



The Book

Number 14, March 1988

Newsletter of the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture
Published by the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts

Book Notes

In 1984 D. F. McKenzie inaugurated the Panizzi Lectures, a new series sponsored by the British Library in honor of its great nineteenth-century director. McKenzie's three lectures, published under the title *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (British Library, 1986), amount to a redefinition of what bibliography is about. A few paragraphs into the first lecture, McKenzie declares that Sir Walter Greg's now classic definition "is no longer adequate." The missing element turns out to be history. McKenzie is prepared to "claim, now, that all bibliography, properly speaking, is historical bibliography." The practice of bibliography must pass beyond a concept of the text as composed of "arbitrary signs" and deal with "meaning." It is crucial to McKenzie that no perfect text exists; from text we move to "texts," as authors, printers, critics, and readers rework and refashion endlessly the "social discourse" that a printed work embodies. Hence the postulating of a "sociology of texts," a phrase that, in McKenzie's words, "directs us to consider the human motives and interactions which texts involve at every stage of their production, transmission and consumption. It alerts us to the roles of institutions, and their own complex structures, in affecting the forms of social discourse, past and present" (6-7). Much of the first lecture departs from a misquoting of a few lines from Congreve as printed as the epigraph of Wimsatt and Beardsley's "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946). This episode of misreading, McKenzie declares, leads him (and us) to the perception that "any history of the book—subject as books are to typographic and material change—must be a history of misreadings" (16). What might dismay another bibliographer becomes the very substance of the discipline and the reason why it must admit history. McKenzie's is the heresy of declaring that "bibliography, simply by its own comprehensive logic, its indiscriminate inclusiveness, testifies to the fact that new readers of course make new texts, and that their new meanings are a function of their new forms. The claim then is no longer for their truth as one might seek to define that by an authorial intention, but for their testimony, as defined by their historical use" (20). In the second of these lectures, McKenzie calls on bibliographers to address nonverbal texts. Here he refers once again to the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), the subject of a separate lecture published in *The Library*, 6th ser., vol. 6 (1984): 333-65. Another interest-

ing example of a nonverbal text, taken up in the final lecture, is *Citizen Kane*. If the major theme of these essays is (to quote their final words) the "text in history," a point of almost equal importance is that libraries must preserve every form of text.

In suggesting that the task of bibliography is "to record and explain the physical forms which mediate meaning," McKenzie cites the chapter by Roger Laufer in volume 2 of *Histoire de L'Édition Française* on "Les espaces du livre." Three other chapters from volumes 1 and 2 appear in Roger Chartier's *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France* (Princeton University Press, 1987), which also provides translations of five separate essays. It is only partially adequate to say that the focus of these essays is on popular culture. Chartier summarizes in his introduction the critique he was led to make of the hypothesis of "rupture" in the seventeenth century between "a golden age of vibrant, free, and profuse popular culture" and "church and state discipline that repressed and subjected that culture." In its place he substitutes the argument that "all procedures intended to create constraints and controls actually implement tactics that mitigate their effects or subvert them." He insists as well on a complex history of dissemination in which such a process begets fresh discrimination. "We need then," he concludes, "to replace simplistic and static representations of social domination or cultural diffusion with a way of accounting for them that recognizes the reproduction of gaps within the mechanisms of imitation, the competition at the heart of similarities, and the development of new distinctions arising from the very process of diffusion" (11). Much of the substance of the essays on the circulation and ownership of books is social history: which social groups owned what kind of books, and how books themselves were used, that is, how they circulated. Here too Chartier argues for the "appropriation" of the *bibliothèque bleue* by "peasant" readers, though this happened only after these cheap books had been fancied by an urban middle class. Here, as in a chapter on the literature of dying, Chartier is sensitive to physical form in ways that, if not fully bibliographic, nonetheless advance the program that McKenzie has outlined.

The Social History of Language (Cambridge University Press, 1987), a collection of (mainly) original essays, is interesting in particular for its opening essay "The Uses of Literacy in Early Modern Italy," by Peter Burke, who edited the volume with Roy Porter. In a preceding intro-

duction, Burke tallies up the arguments for regarding language as a crucial topic for the social historian—arguments as varied as those of Foucault and the ethnographers of speech. The enthusiasm that marks this quick romp through language theory is engaging, but it leaves us doubting that the differences in theory can be easily bridged, or that social historians really mean to embrace the assumption that language “is” the same as social reality or social action. The ancient dualism of “language and society” (or language as “reflecting” society) reappears even in Burke’s own opening statement.

D.D.H.

