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LESLIE HOWSAM

Book history in the classroom

Many scholars whose research includes the history of the book have lately become committed to transferring their knowledge to a new generation of learners. This is a recent phenomenon: only since about the turn of the millennium has a topic called 'book history' been offered to undergraduates. In earlier decades, a handful of advanced students were instructed in what was then identified as bibliography – and only in large research universities in Europe and North America enjoying long traditions of literary scholarship and furnished with rich collections of rare books and manuscripts. Many of that older generation of students were reluctant learners, forced into mandatory studies construed as a standard introduction to literary scholarship. Only a few became inspired to embrace bibliographical knowledge for its own sake, whether in a literary, a library or another setting. Book-history students of the twenty-first century, however, may have little or no knowledge of literary or historical scholarship; perhaps they even lack the experience of reading for pleasure; their college and university libraries may own very few old and rare books – indeed, access to rare books may even be limited to an image on the internet. Far from being experienced as limitations, such challenges are intellectually liberating, allowing instructors and students to think in fundamental ways about what they mean by the book, its history and its place in the world where they have grown up.

Approaches vary widely according to discipline, nationality and chronological focus, and from the ambitious to the prosaic, but it is possible to identify some connecting themes, and some of the inherent challenges and opportunities. This chapter argues that the study of the history and culture of the book offers a valuable way to help students to understand some key institutions of contemporary society – the media of communication, the libraries, the literature and the journalism. So-called 'digital natives', those who were born into an internet world, may benefit especially but so will 'digital immigrants', who remember arriving there and the journey it entailed. Learners of both kinds

find the history of the book attractive because it puts the digital communications and 'new media' with which they are familiar into juxtaposition with 'old' media and their development over centuries.

At its most ambitious, the history of the book has the potential to serve as a framework for a global history of knowledge and culture. The book's long trajectory and dramatic turning points (marks on clay, codex, moveable type, steam and stereotype, paperback, competition with broadcast media, pixels on screen) provide a coherent narrative spine for introducing transnational history. Encompassing all aspects of the written record, but also taking the historical nature of communication as its very subject, the book embraces a chronology coterminous with the recorded history of humankind. And even though it takes the written record as its subject, the study of book history nevertheless also includes aspects of oral culture: scholarship in the long history of the book can scarcely avoid interrogating the ways in which knowledge and stories have passed between the traditions of the spoken word and those of inscription, handwriting, printing and digital media. It has a built-in point of view from which interpretations can be critically engaged: the recognition that readers, the book trade and writers share experience, and compete for authority, in overlapping networks of text and context, material form and interpretation. Hence, for example, a Eurocentric bias is difficult to sustain in the face of Asia's precedence in the art of printing with moveable types; but equally, as the historian Christopher Reed's research demonstrates, mechanized printing in nineteenth-century Shanghai functioned in a world that was proudly conscious of that long-ago primacy.¹

Furthermore, and again at its most ambitious, the history of the book has the potential to frame a materialist approach to the study of written texts. In this teaching and learning scenario, the artistic contribution of authors is not denied, but the student learns how to engage critically with the myth of authorial genius.² Literary scholars who are book historians interrogate the material nature of the novels, poems and essays whose aesthetic and formal nature has been their discipline's primary concern. Students can use these scholarly studies as entry points to a sometimes daunting body of knowledge, the canon (and the counter-canon) of literary works. To engage with textual studies is to think seriously about the forensic traces that are left behind by printers, editors, designers, publishers and other collaborators in the disposition of an author's words on the pages of multiple and variant editions of a work. Because it shows how the text became entangled in its material carrier, book history provides a framework, or point of view, that can highlight a literary work's textuality. Another important contribution is the way in which the history of the book puts literary canonicity itself into

perspective. They learn that the books judged to be the 'best' or 'most representative' works of a national heritage may have been published by a firm working closely with that nation's critical establishment.³

