

those duties combine with steam technology and plant-based raw materials to make paper cheap enough to be disposable. As paper bags and toilet paper came onto the market, old newspapers were suddenly redundant.

Even today, in the age of scans and bar codes, we haven't really disowned paper. Essayist Ian Sansom points out that even travelers who check in with an electronic ticket still vomit into a paper bag and repair the damage with a wet wipe (invented in 1915). One could add that even the two months of the year when e-readers, hardbacks, and paperbacks sell most briskly are kicked off with a paper shredder; after New York's 2012 Thanksgiving parade, spectators piecing together confetti discovered that they were recycled from confidential police records.⁵⁶ It remains to be seen whether books will have more in common with playing cards and money—paper goods for which digital equivalents quickly emerged—or with tea bags and diapers.

A recent toilet-paper ad showed a tech-savvy man scolding his wife for scribbling on scraps of old-fashioned paper; when he shouts out from the toilet that there's nothing left on the cardboard roll, she slips under the door his paper-thin iPad.⁵⁷ The bathroom, this play on paperlessness reminds us, may be the last reading room whose contents will never be shipped to the depository.

Chapter 3

READING ON THE MOVE

IN THE MIDST of the 2013 Supreme Court hearings on the Defense of Marriage Act, which sought to outlaw same-sex unions, Amazon aired an advertisement for its newest e-reading device. Side by side on lounge chairs against a backdrop of beach umbrellas, a man strikes up a conversation with his bikini-clad neighbor: "That's a Kindle, right?"

She looks up from her reading. "Yeah, it's the new Kindle Paperwhite," she replies.

"I love to read at the beach," the man says. "But . . ."

"This is perfect at the beach," the woman reassures him. "And with the built-in light, I can read anywhere, anytime."

After a pause spent squinting down at his iPad again, the man announces triumphantly, "Done!"

"With your book?" asks the straight woman—literally straight, as we're about to discover. For when the man explains that, on the contrary, he's done buying a new Kindle device and invites his neighbor to celebrate, she sidesteps the question by

noting demurely that her husband is bringing her a drink. Her comment sets up the Kindle buyer's newly topical punchline: "So is mine."

The Kindle ad equates modernity with mobility: the freedom to marry who you want with the freedom to read wherever you want. Expanding on the theme two years later, Amazon marketers began to solicit photos with the hashtag #haveKINDLEwillTRAVEL. The resulting flood of images—a white man holds a Kindle on a dirt road; a white man reads silhouetted against a bell tower; a pair of white palms cradle a Kindle in a windowsill overlooking a cliff—measure the power of the device by the sublimity of the landscapes that it blots out.¹ (Only the most riveting read can compete with the Taj Mahal.) Borrowing Microsoft's metaphor of the "window," Amazon's *al fresco* scenes naturalized an otherwise daunting new technology. The wage slave might hunch over a computer in a fluorescent-lit cubicle, but the Kindle's user remained a free spirit, shaded by trees that memorialized now-obsolete wood-pulp paper.²

Yet Amazon's 2013 ad's celebration of the latest legal decision turns out to look oddly atavistic. Amazon's his-'n'-hers contrast harks back to a paperback-era *New Yorker* cartoon where the symmetry of identical bedside reading lamps belies the contrast between a woman's book and her husband's antennae peeking out from behind his newspaper.

And even that pun on twentieth-century bestseller *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* can be traced in turn to the nineteenth-century iconography that associated men with the ephemeral, fragmentary, fast-moving modernity of the newspaper. In contrast, the heroine of one Victorian novel hesitates even to touch a newspaper, managing instead to pinch it

"delicately between her finger and thumb; for the Carlingford papers were inky and badly printed, and soiled a lady's hand."³

Kindle is to book as iPad is to newspaper: one self-contained (designed for offline reading of durable long-form text), the other outward pointing (designed for online browsing of constantly refreshed snippets). Whether men are shown with paper broadsheets or with electronic tablets, cartoonists continue to picture women clinging to the always-about-to-be-superseded book.

Those cartoonists have a point, for industry statistics cast what looks like a reading gap as something more specific: a book-reading gap. In most parts of the world, including the United States, books remain the province of white women, while magazines and newspapers come closer to being evenly distributed. Even as Amazon's ad celebrates the freedom to marry whomever we like, its ad still counts on the viewer to place reading habits on a gender binary.

But this gender gap might be less about men's and women's device preferences than about the time they have to devote to reading in any medium. In an 1869 etiquette manual, the Anglican moralist Charlotte Yonge explained why women read more than men: "There are so many hours of a girl's life when she must sit still," according to Yonge, "that a book is her natural resource."⁴ Most American parents today would nod in recognition at Yonge's claim that girls read more. That may be because reading thrives on the absence of opportunity cost. Books find readers when more lucrative work is ruled out by gender (earning eighty-three cents on the dollar, American women outspend on books) as well as age (literature reading is highest among those too young or old for paid employment).

Once a sign of economic power, reading has become the province of those whose time lacks value.

Yonge's observation would have startled her grandparents, though. For most of British history, men across all social classes read more and read better than women. Only in the nineteenth century did women's literacy begin to climb faster than men's, finally overtaking it at century's end.⁵ Today in developing countries, girls' literacy continues to lag.⁶ Economically, that makes perfect sense. Investment in boys' education promises payoff in the form of high wages, while teaching girls to read withdraws their short-term unpaid work from the household.

Only thanks to servants was the time that Yonge's readers spent outside of the labor force freed up for reading. As a new parent condemned Tantalus-like to push a stroller through the library without stopping anywhere except story hour, I, too, began to wish that bookstores would sell babysitting coupons. Unopened novels found themselves crushed by a stack of the board books that I read with near-liturgical regularity, *Goodnight Moon* replacing bedtime prayers. In the small fraction of brain not devoted to memorizing Dr. Seuss, I remembered Schopenhauer's joke: "It would be a good thing to buy books if one could also buy the time in which to read them."⁷

The defenders of print books are as likely to forget this as the sellers of e-readers. The volunteers of Britain's Reading Agency could usefully remember Schopenhauer's aphorism as they plan this year's celebration of the annual World Book Night. A few years ago, I accompanied an alumna of the course where we played Name That Book as she marked Shakespeare's birthday by handing out free copies of a movie tie-in paperback,

The Perks of Being a Wallflower, on the Boston T. She had been instructed to give copies to "infrequent readers"—but how to profile the hurrying commuters by their likelihood of already having reading material in their backpacks? In the sea of faces reflected in glowing smartphones or canted toward billboards, it proved hard to spot a reader for whom a giveaway wouldn't prove redundant.

At a historical moment when paperbacks litter curbs and ebooks can be downloaded for free by the thousands, the obstacle to reading isn't getting your hands on a book; it's finding time to read it. The volunteers who celebrate World Book Night by handing out paperbacks might be confusing objects with practices—things with experiences. Yet media history reveals that what gets people to read, or stops them from doing so, is rarely the presence or absence of just the right gadget.

