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# *Chapter 19*

## Seeing the World in Print

ROBERT A. GROSS

"SO MUCH OF WHAT I see reminds me of something I read in a book. . . . Shouldn't it be the other way around?" So Meg Ryan muses wistfully at the opening of the romantic comedy *You've Got Mail* (1998). Ryan plays Kathleen Kelly, owner of an old-fashioned children's bookstore on Manhattan's West Side, whose cozy world is shattered when Fox and Sons, a Borders-style superstore, opens just a few blocks away. The Shop around the Corner is a neighborhood fixture, where Kelly presides as "the Story Lady," reading aloud to children, greeting customers by name, and knowing just which book they would like. But how can she compete against the mammoth intruder, with its discount prices, espresso bar, and lively entertainment? In this battle of David and Goliath, Kelly faces off against her co-star Tom Hanks's Joe Fox, the aggressive scion of the commercial empire, who views business as war and takes no prisoners. It is no contest; despite Kelly's brave fight, the giant wins. The film's more compelling struggle is for the heart, and the fun lies in watching love conquer all.[1]

What brings Kelly and Fox together is a most modern matchmaker: e-mail. Having met in that lounge for lonely souls—the chat room—the two carry on an earnest, affectionate exchange of messages, unaware of each other's real identity. She is "ShopGirl," he "NY152," and the brightest spot of their day is the cheery news from AmericaOnline, "You've Got Mail!" Anonymity is the key to romance. The strangers employ the impersonal instrument of electronic communication to express the authentic feelings of the heart. E-mail proves as vital to courtship as ever were handwritten letters sealed with a kiss. Electronic technology, the high-tech agent of modern commerce, the secret weapon of mass retailing that enables Fox and Sons to crush

1. For information and excerpts from the film's dialogue, see http://youvegotmail.warnerbros.com/. Nora Ephron's cinematic indictment of chain bookstores is challenged in a recent essay by Brooke Allen, "Two—Make That Three—Cheers for the Chain Bookstores," *Atlantic Monthly*, July–August 2001, 288.





The Shop around the Corner, is simultaneously a transparent window into the soul.

"You are what you read," Kelly announces early on. On that principle she has run her little store and formed her life. *You've Got Mail* fosters that ideal of reading with a contemporary twist. Kelly, a saint of bookselling, carries the store as a cross, bequeathed by her beloved mother. Her working days are confined to the narrow limits of the shop, her evenings spent with a left-wing newspaper columnist whose hostility to computers—he collects old typewriters—is matched only by his eagerness for publicity. It is a companionable but passionless affair. Not that Joe Fox is doing any better. His longtime lover, a self-absorbed literary agent, pursues dollars as greedily as Joe's father and grandfather, who run the family firm. In the director Nora Ephron's vision, the whole world of print—authorship, journalism, publishing, and bookselling—has been corrupted by money and power. Only Kathleen Kelly and her devoted employees love literature for its own sake. Happily, through the auspices of AmericaOnline, she conveys that faith, Joe returns her sentiments, even reading *Pride and Prejudice* under her tutelage, and they fall in love. As the film brings the two together, reading and experience become one.

With its love of books and transcendent ideal of reading, *You've Got Mail* provides a convenient entryway to a subject that has been engaging scholars on both sides of the Atlantic since David D. Hall announced two decades ago, in an influential lecture that helped to generate the American branch of this international scholarly endeavor, "The history of reading and of readers is central to the history of the book." This was a summons to wide-ranging investigation. Who could read and write in the past? What titles and genres did they choose? What was "the process by which persons responded to a text"? Through such probes, Hall hoped to uncover the uses and meanings of literacy as a central theme in "the history of culture and society."[2] That goal remains, but in its pursuit, our scholarship has recently taken a distinct turn. Few students follow the lead of Kenneth Lockridge and quarry in official records for evidence of popular literacy—though everyone employs his finding that colonial New England achieved the highest rate of male literacy in the early modern world. Researchers are daunted no doubt by the tedious labor involved in counting signatures on wills and deeds and discouraged

2. Hall, "On Native Ground: From the History of Printing to the History of the Book," paper presented at the American Antiquarian Society, November 1983, as the inaugural James Russell Wiggins Lecture in the History of the Book in American Culture, and published in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 93 (1983): 313–36. It is now available in David D. Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 30, 34.

even more by the ambiguity of the results. In the early modern world, we have learned, reading and writing were separate skills, and many more people acquired the former than the latter. Nor has the late William Gilmore's approach—surveying the records of book ownership, as indicated in inventories of estates, and charting the popularity of titles and genres—become a necessity of research. Such findings may disclose broad trends, such as the rise of the novel and growing curiosity about the contemporary world. But they are plagued by uncertainty. Private libraries—even a small collection of Bibles, sermons, almanacs, and primers—were the privilege of the propertied. Listed and valued at the time of death, they reveal not what was read in a lifetime but what was preserved in the home. It is no easy task to classify these holdings, characterize their intellectual bent, and identify them with particular social groups. In the final analysis, the fundamental mystery remains. How did people read and "make meaning" from these printed works?[3]

Elizabeth Eisenstein recognized this problem in *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe* (*PPAC*), only to sidestep it as too hard to handle in the state of knowledge current in 1979. The changes "associated with the consumption of new printed products" are "intangible, indirect," and riddled with uncertainty. Perhaps for that reason, Eisenstein concentrated her mind on the production and dissemination of print, whose broad consequences—extension of communications, proliferation of books, and rationalization of knowledge—have been at the center of historiographical debates over her work. Did printing foster the advance of learning, as she maintains, by generating uniform texts, open to correction and improvement, for a cosmopolitan community of scholars? Or, as her critic Adrian Johns insists, did the press, as conducted by cut-throat capitalists with no compunctions about plagiarizing and pirating, actually undermine the stability and authority of printed knowledge? In this contest of interpretations, the practice of reading has commanded little attention. The leading figures in Eisenstein's account approach books as did

3. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Inquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974); R. A. Houston, *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity: Illiteracy and Society in Scotland and Northern England 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 187–92; Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England 1780–1835* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1989). To trace the reassessment of quantitative studies of book history, see Hall, "Readers and Reading in America: Historical and Critical Perspectives," in *Cultures of Print*, 169–87; Roger Chartier, "Frenchness in the History of the Book: From the History of Publishing to the History of Reading (1987 Wiggins Lecture)," in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 97 (1987): 299–329; James Raven, "New Reading Histories, Print Culture and the Identification of Change: The Case of Eighteenth-Century England," *Social History* 23 (October 1998): 268–87.



the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe, who pored over texts as intently as he stared at the sky, comparing and contrasting reports with an alert eye for inconsistencies and an indefatigable will to fix precise observations in print. His was an exemplary exercise of critical reason, an instance of the new habit of "learning by reading" made possible by the printing revolution, and akin to Eisenstein's own method in her monumental book. Did others read the same way? The question goes unexplored in Johns's critique. Although he notes that anxiety over reading—notably, a fear of the disorderly passions it could unleash—inspired efforts to establish in England an authoritative realm of print, his interest, like Eisenstein's, centers on the production of knowledge. But how books were manufactured, whether by learned printers or by dishonest businessmen, does not reveal how meaning was made.[4]

Unable to answer that question by quantitative methods, researchers on both sides of the Atlantic have shifted direction. Today, the top agenda is reader response: the direct encounter between person and text. Witness the themes in recent scholarship: the codes and conventions of reading, the relation of author to reader, the personalization of print, reading and writing the self. This preoccupation is shared by specialists in literature and history alike. Among critics, it marks a decisive change in the interpretation of texts. No longer is meaning assumed to inhere in the poem or novel, as constructed by the author and deciphered by the scholar. The current credo is that readers create the text anew, "appropriating" characters, themes, images, phrases to serve their own needs and desires. As literary theory has taught us, language is indeterminate, its meanings multiple, and every effort to render a coherent world in words doomed to failure. In that very fluidity resides the creative force of books. Reading, as Janice Radway construes it, takes place in "a space between, a space neither ordered by the text itself nor controlled by the reader, but one born of that special act of ventriloquism whereby the reader speaks another's words in populated solitude."[5] A similar faith in individual agency animates historians. In the figure of Menocchio, the sixteenth-century Italian miller, Carlo Ginzburg reveals the fertile mind and tenacious character of a humble but uncommon man who fashioned an iconoclastic world-view from wayward reading and defended it fiercely before the Roman Inquisition, at the ultimate cost of his life. So, too, have feminist historians discerned, in diaries

4. Eisenstein, *PPAC*, 60, 61; Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998); Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, "An Unacknowledged Revolution Revisited," and Adrian Johns, "How to Acknowledge a Revolution," in AHR Forum, "How Revolutionary Was the Print Revolution?" *American Historical Review* 107.1 (2002): 84–128.

5. Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997), 360.

and letters of women readers, private dramas of resistance to patriarchal domination. "Reading provided space—physical, temporal, and psychological—that permitted women to exempt themselves from traditional gender expectations, whether imposed by formal society or by family obligations," Barbara Sicherman writes. "The freedom of imagination women found in books encouraged new self-definitions."[6]

On such presumptions of the "reader's liberty" the French cultural historian Roger Chartier has issued a manifesto for a field. Against the bleak Foucauldian view of individuals dominated by discourse, he sets the lovely metaphor, borrowed from Michel de Certeau, of readers as "poachers," slipping past the border guards of print and foraging freely where they may. "The book always aims at installing an order," but readers always retain the cunning to circumvent and subvert, if not entirely elude, that claim. Whatever its badges of authority—formidable size, lofty language, royal imprimatur—the book still requires the reader "to give it meaning." "This dialectic between imposition and appropriation" is the driving force of book history.[7]

It is tempting to endorse this stance, especially for an American. What better suits our point of view than a progressive insistence on the creativity of the mind and the capacity of people to resist authority?[8] Unwittingly, that outlook can turn history into a Whiggish contest between liberty and power. It assumes the contemporary ideal of reading—the quest for an authentic self through the written word—and projects it back onto the past. It dissolves the cultural meaning of a text or genre into a myriad of individual responses, all "equally plausible"; putting a premium on "fragmentation and interpretative freedom," James A. Secord cautions, this approach risks becoming "a celebration of Victorian values of liberal pluralism."[9] And it never doubts that books and reading are and have always been good things.

That wasn't what the father of cultural critic Sven Birkerts thought when he found the boy lounging with his head in a book. "What are you doing on

6. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller,* trans. John Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980); Robert A. Gross, "Reading Culture, Reading Books," in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 106 (April 1996): 59–78.

7. Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries,* trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1994), vii–ix, 2; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1984), 165–76.

8. Paul Giles, "Reconstructing American Studies: Transnational Paradoxes, Comparative Perspectives," *Journal of American Studies* 28 (1994): 335, 344.

9. Secord, *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of* Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), 521.



the couch in the middle of the day?" he erupted, as Birkerts recalls in *The Gutenberg Elegies,* a lament for a vanishing world of print. Idle reading was equally anathema to the long line of farmers, businessmen, and politicians who have scorned eggheads, exalted the school of hard knocks, and made anti-intellectualism an American tradition. To be sure, these practical men read newspapers omnivorously and consulted guides on how to raise larger crops and build better houses. And like most people today, they readily followed instructions when it served their interests. Who among us wants a user's manual, whether for car, computer, or VCR, open to creative reading?