In studies of culture and communication, meanwhile, the history of the book has the potential to frame the contemporary media of internet, film, television and radio in a richer theoretical context. Journalism and other forms of presentation (documentaries, features, phone-in commentary and feedback) are merely the latest manifestations of news delivery, and contemporary broadcast and social media are successors to the print, manuscript and oral technologies that worked in specific past societies. Popular culture's sophisticated awareness of how film-makers adapt texts for the screen can be extrapolated to an understanding of how Victorian novels that appeared to be the single-handed creation of a literary genius were actually the result of editor-author collaboration, or hard-fought compromise, or perhaps began with an editorial commission.⁴ A critical understanding of the marketing of best-sellers, book prizes and cinema tie-ins can help us understand the way in which cultural artefacts are created and manipulated.

At its most prosaic, however, the history of the book is just another module (or course of study, or programme) appearing on the curriculum of a school, college or university and presenting learners with the possibility of incorporating its subject matter into their education. Such a listing could be intriguing, but it might also be confusing. The book: what kind of history is that? What country or time period, or which national literature, does it cover? How will the materials and the assignments involved relate to my earlier experiences of studying and learning? Is this for me? Sometimes the initial response will be one of engaged curiosity. In other cases, though, students may question the relevance of studying the history of an object which has, after all, been declared dead, and one about which their own parents, friends and teachers may have strong opinions, strongly expressed.

In other words, the history of the book comes with a good deal of cultural baggage which has to be unpacked before the subject's intellectual and pedagogical potential can be fully realized in the context of classroom encounters with material books, and with the scholarship of book historians. Widespread propaganda about digitization and e-books, combined with widespread misunderstanding about the impact of print technology on western culture in earlier centuries, means that instructors have to help students unlearn what they think they already know – about 'the book' and about 'history' – in order to introduce new and compelling perspectives.

Unlearning what 'everyone knows' about the book in history

At the end of 1999, the German printer Johannes Gutenberg was named 'Man of the Millennium' by *Time Magazine*, for his contributions to European civilization. For most people around that time, however, a simpler fact prevailed: Gutenberg had invented the printing press. To many European and North American adults who had grown up in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the celebration of Gutenberg's achievement was entirely understandable. It made sense not only of the past, but of their own present day. The superstition-racked middle ages, where monks controlled knowledge and laboriously reproduced manuscripts by hand, seemed to have ended abruptly. And modern, rational enlightened thought, widely circulating among open-minded thinkers and from them to avid readers and learners, appeared to have begun. A technology that felt at least as consequential as gunpowder, the compass or the internal combustion engine seemed to have changed the world. A new communication medium, remarkably analogous to the internet, demonstrated that even old words and phrases appeared to have taken on new meanings when they were repurposed in new formats. How could it be a coincidence that geographical innovation and religious reform, in the persons of Christopher Columbus and Martin Luther, had seized on this new media technology of the fifteenth century? Literacy itself seemed to have been enabled by this new technology to facilitate reading. Around 2,000 writers, artists and thinkers were seizing upon the possibilities of a world wide web to express ideas that appeared to vibrate in unison with the technology in which they were expressed, and the millennium seemed to belong to Gutenberg. Although scholars have nuanced or disproved every aspect of this compelling story, it persists in the popular media and even in school and university textbooks. It is the task of the history of the book to displace the myth of print's transformation of European culture, in favour of a narrative which is not only more accurate, but also much more relevant for our time.

To unlearn the popular, compelling and fundamentally flawed history of the book, it is important for students to be persuaded to abandon some comfortable shibboleths:

First, the technology of printing did not substitute textual stability for the instability of manuscripts by introducing the characteristics of fixity and accuracy – and hence did not change texts in a fundamental way so as to enable modern forms of knowledge and of literary authorship in Europe. This myth has been challenged by numerous scholars, but their counter-narrative has not yet entered the popular culture. It's unlikely that a feature

film or blockbuster novel will dispel the Gutenberg myth; instead, the task of doing so will remain among the chief objectives of the book-history curriculum.