Marketing campaigns that tout the portability of e-readers recycle an older triumphalist history that depicted monumental, site-specific volumes giving way to handier, nimbler printed pamphlets, books, and periodicals. Ever since the beginning of the print era, the reformers who made books' mobility stand for readers' modernity cast this change as not only an inevitability but an improvement: more freedom, less friction. Erica Jong might have called it a zipless read.

In reality, sedentary books were never really swept aside by nomadic successors. Already in the late Middle Ages, hefty volumes chained in hulking cathedrals coexisted happily with "girdle books" hung from clothing—the earliest wearables. Oxford University Press's 1875 India-paper Bible used the new technology of onionskin pages to slim down its contents as

elegantly as any MacBook Air, without ever throwing lectern-sized Bibles out of work.

How big your reading matter is turns out to hinge more on where it's consumed than on when. Amazon's fantasy of books without borders airbrushed out the commercial strategies that made e-reading more site specific than print had ever been. Not only do the ebooks available depend on what copyright area you inhabit, but the device on which you encounter those books is determined largely by where you live. Next to income, the best predictor of whether you read on a large or small screen is nationality.⁸ Throughout East Asia, phone reading caught on before dedicated e-readers had a chance to break in on their market. French ebooks gravitate to laptops, while book-length content is likelier to be found on Americans' tablets. In Britain, e-readers have begun losing ground to phones.⁹ How a nation reads turns out to be as distinctive as what: even when the same *texts* circulate across the anglophone world, they take the form, once again, of different *books*. Yet the implicit claim of Amazon's ad campaigns that reading is getting better every day in every way emerged long before electronic media did.

Back in New York Public Library's lobby, I crane my neck to take in a four-part mural that wraps around the foyer like two ripped-apart page spreads. The first panel poses a larger-than-life Moses with the Tablets of the Law. Both elbows braced, five fingers splay and another five clench to support the weight of a supersized hunk of stone. This version of a handheld tablet bears five of the Ten Commandments, though an inadvertent scrambling of two Hebrew letters has turned "thou shalt not steal" into "thou shalt not wipe." The remaining five are

relegated to a heap of shards at Moses' feet. Their jagged disarray reminds viewers that stone, however monumental, lacks the tensile strength that allows paper's cellulose web to bend without breaking.¹⁰

Moses's tablets dwarf the printed sign explaining that the mural was commissioned from Edward Laning in 1938 by Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration, that attempt to revive for a secular age the publicly accessible art that once lived in medieval cathedrals. Three more panels complete Laning's narrative. On the next wall, a monk hunches over a lectern, his shoulders and wrists as tightly rolled as his manuscript. At his feet, a book's clasps seal it as hermetically as the cloister encloses the monk.

Laning's third panel leads us back outdoors to the fifteenth-century German marketplace where a bearded Gutenberg, aided by a burly pressman, shows the local political boss his double-columned proof sheet for the first Bible ever printed. From Palestine to Germany, then westward again: the final panel lands us here in New York, where a fin de siècle gas lamp reveals the besuited owner of the *New York Tribune*, Whitelaw Reid, and the inventor Otthmar Mergenthaler eyeing a sheet printed by Linotype, the method of casting an entire line of type at once that displaced letter-by-letter typesetting in newspapers well into my own lifetime. In the background, a young news vendor shouts out the headlines. The only female figure whom Laning includes is smaller, above one door. There, a mother teaches her son to read. When the goal is a literate new generation of men, women's literacy is only important as a means to an end.

Laning called his series *The Story of the Recorded Word*. Taken together, though, the four panels tell stories, plural. As you circle the lobby en route to the printed paper you're after (or manuscripts, microfilms, or digital catalog records), you progress not just from past to present and East to West, but also from stone to wood pulp. That means from sacred to commercial, from monumental to portable, from precious to universally available, and from the timelessness of the Decalogue to the timeliness of tomorrow's fish-'n'-chips paper.

The grandeur of Laning's Art Deco murals risks overshadowing the 125 miles of stacks that, Atlas-like, hold up the football-field-sized reading room. The content of Laning's images, though, undercuts his chosen medium—the mural—by emphasizing the advantages of flimsy, nondescript paper. Precisely because of its expense, stone has usually been the medium of choice for one-offs—tombstones, for example. In contrast, parchment and, even more, paper lend themselves to multiple copies, decoupling the survival of the text from the durability of any one of its instantiations.

Paradoxically enough, expense also exposes stone to destruction: reuse value makes those tombstones worth rubbing out and re-chiseling, where the cheap modern rag paper shown in panel four isn't worth the trouble of erasing. Laning wanted to emphasize the dignity of the leather-aproned worker who shares the frame with his boss. Yet he draws just as much attention to the muscled man's inanimate counterparts—to the humble but hardworking wood pulp and self-effacing mass-produced print that crowd out the more glamorous, ceremonial, richly textured media such as stone and parchment.

As Laning's panels juxtapose sacred with commercial writing, they also contrast indoor spaces with outdoor ones. A circuit of the room takes viewers from a lightning-bathed mountaintop, to a day-lit scriptorium, to a newsroom's lamplight, only to end up back outside again with the bareheaded youth whom Laning painted above the Salomon Reading Room door. Stretched under a tree with Huck Finn-like abandon, he's tossed his hat onto the grass. Unlike the customs officials at the New York docks, he's not doffing to the Gutenberg Bible across the lobby. Unlike the inhabitants of the next-door Rose Main Reading Room, he doesn't rest his hardback on a table or his own back on a chair. Instead of a painted ceiling, he sits beneath a tree uncannily like the oak whose branches crown Amazon's Kindle icon almost a century later. Lolling on the grass without worrying about stained pages, this reader makes books *al fresco* as characteristically modern, and American, as the picnic.

Or, perhaps, as the bookmobile. Walk past Laning's panels into the wood-pulp-filled, wood-paneled reading room, and you can request a 1901 pamphlet in which the American librarian Melvil Dewey (better known for his eponymous decimal system) declares the new century an age of "traveling libraries." By this, he didn't mean bookmobiles. His goal was, instead, to build a collection that would rotate through rural branch libraries, themselves stationary but constantly unburdening and restocking their shelves with new deliveries. This analog "refresh" button would periodically update the titles available to local users.

Dewey freighted such "itinerating libraries" with more than practical importance. In the new century and the New World,

he boasted, "the cheapness and quickness of modern methods of communication" makes books "grow wings." As smugly as any i-marketer, Dewey bragged that texts "which were thought to belong like trees in one place may travel about like birds."¹¹ The grand staircases leading up to Andrew Carnegie's free public libraries associate books quite literally with upward mobility—just as Carnegie's own life story credited rising with reading. Dewey attributed that uplift more specifically to deracinated books, as if social mobility depended on the material movement of paper.