There are, after all, many kinds of texts, addressed to varied ends, and no single theory can fit them all. "What did individuals read for?" the English historian James Raven asks. "Were they reading to learn and understand? Were they reading to remember something and then apply the skill? Were they reading to gather information or to take a decision? Were they reading, at least apparently, for simple entertainment?" Were they reading, I would add, to identify with elites, to affiliate with "imagined communities," or to adopt the manners and styles necessary for upward mobility? None of these "modalities of reading" need stir contests with authority or foster intense experience. They may, in fact, be the most common encounters we have with print.[10]

Even this pragmatic approach is too simple. It smoothes out the past into a familiar landscape, whose sensible inhabitants are extensions of ourselves. We are thus unprepared to find in the historical record individuals like the young tailor John Dane. Uncertain whether to emigrate from England to America, this future settler of Puritan Massachusetts turned to the Bible to tell his fortune. "I hastily toke up the bybell, and tould my father if whare I opend the bybell thare i met with anie thing eyether to incuredg or discouredg that should settle me. I oping of it, not knowing more then the child in the womb, the first I cast my eye on was: Cum out from among them, touch no unclene thing." On that authority, he booked passage for the New World. And what about the African American freed-woman whom a Scottish traveler encountered in the Reconstruction South? A pious Christian, she could identify only the symbols for Jesus in the Bible, but that was enough. Opening the New Testament at random, she would trace her finger through the scripture, word by word, page by page, until she came upon the sign for her Lord.

10. Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994), 38; Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963); Raven, "New Reading Histories," 286. For a parallel view of reader reception, see Jonathan Rose, "Rereading the English Common Reader: A Preface to a History of Audiences," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992): 47–70.

"'And oh!' she said [according to the traveler], 'how dat name started up like a light in the dark,' and I say, 'Dere's e name of my Jesus!' It was de on'y one word I knew . . . but dat one word made me hunger for more.'" Such incidents reveal the past to be a foreign country, where familiar acts can assume unaccustomed meanings and forms. Robert Darnton has been pressing that insight in his widely read, but little imitated, essays. Reading is "a mystery," he observes. "Both familiar and foreign, it is an activity that we share with our ancestors yet can never be the same as what they experienced." The challenge is to shed "the illusion of stepping outside of time" and to recover the strangeness of the past. "A history of reading, if it can ever be written, would chart the alien element in the way man has made sense of the world." [11]

Seen in this light, the vision of reading in *You've Got Mail* and its nineteenth-century precursors is hardly universal. It constitutes one among many versions that have co-existed, competed, and commingled in American and Western culture from early on and still do. Reading is best seen as a cultural practice, carried out in particular settings and styles, linked to specific groups, and informed with ideological meanings. The challenge for the scholar is to recover such practices in their full richness, to track their trajectories across time and space, and to describe the patterns of continuity and change. A history of reading so conducted "becomes a study of cultural formation in action," to use the apt formulation of Secord.[12] That is a formidable task. Yet, I want to propose we do even more, that we step back and reflect on the conundrum that puzzled the cinematic bookseller Kelly: the relation between reading and experience. To that end, let me suggest a way of thinking about that problem. What does it mean to see the world through print? Reading is, most immediately, an experience in its own right, made accessible as cultural practice. But its impact on personal and collective existence remains unclear. "Books," Ralph Waldo Emerson once suggested, "are for the scholar's idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings." The contemporary Canadian writer Alberto Manguel's mother put the matter more bluntly. "'Go out and live!' [his] mother would say when she saw [him] reading, as if [his] silent

11. David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 26; Grey Gundaker, *Signs of Diaspora, Diaspora of Signs: Literacies, Creolization, and Vernacular Practice in African America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 141; Robert Darnton, "First Steps Toward a History of Reading," in *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 155, and "Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity," in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 216.

12. Secord, *Victorian Sensation*, 3.



activity contradicted her sense of what it meant to be alive." [13] Such formulations sunder reading from living. That relation, we know, is more complex. Aid to existence one moment, reading can confuse it the next. Books can be refuge from life's pain, compensation for its deficits, enhancement of its pleasure, barrier to its promise, threat to its survival. A history of reading, then, is not just a chart of reader response. It must encompass both the social organization of reading, particularly its patterning by race, gender, ethnicity, and class, and its conduct among varied forms of work and leisure, ritual and routine, and communication in the past. In that complex configuration, I propose, lie important clues to the changing character of society and culture.

I can, of course, only illustrate this agenda for research with examples from the area I know best, the United States. What follows is a short survey of what I take to be two leading representations of reading in American culture, which have endured and adapted to changing contexts from colonial times to the present. When Kathleen Kelly stirred on film with passion for print, she hardly resembled a seventeenth-century Puritan, certainly not in the figure of Meg Ryan. But the thrill she sought in the written word—rapturous encounter with other realities, vital communication with other souls—had its roots in the cultural practice of reading in colonial New England. To the evangelical Christians who aspired to build a New Israel in the American wilderness, the Bible, "the book above all books," was the living Word of God, the utterance of "his own most hallowed lips." In the pages of scripture, they heard the "voice" of Christ, speaking directly to the hungry soul. As Saint Paul had assured them, the gospel had been "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God" and "not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart." Whether preached from the pulpit, written down in manuscript, or printed in cold type, the holy text was the pure, unmediated communication of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, Puritans invested the act of reading with sacred purpose. Approach the text in a devout spirit, the New England clergy advised; ponder the words slowly and carefully, literally chew them over, like a cow with its cud, so as to absorb the goodness into the soul. Underline passages you find "most relish in," or make notes in the margin that you may easily, and more quickly find them again." "Once or twice reading over a booke is not enough." This was the style that has come to be known to historians as "intensive reading," the reverent return to the same sacred texts day by day, year by year, over the course of a life. Not just the Bible but sermons, hymnals, and guides to devotion were treated the same

13. Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Selected Essays*, ed. Larzer Ziff (New York: Penguin, 1982), 89; Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Viking, 1996), 21.

way. As preachers of the Word, Puritan ministers claimed its divine aura for their own works: the Holy Spirit spoke through them. And so, too, might it touch ordinary men and women. Ultimately, reading was but the means to an end: the experience of divine grace. At stake was eternal life.[14]

Every aspect of communication—speaking and hearing, reading and writing—was thus fraught with blessings or perils for the soul. The human tongue could be "exceedingly good" or "excessively evil." Protestant reformers promoted godly speech both at the meetinghouse, where they developed a new style of plain preaching, and in daily life, where they aimed to "govern their tongues." All sorts of talk that enlivened early modern villages and embroiled them in conflict—scolding and libeling, bawdy jokes and blasphemous oaths—were subject to peer pressure and criminal sanction in New England. Puritan eyes as well as ears were shut to profane ballads and lewd jests. "When thou canst read," the Reverend Thomas White advised, "read no Ballads and foolish Books, but the Bible." Not everyone was listening, on either side of the Atlantic. "Alas!" the anonymous author of *The History of Genesis* (1690) lamented, "how often do we see Parents prefer Tom Thumb, Guy of Warwick, Valentine and Orson or some other foolish book, before the Book of Life." Although they never stopped inveighing against such popular tastes, the moral arbiters of New England had no more success keeping such chapbooks and "merriments" out of the region than out of the hands of idle youth.[15]

The sacred use of literacy could, at times, verge on superstition. John Dane, the Puritan emigrant, treated the Bible like a crystal ball. Many used it to pick names for their children. For one trusting soul, it was a talisman against evil. Amid an Indian attack on his village during King Philip's War, he sat in the town common calmly reading the good book—only to become the day's sole casualty. For most Puritans, the Bible was not a magical totem but a tabernacle of the spirit, which they longed to enter, and it was this vision of books and reading they bequeathed to later generations of Americans. The Reverend Cotton Mather, New England's most assiduous author, delighted in giving away copies of his books, and as he did so, he alerted recipients: "Remember, that I am speaking to you, all the while you have the Book before you!" As originating spirit, the author was one with the text, animating its every word. The ideal communication brought two souls together in intimate conversation.[16]

14. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder,* 21–31; Hall, *Cultures of Print,* 64; Jane Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 31.

15. Kamensky, *Governing the Tongue,* 3–44; Hall, *Cultures of Print,* 51; Velma Bourgeois Richmond, *The Legend of Guy of Warwick* (New York and London: Garland, 1996), 167.

16. Jill Lepore, "Literacy and Reading in Puritan New England," in *Perspectives in American Book History,* ed. Scott E. Casper, Joanne D. Chaison, and Jeffrey D. Groves (Amherst: Univ. of



On these terms evangelicals have searched for salvation in every wave of revivals in American history. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, they seized on the latest innovations in printing technology—the steam-powered press, the stereotype plate—to produce Bibles and tracts by the million in a crusade to convert every American to Christ. Armed with these pamphlets, college students traveled country roads to the "darkest corners of the land," peddling the word from door to door, and giving away books as freely as Cotton Mather. These were often the same texts that had circulated in Mather's time: the "steady sellers" of Protestant piety. And they were to be read in the same intensive spirit. "It is not he that reads most, but he that meditates most, that will prove the choicest, sweetest, wisest, and strongest Christian," one missionary newspaper urged in 1851.

Far from expiring in an expansive age of capitalism and democracy, the Puritan vision of literacy endured—contrary to the claim of historians, who have detected a shift from intensive to extensive reading in this era. The colonists, it has been argued, read the same books over and over because they had no choice. In an age of scarcity, books were few and costly. But the publishing revolution of the nineteenth century generated a new world of abundance. With access to a vast array of titles for every taste, Americans cast aside old habits, embraced diversity and choice, and began reading "extensively." The new economy was incompatible with the old piety. Evidently, nobody told the evangelicals. They still read the Bible the old way, even as their presses poured forth cheap tales of Christian conversion. In their view, mass printing was a gift from God—"a spiritual telegraph"—designed for sacred ends. Too often it was misused for base purposes, supplying "infidel" and immoral fare for the sake of commercial profit. But properly conducted, it was a boon to mankind. Thanks to modern technology, the Gospel with its universal promise of salvation could spread all over the globe. The medium was *not* the message. And so it has gone with every major advance in communications since. Radio put revivalism on the air waves; television has brought forth an "electronic church" and a Christian Broadcast Network. And the text of the Bible is available free on the World Wide Web.[17]

The sacred practice of reading left a lasting mark on American literary culture. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Calvinism of the Puritan

Massachusetts Press; Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2002, 17–46); Hall, *Worlds of Wonder,* 6; Michael D. Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 20–22.