Second, the book – as understood historically – does not always take the iconic material form of a set of leaves made of paper printed on both sides, bound together along one edge and protected by a hard or soft cover. Technically known as the codex, what is familiarly called 'the book' is only one of many forms in use now and in the past. Books can be made of other materials, and their texts can take other forms. As for the history of the book, a definition in terms of the codex is even less satisfactory. The academic term is even more capacious than the generic one – book history is a way of thinking about how people have given material form to knowledge and stories, in the past and in our own time. Even within the short history of printing, book history embraces the study of periodicals, newspapers and ephemera as well as the bound codex volumes we now associate with the terminology.

A third point is that the textual form of 'the book' includes more genres, literary forms and subject matters than most commentators seem to assume. Modern imaginations, shaped by European, North American or Australasian education systems, and reinforced by the experience of retail bookstores, often overlook the many other printed works on the market. One such is sacred books, whose historicity and commercial value can be overlooked because the authorship is attributed to divine and historic figures, so that to a superficial observer, the vagaries of the book trade seem to have had no place. Another is the use of the codex form for managing large amounts of information, in such genres as the telephone directory and the railway timetable.⁵

Fourthly, the computer and internet combined have not managed to bring about the death of the book, any more than literary theory has literally caused that of the author. Like earlier technologies before them, these new ways of putting words in front of the eyes and minds of readers are unsettling. We do not yet know whether or not they are transformative.

And finally, it will be necessary to unlearn the habit of characterizing one society or another's means of communication in terms of a 'print culture' without offering a deep knowledge of how printers (later publishers), and retail booksellers and their customers, actually operated and how they themselves conceptualized what they were doing. Both writers and readers were connected with, and by, the books and periodicals they read – and so, more concretely, were the men and women of the book trades. But given our knowledge that the texts people were reading, buying and selling, writing and printing were inherently variable, it is impossible to speak of a unified public sphere, any more than to use 'print' culture as a blanket term.

Resources for teaching and learning the history of the book

This chapter does not aim to prescribe how the history of the book should be taught, or to recount systematically how it is actually taught in particular classrooms.⁶ Pedagogy varies too much for it to be practicable to do so, depending as it does upon the instructor's or the institution's definition of 'book' and their approach to its history. Book history is taught and studied in different ways in various nations and institutions, and differently again from the perspectives of several academic disciplines and interdisciplinary configurations. Such practical matters as the instructor's research period and specialty, or the availability of material resources, necessarily shape any given curriculum. Master classes, or concentrated, skill-dedicated workshops in a Rare Book School, will be different again. Rather, the purpose of this chapter is to acknowledge some of the challenges inherent in the enterprise, to offer some ideas about what the learning objectives of such courses, modules or workshops might include and to discuss some possible kinds of resources and approaches.

An undergraduate course, or degree, in English does not prepare the holder to work as a qualified literary critic, and nor do a few courses in history comprise the education of an archival researcher. Further, professional, training is needed, but the initial degree does prepare its holder to be a good citizen and a well-rounded person. The same is true of the history of the book. Many of the skills of book historians are specialized, and cannot possibly be taught in a period of three or four months (or six or eight months) to undergraduates in a conventional curriculum. For some bibliographical research, such skills as paleography, diplomatics and collation are indispensable, but difficult to acquire. However it is possible to gain a broad appreciation of the history of the book, and even of some of its more esoteric knowledge, without aspiring to be an expert. Despite the importance of materiality to the field of study, the intellectual skills associated with book history can be taught without recourse to any specialized materials at all. The conventional methods of reading, thinking, discussing and responding in writing are as applicable to this as to any other subject, and need not even be framed as 'book history'. A course in American literature, for example, could fruitfully draw upon numerous articles and chapters, and use Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray's *Literary Dollars and Social Sense: A People's History of the Mass Market Book* (2005) for the background.