The new American century made books pioneers. Calling "the traveling book" "the precursor of the traveling library," Dewey contrasted a bookmobile-filled America with a dark European past in which readers had to walk "hundreds of miles, perhaps begging their way, to read some book securely chained to a pillar."¹² The chains meant to protect books from theft appear here more like a means of imprisoning them. Where once readers traveled to books, now books would seek out their readers: adventurous volumes playing Odysseus to passive human Penelopes.

Dewey's allusion to mendicant friars invokes a Protestant gothic that recasts each new technology as another dissolution of the monasteries. I once was bound but now am free: as the text's power to liberate minds becomes the book's to shake off its chains, the Prometheus of Laning's grand ceiling changes from a reader to an object being read. The artist's confusion of books with readers prefigures the anthropomorphism of visionary Stewart Brand's 1985 claim that "information wants to be free."¹³

Brand's want was Dewey's need. "Libraries must be mobilized," the library reformer wrote; "books must travel." Nothing worse than staying on the shelf. Walter Benjamin would later compare buying "a book abandoned on the market place" with "the way the prince bought a beautiful slave girl in 'The Arabian Nights.'"¹⁴ As Benjamin's collector manumits an individual book, so Dewey saw himself as emancipating an entire medium.

That portable books were associated with freedom didn't mean that the wares themselves were free. London publisher Allen Lane sold the first English paperbacks on train platforms, branching out in 1937 to vending machines with the start-up-esque name "Penguincubators." The perfect fit for a uniform-pocket sized for an entrenching tool, Lane's invention took off thanks to World War II. (Ironically, their standardized size and color coding by subject imitated the softcovers already being published by the Albatross Press in Hamburg.¹⁵) Long before ebooks, the cheap softcover reprint allowed the field to displace the library. Eventually, like so many other military technologies that subside to civilian uses, Lane's brainchild would allow books to flee the desk for the bus and the treadmill.

In 1958, an expert predicted that microfilms would replace books only once "some genius develops a way for reading them everywhere that books can be read: in the subway, in the bathtub, in a fishing skiff."¹⁶ In practice, of course, a fishing skiff had never been the easiest place to read an exhibition catalog or a folio dictionary. That those were not the examples to which microfilm was expected to live up suggests that by 1958, Lane had succeeded in making the "book" synonymous with

the paperback. Light enough to be carried, flexible enough to be pocketed, and cheap enough to be replaced if the hypothetical skiff capsized, his life-jacket-hued Penguins made bed, bath, and beyond the frontiers that every subsequent reading technology—should its sellers hope to earn a profit—would be challenged to conquer.

In the process, watertightness became a symbol of user-friendliness. In the early years when e-readers still commanded enough of a market to be worth fighting over, Kobo's release of a waterproof e-reader goaded Amazon to hire product testers to spray Kindles with saline solution.¹⁷ The ebook rebranded itself as a u-book: *u* for "underwater," *u* for "ubiquitous."¹⁸ Marketed by contradistinction to the desktop computers that replaced chained folios, the off-road device vended by Amazon and its beleaguered competitors might more precisely be termed the "e-paperback."

But perhaps the real reading revolution has had less to do with where liberated customers read books than where savvy marketers sold them. The novelty of paperbacks didn't just lie in the physical lightness of their covers, but also with the social insight that newspapers weren't the only printed commodity that could be funneled through "drug-stores, variety stores, stationery stores, cigar stores, confectionery stores, super-markets, railway stations, airports."¹⁹ Tempting readers daily rather than during the occasional pilgrimage to a bookstore, Lane brought the mountain to Mohammed.

Where Ben Franklin's printshop sold chocolate and snuff, conversely Penguin funneled paperbacks to tobacconists. Amazon's pseudotelepathic Whispernet promised that "you can be

anywhere in Sprint's high-speed data network coverage area, think of a book, and get it in one minute."²⁰ Later, in-app purchases promised even more instant gratification. Jeff Bezos was copying Lane's realization that mobile reading implied ubiquitous buying.

Amazon isn't the only tech company that's discovered that trick. Google Books founded its 25-million-volume digitization project not in the otherwise canonical garage, but in Oxford University's library stacks, where, as the company itself tells the story, Google employees watched "the librarians bring out centuries-old 'uncut' books that have only rarely seen the light of day."²¹ Historian Anthony Grafton calls this the "sleeping beauty" trope: the book slumbering until the right reader kisses it awake.²² As darkness equates stacks with dungeons, Dewey's contrast between roots and wings gives way to a vertical split between the basement and the cloud.

Libraries have been variously treated as living rooms, labs, playgrounds, and battlefields. But the very commercial giants that mine them for raw materials also cast them as dungeons from which books need to be sprung. Whether vehicled by steam railways or by fiber-optic cable, the logistical freedom afforded by books that can be read anywhere—more: bought anywhere—symbolizes the escape that imaginative literature is tasked with brokering. Yet Google's claim to liberate imprisoned libraries also casts a public-spirited veneer over its sale of book readers' attention to advertisers. Tech companies' promises of texts that can be read anywhere and anytime, meanwhile, follow Allen Lane in confusing readers' access to ideas with publishers' access to customers.²³

None of this is to deny that reading has changed over time. (Book historians like me, after all, spend our working lives studying those changes.) But its evolution turns out to be explained just as much by the development of new technologies as by the emergence of new settings for reading. In the eighteenth century, when a new cult of nature encouraged hikers to cram poetry anthologies into their rucksacks, Rousseau set the fashion for traversing a page at the same time as a mountain. Books kept on moving at a pedestrian pace until, half a century later, engineer John McAdam's eponymous "macadam," which smoothed roads by covering soil with a layer of crushed, single-sized stones, decoupled reading from vomiting. As long as seats with minimal suspension bumped along uneven stone surfaces, squinting over a swaying book had few charms: in the seventeenth century, diarist Samuel Pepys testified that it was more comfortable to sing rounds with the strangers he met on the coach.²⁴ Only a multitasker as efficient as Napoleon could devour bestsellers nonstop in his carriage, tossing finished volumes out of the window as we might throw out a used Coke can.²⁵ The eccentricity of this practice can be measured by the fact that Thackeray expected readers to get the joke in the first chapter of his novel *Vanity Fair*, where the short, half-French upstart Becky Sharp flings a copy of Johnson's Dictionary out of a moving carriage.

Laning divided his panels in the New York Public Library according to the changing technologies through which texts get made. But book sizes were determined as much by the changing environments that books inhabited. As candles gave way to gas, then gas to electricity, portable lighting enabled reading to colonize the margins of the workday: the bedside

novel, the newspaper skimmed en route to work. Commuters wedged in between books, reading sandwiched between scheduled activities: by 1855 the economist Walter Bagehot observed train passengers "tak[ing] their literature in morsels, as they take sandwiches on a journey."²⁶ As heavy tomes went the way of sit-down dinners, reading oozed into the dead zones of delays, transit, in-betweenness. In the process of worming their way into ever more venues, books also colonized ever more nooks and crannies of time.

