



Sandro Jung and Stephen Colclough, eds. *The History of the Book*. Thematic Issue of the *Yearbook of English Studies*, no. 45. London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2015. 296p., ill. ISBN 9781781882122. £100.00 / \$150.00 (paperback).

Though the *Yearbook of English Studies* describes itself as a publication “devoted to the language and literature of the English-speaking world,” this year’s special issue, “The History of the Book,” is narrowly focused on the British Isles. As scholars of colonial American textual cultures, we find ourselves unexpectedly positioned to review this collection as interlopers. It is from this position that we address broad questions of interest to SHARP’s global audience. What can this regional collection tell us about the state of book history in British studies? What contribution does it make to our understanding of book history as a global discipline?

The volume features thirteen essays, in roughly chronological order by subject matter, seven of which focus on the eighteenth century. The contributors are for the most part senior figures in their fields. Collectively, the essays paint the field of book history in broad strokes, addressing the illustration, printing, sales, copyright, anthologizing, collection, and reading of books and ephemera. Methodologically diverse, the essays move among several areas: the close reading of texts, images, and correspondence; the printing history of specific presses or genres; and the larger-scale analyses that contributor Mary Hammond describes as distant reading. From the pocket memorandum book (Stephen Colclough) to the jobbing printing of seventeenth-century London (James Raven), forgotten genres are revived, and our understanding of long-studied texts is refreshed, as in the case of *Twelfth Night*, which Stuart Sillars studies in a melancholy 1908 edition illustrated by Heath Robinson.

Readers – across classes, regions, and genders – have a strong presence in this collection, which addresses a range of topics pertaining to the history of reading, from the visual literacy required by eighteenth-century broadsides to the virtual readers of Garrett Stewart’s essay. Of particular interest for the study of reading and reception is Shafquat Towheed, Francesca Benatti, and Edmund G. C. King’s “Readers and Reading in the First World War,” in which each of the authors takes a different approach to the study of British wartime reading practices: a computational analysis of reading experiences in wartime publications remains mostly speculative, but it is well supported by a close study of textual circulation among prisoners of war and another of a single reader on the Macedonian front. The methodological strength of this article lies in its ability to tell multidimensional histories from multiple points of analysis.

The essay on the prisoner-of-war library is one of a number of studies concerned with the process of collection. David Allan takes up collection in its most literal form, illuminating the contents and contours of bibliophilia and its accompanying accumulations as they shaped eighteenth-century British literary life. The thematics of collection also appear in studies of series, anthologies, and editions: what happens when disparate texts are brought together in a single binding or a single room? At stake in these studies is the formation and stability of the national literary canon. Yet the international dimensions of book collecting and the specter of textual fragmentation – the counterpoint of accumulation or curation – haunt these studies, and, for that matter, our reading of them.

Despite its narrow focus on the British Isles, hints of larger spheres of textual circulation appear throughout the volume. Thomas F. Bonnell's "Furnishings" highlights a 1770 advertisement for the "The English Poets" series – which includes *Devil on Two Sticks* (probably Foulis's 1768 translation of Alain-René Lesage's *Le Diable Boiteux*). Translations and textual borrowings from across Europe lace the anthologies and libraries of the literary figures represented in these studies. In the article on the First World War, we are further reminded that the British elite who fought abroad were multilingual textual consumers, although their access to and consumption of texts in German, French, or Italian is not analyzed. And Melissa Homestead's study of U.S. novelist Catherine Sedgwick's efforts to obtain British copyright both makes an important contribution to our understanding of transatlantic literary relations and, in the context of this collection, raises the question of the extent to which the English distribution of books from abroad inflected the landscape of canonization. Many of these essays touch upon the question of British national identity, but the rich sorts of approaches opened up by Antoinette Burton, Ian Baucom, and Daniel O'Quinn do not find their book historical parallels here. What happens to English book history when it is embedded in a multilingual reading culture, or extended across the empire (and back again)?

Finally, this volume interestingly indexes the effects of the digital on book history with its many essays treating dimensions of print's past that mass digitization projects like Google Books tend not to capture, or not to capture well: illustrations, broadsheets, print-manuscript hybrids, notebooks, diaries and journals, and art made of books. Surprising, then, is the tentative approach to digital scholarship represented here. England has long been at the forefront of anglophone textual digitization and corpus linguistics, and the studies



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represented in this volume show an awareness of the richness of digital resources and of the methods used to analyze them, along with a healthy concern for the adequacy of these methods. Yet none of these computational analyses were carried to completion.

In reviewing this collection, we find ourselves asking many of the same questions that are engaged critically in various of its studies: questions about the role that acts of collection have played in the establishment, or about the contestation of canons and traditions. Each of the essays here is elegant and well researched, and together they offer a survey of the landscape of modern British book history. The questions that they provoke are encouraging, pointing toward new pathways in British book history.

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