For a course in the interdisciplinary history of the book, however, a set of introductory chapters or readings (such as the ones in this volume) can sketch a useful chronology and introduce broad general concepts. A number of textbooks and readers are on the market. Using such a work as a starting

point, the instructor is in a position to add more specialized readings, which can be connected to research assignments. Every instructor will have his or her own preferred books and articles, the ones that feel comfortably teachable. From a learner's point of view, selected readings should address issues that reiterate the objectives of the course in such a way that the experience makes sense as a whole. For example, an opportunity might be provided to read and review a scholarly monograph whose subject is a single powerful book. Each work of this kind offers its own narrative of production and reception, so that the general message of book history is reinforced by the specific instance. Examples include James Secord's *Victorian Sensation: The Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (2000) and Patricia Coit Murphy's *What A Book Can Do: The Publication and Reception of Silent Spring* (2005). Such works tell a graphic story about more than the intellectual, political and social impact of a work; they also recount and analyse its authorship, publishing and reading.

In some institutional settings, there is room for creative and exploratory approaches to teaching the history of the book, even without invoking specialized techniques or inaccessible materials. An instructor who has introduced a chronological and thematic outline of the general tenets of book history could branch out by assigning students to read 'biblio-fictions' – novels where the materiality and the mingled cultural and commercial nature of books are intrinsic to the plot. The students are assigned to read books about books, but this time fictions rather than histories. Geraldine Brooks's *People of the Book* (2008) is only one of dozens of examples. This approach could easily be made multimedia by incorporating excerpts from films (Jean-Jacques Annaud's 1986 *The Name of the Rose* or *84 Charing Cross Road*, directed by David Jones in 1986) and television (Dylan Moran's and Graham Linehan's *Black Books*, broadcast in Britain 2000–4). The examples offered here are intentionally popular and accessible, but the approach could be varied to draw out the bibliographical themes in canonical literature (Gissing's *New Grub Street* is but one example). Tests and assignments would demonstrate to what extent students had understood the real-life themes underlying various fictional treatments.

Paradoxically, one of the best places to study the history of books in depth may be the internet. Students accustomed to hearing some teachers' disdain for Wikipedia.org, and aware of professorial anxieties about the use of online essay banks for systematic cheating, may be surprised to find that a number of humanities academics have spent their working lives side by side with software programmers. They will learn that a number of scholars were inspired early in the life of the internet, by the possibilities inherent in systematically

demonstrating the diversity of certain books – along with their beauty, their complexity and something of their history. Two of the earliest such projects, those addressing themselves to the multimedia artists William Blake and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, have designated themselves as ‘hypermedia archives’. Online resources can also be used to illustrate bindings, page designs and other features of rare books in special collections around the world, as well as to demonstrate how a hand press works, or how type is set in a composing stick.

Assignments can be devised to make pedagogical use of an institutional library’s subscriptions to online research databases, and also to deal with the inevitable limitations of students’ knowledge. Students often find themselves thwarted when asked to take advantage of the rich range of online resources for studying the history of the book, only to discover that their particular question remains unanswered by scholars, or is too complex to tackle within the limits of an assignment. They may not know that considerable knowledge exists only in scholarly monographs and printed reference works. They may still be uncertain about what the subject entails, or lack the background knowledge necessary to identify a personal interest. One answer to this situation is for the instructor to construct a set of assignments, with print and digital materials packaged expressly to provide an experience of reading texts and images in their original form (or a digitized version of that form), but with the primary materials supported by appropriate secondary and tertiary sources.