More fundamentally, new physical settings empowered print to referee social relationships. First, horse-drawn omnibuses made it possible to read fellow commuters' books as easily as one's own. Eyeing the first installment of Dickens's *Little Dorrit* over the shoulder of a passenger on a Manchester bus in 1855, Elizabeth Gaskell complained that her fellow traveler "was such a slow reader . . . you'll sympathize. . . [with] my impatience at his never getting to the bottom of the page."²⁷ Next, in railway carriages so new that their etiquette remained to be established, spread-eagled broadsheets introduced strangers to one another. "Always Be Polite When Traveling," warned a cartoon that showed a gambler offering to share the sports page of his newspaper with the clergyman buried in a stouter, squatter tome on the opposite site of his train compartment.²⁸

The same objects that tempted Gaskell to snoop and helped the fictional gambler break conversational ice, however, could work on the contrary to screen readers from each other, providing an excuse to ignore others who were physically present. One 1857 etiquette expert warned that while "civilities should be politely acknowledged" on public transport, "a book is the safest resource for an 'unprotected female.'"²⁹ Travelers privatized

public transportation by retreating into the fold of a page as snails shrink into their shells. As new kinds of vehicles forced strangers together, print became their chaperone. Kafka called books an axe to break the frozen sea within their reader. But the book can also be a defensive weapon.

Outside of public transit, books filled more painful waits. A few hours into labor, about to give birth to the future author of *Frankenstein* at the cost of her own life, Mary Wollstonecraft scribbled a note to her husband, William Godwin: "Pray send me the newspaper. I wish I had a novel or some book of sheer amusement to excite curiosity and while away the time. Have you anything of the kind?"³⁰ Caregivers, too, need distraction, as Queen Victoria's future prime minister William Gladstone realized when he stationed himself outside of his terminally ill father's bedroom with a dimly lit volume of Henry Mayhew's protosociological treatise *London Labour and the London Poor*.³¹ Reading carves out the space in which we wait for a baby to be born or a parent to die. Fear of death needs beguiling in more public spaces too. Fifty-two libraries opened in the London Underground when it was used for bomb shelter during the 1940–1941 Blitz.³²

On the battlefield, too, reading has numbed physical and emotional pain. As I type with my right fingers, my left palm cradles a smartphone-sized 1836 reprint of American lexicographer Lyman Cobb's *The Reticule and Pocket Companion; or, Miniature Lexicon of the English Language*. The same dictionary whose folio edition holds ponderous audiences on a library lectern can go off-road in a man's pocket or a woman's protopurse "reticule." We know what paths this book traveled, because a

date (June 4, 1863) is palely inked next to its owner's name and the name of the Union army unit that he joined almost two years later. The waterproof oilcloth that wraps its leather binding, the water stains that brown the pages nonetheless, the pencil calculations smudged into the endpapers—all these reveal the pocket-sized manual traveling to places where no shelter or inkwell is handy. Unevenly stitched-up pages testify in thread to the protectiveness inspired by belongings small enough to be worn against the skin. Separated by only a few layers of cloth, the book's wounds become an extension of the soldier's.

By the era of streetcars, riding was synonymous enough with reading for sci-fi to imagine the airships of the future equipped with in-flight newspapers.³³ Though the airships never materialized, the first airplane passengers were quick to notice "inflight magazines' . . . conveniently located next to the motion sickness bags."³⁴ Advertisers largely abandoned in-flight magazines only once smartphones took away the captive audience of travelers who had misgauged how many pounds of paper would last a transatlantic flight.

If new kinds of commuting opened up time and space for reading, reciprocally printed matter helped the swelling ranks of office workers tolerate a long slog from home to work. It might not be too much of a stretch to claim that without books and newspapers, the Victorians would never have invented the suburb. We compare the web to an "information superhighway," but literal highways depend on commuting time filled by music or recorded speech. At the dawn of the MP3, about half of audiobooks in circulation were accessed on the cassette decks of commuters' cars.³⁵ In the 1970s, that historical sweet spot

between the end of the *Chatterley* ban and the development of Sony's first Walkman, Georges Perec announced that "the true library of the people is the Metro."³⁶

In 1994, as monitors began to edge photocopies off desks, the novelist E. Annie Proulx predicted that pleasure reading would stay on paper. "Nobody," Proulx declared, "is going to sit down and read a novel on a twitchy little screen. Ever."³⁷ Yet within a decade of her prediction, the emergence of unlimited text-messaging plans in Japan had the unintended consequence of creating a market for novels scrolled down a few eye-watering lines at a time. By 2008, five of the country's ten best-selling print books were cell-phone novels, composed on phone keypads and squinted at on miniature screens.³⁸ Only Proulx's technicality about "sitting down" held true, for these pleasures were taken standing. The cell-phone novel's natural habitat was the crowded Tokyo subway, in a straphanger's free hand.

In the early days of Tumblr, a photographer named Ourit Ben-Haim began to snap the backs of books swaying their way across the five boroughs. Her *Underground New York Public Library* proved a good place to get ideas for new reading material: every model a sandwich man. Later, a team of commuters took the name of @CoverSpy to note the books they saw in the hands of their fellow commuters, tweeting cover images along with capsule descriptions of the passenger reading them ("*Labour in Irish History*, James Connolly [M, 20s, glasses, black coat, brown cap, lost balance on train, C train]"; "*Grant*, Ron Chernow [M, 60s, blue windbreaker, gray beard, licking index finger before turning each page, 1 train]").

Told from the point of view of transportation, the history of mobile reading departs from both print and electronic book publishers' stories of progress. Instead of tracing changes in reading habits to successive technologies, we can see styles of reading changing in step with the times and places carved out by new infrastructures. Those new settings, in turn, welcomed new shapes and sizes of reading matter. Whether the legibility of a page depends on the presence of sunlight or the absence of glare, whether a book's cover hides the inside from prying eyes or a broadsheet allows two pairs of eyes to scan different sides of the same surface: the way each of these objects was carried changed the way readers carried themselves.

The more new times and places lent themselves to reading, the more rules needed to be imposed or self-imposed about what to read when. The golden age of print scheduled scale, whether weekly—Dickens's character Captain Cuttle "made it a point of duty to read none but very large books on a Sunday, as having a more staid appearance"³⁹—or daily, as when the Earl of Chesterfield explained that "I converse with grave folios in the morning, while my head is clearest and my attention strongest: I take up less severe quartos after dinner; and at night I choose the mixed company and amusing chit-chat of octavos and duodecimos."⁴⁰ This eighteenth-century gentleman was measuring the passage of time by progressing from volumes as deskbound as an iMac to others as handy as a smartphone.