17. David Paul Nord, "Religious Readers and Reading in Antebellum America," *Journal of the Early Republic* 13 (1995): 246, 255; David Edwin Harrell Jr., "Oral Roberts: Religious Media Pioneer," in *Communication and Change in American Religious History,* ed. Leonard I. Sweet (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 320–34.

fathers lost its hold on New England's leading intellectuals. But the ethic of "plain living and high thinking" remained. For all his talk of finding God in nature, Ralph Waldo Emerson, trained as a Unitarian minister, looked to books for intense, spiritual experience, just as his clerical forebears had done. "When the mind is braced by labor and invention," he proclaimed, "the page of whatever book we read becomes luminous with manifold allusion." Instead of salvation, Emerson sought epiphanies in texts: the illumination of truth in one mind by another. His ideal was an intimate exchange between author and reader—exactly what he found in the French essayist Montaigne. "[His] is the language of conversation transferred to a book. Cut these words, and they would bleed; they are vascular and alive." Similarly, Henry David Thoreau converted the act of reading into a strenuous exercise of the spirit. "It requires a training such as the athletes underwent," he declared in *Walden,* "the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written." It is tempting to think that such visions were confined to a narrow intelligentsia. Not at all. Young clerks in the countinghouses of Manhattan in the 1840s were eager for cultural experience, albeit on a less exacting plane. Attending lectures, joining in conversation, reading books: in such pastimes, they sought contact with other minds. A satisfying lecture stimulated thought and stirred emotions, a disappointing one lacked "depth and earnestness of feeling." So, too, with a good book, like Longfellow's *Hiawatha,* which one Boston clerk kept with him in a "side pocket," an ever-ready friend. "This little volume has since been a traveling companion with us for many hundred miles," he reported affectionately. "It has been read and re-read—read in silence, read aloud, read to the lady we love, and ladies we do not love." Likewise, the businessmen, professionals, and politicians who patronized the Richmond (Virginia) Library Company in the 1840s and 1850s threw themselves into the works of Walter Scott with the same intensity that evangelicals pored over the Bible and devotional texts. One Waverly novel was seldom enough; readers would go on "binges" with Scott, racing through four or five titles in a row—usually, one a week—and occasionally returning to favorites a few years later. Absorbed in a fictional world that afforded, in one admiring estimation, "all varieties of science, information, profession, and character," they were evidently eager to commune with "the man in the imagination, the cheerful, healthy, vigorous, sympathetic, good-natured and broad-natured Walter Scott himself."[18]

18. Emerson, "American Scholar," 90; Thomas Augst, *The Clerk's Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003), 85, 91; Thoreau, *Walden,* ed. William Rossi (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 68; Emily B. Todd, "Walter Scott and the Nineteenth-Century American Literary Marketplace: Antebellum Richmond Readers and the Collected Editions of the Waverly Novels," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 93 (December 1999): 495–517; Nina Baym, *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1984), 35, 144.



This ideal of "friendly reading," as Barbara Hochman calls it, shaped the conventions of fiction in nineteenth-century America. To read a novel was not just to meet the characters and follow the plot; it was also to converse with the author, as if sitting in a parlor among friends. When modernist writers in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries refused that relation and withdrew from the text, readers felt betrayed. Fleeing the cold, impersonal world of experimental fiction, they found a warm welcome in the Book-of-the-Month Club, started in 1926. That "middlebrow" enterprise, as Janice Radway portrays it, was dedicated to books that could "capture the regard of readers" and compel their emotions. Its ethos was defined by Henry Canby, the editor and critic who led the selection committee. What he craved in books was "deep reading," total immersion in a text. "Reading for experience," he affirmed, "is the only reading that justifies excitement. . . . [It] is transforming. Neither man nor woman is ever quite the same again after the experience of a book that enters deeply into life." Deep reading was, in fact, a secular conversion experience. In the pages of a book, the reader is born again. Though Canby was choosing texts for the professional middle class in a corporate world, he was carrying on the tradition of Puritan preachers and of New England intellectuals. Appropriately, he wrote a biography of Thoreau. His ideal of reading, Radway tells us, guided Book-of-the-Month Club editors down through the 1980s. And it inspires film characters like Kathleen Kelly in *You've Got Mail* today.[19]

At the opposite pole from the "personalism" of the Book-of-the-Month Club is the style I call "rational reading," a cultural practice with equally deep roots in American life. As an ideal, it developed along with the printing press in early modern Europe. As Eisenstein has shown, early printing houses gathered learned men of diverse nations and faiths—Christians, Jews, Arabs—into cosmopolitan communities, where they collaborated on works of ecumenical scholarship. Though Reformation and Counter-Reformation disrupted such endeavors, that model of cooperation had enormous appeal, and in the eighteenth century, it inspired the conduct of learned culture. Through networks of correspondence that crossed the Atlantic, educated men shared the results of scientific research into the natural world. Their intellectual outlook was empirical; in the advancement of learning, they

19. Barbara Hochman, *Getting at the Author: Reimagining Books and Reading in the Age of American Realism* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Radway, *Feeling for Books,* 294.

pledged allegiance to facts and experiments, not authority and tradition. That commitment nurtured a "cool" sensibility, geared to logic and reason and detached from emotions, especially in religion. The goal of learning was, after all, to be "useful," to improve the condition of mankind. To that end, freedom of inquiry was indispensable. Men of learning required the right to pursue ideas for their own sake, without restraint by state or church. They had the obligation as well to rise above prejudice and assist fellow seekers of truth, whatever their country. All belonged, in principle, to an international Republic of Letters.[20]

For all its claim to be impartial and disinterested, this vision of learned culture had powerful political consequences. It challenged the old order of the eighteenth century with a new model of social organization. In the influential formulation of the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas, it brought into being a critical "public sphere," an autonomous realm, independent of state and church and separate from the household, in which men could share their thoughts about civic affairs. This forum arose in coffeehouses and taverns, in clubs and salons. It took shape as well in print culture, notably, in the newspapers springing up in leading cities throughout the Anglo-American world. As a medium of public debate, the press acquired fresh meaning. No longer would it radiate a personal spirit, human or divine. Rejecting that evangelical view, the champions of the public sphere recast print in impersonal terms. Its cold type carried abstract truth. Detached from specific persons, the newspaper was identified with a general public. In its pages, citizens followed the rule of reason. They discussed principles, not personalities; they forswore self-interest for the common good. Speaking for everyone in general and nobody in particular, the anonymous voice of the press could claim to represent a new force—public opinion—that was constituted in its columns of type. It thus embodied the sovereignty of the people. The republic was born in print.[21]

Such was the vision, according to Michael D. Warner, held by the Patriot elite that led the American Revolution and established a new nation under the Constitution. In its terms, the cultural practice of literacy was remade. In pamphlets and newspapers, critics of the mother country assumed the personae of virtuous statesmen from Greece and Rome and studded their essays with learned references to antiquity. Their duty, as they saw it, was to expose the

20. Eisenstein, *PPAC*, 99–101; David D. Hall, "Learned Culture in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, ed. Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, vol. 1 of *A History of the Book in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 415–8.

21. Warner, *Letters of the Republic*, 34–117; Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989).



danger of imperial measures, to set forth the causes and consequences of the crisis, and to lay out a reasoned plan of resistance. The responsibility of the public was to read and reflect—and ultimately to support the gentlemen who spoke in their name. Fired up by the republican mission, John Adams proclaimed in the *Boston Gazette*, "The people have a right, an indisputable, unalienable, indefeasible divine right to that most dreaded and envied kind of knowledge, I mean of the characters and conduct of their rulers." Let no one dare to take that away. Be not "intimidated . . . from publishing with the utmost freedom, whatever can be warranted by the laws of your country; nor suffer yourselves to be wheedled out of your liberty, by any pretences of politeness, delicacy or decency."[22]

Who read these essays, and in what cultural mode? For all the talk about "critical reason" as the key to the public sphere, we know little about its actual exercise. To judge from the newspapers, a large gap existed between ideals and practice. Initially, the gentlemen who penned the disquisitions on liberty for the press wrote for educated readers like themselves. Presumably, these privileged communications would be passed along to the common people by their "betters." "When I mention the public," the Virginian John Randolph explained in 1774, "I mean to include only the rational part of it. The ignorant vulgar are as unfit to judge of the modes, as they are unable to manage the reins of government." But in the course of the Revolutionary movement, the Patriot elite had to mobilize the lower orders—farmers, mechanics, laborers—for a fight that demanded force and numbers as well as reason. Politics was quickly popularized, with a rapid transformation of public rhetoric. No longer could gentlemen assume with Thomas Jefferson that the audience for their words would be "an assembly of reasonable men." Instead, they had to compete for public favor against upstarts with little education, who did not hesitate to exploit prejudice against "Aristocracy," accuse opponents of self-interest, and employ a fiery, emotional style in debate. Then again the political elite was willing to play the same game to get its way. In the campaign for the Constitution, Federalists jettisoned the ideal of anonymity. They invoked a "spectacle of names," urging voters to follow the lead of Washington and Franklin, and they closed the pages of their newspapers to contributors who declined to reveal their identities. Once their opponents were known to be mere "plowjoggers" and mechanics, Federalists expected,

22. Gordon S. Wood, "The Democratization of Mind in the American Revolution," in *Leadership in the American Revolution* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1974), 63–88; John Adams, "A Dissertation on the Canon and the Federal Law" (1765), quoted in Richard D. Brown, *The Strength of a People: The Idea of an Informed Citizenry in America 1650–1870* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1996), 56–7.

nobody would take their opinions seriously. By the time the Constitution was ratified, the new nation was a far cry from a rational republic.[23]

The ideal of an informed citizenry endured, at least in the political elite. But the republicanism of the founders had to adapt to popular culture, and the result was the mass democracy of the Jacksonian Age. To his everlasting disappointment, Jefferson could not persuade the Virginia legislature to fund his scheme for tax-supported public education for all white men. Nor could George Washington, James Madison, or John Quincy Adams get Congress to establish a national university. The course of American politics would be guided not by an enlightened elite but by professional politicians at the helm of competitive parties. In the heyday of nineteenth-century politics, Democrats got out the vote with huge rallies, torchlight parades, and summons to battle in the party press; Whigs and then Republicans did the same. Nobody tried very hard to win over the other side with rational argument. That notion gained credence in American life, as the sociologist Michael Schudson has argued, only in the Progressive Era, when reformers successfully pressed measures—civil service, the Australian ballot, the referendum—to strengthen the role of the expert and to empower the independent citizen. Parties abandoned "spectacular campaigning" and concentrated on delivering their message through an ever-more professional press. Thanks to these changes, supporters of good government anticipated an age of informed citizens, rationally considering the issues, weighing the arguments of all parties, obtaining essential knowledge from a responsible press. Instead, Schudson notes, "the citizens themselves began a retreat from political activity, voter turnout dropped precipitously, and the fate of democratic rule seemed very much in doubt."[24]

This survey of rational reading in the public sphere is heavy on ideology, weak on practice. It highlights a tension between civic ideals and popular democracy, and in the process, subtly disparages the self-education of common people. In this model, elites—or at least a few intellectuals—discuss issues calmly and rationally, while the masses are moved only by passion and interest. That premise understates the powerful drive of women, blacks, and other groups to inform themselves and to challenge their traditional exclusion from suffrage and office. The privileged classes are no less prone to prejudice and selfishness than those they presume to rule.