Despite the range of materials available for learning about the history of books by reading about it, however, an education in the subject should always include some opportunity for students to get their hands on some genuinely old and rare books. Any librarian who has an interest in special collections and rarities is a natural collaborator for the instructor in a course in the history of books. In many institutions, library and information professionals are keen to become involved in the pedagogical project, and embrace the opportunity to participate in the teaching of book history classes. Their contribution will probably take place inside the library, of course, where students’ encounters with their bibliographical heritage can be carefully monitored even while being kindled. The instructor can circumvent this necessary limitation, however, if he or she has a small budget for purchasing a few copies of old – but not rare or valuable – books for classroom purposes. The opportunity to dissect a book has been documented by a number of classes as among the most memorable aspects of their education.⁷ The lessons that some old books are not rare, and can be ripped apart in the interests of learning (and conversely that some rare books are not old and must be preserved in the interests of future scholarship) are some of the most important outcomes of any course in the history of the book.

The librarian is not the only potential collaborator for the teacher of book history. Historians often find teaching partners in the English department, while professors of English literature have been known to discover a shared interest in the material book among their colleagues who teach French or Italian studies. Nor should instructors limit their search for colleagues to their own campus. A community where institutions of higher learning lack a bibliographical press can probably find a local craft printer, bookbinder, marbler or papermaker willing to offer a guest lecture, or to receive student visits and entertain questions. Local antiquarian and second-hand booksellers are not only a fount of knowledge, but also the purveyors of inexpensive books for student projects. A small press publisher, a freelance editor or a local bookseller might be pleased to give an occasional lecture. Book collectors are another set of extraordinarily well-informed book people, and many of them are generous and anxious to pass some of their knowledge on to a younger generation. Among visual artists, the ‘Book Arts’, which currently flourish among practitioners attuned to the changing role of media in their own work, offer another source of expertise which can be shared with students.

Perhaps the ideal collaborator – or indeed instructor – for the history of books is a handpress printer oriented to pedagogy and managing a bibliographical press. The lesson that the book is an object which is also a text is one that can be learned by the body, as the learner sets up a text on a typographer’s composing stick and pulls the bar of the platen press or the handle of the cylinder proofing press to create an object in multiple copies. The opportunity to learn the rudiments of the printer’s craft in practice is to be found in only a handful of universities and libraries. Printer and scholar Noel Waite notes that ‘In the 1960s several “bibliographical” presses were established by those wishing, among other things, to teach the methods of textual transmission in the medium of print as practised in the handpress era. Although these presses were attached to institutions of learning, they were run by enthusiasts, whose productions went beyond the call of duty’. A bibliographical press has been further defined as ‘a workshop or laboratory which is carried on chiefly for the purpose of demonstrating and investigating the printing techniques of the past by means of setting type by hand, and of printing from it on a simple press’.⁸ This kind of press might print everything from facsimile pamphlets to wedding invitations, but its purpose is pedagogical, not commercial. The university or library where a bibliographical press is installed has a valuable experience to offer students, one well worth the necessity for employing a competent printer and making room for the equipment and supplies.

Learning the history of the book with the body as well as the mind is not confined to the printing shop. It happens in the library, too, or wherever there is an opportunity for people to touch, smell and investigate old books:

handling books leads to a sensory and emotional understanding that does not occur in many other fields of study. The rigorously scholarly instructor will, no doubt, aim to keep the study of the book and its history on an austere academic and even scientific level. But it is impossible to deny altogether the ineffable, almost spiritual dimension that pervades the study of books and periodicals in past and present cultures. It is a routine occurrence in the classroom for a few students to feel very strongly indeed about their visit to the special collection library, or their opportunity to pull on the bar of an iron press. There is a tactile aspect to the history of the book that seems to connect directly to human emotions. The materiality of a written document surviving from the past is one element. The fact that this material object carries a written text laden with meaning is another, especially when the student can see how that meaning is molded and enhanced by the tactile and emotional responses the materiality creates. Feeling the way the ink bites into the page of an early printed book to create a three-dimensional entity; transcribing a reader's marginal notes and connecting them to a fuller knowledge of the life of that reader's mind; smelling the scent of a freshly printed book or one that has been handled for centuries. These kinds of sensory experiences and aesthetic responses can be called forth by other objects, but they are particularly powerful when evoked by the text-bearing objects we call books. It is not necessary for the student of the history of the book to experience this emotional reaction, but it is important for the teacher to anticipate it.