Keeping one book running for mornings while holding another in reserve for the afternoons became as crucial to Victorian gentleman scholars' routine as was eating bacon for breakfast and soup for supper. In his retirement, Gladstone

rotated (in his own words) “Dr Langer’s Roman History (in German) for morning reading, Virgil for afternoon, and a novel in the evening.”⁴¹ Virginia Woolf’s father reveled in violating hourly *and* weekly norms when on April 24, 1870, he reported “spending a quiet Sunday morning in Birkbeck’s smoking room—reading a novel.”⁴²

Asking when people read, though, is only one way to register books’ entanglement with schedules. Other research tracks when people borrowed books that they may or may not have followed through with reading. One eighteenth-century library register shows more use in winter than summer and reveals that rural people “tended to take out books towards the end of the week, even when the library was open on Monday and Tuesday.”⁴³ We could ask, even more obliquely, what people did and didn’t notice about when they read. When do diarists register only on what day of the month they read a work, for example, and when do they specify the time of day?⁴⁴ Scrapbookers who paste in tickets from plays they attended rarely make a note of the show’s hour, because everyone knows at what time a performance takes place. In contrast, an elderly Lady Trevelyan (born Hannah Macaulay) could still recall the place (the seaside resort Brighton), the year (1816), the season (summer), and the time (evening) when as a girl she’d listened to her brother Tom read aloud the interminable novel *Sir Charles Grandison*.

The beach book is marked by its banishment from daily working life. Hannah explains that “poetry and novels, except during Tom’s holidays, were forbidden in the daytime, and stigmatised as ‘drinking drams in the morning.’”⁴⁵ Their father’s rules responded to the threat posed by cheap print’s ubiquity and what we would call today its “always-on-ness”: before the

advent of sound recording, no need to warn your son against 10 a.m. symphonies. When the structuralist theorist Gérard Genette observed that texts lack tempo markings, he omitted to add that, also unlike music before the age of sound recording, print can be experienced in whatever time and place you choose—light permitting.⁴⁶

From the age of the oil lamp to the age of the gas mantle, after-hours novel reading was considered the surest sign of insanity.⁴⁷ Early illustrators outfitted Don Quixote with a nightcap to signal that (as Burton Raffel translates it) “with virtually no sleep and so much reading he dried out his brain.”⁴⁸ The candlelit pages of chivalric romances disrupt the biological rhythms that reassert themselves as soon as Don Quixote takes to the road, where darkness marks the end of each day and each chapter.

The genre being read mattered as much as the kind of person doing the reading—and the pace at which books were read mattered as much as the time of day at which that reading happened. Reading at the wrong time, at the wrong pace, by the wrong person continued to worry moralists even as the demographics of who counted as the wrong person shifted. By the eighteenth century, Cervantes’s doddering old man was upstaged by the romance readers whom Samuel Johnson termed “the young, the ignorant, and the idle”—and, increasingly, the female. The night shift falls to women, as Don Quixote’s shabby study changes into the boudoir of an aristocratic lady, who, after dressing for a ball (according to Rousseau’s self-aggrandizing account)

began to read [*La Nouvelle Héloïse*] while waiting for the time [to leave]. At midnight she ordered [her servants] to get the horses ready and continued to read. They came to tell her that

her horses were ready; she gave no answer. Seeing that she was forgetting herself, her [servants] came to notify her that it was two o'clock. "There is no rush yet," she said, still reading. Sometime afterward, because her watch had stopped, she rang to know what time it was. They told her that it was four o'clock. "Since that is so," she said, "it is too late to go to the ball, put up my horses." She had herself undressed and [spent] the rest of the night reading.⁴⁹

I first encountered the anecdote in the work of pioneering book historian Robert Darnton, who used a trove of fan mail sent to Rousseau to reconstruct readers' responses to the novel. Replace "horse" with "car" and the scene Rousseau describes will be plausible to anyone who's ever sat in the driveway, removing the key from the ignition only once an audiobook reaches its end. When Amazon decided to strip the Kindle app of an on-screen clock, it followed Rousseau in making the breakdown of time-keeping gauge the reader's rapture. When the "reading mode" that followed disabled alerts and reminders, interrupting servants were definitively shown the door.⁵⁰

In contrasting the unpunctual aristocrat with her servants who read only clocks, Rousseau slyly reversed eighteenth-century conduct literature's warning to servants against reading on their masters' time or tallow. Samuel Richardson boasted that as an autodidactic apprentice, he "took Care, that even my Candle was of my own purchasing, that I might not in the most trifling Instance make my Master a Sufferer."⁵¹ Decades later, his 1747 novel *Clarissa* featured an aristocratic villain who sets fire to a house before laying the blame on "the carelessness of Mrs. Sinclair's cook-maid, who, having sat up to read the

simple history of Dorastus and Faunia, when she should have been in bed, had set fire to an old pair of callicoe window-curtains."⁵² Other characters believe the lie precisely because such accidents traditionally concretized the moral danger of servants' reading: burning the bed prefigured hellfire. Books at the wrong time scrambled natural rhythms as surely as books in the wrong hands upended the social order.

For that same reason, reading at the wrong time could bring the thrill of rebellion. In the last days of the Hapsburg empire, books tempted a small-town child named Nikola Tesla to stay up after his bedtime, until his father had to hide the family's candles. Years later, after growing up to become an electrical engineer, Tesla remembered scavenging for tallow to cast into candles with homemade wicks. All night, the aging inventor wrote in his memoir, "I would [plug] the keyhole and read, often till dawn when all others slept."⁵³ Snuggled under the covers while his parents snored, Tesla cradled the book as tenderly as a lover's body.

Considering media history alongside the history of the steam engine and the suburb suggests that the particular technology through which texts and images are disseminated matters less than larger-scale changes in the structure of daily lives. As one social critic has put it, we might tie the decline of pleasure reading to "the generalization of insecurity and economic precarity; the erosion of the separation between work and life; the decline of the home's integrity as a space external to the bustle of capitalist existence."⁵⁴ To understand what this means, consider those subway novel-readers. Now that cellular networks have penetrated underground, the same office worker who might have once used a presidential biography to while

away the minutes of his commute might now use that time to answer work emails. His problem isn't the lack of the right reading device—print or electronic—but the work ethos, in the twenty-first century, that means that no one's ever really off the clock. Once in-flight wireless arrived, some workers were not only expected to travel long distances for their jobs but to spend the time in transit working too. Now "airplane mode" has become as metaphorical as the "library atmosphere" that Amtrak invoked in the heyday of the laptop.

Perhaps that's why, in the age of the backlit screen, we hope that the print reading that once flouted schedules can set them. Weeks after the launch of the iPhone 5, I went to a North London housing estate to meet an administrative assistant, just retired, who was a hundred pages into a well-creased movie tie-in paperback of Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil*. She'd never had time for fiction before, but her doctor blamed her insomnia on late-night screen time. She had joined the housing estate's book club, she explained, to break her habit of checking Facebook at night. Novel reading would provide her with an evening routine, lit by nothing more inflammatory than a bedside incandescent.