A similar objection arises to the opposition I have posed between reading

23. Wood, "Democratization of Mind," 67, 72.

24. Warner, *Letters of the Republic,* 126–7; Brown, *Strength of a People;* Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of Civic Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999), 187.



practices. Are "personalism" and "rational reading" as incompatible in reality as they appear in principle? Must individuals decide between subjective immersion in texts and impartial encounters with disembodied ideas? So our history of reading inadvertently suggests, notwithstanding considerable evidence that people in the past saw no need for such choice. In the eighteenth century, sense and sensibility frequently went hand in hand. As Robert Darnton has shown, French readers could embrace the *Encyclopedists'* indictment of the ancien régime as contrary to reason and nature, even as they indulged the "delicious outpourings of the heart" in response to Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse.* Thomas Jefferson, for one, had no problem with this logic. As a gentleman of letters devoted to Enlightenment ideals, he preferred to compose and circulate his manuscripts for select coteries, and when he did put his writings before the general public, he invariably sought to remain anonymous. So adroitly did he conceal the private personality behind the public man that Jefferson remains to this day an "American Sphinx." Nonetheless, America's philosopher-statesman cherished the heart as well as the head. In 1771, he drew up a list of books for the education of a gentleman, numbering 148 titles in all. Not surprisingly, politics, law, ancient and modern history, and natural philosophy comprise much of the collection. But it also included a good many works of poetry, drama, and fiction. For Jefferson, novels were a powerful instrument for promoting "the principles and practices of virtue." "We never reflect whether the story we read be truth or fiction," Jefferson advised the young man, Robert Skipwith, for whom he compiled the catalogue. "If the painting be lively, and a tolerable picture of nature, we are thrown into a reverie, from which if we awaken it is the fault of the writer. I appeal to every reader of feeling and sentiment whether the fictitious murther of Duncan by Macbeth in Shakespeare does not excite in him as great a horror of villainy, as the real one of Henry IV by Ravaillac as related by Davila." The ideal republican was a man of feeling and reason alike.[25]

Nineteenth-century Christians displayed their own breadth of interests and tastes. For many evangelicals, piety and intellect were allies in a common cause. Consider the case of Matthew Floy, a "devout Methodist" who yearned to bring the light of the Gospel to everyone, "even the most humble beggar." Living in lower Manhattan during the 1830s, he had his work cut out for him. By day, the young man, then in his twenties, still single and residing

25. Darnton, "Readers Respond to Rousseau"; Douglas L. Wilson, "Jefferson and the Republic of Letters," in *Jeffersonian Legacies,* ed. Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1993), 50–76; Thomas Jefferson to Robert Skipwith, August 3, 1771, in Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 741; Andrew Burstein, *The Inner Jefferson: Portrait of a Grieving Optimist* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1995).

in his parents' home, labored in the family nursery business; in leisure hours, he attended Methodist class meetings, taught Sunday school, and devoted much of his time to books. As he prepared himself for the duties of adult life, Floy sought models in his reading, a record of which he faithfully kept in a diary from 1833 to 1837. In that four-year period, he bought more than two hundred books and read over a hundred of them. To judge from some of his choices and comments, this denizen of Jacksonian America was still living in the colonial past. His reading fare consisted of the Bible, which he consulted daily in a pocket-size version he always carried with him, and such "steady sellers" of evangelical Protestantism as Philip Doddridge's spiritual biography of the "Christian soldier" James Gardiner, first issued in 1747. In these devotional texts, Floy sought examples of "ardent piety." He shunned altogether the popular genre of the novel—it was, in his view, a source of moral corruption, responsible for creating "a greater part of the prostitutes in the world"—and paid no heed to the emerging penny press, the tabloids of the day. Cotton Mather would have approved. Yet, Floy was also a man of his times, and driven by a "thirst for knowledge," he bought many contemporary books with a secular bent, particularly volumes of history and biography. In the interest of forming his character, he took up whatever he "conceived to be useful." One unlikely choice was the earl of Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son,* a late-eighteenth-century work suspect for its lax morals and cynical advice for getting ahead. Floy was appalled by Chesterfield's "wicked" counsel of hypocrisy, yet he was prepared to separate the wheat from the chaff. Intent on becoming a Christian gentleman, Floy was open to Chesterfield's lessons in "politeness," even as he aspired to put them to evangelical ends. In this instance and many others, Floy was ready to take advantage of diverse genres of print. Read in the proper spirit, godly and worldly books belonged on the same shelf.[26]

Only by grappling with such concrete details, as documented in diaries, letters, library circulation records, and inventories of estates, to name a few key sources, can we get beyond ideology and witness the actual practice of reading in everyday life. For this purpose, bibliographical skills are indispensable. How else to determine the meaning of an individual's reading but by reconstructing, title by title, the works she assembled and read? In this inquiry, the physical character of a book may matter as much as its contents.

26. Scott E. Casper, *Constructing American Lives: Biography and Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1999), 125–30; Scott E. Casper, "Antebellum Reading Prescribed and Described," in Casper, Chaison, and Groves, *Perspectives on American Book History,* 142–6.



Most students of reading have ignored that essential point. A book, after all, is more than a text, and it does not spring directly from its creator's head. Only through the collaborative effort of diverse agents—paper makers, compositors, pressmen, proofreaders, binders, publishers, shippers, and retailers, not to mention authors—do books actually make their way to readers. What impact does the material form of a book have on its cultural connotations? To take one example: can a collective product express a personal voice? Pious Christians have always thought so; God can speak in any medium, whether scroll or codex, manuscript or print, prayer, psalm, or burning bush. In practice, some forms can seem more appropriate than others. As Jean Ranson, a French Protestant enthusiast of Rousseau, informed his bookseller, the Bible should appear in a folio edition: "It is more majestic and more imposing in the eyes of the multitude for whom this divine book is intended." It was perhaps easy to conceive of books as personal expressions in the early modern period, when every aspect of their creation was done by hand. But how did the ideology of personalism survive in the industrial era? With great difficulty, according to the historian Paul Gutjahr, who argues that the Word of God lost its divine "aura" in the age of mass production by steam-powered machines. That seems unlikely, given that Amsterdam printers were already stereotyping the Bible in the seventeenth century, as the late Hugh Amory has observed, and churned out some three million copies in the eighteenth century. The links between form and content remain elusive.[27]

What, then, of the relation between reading and experience? The act of reading, as I suggest, is invested with diverse meanings by the larger culture, even as it takes shape in encounters with specific texts. No individual approaches a book as a tabula rasa. And no one is compelled to take dictation from an author. Modernist writers could not win readers whose tastes ran to "warm-blooded" narratives. However reading is constructed, it surely plays many roles in everyday life. It can, of course, enable individuals to imagine new worlds for themselves and thereby challenge constraints on their lives. That was clearly true for women readers, for blacks, and for restless young men on New England's farms. But is the conversion of reading into experience always a good thing? In the mid nineteenth century, Karen Halttunen informs us, a "pornography of violence" emerged as a literary genre, offering up graphic accounts of rape, torture, and murder to male readers in northern cities. Why this surge of blood-lust? One reason may be the new sensitivity to

27. Darnton, "Readers Respond to Rousseau," 222; Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777–1880* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1999); Amory, review of Gutjahr, *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3d ser., 57 (2000): 450–3.

pain and suffering in antebellum culture. Spurred by that impulse, Americans put an end to the carnival of the gallows, assigned the management of funerals to undertakers, and removed other physical functions from public view. Denied access to concrete experience, people embraced the lurid fantasies of the press. Or perhaps, the appeal of pornography was to beleaguered workingmen, whose autonomy at work was slipping as a result of industrialization, and whose traditional pastimes—hard drinking, cockfighting, boxing, and wrestling—came under attack by bourgeois reformers. Repressed in life, their manly passions rioted in texts. In this instance, it was surely a good thing readers did not put their reading into practice. Sadly, we cannot say the same for millions who have consumed racist stereotypes in the press and made them all too real. In such cases, rational reading takes on a moral imperative.[28]

Ultimately, neither the complexities of experience nor the contradictions of human nature can be captured in the pages of a book. No reading practice can overcome that gap. A history of reading thus needs not merely to log the response of individuals to texts but to assay the complex modes in which people connect textual encounters with the rest of their lives. It is surely only a happy moral for a Hollywood film to hope that reading and experience will always be one.

28. Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 79–86; David M. Stewart, "Reading Violence: Toward a Recreational Male Identity," paper presented at annual meeting of the American Studies Association, Seattle, WA, November 1998.

# *Chapter 20*

# The Printing Revolution

## *A Reappraisal*

ROGER CHARTIER

THE MAGNIFICENT set of contributions gathered in this volume permits us to assess the manifold influences long exercised by Elizabeth Eisenstein's great work. Furthermore, it leads to new assessments of the real issues behind hastily made critiques and overly abrupt objections in the midst of heated controversies—even the most recent ones.[1]

The first of these reassessments concerns the notion of print culture and one of the most fundamental effects that Elizabeth Eisenstein attributes to the "printing revolution": the distribution of texts on a level unknown in the time of manuscripts. This effect is indisputable. With Gutenberg's invention, more texts were in circulation and each reader was able to find a greater number of them. But what are these texts whose numbers were multiplied by printing? Books, of course. However, as D. F. McKenzie shows,[2] and as Peter Stallybrass further demonstrates in his essay here, books were often a fraction, sometimes a very small fraction, of the output of print shops between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. Print production comprised mainly libels, pamphlets, petitions, placards, forms, notes, receipts, certificates, and many other kinds of "ephemera" or "job printing," which represented the main source of income for these businesses. The consequences of this clarification are not trivial when defining "print culture" and its effects. In fact, the first of these effects is to revolutionize written culture itself, by making familiar objects and practices that were unknown or marginal in the manuscript era. In the cities at least,

This essay was translated from French by Genevieve Dell.

1. See the exchange between Elizabeth Eisenstein and Adrian Johns in AHR Forum, "How Revolutionary Was the Print Revolution?" *American Historical Review* 107.1 (2002): 84–128.

2. McKenzie, "The Economies of Print, 1550–1750: Scales of Production and Conditions of Constraint," in *Produzione e commercio della carta e del libro, secc. XIII–XVIII,* Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica F. Datini, Prato, ser. 2, no. 23, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Florence: Le Monnier, 1992), 389–425.

printed matter takes over the walls, is read in public spaces, and transforms administrative and business practices.[3]

Hence the need to reformulate what has been a source of so many misunderstandings: the opposition between "scribal culture" and "print culture." With the work dedicated to manuscript publication in England,[4] Spain,[5] and France[6] over the past decade, no one today would argue that "this" (the printing press) killed "that" (the manuscript). Numerous kinds of texts (poetry anthologies, political libels or tracts, aristocratic books of conduct, newsletters, libertine and unorthodox texts, music scores, etc.) enjoyed a wide circulation through manuscript copies.[7] The reasons for the continued use of manuscripts are many: writing was cheaper than printing; handwritten texts eluded censorship more easily than printed ones; circulation could be restricted to an elite audience; and manuscript as a medium was more malleable in allowing additions and revisions. In short, it is now recognized that printing, at least for the first four centuries of its existence, did not lead to the disappearance of handwritten communication or manuscript publication.

Moreover, it led to new uses for handwriting. Peter Stallybrass describes many printed items with blank spaces and blank pages that invite their purchasers or other users to supply handwritten information. There are blank pages interleaved in almanacs, spaces waiting to be filled in on printed forms or under headings of commonplace notebooks, as well as wide margins or line spacing in publications, providing spaces for a reader's handwritten annotations. It would be easy to multiply examples for these printed items whose purpose is to engender and preserve writing by hand: editions of Latin classics used in sixteenth-century colleges,[8] the marriage charters used in some seventeenth-century dioceses in southern France,[9] or the first daily planners to feature the division of each day into various time segments, used in Italy since the eighteenth century.[10]

3. Antonio Castillo Gómez, *Escrituras y escribientes: Prácticas de la cultura escrita en una ciudad del Renacimiento* (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Gobierno de Canarias y Fundación de Enseñanza Superior a Distancia de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 1997).

4. Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993); Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Lyric* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995); H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sydney and the Circulation of Manuscripts, 1558–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); and, more recently, David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order, 1450–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002).

5. Fernando Bouza, *Corre manuscrito: Una historia cultural del Siglo de Oro* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2001).