While the sensory experience of learning about old books is often intense, so is the intellectual engagement that comes with thinking abstractly about how they work. The history of the book has a theoretical component, and a course of study directly focused on that history will have to decide when, and how, to introduce such ideas as Robert Darnton's 'communication circuit', D. F. McKenzie's 'sociology of texts', Pierre Bourdieu's 'literary field' and Benedict Anderson's 'print capitalism'. The extent to which students are required to engage with these ideas will depend upon their disciplinary background and their level of study. Some instructors will choose to introduce these concepts at the beginning of a course, in order to frame the ideas that are to be inculcated. Others will wait until later in the semester, once a chronology or trajectory of 'the book' through history has been established, some virtual or hands-on processes experienced, and some exemplary scholarship read and analysed. Both are possible, but it might be most useful to introduce some of these ideas in two stages, initially as straightforward models, and then again midway through the course, this time as concepts which can be undermined when tested in the real world of book-historical research. The important thing to stress is that each of these concepts comes with its own panoply of critical scholarship. Whether they are introduced at the outset or

later, none of the theoretical approaches should be taught as a rigid model. No model has yet been introduced that can explain everything we need to know about the book in social, economic and cultural context. Indeed the student who has learned to think in terms of one or other of these models may have to unlearn that way of thinking, in order to accommodate something more theoretically capacious. If the history of the book can make the ambitious claims discussed above, in various disciplines and interdisciplinary settings, then a vigorous debate over theoretical approaches is inevitable and necessary.

One approach to introducing students to the cut-and-thrust of debate within the history of the book is to set up assignments where scholars' work is paired with that of their critics. Two examples will suffice. The collaborators who were among the founders of the history of the book, Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, suggested that, if other calculations were correct, 'then about 20 million books were printed *before 1500*' (that is during the fifty or so years of the incunabula period in Europe). This statistic was reproduced without qualification by Benedict Anderson, who used it as the basis for a political interpretation of the impact of print. It will be salutary for students to learn how that figure has been systematically disproved by Joseph Dane. Another such exercise is provided by Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, which offers an inspirational and engaging argument – until it is challenged by a reading of Adrian Johns, whose *The Nature of the Book* initiated its own equally powerful analysis by qualifying Eisenstein's.⁹

History of the book in the college or university

While there are numerous stand-alone courses in the history of the book, at schools and universities around the world, there are only a few fully fledged degree-granting programmes. Because of book history's inherent interdisciplinarity, such programmes normally draw on resources from across the institution, even though they might be located in a single faculty or department. While the approach can be strictly theoretical, in some institutions students are offered practical training in publishing studies, book science or book studies. Here the teaching programme is oriented to employment in practice-based or vocational trades, with the historical and theoretical component serving in a supporting role and instructors valued for their real-world expertise. In more academic settings, however, the study of the book presents itself as an interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary arrangement, a formal or informal collaboration among instructors with shared interests. In such cases, a degree focusing on the history of the book, whether graduate or

undergraduate, is typically a degree in English, library and information studies or another discipline, with a certificate or acknowledgement of concentration in the field. Holding a Master's degree with this kind of endorsement enhances the student's profile in applications to competitive doctoral programmes where bibliographical and book-historical knowledge are prized.

The history of the book has made significant and well-recognized contributions to studies in the history of science, as the work of Ann Blair, Adrian Johns, James Secord and others attests. A course of study for science majors, organized around the history and practice of scientific communication, can provide students with a valuable orientation to aspects of their own discipline. It could also serve as a meaningful way to fulfil the typical 'breadth' requirement for sampling the humanities or social sciences. At the teaching level, scholars in book history working within an arts, humanities or social science faculty might find unexpected collaborators among professors of science or engineering, in the shape of aficionados of the history of science and technology, willing and able to share their knowledge, expertise and book collections.