Then again, that reversal may be less drastic than it looks. As the books once expected to stimulate retrain to sedate, adults are granted what was, for more than a century, a toddler's prerogative. When nineteenth-century publishers invented the bedtime story, print began its slow march from a rule breaker to a schedule setter.⁵⁵ Only in the era of the adult coloring book, though, can readers of any age be bribed to sleep by print. When the University of Warwick launched a new online course, Literature and Mental Health, its syllabus

promised not that Austen or Wordsworth will provide insight into the human mind, but rather that reading them will "calm" and "reassure."⁵⁶

The transformation of print from a rousing wake-up call to something more like a blankie comes as part of a broader infantilization of reading. Digital-era observers have struggled to explain why so many American adults are reading literature meant for children. In 2012, 55 percent of young-adult books were purchased by buyers over seventeen, of whom a surprising 78 percent reported that the book wasn't intended as a gift.⁵⁷ Two years later, a Nielsen study attributed 80 percent of young-adult literature sales to over-seventeen readers.⁵⁸ Once, children peeked into their parents' copies of *The Joy of Sex*. Now, the balance of trade was reversing. The twentieth-century fear of teenagers' laying their hands on "mature content" gave way to a new anxiety about adults reading books written and marketed for teenagers.⁵⁹ As books went from stirring readers up to calming them down, so reading's relation to age changed as well. From an activity that speeds time up, turning teenagers into adults, reading has become a means of regression.

Nowhere is that truer than at bedtime. The BBC now advises insomniac listeners to "get stuck into a good book, practice meditation or have a relaxing bubble bath."⁶⁰ Like the doctor's recommendation, their advice has evidence behind it. In 2014, one clinical study suggested that reading electronically rather than on paper "can cause sleep deprivation and increase the risk of cancer." The study in question correlated the use of smartphones and iPads with lower levels of melatonin, the hormone that regulates sleepiness. Its absence is associated, as well, with breast, bowel, and prostate cancer.⁶¹ A

finer-grained comparison revealed that when participants did their bedtime reading on an iPad, their melatonin levels were lower than those who read either printed books or e-readers.⁶² Once again, the study design is as telling as its results. The researchers weren't comparing *Good Night, Gorilla* with *Gone Girl*. Their focus was the delivery device. But of course, what might make printed books more relaxing than reading on an iPad might not be the medium itself but the fact that emails and alerts reminding us of the tasks that await us when we wake the next day don't pop up on our paperbacks.

If you care about the future of the deep, sustained engagement with lasting truths that a few books have long sparked in a few readers, then the threat you should be worried about isn't the Kindle. E-readers—hardware designed specifically for the reading of long-form, infrequently updated, purely textual content—remain one of Silicon Valley's most spectacular flops. From their peak of 23 million in 2011, e-reader sales have declined worldwide in each successive year, dwindling to less than a third of that in 2016. Devices that promised to revolutionize reading habits were quick to go bust (like the Sony e-reader launched in 2004 and retired a decade later), drive companies bankrupt (as seems likely if Barnes and Noble keeps taking losses on its Nook e-reader).⁶³

But electronic reading thrives even as e-readers, on which the only reading matter is book length, turn out to have been a dead end. Ebook sales have risen steadily since 2015, with Amazon and self-published imprints increasingly dominating those sales. Now, the long-form, shelf-stable electronic texts that e-readers were designed to deliver are increasingly accessed through digital reading applications and other soft-

ware programs accessed on internet-enabled devices whose primary purpose involves shorter and more ephemeral text. In 2017, 61 percent of American ebook readers reported accessing texts through a tablet, compared to 54 percent who reported accessing ebooks through an e-reader. Significant numbers also reported using Wi-Fi-equipped smartphones and laptops for the same purpose.⁶⁴

In 2019, journalist Paul Greenberg noted that the average American spent 1,500-odd hours yearly on their smartphone. Searching for a benchmark that would convey the magnitude of those hours, he calculated that at average reading speed (280 words per minute), that same American could enjoy or at least endure Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*—twenty times every year.⁶⁵ It's a memorable metric. If you're old enough to think back to those distant days before your first smartphone, though, you may try and fail to remember those twenty-fold perusals of Proust. Just as one can calculate how many times the cars parked in Los Angeles can circle the world without actually lining Volvos up along the equator, Proust rereading appears here more as a measurement of absurd duration than as an activity in which one might realistically engage.

News articles with titles like "The Death of Books Has Been Greatly Exaggerated" regularly cite, as evidence for the health of printed books, consumers' distaste for their electronic equivalent.⁶⁶ Pbooks and ebooks, though, may not be the real antagonists. If you've been beating yourself up for reading fewer printed books, the culprit is unlikely to be ebooks, much less e-readers. The real competition comes from the same corner that it did in the print era: image-heavy chunks of disposable, browsable ephemera.⁶⁷ Our ancestors called them "the paper."

We know that the Sunday paper arose as a secular way of marking the distinction between work and leisure time, but it's easier to forget that religious reading itself arose in part as a way of filling the long hours when work was forbidden. One 1896 article on "Sunday Reading," for example, declares that "in the prohibition of games and of the usual activities of young life upon that day, reading becomes almost the only resource." The point is not that goody-goody books crowd out exciting romances, but that sitting still, with the book as a kind of seat belt, takes the place of active work and play.⁶⁸ Charlotte Yonge's contrast between girls and boys morphs here into a contrast between children and adults. In both cases, you read because there's nothing else to do.

The overrepresentation of the very old and very young in the reading public; the emergence of the mass-circulation newspaper in the nineteenth century thanks to suburbs linked by commuter train; fiction's persistent alliance with bed, beach, and beyond; the centuries-old fear of housewives' fiction-fueled imaginations—all these reflect the vacuums that print once rushed in to fill. In each case, making room for reading has turned out to hinge less on finding the right device—or even on shutting off the wrong device—than on carving out some digital-age equivalent to those negative spaces.

If you value the union of opposites brokered (sometimes but not always) by long-form, long-term reading—emotional absorption with intellectual reflection, inwardness with empathy, the capacity to withdraw from those around us while remaining attuned to distant minds—then the book may no longer be the only place to look. If we think of printed paper not as an inert collectible but as a cue or catalyst, then fetishizing the wood

pulp and thread or glue onto which attentiveness, curiosity, and imagination have sometimes piggybacked means looking in the wrong place. More useful might be exploring what new—or old but forgotten—ways of circulating and sharing and responding to words might allow those habits to flourish.