Research Notes

LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND IDENTITY
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

My present work, leading toward a book tentatively titled *Democratic Eloquence* and under contract to William Morrow and Co., is on the relationship between language, education, and identity in nineteenth-century America. I have explored how Americans worried about language and rhetoric from the time of the Revolution to about 1900. My main emphasis is on how popular linguistic styles shift in the early nineteenth century, destroying republican assumptions about rhetoric and the polity and generating a series of responses by distressed guardians of culture. In connection with this I have looked at the evolution of certain key texts that are used to define appropriate language—the dictionary, the English Pro-

testant Bible, school textbooks, and popular handbooks on language and rhetoric.

My work intersects with the history of the book in a number of ways. For example, I have been quite interested in the spread of texts like the elementary grammar and dictionary to a mass reading public in the early nineteenth century. I have also looked at the nineteenth-century birth of new book genres relating to linguistic decorum, such as the high school literature textbook and popular handbooks giving advice about “correct” and “incorrect” English. I have also traced how *publishers* in the nineteenth century begin to inject themselves actively into the making of books like dictionaries, grammars, and the English Bible (as opposed to just selling them). For example, the Webster-Worcester battle of the dictionaries of the mid-nineteenth century was orchestrated by publishers, and the Merriam brothers (Webster’s publishers) shaped the *content* of the dictionary (to the chagrin of most of Noah’s heirs) to ensure market success.

I am particularly interested in how linguistic style is used to define the self, the implications of rhetoric for identity. The shift to more “vulgar” forms of mass communication in the early nineteenth century meant that language was no longer used to reflect character. Popular stump speakers, preachers, and newspaper editors all developed more utilitarian attitudes about the use of language—use whatever moved the audience. Their public idiom was more closely related to “role playing” than character building. They shifted emphasis, in other words, from *ethos* to *persona*. Yet they operated in a culture that was without a positive vocabulary to describe such behavior. Consequently, they continued using the vocabulary of “character” and “rhetoric” even as their behavior indicated different sympathies. This both created confusion (who really was refined?) and angered those staunch defenders of republican literary rhetoric (E. L. Godkin and Charles E. Norton, for example), who deeply distrusted popular speech and who continued to associate language use with character.

In the closing chapters I discuss the ways that anti-rhetorical attitudes about language, particularly those of the emerging discipline of linguistics, contributed to a reconciliation of educated and popular culture and to the creation of a new identity for the educated adult. Instead of refined literary rhetoric you have technical language encouraged at work and casual, informal (popular) language praised elsewhere. Instead of language contributing to character there is a frank acceptance of the notion that decisions about usage are tied to shifting “roles.”

This, too, I trace through the evolution of major texts. For example, in the 1890s, what was called the “literary” or “defining” dictionary gave way to the “encyclopedic” dictionary. The former (reflecting the Johnsonian tradition) recorded the literary usage of gentlemen and ladies

American Antiquarian Society
185 Salisbury Street

Worcester, Massachusetts 01609-1634
Telephone (617) 755-5221 or 752-5813
(area code 508 after July 15, 1988)

Marcus A. McCorison, Director and Librarian
John B. Hench, Associate Director for Research
and Publication

David D. Hall, Chairman, Program in the History
of the Book in American Culture

The Book: Newsletter of the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture (ISSN 0740-8439) is published in March, July and November by the American Antiquarian Society at the above address.

Editors: David D. Hall and John B. Hench
Assistant Editor: Sheila McAvey

The Editors welcome all news relevant to the interests of the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture.

Copyright © 1988 by American Antiquarian Society

while the latter included (for the first time), mountains of slang and jargon. I also discuss the growing disillusionment with the “literary” King James Bible and the birth of the “modern-language Bible” movement during the 1890s, which tried to recast the English Bible into contemporary colloquial English.

Kenneth Cmiel, University of Iowa

LADY BOOK AGENTS, 1820s-70s

As part of a larger study on gender interaction on public conveyances during the transportation revolution, I have been noting with interest the rare but fascinating travel accounts published by women who sold books by subscription. The nineteenth-century book trade relied heavily on agents, the prototype of the traveling salesman, who drummed up sales by going door to door, usually in a designated territory, with sample copies of new books. The agents, who worked on commission, pitched the book, enlisted purchasers, and returned some weeks later to deliver the goods and collect the money. Want ads for agents often targeted clergymen or male teachers on summer vacation as ideal book salesmen, but the logic here—literacy, respectability, acquaintance with literature and elevating reading—applied equally well to many women. But more important was what militated against employment of women as agents: the widespread assumption that women who traveled alone and earned a living by approaching strange men all day long were violating norms of respectable behavior and perhaps were courting serious danger as well.