Here is another learning objective for studies in the history of the book: critical thinking and research skills. In the syllabus of most programmes in both humanities and social sciences, the study of critical reading and research methodology looms large. Students must be introduced to the concept that each secondary source they use is not only a piece of analysis and narrative but also part of an ongoing scholarly conversation, and that ideas and interpretations build upon the theory and practice of earlier scholars. At the same time, students are introduced to the methods of research, the use of printed books in the library, and (in some disciplines) of manuscript sources in the archive. Some instructors find it useful to incorporate in this module an awareness of the material form of written artefacts from the past. Students who learn how to read the outside (as well as the inside) of a book can recognize the names of publishers, identify whether a work is aimed at an academic or a popular readership, distinguish a textbook from a monograph and so forth. All these skills, essentially bibliographical, are crucial to appreciating academic writing. Similar exercises can extend to the reading of different scholarly genres, such as the website, the scholarly article or the book review.

The university administrator with a budget to consider will be interested in offering book studies because they are attractive to learners from both practical and intellectual perspectives, and such an administrator will be pleased to offer instructors an opportunity to teach their research specialty. But therein lies the challenge: no instructor can possibly specialize in the whole

field, because it is too diverse. And if instruction is to happen at an advanced level, it may be difficult, expensive or even impossible to offer training in specialized skills. The history of the book is an attractive subject and (as this chapter has argued) one that can be made accessible to students who lack any prior awareness of it. Nevertheless there are times when very specialized knowledge is required, and that expertise is held by only a handful of scholars in the whole world. The answer, in this case, is to bring the students to the instructor for a short period of time, rather than put the instructor regularly in front of students but only in his or her own institution. The concept of a Rare Book School was initiated by the American rare-book librarian Terry Belanger, who hired a series of experts to teach five-day non-credit courses on subjects relating to the history of the book and rare-book librarianship. Belanger's successors have developed variations on the basic concept which now flourish around the world.¹⁰ The demand for intensive summer courses, workshops and master classes is fuelled by the introductory courses which create a demand that non-specialist instructors cannot fill. The participants are not only academics, but also librarians, antiquarian booksellers, conservators and archivists, as well as enthusiastic amateurs. Rare Book Schools are also places where the relevant digital knowledge of the present generation is put into conversation with the bibliographical knowledge drawn from the recent past. This model is of particular importance as the skills of the bibliographer, and associated skills, are no longer routinely taught in institutions of higher learning. Practitioners and educators keep vital knowledge alive and pass it on to the next generation.

The history of the book in the educated imagination

The slick brochure, the plausible website, the over-hyped bestseller – each of these carries evidence inherent its own design. Not all of them are books, but each of them is nevertheless part of the history of the book. People who have studied that history know something their fellow-citizens don't. It is possible, actually, to judge quite a lot about a book by its cover. And what has been learned about old books can be applied to new ones, as well as to other media both old and new. A chronologically oriented progression through the history of the book in various world cultures concludes, for most teachers and learners, with the subject's application to contemporary media. In some cases there may be an extensive analysis of the publishing industry and its commercial and cultural practices. But even if their investigation has been limited to the past, students still take away an awareness of how books and texts are separate, but comingled; of how they change, with changing times and in response to the entangled interests of those who publish, use and

compose them. It is useful to know, taking a well-known example, how badly Shakespeare's plays were printed in his own time, and further distorted by printers throughout the following decades and centuries; how they have been disentangled with varying degrees of success by scholarship, including bibliographical scholarship; how the plays became part of mass culture in the nineteenth century; and how they were incorporated into the twentieth-century schoolroom and the twenty-first-century media culture.¹¹ Even if the details are forgotten, the underlying message is not. Knowledge of the history of the book, conceptualized thus, is an essential component of what is sometimes called 'media literacy'. Like the latter, it incorporates concepts of critical thinking, identification of bias and recognition of how commercial interests intersect with political and cultural representations.