We might find one example in the work of the great utopian socialist writer, printer, and designer William Morris. In the same year that Dewey was celebrating the mobilization of the book, Morris pointed out dryly that easy to carry means hard to hold. "A small book," he explained, shortly after the pocket lexicon returned from the Civil War in one piece (though verging on two pieces whenever the tenuous binding finally gave way),

seldom does lie quiet, and you have either to cramp your hand by holding it, or else to put it on the table with a paraphernalia of matters to keep it down, a table-spoon on one side, a knife on another. . . . Whereas, a big folio lies quiet and majestic on the table, waiting kindly till you please to come to it, with its leaves flat and peaceful, giving you no trouble of body, so that your mind is free to enjoy the literature which its beauty enshrines.⁶⁹

What Morris says of the hand could equally well be applied to the eye. The type size that makes a book fit into a pocket or reticule can also make it illegible for all but the most clear-sighted readers. (You may have dithered between staggering under a backpack full of large-print hardbacks or squinting at fine print that straggles off into the gutter of onionskin page spreads.) And as Kindle ads' attacks on the iPad's susceptibility to glare remind us, the ease with which words can be carried to the

beach makes them harder to read there. At the end of the twentieth century, Frederick Kilgour, the creator of the first online union catalog that made it possible for any computer user to search information about the holdings of multiple libraries, described the book as “an artifact that is portable—or at least transportable.”⁷⁰ How to weight ease of carrying against ease of use remains an open question in the twenty-first.

A shell game shuttles effort around the user’s body. Folios save the eyes at the expense of the back; paperbacks spare shoulders but crane necks. Human decisions, as much as the laws of physics, ensure that the same technologies that promise to cure our ills can cause others. Currently, for example, despite the possibilities offered in principle by digital text that can be expanded or converted into voice, private companies’ digital rights management strategies are making texts less accessible to disabled readers than they were in the era that stretched from the early-nineteenth-century invention of Braille to the rise of the audiobook recorded on vinyl.⁷¹

Yet what Morris questioned was something even more basic than small books’ practicality: Were convenience and efficiency desirable in the first place? His 1896 romance *The Well at the World’s End* envisioned a book readable only when laid open on a particular stone altar at a particular place in a particular forest. Literary critic Jerome McGann has shown that Morris’s own press deliberately made books “hard to read,” jamming up the works to force readers to pause long enough to notice their look and feel.⁷² In place of conspicuous consumption, his high-end, high-volume volumes offered conspicuous inconvenience.⁷³

The same unwieldiness that enforces a slowdown also limits the situations in which a book can be used and the company in

which it’s accessed. As far as convenience goes, the eleventh-century tax survey known as the Domesday Book, kept in a special chest with three different locks whose keys were divided among three people, has less in common with a Penguin paperback than with an encrypted website that can be accessed only by entering a code sent to the user’s cell phone. The Domesday Book looks more like the paperback, but functions more like the website.

Immobility doesn’t have to mean monumentality. No one ever revered the yellow pages tethered to telephone booths. But by restoring the sense of occasion that he associated with medieval manuscripts, Morris hoped to forestall the always-on reading that we equate with the smartphone but that he blamed on cheap print. Like familiarity, ubiquity breeds contempt.

What John Plotz terms Morris’s “experiments against portability” go well beyond substituting big books for small.⁷⁴ The media to which Morris gravitated—tapestries designed to match the size of a particular wall, or wallpaper that would be destroyed if pried away—reject the convenience of easel paintings that can be rehung, engravings that can be stashed in a drawer, and books that can be slipped into a pocket. Morris provides one corrective to the technoboosterism that Google and Amazon inherit from Dewey. In distinguishing ease of access from quality of engagement, *The Well at the World’s End* reminds us that chained books may set imaginations free.

ONE AFTERNOON IN the reign of the iPhone 4, I uncurled two hardbacks in my book bag. As I slid the strap over magazines thumbed in doctors' waiting rooms, the fine print on

Hunching over my laptop to Google "back pain," I learned legislate the weight of children's schoolbags. Faced with a study the average child, a bill now capped bookbags at 10 percent of the the laptop's clamshell might be worsening my back. I sat an external its electronic equivalent, and sat myself on a flat, matte edition of catalog, whose oversize pages made me hope for stability, only Adjusting the tottering stack, I was newly grateful to have shelves in shape (one reason Jeff Bezos made books the guinea pig for his need to prop up one leg of a table, there's bound to be *some* book

But ejecting my laptop from my lap turned out not to stem the reading. My leg spasmed the moment I lowered myself into what had Faced with a choice between standing or lying flat, I found myself pages projected onto the ceiling. Pacing the room while I held a

I'd thought of books as what you picked up when you were running laps, an adult who took novels to sickbeds. But now that from the familiar geometry of bound pages on a table facing a body to more and more doctors, my books abandoned their usual waist teetered on cinder blocks, like the stilettos I could no longer wear of Galen Cranz's *The Chair* (1998) spread-eagled on top of its glass.

I learned from Cranz, an architect as well as a practitioner of the metonymy "chairman"; hence the shock value of Gandhi's

my back, unfurled my neck, and sandwiched my laptop between my shoulder, my spine gave. Let's pass quickly over the rest: the pill bottles.

that in 2006, India had become the first country in the world to finding that the average backpack weighed almost half as much as weight of a schoolchild.¹ I learned, too, that my goosenecking over monitor on a squat Portuguese-English dictionary superseded by Emily Dickinson's envelope poems (I'd tried a Robert Motherwell to realize that most art books are cursed with slippery covers). full of cheap, ubiquitous objects that are both relatively uniform mail-order business: their box-ability) and varied in size (if you in your possession that fits).²

pain. I stopped biking, stopped drinking, and eventually stopped once been the most comfortable piece of furniture, a cushioned chair. without a lap to rest a book on. Flat on the floor, I fantasized about volume open, I craved a third hand with which to annotate.

too weak to do anything else: a kid who hid in study hall to avoid reading made me ill, illness stopped me from reading. Or, at least, on a chair. Instead, I was learning new ways to read. As I shuttled height for higher and lower perches. Higher, because my desk soon myself. And lower, once I lay underneath a coffee table with a copy

the Alexander Technique, that chairs connote prestige. Hence decision to sit on the floor. The International Civil Rights Center

and Museum in Greensboro, North Carolina, enshrines the boundary between the bar where blacks stood and the counter

Yet standing can also confer power. In Romance languages, is what humans tell dogs. Looming over a seminar table, I struck. Prevented from sitting at their level, I saw words like "authoritarian" was true; no longer able to twist my body like a sunflower to feign

The icon for disability is a wheelchair: the paradigmatic cripple almost as much stigma. Flight attendants treated my unbuckled seat reading wouldn't be remarked upon: rush-hour subways, checkout 1793 painting showed the Jacobin martyr Marat dying in a bathtub, dermatitis herpetiformis, Marat had been soaking in vinegar while the-tub writing trays. Their buyers may have been missing the point, but reading with one hand kept dry while the other soaps enables you can't take notes; sometimes, one wants to be prevented from

My reading positions wouldn't have seemed so strange in earlier to rest their scrolls; in an age when adults regularly read aloud, reading as a healthy exercise for body and mind: it expanded once the unfurled scroll gave way to the folded codex did readers stood at attention before the vellum that they were illuminating, of safer candles and to the shrinking of trim sizes. Previously treason could now be slipped into a pocket. Readers since then broadsheet, tucking their faces into a laptop's fold, and screening