I have no idea how many women in fact did work as book agents. However, five of them wrote full-length books about their experiences as they violated norms and courted danger. Several of them quite enjoyed the adventure of puncturing other people’s prejudices. For example, the Misses Mendell and Hosmer describe in their 1854 book, *Notes of Travel and Life* (New York, 1854), how they bantered and flirted with male fellow passengers in stagecoaches, sang loudly on a boat ride, declined frequent offers of male protection, argued saucily with those who condemned them, and in general traded on their charms to sell books to men. Mendell was a woman in her mid-twenties from a tiny village in Jefferson County, New York, Hosmer a nineteen-year-old female from Vermont whose parents had recently died. They spent part of a year peddling books in the District of Columbia, Virginia, and North Carolina for the Harper brothers, but when it came time to put their own story into print they opted for a private printing.

Oddly, so did two of the other lady booksellers. Anne Royall was peddling her own books about travel as she traveled. Her *Sketches of History, Life and Manners in the United States*, published under the pseudonym “a Traveller,” appeared in 1826. The three volumes of *The*

Black Book: or A Continuation of Travels in the United States (Washington, D.C., 1828-29) were the most notorious of her several travel books, in part because any person who was rude to her or declined to buy her books ran the distinct risk of being described in very unflattering terms in Mrs. Royall’s next publication. Annie Nelles also opted for private printing of her travel-biography, *Annie Nelles; or The Life of a Book Agent* (Cincinnati, 1868). The remaining agent in my small set, Mrs. J.W. Likins, who wrote *Six Years Experience as a Book Agent in California* (San Francisco, 1874), sold books in California for the bookseller and publisher H.H. Bancroft, but when she chose a printer for her book it was the Women’s Union Book and Job Printing Office in San Francisco. Did these women know enough about the book trade to figure that larger profits might accrue to them if they published their works themselves? After all, they could distribute the books the same way the major companies did—by subscription agents. Or, did the major companies reject their manuscripts, forcing them into private printing arrangements?

All of these books are available for study at the American Antiquarian Society. The appeal of these travel accounts lies in the abundant and sensitive commentary on several issues: how men and women actually behaved in public, what it meant to be respectable and what happened when one’s facade of respectability was challenged, and the dangers that women traveling alone might face. These lady book agents were unusually spunky and perceptive women; they were ideal participant-observers operating at the margins of the Cult of Domesticity, where serious slippage was in evidence.

Patricia Cline Cohen
University of California at Santa Barbara

AAS to Publish Study of Concord Libraries, 1795-1850

Of interest to scholars in the field of the history of the book in American culture is the forthcoming *Much Instruction from Little Reading: Books and Libraries in Thoreau’s Concord, with Catalogues of the Collections of the Charitable Library Society and the Concord Social Library, 1795-1850*, by Robert A. Gross. Originally appearing in two issues of the *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* (vol. 97, parts 1 and 2), this book is a study of the evolution of two model social libraries during the golden age of such libraries in New England. The Charitable Library Society was founded in 1795 in Concord, Massachusetts, with the intention of promoting “useful knowledge.” The library declined after the War of 1812, but a renewed effort to establish an “age of reading” gave rise, in 1821, to the Concord Social Library, which incorporated the holdings of the Charita-

ble Library Society. Later changes led to the absorption of that second library into the town-funded public library after 1851.

By looking at the annual reports and the holdings of both libraries, Gross analyzes the activities of the Charitable Library Society and the Concord Social Library as a reflection of the ideology, cultural goals, and reading tastes of genteel society in nineteenth-century Concord. Two-thirds of this volume comprises a reconstructed listing of the holdings of the two libraries, arranged both by genre and by year of acquisition. With the latter arrangement, the catalogues chart the shifting currents of intellectual tastes for social libraries of the period. In the introduction to this part, Gross describes his methodology and offers suggestions for further research into the history of books and libraries.

Copies of this 180-page paperback cost \$13.95 and can be purchased through the Society's distributor, the University Press of Virginia, Box 3608 University Station, Charlottesville, VA 22903. Send payment with order, adding \$1.50 postage and handling for the first book ordered, \$.75 for each additional book. Virginia residents add 4½% sales tax.

American Quarterly Spring Issue to Highlight Reading History

The spring 1988 number of *American Quarterly* will be an issue devoted to the subject of reading history. The essays to be published in the journal are "Towards a History of Books and Readers," by Cathy N. Davidson (Michigan State); "Literacy Instruction and Gender in Colonial New England," by Jennifer Monaghan (Brooklyn College of CUNY); "A Republican Literature: A Study of Magazine Reading and Readers in Late Eighteenth-Century New York," by David P. Nord (Indiana); "Antebellum Reading and the Ironies of Technological Innovation," by Ronald J. Zboray (Berkeley); "Moving on Down the Line," by Hortense Spillers (Haverford); and "Becoming Noncanonical: The Case Against Willa Cather," by Sharon O'Brien (Trinity College, Dublin). There are advance discussions for publication of this issue as a separate book, edited by Cathy Davidson, with the John Hopkins University Press.

AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY
185 SALISBURY STREET
WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS 01609-1634

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 416
WORCESTER, MASS. 01609