6. François Moureau, ed., *De bonne main: La communication manuscrite au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Universitas; Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1993); Miguel Benitez, *La face cachée des Lumières: Recherches sur les manuscrits philosophiques clandestins à l'âge classique* (Paris: Universitas; Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996); François Moureau, *Répertoire des nouvelles à la main: Dictionnaire de la presse manuscrite clandestine XVIe–XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Universitas; Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999).

7. Roger Chartier, "Le manuscrit à l'âge de l'imprimé (XVe–XVIIIe siècles)," *La lettre clandestine* 7 (1998): 175–93.



The convergence of handwriting and print is not limited to texts designed explicitly for combining the two. Readers in the past, particularly scholarly ones like those described by Ann Blair, often took up printed texts to correct errors and create useful lists of errata by hand; in some extreme instances (such as the biblical cross-referencing by the Ferrar family at Little Gidding, studied by Margaret Aston), readers created original books by interspersing handwritten references and commentary with cut-and-pasted printed fragments. These practices enable an extended, candid discussion about the standardization attributed to printing. Such an acknowledgment, however, does not imply ignoring all the processes that limit the effects of standardization: "stop-press corrections," which generate an array of possible combinations of corrected and uncorrected sheets within copies belonging to an edition, resulting in multiple states of the "same text"; handwritten "marginalia," which distinguishes the copy of a work through a particular reader's adaptations;[11] and the selection of particular texts, manuscript and print, chosen at will by a reader and then bound together to create a unique volume.[12]

As Harold Love emphasizes, the printed text is open to mobility, flexibility, and variation, if only because at a time when print runs were still limited (between 1,000 and 1,750 around 1680, according to a craftsman, the printer

8. Anthony Grafton, "Teacher, Text, and Pupil in the Renaissance Class-Room: A Case-Study from a Parisian College," *History of Universities* 1 (1981): 37–70; Ann Blair, "Ovidius Methodizatus: The Metamorphoses of Ovid in a Sixteenth-Century Paris College," *History of Universities* 9 (1990): 72–118; Jean Letrouit, "La prise de notes de cours sur support imprimé dans les collèges parisiens au XVIe siècle," *Revue de la Bibliothèque nationale de France* 2 (1999): 47–56.

9. Roger Chartier, "Du rituel au for privé : Les chartes de mariage lyonnaises au XVIIe siècle," in *Les usages de l'imprimé (Xve–XIXe siècles)*, ed. Chartier (Paris: Fayard, 1987), 229–51; translated by Lydia G. Cochrane as "From Ritual to the Hearth: Marriage Charters in Seventeenth-Century Lyons," in *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe, 15th–19th Centuries*, ed. Roger Chartier (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989), 174–90.

10. Lodovica Braida, "Dall'almanacco all'agenda: Lo spazio per le osservazioni del lettore nelle guide del tempo italiane (XVIII–XIX seccolo)," *Acme: Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università degli Studi di Milano* LI, fasc. 3 (1998): 137–67.

11. See the essays collected in Sabrina Alcorn Baron, ed., *The Reader Revealed* (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 2001), and in "Le livre annoté," *Revue de la Bibliothèque nationale de France* 2 (1999).

12. Max W. Thomas, "Reading and Writing in the Renaissance Commonplace Book: A Question of Authorship?" in *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature*, ed. Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1994), 401–15.

Alonso Víctor de Paredes),[13] the success of a work implied several reprintings, which were never exactly identical to one another. Just as the production capacity of printing shops was far from being fully mobilized (at least for book printing), so too was the capacity of printing to reproduce a work whose individual copies were identical to one another, a potential that was not fully realized. Conversely, manuscript transmission does not necessarily entail textual alteration, especially when, as with the Bible or the Torah, the words are fixed and the text strictly controlled. Rather than a general, definitive diagnosis contrasting the permanence of print and the instability of handwriting, what matters is a comprehensive review of each textual transmission within its specific context.

Upon completing this first set of revisions, displaying the complex relationship between "scribal culture" and "print culture," we find the latter concept redefined. The comparison with Chinese printing introduced by Kai-wing Chow deepens this reevaluation. First, this comparison calls for a distinction between printing and Gutenberg's invention (or that of Füst or Coster according to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century accounts), because woodblock is also a printing technique and because the use of movable characters (of clay, wood or metal) does not imply the use of a press in the East, owing to the quality of paper. Such a comparison shows next that printed texts made with movable characters were not as rare in China as previously thought, even though wood carvings, or xylography, was the most commonly used technique because of its cost effectiveness (cheap labor, abundance of wood). Finally, this comparison demonstrates that it would be a grievous error to assume that typography is vastly superior to xylography, and the West more advanced than the East. On one hand, the technique of printing texts from woodblocks gave rise in China to a print culture very similar in its commercial organization and productions (encyclopedias, compilations, commonplace books, popular editions, etc.) to that of the West.[14] On the other hand, woodblock printing played a fundamental and enduring role in the West, as proved by both the continuity (wrongly questioned) in the fifteenth century between "block books" and incunabula and the continued, subsequent use of woodblock printing not only for illustrations and initials, but also for texts. Paradoxically perhaps, the fixity of texts associated with Gutenberg's invention no doubt is better exemplified by texts produced by

13. Alonso Víctor de Paredes, *Institución y origen del arte de la imprenta y reglas generales para los componedores,* ed. Jaime Moll (Madrid: Bibliotheca Literae, Calambur, 2002).

14. See the essays collected in *Late Imperial China* 17.1 (June 1996), and Kai-wing Chow, *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004); and Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow, eds., *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2005).



engraved woodblocks, which could be used to print several thousand, even tens of thousands, copies.

The effects specific to Gutenberg's invention, however, are not those most often underscored. These concern the relationship between the works as texts and the forms taken by their material inscription. In the first place, if the printed book inherits basic structures from the manuscript book (i.e., the distribution of the text into gatherings and leaves specific to the codex, whatever the production or reproduction technique), it also introduces innovations that profoundly modify the relationship between the reader and the written text.[15] That is true of paratexts, or more precisely according to Gérard Genette's terminology, *péritextes,* which make up the book's threshold that William Sherman analyzes. Once printed, these paratextual items acquire an identity immediately perceptible by their particular signature marks (italics, vowels with tildes, symbols) that differentiate the preliminaries from other gatherings. The preliminaries were always printed (with the tables and the index) after the body of the book had been printed, and they were often prepared by the bookseller or printer rather than the author.[16] The architectural metaphors that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries designated these "porches" leading to the work itself, are strongly justified by the typographically marked separation between the work and the "vestibule" (a word chosen by Jorge Luis Borges) leading in to it.

In addition, compared with the manuscript, the printed book renders more common the practice of collecting works by the same author in a single volume. This innovation is not unique, given that in the fourteenth century the works of certain vernacular authors began to be bound within single volumes consisting only of their individual compositions. But this practice of print broke with the dominant tradition in the manuscript era, that of the miscellany, in which texts belonging to many different genres, dates, and authors were gathered together.[17] The 1616 Folio collected edition of Ben Jonson's works, composed by Jonson himself, or the 1623 First

15. For an example of the effect of typographic forms (format, layout, punctuation) on literary meaning, see the pioneering study of D. F. McKenzie, "Typography and Meaning: The Case of William Congreve," in *Buch und Buchhandel in Europa im achtzehnten Jahrhundert,* ed. Giles Barber and Bernhard Fabian (Hamburg: Hauswedell, 1981), 81–125, reprinted in McKenzie, *Making Meaning: "Printers of the Mind" and Other Essays,* ed. Peter McDonald and Michael F. Suarez, S.J. (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 198–236.

16. Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 7–8; Juan Caramuel, *Syntagma de Arte Typographica* (Lyon, 1664), ed. Pablo Andrés Escapa (Salamanca: Instituto de Historia del Libro y de la Lectura, 2004), 134–43.

17. Gemma Guerrini, "Il sistema di communicazione di un corpus di manoscriiti quattrocenteschi," *Scrittura e Civiltà* 10 (1986): 122–97; Armando Petrucci, "Del libro unitario al libro miscellaneo," in *Tradizione dei classici, trasformazioni della cultura,* vol. 4 of *Società romana e impero*

Folio collection of Shakespeare's works (which owes nothing to Shakespeare and everything to his old colleagues and stationers' owning or having bought the "rights in copy" to his plays), or even before, the editions of *Workes* by Heywood, Gascoigne, or Samuel Daniel are exemplary illustrations of the link forged between the material aspect of the printed book and the concept of works supposedly complete.

It is the same for the notion of "national literature," as demonstrated by David Scott Kastan in his examination of the publishing initiative of the bookseller Humphrey Moseley, who, beginning in 1645, issued a series of texts introducing readers to the works of English poets and playwrights of his generation. The volumes follow a homogenous format (octavo for the poems, in quarto for the plays), the title pages share a similar arrangement, and the "frontispieces" offer a portrait of the author. At a time when neither the specificity of the word "literature" nor the dignity in writing for the theater was recognized, as demonstrated in the exclusion by Bodley and his librarians of such texts, the enterprise of the very royalist Moseley, publisher in 1647 of the folio collection of the works of Beaumont and Fletcher, brings coherence to a corpus that separates poetry and theater from other genres (history, narratives, travels, etc.) and builds a national canon that includes only English writers. Moseley's is not a singular instance, since at the same time in France, Charles Sorel introduces his *Bibliothèque française* (published in 1664–5),[18] which includes only those authors born in the kingdom or those naturalized by translations as in the case of "comic novels," which were nevertheless moral works, written by Spaniards.

In the course of debates centered on the printing revolution, two models have arisen in our understanding of historical phenomena, which are found also in this book. The first one emphasizes the dissemination of texts as well as presses. It analyzes practices that multiply publications and guarantee a larger circulation of texts and news: thus, the pirated editions (*contrefaçons*) in France that Jean-Dominique Mellot discusses or Elinor James's petitions regarding printing houses and the book trade in London between 1695 and 1715 Paula McDowell presents or even the publication of gazettes in Colonial America creating an "information system" that Calhoun Winton analyzes. Translations from one language to another;[19] the multiplication of anthologies, excerpts or "libraries" of any kind;[20] the early invention of cheap editions meant for readers of mass popular works ("pliegos sueltos," broadside ballads, chapbooks, "Bibliothèque bleue");[21] as well as the "culture of reprinting" during the nineteenth century[22] should be added to the list of practices invented and multiplied by printing that lead to the acculturation of writing in Western societies from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century.

*tardoantico*, ed. Andrea Giardina (Bari: Laterza, 1986), 173–87; translated by Charles Radding as "From the Unitary Book to Miscellany," in Petrucci, *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy: Studies in the History of Written Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1995), 1–18.

18. Charles Sorel, *La Bibliothèque françoise* (1664; repr., Geneva: Slatkine, 1970).

19. See, for example, Roger Chartier, "La Europa castellana," in *La España en tiempos del Quijote*, ed. Antonio Feros y Juan Gelabert (Madrid: Taurus, 2004), 129–58.