A Bible feels different when it inhabits a pulpit or a reader's lap; the newsstand or spread on the breakfast table. Whether the reader's electronic object itself, but on the surfaces that support her body the designer Craig Mod proposed to customize fonts not just for eye: "Bed (close to face)," "Knee (medium distance from face)," and

The rise of literacy can be told as a story about desk height and physically supporting a book, unless one outsources that work to a

chairs occupied during the 1960 sit-in that breached Woolworths' where whites sat.

the word for "seat" comes from the same root as "sedative." "Sit" students dumb: the tallest person in the room is usually the loudest. sprout on my students' evaluations. I'd like to think the opposite interest in other speakers, I actually had to listen.

sits while others stand. The reverse, though, turned out to prompt belt like an open straitjacket. I brought books to places where upright lines. In museums, I stood staring at portraits of sitters. David's flanked by an inkstand and a pool of his own blood. To treat his answering the mail. The painting's success boosted demand for over-Rousseau called pornography "books one reads with one hand," subtler pleasures. I keep books by the bath because it's the one place multitasking.

eras. The Romans needed no chair to sit on or table on which standing allowed the voice to project. Doctors recommended the lungs, strengthened the arms, and stretched the back. Only began to hinge at the waist as well. Medieval monks perched or but eighteenth-century readers bedded books thanks to the rise as large as a 1950s mainframe, a text containing pornography or have returned to the vertical, scanning billboards, hiding behind a their face behind a phone like some court lady's fan.

a newspaper, when its headlines are read while loitering opposite neck or back bears the brunt depends not just on the printed or and her reading material. In the early days of tablet computing, differently sized devices, but also for different distances from the "Breakfast (far from face)," the latter in order to keep crumbs away.³ spectacle design. Reading, we all know, takes effort. But so does piece of furniture. The historian Erich Schon points out that before

around 1800, books were most often depicted in hands or on knees, contact with the text dwindle to an occasional touch of the finger.

By extension, the intellectual work—or lack thereof—elicited by lack thereof—of the bodies that hold them, even of the furniture sprawls on a sofa or lolls at the hairdresser's; a fine snow of hair *Goriot* to “you who are holding this book in your fair white hand, declared, “I have no faith in reading that is compatible with an arm-writing desk over those that manifested spinelessness.”⁴

Dickensian clerks perched at high stools, like McMansion though, bodies and papers changed places in the office. The women while vertical filing forced papers that had once rested flat onto their slumping in drawers.”⁵

As copying and filing became women's work, writing literature Hemingway explained in a 1950 letter that “writing and travel up.” Nabokov told a *Playboy* interviewer that “I generally start the on, when I feel gravity nibbling at my calves, I settle down in a finally, when gravity begins climbing up my spine, I lie down on containing the interview was read.”⁶ At the turn of the millennium, posture in which they peed. Donald Rumsfeld worked standing, the same pneumatic lifts used in chairs.

Centuries before the Kindle became the device of choice for baby in the other hand), labor-saving devices aimed to take books Even the “index” takes its name from the second digit, used to hold designed Ferris wheel-like contraptions in which each volume bookshelves that spin the desired book into arm's reach; lecterns such 1588 machine promised to spare “those who are indisposed on the contrary, we adjust our chairs in relation to a fixed-height

At the end of the nineteenth century, one early adopter Octave Uzanne pointed out, “forces our bodies into various it constrains us to acquire a certain dexterity in the art of turning

Only once books came to rest on tables did the reader's bodily eyes replaced hands.

different literary genres can be made visible by the uprightnes—or that holds those bodies. In eighteenth-century paintings, the reader powder dusted the pages. In 1835, Balzac addressed his novel *Father you who sink down in your soft easy chair.”* When Lucy Soulsby chair,” she was privileging those kinds of reading that required a

dwellers at a breakfast bar. At the end of the nineteenth century, taking over formerly male-dominated office jobs subsided into chairs, edge, thanks to new cabinets guaranteed to prevent “sagging or

retained its manly aura only by eschewing comfortable chairs. broaden your ass if not your mind and I like to write standing day at a lovely old-fashioned lectern I have in my study. Later comfortable armchair alongside an ordinary writing desk; and a couch”—the same position, perhaps, in which that magazine the position in which men wrote remained as distinctive as the and Dick Cheney bought an adjustable-height desk propelled by

nursing mothers (one-handed swiping makes it possible to hold a off readers' hands. Bookmarks began their life as prosthetic fingers.⁷ one page open while flipping to another. Renaissance inventors rides flat on a tray, open to just the right page; lazy Susan-like equipped with angle brackets and height-adjustable screws. One and tormented by gout” the trouble of lifting their books. Today, reading surface.

proposed a solution to back pain: sound recording. Reading, fatiguing attitudes. If we are reading one of our great newspapers and folding the sheets; if we hold the paper wide open it is not

long before the muscles of tension are overtaxed, and finally, if leaves and turning them one after another, ends by producing an worried that the solution would soon give rise to a new problem: so with the phonography yet to be, the aurists will begin to dictated to secretaries, so audiobooks automate the eighteenth-master's chair.

Today, no bigger bait and switch exists than what parents do when reading with snuggles, only to plunge him or her into a lifetime of got read aloud to too. Scholars debate how representative of fourth-at seeing another reader staring at a page but making no sound. (ratherthanrunningthemtogetherlikethis) allowed readers to parse readers continued to move their mouths, as children do today. Nilo factories routinely paid a "lector" to read aloud to them: Montecristo weeks and months.

My own story has that most bookish of structures, a happy binder with one foot propped on a book. For the yellow pages Microsoft manual. Now that abdominal curls have unscrolled my WebMD.com.

I learned something more basic, though, that no ergonomics coached me to stop aiming for the perfect posture that girls once to be flexible. Readers can likewise learn when to read in print and slowly, when to search an encyclopedia and when to have their

we address ourselves to the book, the necessity of cutting the enervated condition very distressing in the long run." But he also "Just as oculists have multiplied since the invention of journalism, abound."⁸ As Siri's ladylike voice resurrects the days when bosses century servants who read aloud, standing discreetly behind their

they read aloud to a baby. Hook your darling on books by associating tête-à-têtes with books. For most of human history, though, adults century readers St. Augustine was when he reported his shock Even once the new convention of inserting spaces between words text without having to sound it out syllable by syllable, medieval Cruz's play *Anna in the Tropics* reminds us that workers in Cuban cigar cigars honored the Dumas novel that they heard over the course of

ending. An occupational therapist taught me to sit on a three-ring pictured in her yellowing diagrams, I substituted an outdated spine, I can finally curl up with a good book. Or, at least, with

textbook could have taught me. The occupational therapist also learned by balancing books on their heads. Instead, she taught me when to opt for digital, when to read quickly and when to read souls searched by a poem.