bookshops are stern and quiet. I want people to step in and feel like they can ask me stuff. I can tell them about the books I enjoy. I notice those are the ones I end up selling most often.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE FUTURE, IN FIVE YEARS OR SO?

Of bookselling or of my bookshop? I am hoping to use the basement of my store in the future. I will have to see. I have four years to pay back the loan on my CrowdAboutNow sponsorship. I have only been open for a couple of months. I need to work at spreading the word, building up a clientele, and keep on showing people books. We need to keep reminding ourselves of their existence, lest we forget about them. You know, I do believe in the paper book's survival. That is not to say I believe every bookshop will survive.



Menno Barkema

Owner of Leidse Stripshop Mevrouw Kern, Leiden

HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR WAY INTO THE COMIC BOOK WORLD?

I started reading them when I was ten, and started dealing in comic books as soon as I had a car. After secondary school I got my retailer's certificate. Back then, that was compulsory if you wanted to be in retail or open a store. There was no course on cartoons. I acquired all comic book knowledge myself; it is a self-taught specialism. To go into the comic book business, you need to know what you are doing, what you are selling. You need to know which ones are popular, what sells at what price point, which books are rare, where you can acquire them. It is a complex business. That is why regular bookstores do not sell comic books, only us specialists do.

CAN YOU TELL US A BIT MORE ABOUT THE STORE. ARE YOU SPECIALISED IN CERTAIN COMIC BOOKS?

The store was established in 1981 and named after a regular customer and great comic book enthusiast. Four years ago, I joined the second owner, Hans Edink. As of January 2018, I run the store by myself. Comic books in Dutch make up 80% of my business. My bestsellers are no surprise; *Suske en Wiske* [Spike and Suzy], *Kuifje* [Tintin], *Asterix*, *Donald Duck*. Some I can get at CB [the Dutch book distributor], but for most titles I visit at least twenty different locations so as to offer my customers what they want.

MEVROUW KERN ALSO HAS A WEBSTORE. SINCE WHEN CAN CUSTOMERS FIND COMIC BOOKS THERE?

I believe the webstore has been online for fifteen or twenty years. It must have been launched as soon as the internet existed. I have personally been selling comic books online since the nineties. In those days, you managed to sell everything. Later, there was more

competition. This led to setting up an actual store. The physical store will always be the main attraction. After all, you want to hold comic books, look at them. In a webstore, you see a picture, maybe a short description, that is all. It is like reading the back of a videotape. You will not know what type of movie it is, or whether you will like it. You need to watch it to know for sure. The same goes for a comic book. You pick it up, you flip through it, you look at the images, at the drawing style, the story. That is how you will know it sparks your interest. Comic books are expensive, too, so looking at them in-store helps you decide..

IN THE MUSIC AND FILM INDUSTRY, PIRATING AND ILLEGAL
ONLINE SHARING IS A BIG ISSUE. THE BOOK BUSINESS, TOO, IS
FACED WITH OPEN ACCESS, COPYRIGHT AND ILLEGAL SHARING.
HOW DO THESE DEVELOPMENTS AFFECT YOUR BUSINESS?

Comic books are a beautiful, luxury product. There is a desire to collect them physically. You want to hold them and have them on display. Comic books are not like newspapers. I can imagine people have no need for a physical paper. News gets old quickly. Comic books are more like photos. I will always prefer a physical photo to its digital counterpart. Admittedly, some comic books like the Marvel series are expensive and hard to come by. So, if by illegally obtaining them online you can read the story, I can imagine some will do so. But I do not think pirating poses a genuine threat to the comic book industry. To successfully spread illegal scans of comic books, you need to deconstruct or damage an original. I cannot imagine anyone would want, or would take time to do that.

THE TXT TEAM



Danae Barboudi

Editor

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/danae-barboudi-546072149/>



Martina Di Gregorio

Designer

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/martinadigregorio>



Lucy Drew

Editor

lucy.drew@gmail.com



Eric-Jan Dros
PR Officer
www.linkedin.com/in/erikjandros



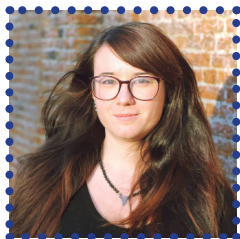
Khrystyna Kernytska
Editor
khrystynakernytska@outlook.com



Roos Knigge
PR Officer
roosknigge@live.nl



Sam Koster
Editor-In-Chief
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/sam-koster-714b9513a/>



Adele Pusiol

Designer

www.linkedin.com/in/adele-pusiol



Naomi Remijn

Director-in-chief

nremijn@gmail.com



Loren Snel

PR Officer

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/lorensnel/>

TXT: The Book Issue

Book and Digital Media Studies
Master's Programme, Leiden University
2017-2018