Moreover, such a model is also present in the essays illustrating the geography of the diffusion of printing shops in different parts of the world. As suggested by Antonio Rodríguez-Buckingham, Vivek Bhandari, Geoffrey Roper, Jane McRae, and Tony Ballantyne, the typology of this diffusion of Western printing technology involves several elements: the date of the installation of a first press (1539 in Mexico, 1798 in Egypt, 1821 [for the Maori language] in New Zealand); a prior knowledge of writing or a lack thereof in the cultures encountered by Europeans; the domination, be it colonial or not, exerted by Europeans on the newly discovered territories; the respective weight of locally printed productions and those of Europe. The Scottish example Arthur Williamson studies shows that even in Europe a map of the places of publication of texts and that of the origins of the books read in a particular area do not overlap. This divergence is even more obvious in colonial situations, where a great gap exists between the ultimately very few works printed in local shops and those arriving from the metropolis, brought by booksellers or private individuals.[23]

Intersections among these many elements depend on the uses and meanings assigned to printing outside Europe. Printing, within the framework of colonial empires, is an essential tool used for the purposes of administration, Christianization, and acculturation. But it is also the object of specific appropriations and uses by which a tool employed by colonizers to insure their dominance was turned against them. This duality is full of misunderstandings and ambiguity, as D. F. McKenzie shows in the well-known analysis

20. See also, for example, Barbara M. Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1996); and Leah Price, *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000).

21. For a comparison on a European scale, see Roger Chartier and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, eds., *Colportage et lecture populaire: Imprimés de large circulation en Europe, XVIe–XIXe siècles* (Paris: IMEC Editions and Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1996).

22. Meredith L. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834–1853* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

23. Carlos Alberto González Sánchez, *Los mundos del libro: Medios de difusión de la cultura occidental en las Indias de los siglos XVI y XVII* (Seville: Deputación de Sevilla; Universidad de Sevilla, 1999).

of the Waitangi Treaty (1840), illustrating the different, even contradictory meanings given by the Maori chiefs and the colonizers to the words, the written document, and the act of signing.[24] The emphasis placed on the diffusion of Western techniques permits us to situate the history of printing within the "connected stories" that, today, are giving a new appearance to the project of global history.[25] But it also requires that particular attention be given to the representations and practices that invest the same technique with such diverging meanings.

From this stance, the "dissemination" model in our understanding of print culture is not necessarily opposed to the "constructivist" one, which underscores that there are no properties intrinsic to typography. These properties, according to Adrian Johns, are always constructed based on the representations and conventions that make it possible to have confidence, or lack of it, in the book entrepreneurs; to judge the authenticity of texts or the value of editions; or even to credit the knowledge transmitted by printed texts.[26] In the Spanish Golden Age, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Quevedo echo all those who denounce the dishonesty and tricks of the booksellers and publishers, the multiplication of useless books, and the denaturation of knowledge given to readers unable to understand it.[27] In establishing, though not without conflicts or differences, shared rules to detect corrupted texts and false knowledge, members of the book trade are attempting to counter the discredit so firmly affixed to both printed books and their publishers.

The attention given to the collective practices according authority to printed matter places "print culture" in the paradigm governing a new history of sciences. This history gives special weight to three processes: negotiations fixing the conditions under which experiments are replicated, thus allowing results to be compared or cumulated; conventions defining the credit that can be granted or refused to the certification of discoveries based on the quality and condition of the witnesses and their capacity to tell the truth; and controversies arising not only from antagonistic theories but even more

24. McKenzie, "The Sociology of Texts: Orality, Literacy, and Print in Early New Zealand," *The Library*, 6th ser., 6 (1984): 333–65, reprinted in McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 77–130.

25. Patrick Karl O'Brien, "Perspectives on Global History: Concepts and Methodology / Mondialisation de l'histoire: concepts et méthodologie," *Proceedings, 19th International Congress of Historical Sciences / Actes, XIXe Congrès International des Sciences Historiques* (Oslo, 2000), 3–52.

26. Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998).

27. Fernando Bouza, "Para qué imprimir: De autores, públicos, impresores y manuscritos en el Siglo de Oro," *Cuadernos de historia moderna* 18 (1997): 31–50. See also Ann Blair, "Reading Strategies for Coping with Information Overload," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64 (2003): 11–28.



from conflicting conceptions about which social and epistemological conditions should control the production of scientific discourse about the natural world.[28] This intelligibility model provides a pertinent account of the multiple transactions conceding, or tending to concede, authority to all texts and all books governed by the distinction between what is true and what is false. Books of natural philosophy, as well as theological works or travel narratives, produce truths requiring accreditation from different mechanisms, inside or outside the texts.

Is this true, however, for all of printed matter, of which a large part, perhaps a majority, is dedicated to texts that are not dependent on the criteria of veracity? A ready example is given by works of fiction whose reception is not governed by the conventions specific to the discourses of knowledge. In the theater, for instance, the respect for the "right in copy," which trade courtesy dictates must be given to the bookseller who first enters the title of a given text in the Stationer's Company register, does not imply a similar respect for the authenticity of that text or the accuracy of its printing.[29] The desire to read a play or the pleasure in reading did not depend, in this instance, on the recognition given to the edition, nor the trust accorded to its publisher.

Just as the many meanings given to Gutenberg's invention cannot be deduced from its technical mechanism, the meaning of the texts propagated by such an invention is not intrinsic to them. It is shaped by the readers—and by readers who share codes and reading strategies. As Robert Gross indicates in his essay here, they can create specific and long-lasting relationships with what is written as well as specific links between reading and experience. Therefore, for Gross, the Puritan conception of the book characterizes American culture between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, as does critical and rational reading from the eighteenth century on—without excluding a possible association between the two ways of reading, between piety and understanding.

Robert Gross juxtaposes this necessary inventory of "reading modalities" to the overly simple and anachronistic thesis (which would be mine) that freedom is a universal and essential characteristic of reading, which would entail breaking up all acts of reading into an infinite fragmentation and holding all interpretations as equally plausible, or comparable. That is not my position, even if some overly definite formulations would lead one to think so.

28. Simon Schaffer and Steven Shapin, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1985); Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994).

29. David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001).

The emphasis placed on the reader's poaching[30] was inspired by the desire to distance the reader from the text and to assert, contrary to a purely linguistic approach, that meaning is born not of textual machinery but of the relationship between what is read and the reader. But, as opposed to the phenomenological perspectives describing the act of reading in its double individual and universal dimension,[31] historicization of categories such as "interpretive community" (found in Stanley Fish's work) and "appropriation" (borrowed from both Foucault and hermeneutics) are reminders that each reader is constructed by the conventions, norms, interests, and practices that socially and culturally characterize the different ways of reading. These common codes are both classificatory principles and internalized judgments, ruling the relationship with what is written (or decoding the social world) for all those who share the same trajectories and experiences. This is not at all about dissolving the cultural meaning of texts or genres appropriated by readers in a myriad of universal responses; on the contrary, this is about locating the preferences and reading practices that a reader adopts—or that are imposed on him or her—within the systems of constraints defined by the reader's social identity and the textual as well as material forms of the written text.

The capacity of Elizabeth Eisenstein's significant book to provoke much thought has not waned with time. As proof, consider its presence in reflections that, like those of Barbara A. Brannon or James A. Dewar and Peng Hwa Ang here, try to bring about a more assured diagnosis of our present-day revolution: the digital revolution. An analogy between the printing revolution and the Internet is tempting. Nor is it without validity since both concern a technical innovation that proposes (or imposes) a new technique for transmitting text and images. It is therefore legitimate to use this comparison to locate fundamental mutations introduced by electronic text. On one hand, the digital revolution replaces printed fixed texts (at least partially) with open, mobile, and malleable texts. Texts and hypertexts assembled on the screen by the reader's preference are by nature ephemeral and, unless secured, can be cut, increased, moved, and recompiled at will. On the other hand, unlike the multiple and successive operations and decisions associated with printed publication—distributed among editors, publishers and booksellers,

30. Michel de Certeau, "Lire: Un braconnage," in *L'invention du quotidian* (Paris: U.G.E., 1980; rev., 1990), 239–55; translated by Steven F. Rendall as "Reading as Poaching," in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1984), 165–76.

31. Wolfgang Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens: Theorie ästetischer Wirkung* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1976), translated by the author as *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978); Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman, eds., *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980).



master printers, typesetters, proofreaders, and pressmen—desktop publishing enables each author to be his or her own potential publisher, editor, and bookseller. Hence, it is useful to reflect on the effects of the "print revolution" to understand, by seeing the similarities or differences, what is to be expected in this new mutation of written culture.

It seems to me, however, that it would be an error to limit the comparison of the present and the past only in those terms. In fact, the digital revolution enables texts to be read on a new surface (the screen and no longer the page) and from a new object (the computer and no longer the book or other printed artifacts). These changes fundamentally alter both the methods of textual inscription and the readers' intellectual and physical relationship with what is written. This disruption is not at all comparable with Gutenberg. The printed book remained identical in its fundamental structures (gatherings, leaves, pages) to the manuscript book. And the new objects (libels, posters, forms, etc.) multiplied by printing did not undo the essential characteristic of written culture—that is, the link immediately visible between genres of text, classes of objects that are distinct from one another, and types of uses of the written word. By contrast, in the digital world, all texts, no matter their own identity, are displayed on the same medium, the computer screen, and in very similar forms and dispositions. In that sense, the break in the twentieth century is much more radical than that in the fifteenth century.[32]

If one is to find an analogy in a *longue durée* history of writing and reading, one should look at the invention of the codex. By replacing the scroll with a new book form, this revolution, largely forgotten or unacknowledged except by specialists, is the one that led to practices that are still ours today and that were completely impossible with the scroll: for example, leafing through a book, quickly locating a passage, using an index, and writing while reading.[33] Between the second and fourth centuries, a new book form became predominant and was inherited by Gutenberg, Füst, and Coster. Despite the title of the aptly famous work by Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin,[34] books did

32. Roger Chartier, "Languages, Books, and Reading from the Printed Word to the Digital Text," *Critical Inquiry* 31 (Autumn 2004): 133–54.

33. Guglielmo Cavallo, "Testo, libro, lettura," in *La circolazione del testo,* vol. 2 of *Lo spazio letterario di Roma antica,* ed. Cavallo, Paolo Fedele, and Andrea Giardina (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1989), 307–34, and "Libro e cultura scritta," in *Caratteri e morfologie,* vol. 4 of *Storia di Roma,* ed. Aldo Sciavone (Turin: Einaud, 1989), 693–734. See also Alain Blanchard, ed., *Les débuts du codex* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989).

34. Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L'apparition du livre* (Paris: A. Michel, L'Evolution de l'Humanité, 1958; reissued Paris: A. Michel, 1999); translated by David Gerard as *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing, 1450–1800,* ed. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and David Wootton (London: N.L.B., 1976; reissued London: Verso, 1990).

not make their first appearance with printing, nor with the codex. One must therefore be careful not to attribute to printing and to movable type the textual inventions (index, tables, cross-references, numbering, and pagination) that were part, more than ten centuries before, of the new materiality of the book which made them possible—or necessary. Therefore, to understand the effects on texts and reading engendered by the transformation of the modalities of their publication and diffusion, we must broaden our chronological perspective and also examine the codex revolution as well as the print revolution. And we are invited to do precisely that by the eternally young Elizabeth Eisenstein's book, more than twenty-five years after its publication.

# A Conversation with Elizabeth L Eisenstein

IN LIEU OF a formal afterword, we conclude this volume with a short conversation with Eisenstein, in which we posed to her some questions we have not seen answered elsewhere.

EDITORS: What were the challenges you faced in undertaking such an ambitious project on a topic generally viewed at the time as arcane?