Unlike a media literacy oriented primarily to the 'new' and inherently visual media of internet and television, however, the history of the book inculcates an attitude of scepticism towards the myth of a solitary authorial genius. That myth is the notion that Shakespeare or Newton, Dickens or Darwin, was the sole source of the world-changing ideas that were, and continue to be, published under that author's name. The myth rests on the fact that knowledge or artistry can have such a powerful effect on the human intellect and imagination that they seem to exist in an unmediated trajectory between the 'genius' author's mind and the experience of the reader. The gatekeeping agency of publishers, the textual intervention of printers and editors, the collaboration of spouses and colleagues, the typographical and spatial messages created by book designers – all these and more are invisible, except to the trained eye of research. Not only that. Since the seventeenth century at least, books and periodicals have been designed consciously to promulgate this myth of authorial authority, to create the effect that the book is a work of literary, scholarly or scientific brilliance. Undermining the myth of the solitary *scientific* genius has been the work of historians of science, who have shown that the inventions and discoveries of the past were only possible in the context of other kinds of knowledge in circulation at the time, and were inherently collaborative. The unsung work of laboratory assistants is being recognized, along with that of the printers and publishers who also, quite consciously, acted to present certain figures as lone inventors.

One of the dominant conversations of our own time is the one about the imminent death of the book and the obsolescence of libraries. The producers of various kinds of electronic devices designed chiefly for leisure reading want their product and service to be the dominant model. But so did the proprietors of circulating libraries in the nineteenth century. The providers of databases and digital texts to public and research libraries, similarly and understandably, market their services in terms of making older materials obsolete. So did

the manufacturers of microfilm, only a few decades ago. The educated person who knows a bit about how books (and other media) travel and transform, and hence that it is not technology, but human choices, behind the changes that take place, is armed with the ability to read the message of the material form. She or he will not be persuaded by apocalyptic statements, and will know how to value the library as a cultural institution that survives and flourishes by changing, along with the books it collects.

NOTES

1. C. A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876–1937* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004).
2. C. Haynes, 'Reassessing "Genius" in Studies of Authorship: The State of the Discipline', *Book History* 8 (2005), 288.
3. J. B. Friskney, *New Canadian Library: The Ross-McClelland Years 1952–1978* (University of Toronto Press, 2007), 152–84.
4. J. A. Sutherland, *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (University of Chicago Press, 1976), 6.
5. M. Esbester, 'Nineteenth-century Timetables and the History of Reading', *Book History* 12 (2009), 156–85.
6. For some practical guidance of this sort see A. R. Hawkins, *Teaching Bibliography, Textual Criticism, and Book History* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006).
7. J. D. Groves, 'Dramatising the Familiar: Showing Students what they Don't Know about Books', *SHARP News* 6:1 (1997), 2–4.
8. N. Waite, 'Private Printing', in P. Griffith, R. Harvey and K. Maslen (eds.), *Book and Print in New Zealand: A Guide to Print Culture in Aotearoa* (Victoria University of Wellington, 1997), 83–4; P. Gaskell, 'The Bibliographical Press Movement', *Journal of the Printing Historical Society* 1 (1965), 1–13.
9. J. Dane, *The Myth of Print Culture* (University of Toronto Press, 2003), 32–5; A. Grafton, E. L. Eisenstein and A. Johns, 'AHR Forum: How Revolutionary was the Print Revolution', *American Historical Review* 107 (2002), 84–128.
10. There are Rare Book Schools and similar short-term programmes operating in England (London), France (Lyons), New Zealand (Wellington and Dunedin), the US (Charlottesville, Los Angeles, College Station Texas, Urbana and Colorado Springs) and elsewhere. For an up-to-date listing, see www.rarebookschool.org/ related.
11. L. Erne, *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).