EISENSTEIN: The main challenge was how to present my ideas in an acceptable form. After publishing "Clio and Chronos," I had written a long letter to Robert K. Merton about his book, *On the Shoulders of Giants,* explaining why I thought the aphorism in his title had different meanings for those who lived before and those who lived after the advent of printing.[1] Merton wrote back that he had never considered the significance of printing in this light. He urged me to publish a fuller account of my views, even though they were still somewhat inchoate, under the heading of a "preliminary report." Encouraged by his advice, I turned out a long article, cautiously titled "Some Conjectures." Its acceptance by the *Journal of Modern History*[2] paved the way for subsequent articles and eventually for the two-volume book.

I never thought my work dealt with an "arcane topic." Rather I thought of it as a way of tackling some long-standing, major problems in early modern European history. I had long been dissatisfied with conventional treatments of the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the so-called Scientific Revolution.

1. Eisenstein, "Clio and Chronos: An Essay on the Making and Breaking of History-Book Time," *History and Theory* 6, Beiheft 6: History and the Concept of Time (1966), 36–64; Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants: A Shandean Postscript* (New York: Free Press, 1965).

2. Eisenstein, "Some Conjectures about the Impact of Printing on Western Society and Thought: A Preliminary Report," *Journal of Modern History* 40.1 (1968): 1–56.

After I started teaching and had to discuss such developments regularly with students, my dissatisfaction increased. It occurred to me that by considering possible changes wrought by printing, a topic that had been neglected in my own undergraduate and graduate studies, some familiar problems could be tackled more successfully. This consideration meant engaging with the sort of "grand narrative" that has fallen out of fashion in recent years. Fashionable or not, narratives pertaining to the course of Western civilization continue to provide agreed-upon reference points for most humanists and social scientists. Historians have a special responsibility for maintaining such guidelines in good working condition.

EDITORS: What was it like trying to make your way in what, when you began your career, was an overwhelmingly male profession? Did your situation have any effects on your work?

EISENSTEIN: In the early 1950s I had been unable to obtain even a part-time job at either of the two universities (in Madison, Wisconsin, and State College, Pennsylvania) where my husband, a physicist, served on the faculty. I had no more luck after we moved to Washington, DC, in 1956–7. By then I had obtained a Harvard Ph.D. and had a book accepted by the Harvard University Press.[3] I applied to several institutions: Georgetown, George Washington, Howard, Catholic Universities, and the University of Maryland. All seemed reluctant to hire a woman historian. Finally, I landed a job as a part-time "adjunct lecturer" at American University. I was hired to teach a required survey course in "Western Civ" to two sections of a captive audience of 120 students. Although frustrating at the time, I now realize that handling a survey course was not without benefit: it forced me to go over and over the problems mentioned above in a way that increased my dissatisfaction with conventional treatments.

The experience of being marginalized as a woman scholar during the 1950s and 1960s may have some bearing on why I tend to adopt a skeptical, even iconoclastic, attitude toward views that are accepted by most of my colleagues. This tendency was evident in my earlier work in the field of French studies, where I challenged the accepted (quasi-Marxist) interpretation of the origins of the French Revolution.[4] It also was manifested in *The Printing Press as an Agent*

3. Eisenstein, *The First Professional Revolutionist: Filippo Michele Buonarroti (1761–1837): A Biographical Essay* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959).

4. Eisenstein, "Who Intervened in 1788? A Commentary on *The Coming of the French Revolution*," *American Historical Review* 71.1 (1965): 77–103. See also Jeffrey Kaplow, "On 'Who Intervened in 1788?'" in "Class in the French Revolution: A Discussion," *American Historical Review* 72.2 (1967): 497–502.



*of Change* (*PPAC*), as was noted, with disapproval, by several reviewers. That I expressed disagreement with some views set forth in major works by distinguished scholars was taken as a sign of overreaching. When I cited relevant passages from the most authoritative works by the most distinguished historians, I did so, not to question their undoubted mastery of their craft, but, rather, to demonstrate a general failure to make room for changes wrought by printing.

EDITORS: You have discussed elsewhere the circumstances surrounding the inception of *PPAC*, but we don't know about the years you spent researching and writing. Can you say something about that?

EISENSTEIN: I spent most of my time in the 1960s and 1970s trying to become familiar with recent work in the diverse fields covered by my book. Gaining this knowledge entailed reading many monographs and special studies while attending seminars and conferences at rare-book libraries and affiliated societies. I sought bibliographical guidance from medieval codicologists and Renaissance historians, from the authors of studies on early printers (notably Robert Kingdon and Natalie Z. Davis), and history of science specialists.

In the hope of receiving useful feedback, I also gave papers at numerous conferences here and abroad and published several articles. I was disappointed by the lack of response. Apart from a single article that questioned my approach to the problem of the Renaissance,[5] there was little to indicate how my views were being received. The contrary was true after the publication of my book, which was widely reviewed.

EDITORS: As you say, your book was widely reviewed, generally, though not uniformly, favorably. How did you imagine your book would be received? What was your reaction to the criticism?

EISENSTEIN: The sheer number of journals that ran reviews surprised me. So did the variety of specialties represented by the reviewers. (They ranged from cartographers and library scientists to anthropologists and media analysts.) Of course I was heartened by positive reviews and disheartened by negative ones. Probably the most influential piece was Anthony Grafton's informative review essay.[6] Among other criticisms, Grafton took me to task for devoting too much attention to secondary accounts while failing to consult the early

5. Theodore Rabb and Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, "Debate: The Advent of Printing and the Problem of the Renaissance," *Past & Present* 52 (August 1971): 135–44.

6. Grafton, "The Importance of Being Printed," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11.2 (1980): 265–86.

printed books that presumably constituted my sources. Others have often echoed this complaint. Probably I should have pointed out more emphatically that my work was intended to be a critique of historical literature and was not aimed at listening to the voices of the past.[7]

EDITORS: Your book seems to have had an especially strong influence on English literary studies. Does this surprise you? What effect do you think the book has had in your own fields of history and French studies?

EISENSTEIN: As is true of the editors of this collection, I've spent recent years working in the Folger Shakespeare Library, which holds special attractions for literary scholars engaged in research on early modern English topics. Thus, we are all especially familiar with work in this field. Still, there are several scholars who have applied some of my views not to English but to early modern French literature.[8] And there are numerous other groups concerned with such topics as technology and culture, nationalism, and media and communications that have also made use of my book.[9] During the years I spent as a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (1981–2; 1991–2) interest in my work was exhibited by many other fellows, none of whom were literary scholars or concerned with early modern England.

I have also traveled abroad sufficiently to observe wider repercussions. As an invited guest to conferences held by diverse groups in Greece, Portugal, Italy, Israel, Norway, Ireland, Australia, I've encountered colleagues who work on diverse non-English topics. Among the contributors to this volume, I first met Jean-Dominique Mellot at a conference in Lisbon and Tony Ballantyne at another in Cork. My large book was translated into Italian. The abridged version has been issued in numerous translations, including French, Greek, Japanese, Polish, and Portuguese.[10] As a member of the Society for French

7. Roland Crahay's review in *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance: Travaux et documents* 42 (1980): 700–703, used the helpful phrase "historical epistemology." In his *Times Literary Supplement* review, June 24, 1983, 679, Nicolas Barker also recognized that my chief concern was with the way history was being written.

8. Cynthia Brown, *Poets, Patrons, and Printers: Crisis of Authority in Late Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995); and Adrian Armstrong, *Technique and Technology: Script, Print, and Poetics in France, 1470–1550* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000) are two titles that come to mind.

9. See, for example, references in "Technology and the Rest of Culture," *Social Research* 64.3 (1997), a special issue of the journal containing all versions of presentations given at the Technology and the Rest of Culture conference held at the New School in January 1997. See references to Patrice Flichy and Bruno Latour in nn. 17 and 18. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; rev. and extended edition, London and New York: Verso, 1991) is probably the most often cited study of nationalism that makes use of my work.

10. For details, see Appendix A. Most recently, Al Hiwar Athaqafi Publishers has contracted for an Arabic-language edition.



Historical Studies and as a beneficiary of the University of Michigan history department's faculty-exchange program, I have long enjoyed cordial relations with many French scholars. During a term spent in Paris, I served as a visiting professor (*maître d'études*) at the École Pratique des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. One of my preliminary articles was published in the *Annales*.[11] The same journal published an extended review essay that discussed my work.[12] Controversies about it were surveyed in *Le débat*.[13] I've contributed to the history of the book in France (*Histoire de l'édition française*),[14] to two essay collections on French press history,[15] and to a festschrift in honor of Henri-Jean Martin.[16] Patrice Flichy, the editor of *Reseaux*, a French journal sponsored by the National Center for Telecommunications, reviewed my work in a special issue on new approaches to communications.[17] In France, also, my treatment of scientific communications caught the attention of Bruno Latour, whose controversial account of what he calls "immutable immobiles" originated from his reading of my book.[18]

With regard to history "as a discipline at large," current fashions tend to favor the adoption of a "micro" rather than a "macro" approach to the past. Insofar as sweeping syntheses are being attempted, the vogue for world history has tended to eclipse earlier, more circumscribed accounts. Thus, my approach is vulnerable to the charge of being too Eurocentric. Nevertheless, as is shown by this collection, many of the issues I discuss are relevant to developments that occurred outside the Western world.

11. Eisenstein, "L'avènement de l'imprimerie et la Réforme: Une nouvelle approche au problème du démembrement de la chrétienté occidentale," *Annales: Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 26.6 (1971): 1355–82.

12. Roger Chartier, "L'ancien régime typographique: Réflexions sur quelques travaux récents," *Annales: Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 36.2 (1981): 191–209, esp. 207–8.

13. Jacques Revel, "La culture de l'imprimé," *Le débat* 22 (November 1982): 170–92.

14. Eisenstein, "Le livre et la culture savante," in *Le livre conquérant: Du moyen âge au milieu du XVIIe siècle*, vol.1 of *Histoire de l'édition française*, ed. Henri-Jean Martin and Roger Chartier (Paris: Promodis, 1982), 563–83.

15. Eisenstein, "The Tribune of the People: A New Species of Demagogue," in *The Press in the French Revolution*, ed. Harvey Chisick with Ilana Zinguer and Ouzi Elyada, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 287 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1991), 145–59, and "Le publiciste comme démagogue: La *Sentinelle du peuple* de Volney," in *La révolution du journal: 1788–1794*, ed. Pierre Rétat (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1989), 189–95.

16. Eisenstein, "The Libraire-Philosophe: Four Sketches for a Group Portrait," in *Le livre et l'historien: Études offertes en l'honneur du Professeur Henri-Jean Martin*, ed. Frédéric Barbier et al. (Geneva: Droz, 1997), 539–50.

17. Patrice Flichy, "La question de technique dans les recherches sur la communication," *Réseaux: Communication, technologie, société* 50 (1991): 53–62.

18. Latour was largely responsible for arranging for a French translation and getting the first French edition of my abridged version published. On the "immutable mobiles" controversy, see Michael John Gorman, "The Elusive Origins of the Immutable Mobile," http://www.stanford.edu/group/STS/immutablemobile.htm.

I have long believed that questions pertaining to printing and its effects are especially well suited to comparative study.[19] The enthusiastic reception of printing by Western churchmen seen in tandem with the prolonged rejection of printing by Islamic authorities is just one of many intriguing contrasts that are worth further exploration. In my big book, I paused over the difference between Christian and Muslim sacred texts and noted that the Koran lent itself to transmission by means of oral recitation much better than did the larger polyglot Bible. The latter was much more vulnerable to changes wrought by printing partly because of the difficulty of transmitting it by word of mouth.[20]

Another intriguing comparison, between Chinese and Western printing, is explored by Kai-wing Chow and discussed by Roger Chartier in this collection. Chartier brings out the advantages of xylography for fixing texts but stops short of noting the significance of combining woodblock illustration with letter-press printing and connecting the two with various devices as is exemplified by Vesalius's *De Fabrica.* As noted in *PPAC,* the hiring of illustrators to make fresh woodblocks and engravings for the purpose of illustrating newly printed ancient texts contributed to a reappraisal of inherited technical literature.[21]

EDITORS: You have been criticized for your treatment of "standardization" and "fixity," terms that figure largely in your discussion of print culture. How do you respond to this criticism?

EISENSTEIN: Granted that the terms in usage are less than rigorous, I regret the way critics tend to discuss standardization and fixity as if these two terms were interchangeable. Standardization represents a synchronic aspect of print culture: it entails the publication of numerous copies of the same text or the same image, chart, map on the same date. "Print spread texts in a different way from manuscript; it multiplied them not consecutively but simultaneously."[22] This synchronic aspect can be illustrated by the way the Declaration

19. See my remarks as a commentator at a session at the January 5, 1997, annual meeting of the American Historical Association in New York sponsored by the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP): "Printing as an Agent of Change outside Europe." The papers dealt with printing in colonial Virginia, in Egypt under the Ottomans, and in Meiji Japan.

20. See *PPAC,* 334–45. In his essay in this volume, Chartier couples the Bible with the Torah as being amenable to strict control and being "fixed" by scribal transmission. Although this seems to be true of the Koran, it is not in accord with most studies of changes undergone by manuscript versions of the Vulgate.

21. *PPAC,* 54, 264–7.

22. Introduction to *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300–1700,* ed. Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 20.



of Independence was first issued in printed form so that copies could be made immediately available to all thirteen colonies. Only later was a hand-inscribed presentation copy produced.[23]

Fixity (or preservation) points to a diachronic aspect. Copies of a given text (image, etc.) were issued in sufficient quantities to preserve it (as manuscripts had not been preserved) over the long *durée,* making it available to successive generations for reconsideration and augmentation. The preservative powers of print account for the way the number of known plants went from six hundred in the fifteenth century to some six thousand two centuries later. They also explain why previously lost languages once decoded were not lost again or why bibliographies kept expanding to the point where bibliographies of bibliographies became necessary. Preservation by means of duplication set the knowledge industry on a path that led from an economy of scarcity to one of abundance and glut.

Features such as standardization and preservation ought to be regarded as relative not absolute phenomena. Recent studies show this point is worth more emphasis. It seems especially pertinent to questions raised by Adrian Johns with regard to standardization. To say that early printed products were more standardized than were late medieval manuscripts is not to deny that they were also more multiform than were the later products of mechanical presses, or of lithography or photography. Far from denying this point, I warn against ignoring it. Yet Johns seems to believe he is refuting my arguments when he devotes much of his massive study of scientific publication in early modern England to documenting the multiformity of early printed output. That "exactly repeatable" pictorial images were often reproduced inexactly is evident from my own reference to "reversals, misplacements, and the use of worn and broken blocks." Many more examples are cited by Johns. They all confirm that the output of the handpress fell short of meeting modern standards. But they do not contradict the point that early printed products were more standardized than were hand-copied ones.[24]

To dwell on the incapacity of the handpress to meet modern standards, moreover, is to assume an anachronistic posture. Johns is so intent on contrasting early printed products with modern ones that he often forgets this contrast was unavailable to early modern Europeans. "Contemporaries had good reason to be wary," he writes, since "their editions of Shakespeare, Donne, Sir Thomas Browne were liable to be dubious." The First Folio of

23. Thomas Starr, "Separated at Birth: Text and Context of the Declaration of Independence," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 110, pt. 1 (2002): 152–90.

24. McKitterick acknowledges that there was a "greater measure of standardization in the printed book" but at the same time seems to object to my asserting that this was the case. McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 99–100.

Shakespeare contained "non uniform spelling and punctuation. . . . No two copies were identical. . . . In such a world, questions of credit took the place of assumptions of fixity."[25] Concern about non-uniform spelling and about variants in a Shakespeare folio was not characteristic of the early modern world. The erratic spelling of seventeenth-century English writers would have appalled modern schoolteachers but was accepted as common practice at the time.[26] Contemporaries were surely not bothered by "variants" in the First Folio since the device used to uncover and count them was not developed until the twentieth century.

However relative was the degree of standardization obtained by the hand-press, the fact remains that early modern Europeans were much better able than their forebears had been to consult more or less the same text, chart, or table at more or less the same time and to correspond with one another about the same items on the same page.[27] Even polemical pamphlet controversies showed a capacity on the part of participants to refer to identical passages when carrying on an argument.

EDITORS: *PPAC* is usually credited with playing a significant role in the creation of a new field, that of the history of the book, yet you have said that you were not writing book history. Could you comment on this and also say something about how you conceive of the relationship between book history and print culture studies?

EISENSTEIN: The chief problem I have with "book history" is suggested by Peter Stallybrass's essay in this collection.[28] When Daniel Boorstin first proposed creating a "center for the book" in the Library of Congress, I objected that the title implied exclusion of newspapers and all the other nonbook printed materials housed in the Library. Of course, the Center for the Book has flourished, and Boorstin was probably right to waive aside my seemingly pedantic objection.

25. Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), 30.

26. Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), 344.

27. See, for example, exchanges concerning Copernicus's *De Revolutionibus* in Robert Westman, "Three Responses to the Copernican Theory," in *The Copernican Achievement,* ed. Robert Westman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1975), 285–345.

28. On this point, see my reply to Adrian Johns in the AHR Forum, "How Revolutionary Was the Print Revolution?" *American Historical Review* 107.1 (2002), 126, where I deny that my work is "centrally about the history of books." See also the new afterword in the 2nd ed. of Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 317.



Nevertheless, current concern with the book, as both Stallybrass and Chartier observe, often results in neglect of many other historically significant printed products. One regrettable outcome is that books and periodicals are encouraged to go their separate ways despite their natural affiliation.[29] Furthermore, book historians are likely to regard the changes that came after the adoption of printing as relatively insignificant in view of all the other major changes (word separation, adoption of half uncials, commercial copying, etc.) evidenced in the manuscript book after codex replaced scroll. Book historians have good reason to cite M. B. Parkes's thought-provoking comment that "the late medieval book differs more from its early medieval predecessors than it does from the printed book of our own day."[30]

Because "book history" encourages the view that nothing much changed after printer replaced scribe, I think the frame provided by this label is too restrictive. Other historical disciplines tend to be more accommodating. Economic historians, for example, have long made ample room for the innovative aspects of early printing. From their perspective, the early printer belongs in the company of other entrepreneurs and early capitalists. Social historians are unlikely to confuse scriptoria with printing shops or the earlier occupational culture with the later one. Within western Europe, the book-as-object goes back to the era of the codex, whereas the fifteenth-century printer is generally acknowledged to be a "new man" (or woman—*pace* Paula McDowell).

It is possible, of course, to regard "print culture studies" as a "subset" of book history. I prefer to think of such studies as a subset of a broader history of communications, although, to be sure, communications as a historical field of study is still in an amorphous state. The labels and categories that are used within such a field are bound to be untidy. The catch-all title of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing[31] is less than rigorous. Yet it has the advantage of being capacious and as a result has been serving its membership rather well.

With regard to labels and categories, something needs to be said about the use of such terms as "scribal culture" and "print culture." These terms seemed helpful for describing the large concatenation of activities entailed in duplicating and distributing written materials before and after the use of the

29. See relevant discussion in Eisenstein, *Grub Street Abroad: Aspects of the French Cosmopolitan Press from the Age of Louis XIV to the French Revolution,* Lyell Lectures, 1989–90 (New York: Clarendon. Press, 1992), 10–12.

30. M. B. Parkes cited by McKitterick in *Print, Manuscript,* 11.

31. For information about the society, see http://www.sharpweb.org/.

wooden handpress.[32] This large concatenation of activities was fundamentally changed after the establishment of printing shops. An eminent authority on punctuation in manuscripts makes it clear how hand-copying practices themselves came to be dominated by printed ones:

> New conventions became established and were disseminated more quickly through printed books than through manuscripts because of the number of identical copies produced through the new process. . . . Practices established by printers soon began to appear in manuscripts. . . . The written word had become associated in the minds of readers with the printed word and the conventions of written language had become dominated by those employed in printed texts.[33]

In this sense, it seems fair enough to say that scribal culture had come to an end. It is in this sense that I refer to a shift from script to print. But this does not mean that manuscripts were no longer being produced or that copyists had stopped plying their trade. To say, as Parkes does, that manuscripts followed conventions employed in printed books is obviously not to deny that manuscripts continued to be produced. The same point applies to Curt Bühler's finding that scribes soon began copying from printed books.

Since my first edition was published, the fallacy of doctrines of "supersession" has been brilliantly illuminated by Paul Duguid and Geoffrey Nunberg.[34] Elsewhere I've made clear my agreement with their position while also questioning recent doomsday pronouncements about the supersession of print.[35] Here, let me simply reiterate: printed texts did not supersede manuscripts any more than engraving and woodcut superseded drawing and painting. Nevertheless, the introduction of printing did arrest and then reverse the process of loss, corruption, and erosion that had accompanied the hand copying of texts and images. After printing, the output of manuscripts, however large or small, far from arresting the increase in book production, augmented it.

One more comment about terminology: it is a good idea to distinguish

32. Adrian Johns's definition of print culture comes close to agreeing with mine: "a vast array of representations, practices and skills which extended from the printing shop through the bookshop and marketplace to the . . . study . . . and home—and thence back to the printing house again" (*Nature of the Book,* 58).

33. M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1993), 56.

34. Geoffrey Nunberg, introduction to *The Future of the Book,* ed. Nunberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1996), 9–20; Paul Duguid, "Material Matters," in ibid., 66–71.

35. Eisenstein, "From the Printed Word to the Moving Image," *Social Research* 64.3 (1997): 1049–66.



between hand copying, which persisted after printing but did so in a diminished form, and handwriting, which flourished after printing at least until the invention of the typewriter, as numerous printed manuals on penmanship and letter writing suggest.

EDITORS: Do you see any points of comparison between the printing revolution you describe and the communications revolution progressing as we speak?

EISENSTEIN: The "electronic age" encompasses too many changes affecting communications (from radio and telephone to photocopying and computers) for any simple comparisons with the fifteenth-century revolution to be drawn. Moreover, such comparisons tend to relegate printed communications to the past or at least to overlook the significance of their persistence at present. This tendency is demonstrated by numerous gloomy prophecies about the "end of the book." Yet just as handwriting coexisted with the printed word, so too, I think, the printed word is likely to coexist with electronic communications. No doubt we are in the midst of unprecedented transformations. But this does not mean that the printing revolution has ceased gathering momentum or is becoming irrelevant to our concerns. Librarians make full use of electronic databanks not to dispense with printed materials but rather to locate them more efficiently. Moreover, librarians are still concerned about the increased output of printed books and the persistent shortage of bookshelf space. Even while the preservative powers of print continue to pose problems, they also serve as a safeguard against losing completed texts in cyberspace. Indeed, the fluidity of texts on screens enhances the value assigned to the fixity of hard copy. I see that I have reached a point where I'm repeating myself—a sure sign that it is time to bring this conversation to a close.

Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book

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# Agent of Change

## *Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*

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